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Beyond the Blackboard Highlights an Outstanding Teacher

The Hallmark Hall of Fame offers another true story this month. It is *Beyond the Blackboard* and it is based on the experiences of Stacey Bess, a first time teacher in Utah. Her efforts on behalf of homeless students make for an inspirational and emotional TV movie, and this film shows the power of one person making a difference. This is the type of movie Hallmark does with expertise, and thanks to a strong performance by Emily Van Camp it is one of their best efforts of the year.

The film follows the life of Stacey Bess (Van Camp) as she enters the teaching profession. She has a husband and two children but she is called to teach. When she meets the school administrator (Timothy Busfield) in her area, he is quite adamant that she commit to filling out the school term in the class where she is assigned. He also stresses that she must be able to teach grades one through six.

The next day when Stacey arrives at the place where she has been told to report she finds it is one room in an old building down by the railroad tracks. The classroom doesn't even have desks or books. The location is a place where the homeless live and her students are the children of these homeless adults.

Slowly but surely Stacey begins to make an impact on the kids and on the parents. She finally finds an ally in her school superintendent (Treat Williams) who sees her as fulfilling the true meaning of teaching. She also has the support of her family, especially her husband Greg (Steve Talley).

This program is everything audiences have come to expect a Hallmark Hall of Fame production to be. It is dramatic but uplifting, emotional but true. And there is an annotation at the end that explains what Stacey went on to accomplish.

Van Camp gives Stacey all the necessary traits to accomplish such a situation. She presents her as determined but compassionate. She dearly loves her students but this also means she will fight for them. Talley is almost too good to be true as her husband. Williams and Busfield have very few scenes in the movie.

Nicki Aycox is impressive as the mother of two of the children Stacey teaches. Among the children the standouts are Paola Nicole Andino as Maria and Liam McKanna as Danny. They make the biggest impression but each of the children in the cast is adorable and quite the natural actor.

Beyond the Blackboard is another movie that is too good to be true, if it weren't true. Kudos to the Hallmark Hall of Fame for finding Stacey Bess' story and for making it a thoroughly engaging and impressive film.

Beyond the Blackboard premieres on CBS, Sunday, April 24 at 9PM.

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