

INTRODUCTION TO BOB ROBERTS

About two months before we started shooting BOB ROBERTS a person very close to me, a person I have known since I was a child, reacted in a strange way to the information that I had been given the go ahead.

"You shouldn't do it."

"What are you talking about?"

"It's a weird time right now."

It was. We had just been through the "experience" in the Gulf and our television sets were giving us continual images of victory, of feelgood Americana parades, and of reruns of celebrity-support-the-troops videos. There even was the obligatory Bob Hope Welcomes the Troops Home Television Special complete with bad jokes, sexy gals, movie stars, and what--in a strange, surreal moment--appeared to be some kind of verbal soft shoe with those two feelgood guys, Dick Cheney and Colin Powell.

I thought this war stunk. From the beginning. Like a lot of people in this country, I did not buy into this as a necessary war. I hoped for reason and prayed for peace and watched futilely as impotent Democrats and partisan Republicans allowed this exercise in presidential power politics to happen. And when it came time to speak out, I was intimidated by the voracity and intensity of the drumbeating as the tribal elders from NBC, CBS, ABC, CNN, and PBS called the nation to war. The question posed to the many became: "Do you support the troops?" not "Do you

support our policy?" People resoundingly said yes, we support the troops, how can one not support the troops?

I began getting phone calls to participate in "bipartisan" support-the-troops videos. I got letters from right-wing pundits "suggesting" that I back off from protest as this was a time for unity. I was told by people I trust in the industry that my protesting the war might have career ramifications. I called friends in the industry to join me in Washington to protest the war. No deal.

"I'm not touching this one."

I've never felt so alone as I did then. I was lucky to have a household with a dear friend that shared my fears but together we felt insane, as if there was something we'd missed. All of ~~my~~ ^{Gwen} anxiety disappeared when we arrived in Washington on January 29th. There were hundreds of thousands of people from thousands of miles away in all directions, converging on the start of this march having traveled for hours to affirm their sanity, to shout, and to show their anger.

"I am not insane. This is a corrupt war. It will not stand."

I remember feeling that although we were a minority there was a moral certainty there. These were intelligent people all taking a risk by being there, and I realized it would be only a matter of time before the tide shifted. I marched, linking arms with parents of Gulf war soldiers.

I held a flag. I held it proudly. It was our flag to protect, to fight for in our way--uncompromised by the media at least for the present. The next day the media would compromise our actions. What was 400,000 became 75,000. What was a remarkable display of courage and conviction became a blip on page 17 buried in the recesses of the papers of record with a picture of one of the fifty pro-war maniacs shouting at a long-haired man.

Had I not gone to Washington, I don't know if I would have been able to answer my friend's concern about doing this film now in "scary times."

"Sounds like it's the perfect time for it."

Those that love war, that see miliarty action as legitimate foreign policy do not have the support of the American people. We are not a war-loving nation. The war lovers are the few. What the few do have is a way of, as Noam Chomsky puts it, "manufacturing consent," through a facile, impotent media which allows the question to be: "Do you support the troops?" instead of "Do you support our policy?" A media that allows itself to be restricted, monitored, and intimidated by its government is not a "free" press and is certainly not fulfilling its role in a democracy.

We were filming in Avila, Pennsylvania one day. We had festooned this town with yellow ribbons for a drive-by bus shot. An older gentleman came up to one of the crew

members and asked what we were doing. Unwilling to get into a political debate in the middle of what by all rights could have been called Bush country, the crew member said, "We're doing a film about Desert Storm." The man stood a moment then said, "Desert Storm was a sham. A way for Bush to keep his friends rich."

I have faith in the America people. I have had the good fortune to go out into ^{the country} ~~it~~. I have seen some dark shit, some racist bile, but I have also met a lot of good people who are committed to their families and know how to love. Given the information, they would not support unneeded violence. The key is in the information they receive. And if there is no desire for truth, if there is no vigilance in protecting and honoring reason and intelligence over demagoguery and propaganda, then there can be no morality. When one has something to do with the manufacturing of consent for slaughter, for massacre, then that person is just as culpable, just as responsible as the general giving the orders. When our flag is waved in celebration of 300,000 dead something is wrong with that flag, and something is spiritually dead in all of us. Who is responsible? The writer of propaganda or the reader?

I set BOB ROBERTS in the fall of 1990 because I want to remember that time: it was an extremely significant time when we saw quite honestly how our government works and

how willing the news media is to go along with it and be the lap dog of government. It is because of this corruption and complicity that Bob Roberts exists and is able to rise to power.

All this said, we set out to do a caustically funny film. I have great faith in laughter--it is a great companion to fear and a release much needed in times of such absurdity and madness. Enjoy.