

56 AND COUNTING

British series revisits children interviewed in 1964

56 UP: Directed by Michael Apted. Cinematography, George Jesse Turner. Editing, Kim Horton. First Run Features, 2013. Not rated. 144 minutes. ★ ★ ★ ★ ☆

It's never too late to start watching the *Up* movies. The British documentary series began in 1964 with *Seven Up*, in which children from varied socio-economic backgrounds were interviewed. The series follows 14 (give or take) of these kids, revisiting their lives every seven years. Director Michael Apted, a researcher on the original film, has now been directing the series for almost 50 years, and it's his deep voice that asks the participants questions about their lives, their dreams, their goals and — now that they've all passed the mid-century mark — their regrets.

If it sounds intimidating, joining a story several decades in the making, trust me when I say it isn't: I've been meaning to watch the *Up* films since I was a teenager, and this is the first I've actually seen. Apted and his editors do an excellent job piecing together key moments from the past films to create context for the most recent set of interviews. It's astonishing, really, that they have footage to fill in the background for nearly every reference point. While there are question marks around the "reality" in reality TV, that's not the case here.

The people featured in the series were chosen for their varying backgrounds: They come from a children's home, a wealthy suburb, a working-class neighborhood. The series intended to explore the effect of class on a person's life, and Apted and his team deftly illustrate class difference without forcefully foregrounding it. The point is neatly, if



unintentionally, driven home by the well-off and well-meaning John, whose obliviousness to his privilege serves handily to underscore how privileged he is. On the other end of the spectrum, Jackie struggles with shrinking benefits and a system that tells her she's capable of working even as arthritis makes getting out of bed a struggle. The rest of the participants are on many rungs of the economic ladder: One works for a university, one is a handyman at a retirement village. One, Peter, dropped out of the series after *28 Up*, when he was displeased with how his comments were portrayed in the media. He returns in *56 Up* in hopes of promoting his folk band.

What's unexpectedly fascinating, at this point in the series, is the conflicting sense that while on the one hand, every one of these lives is unique and compelling, on the other hand, they start to sound very similar. The fuzzy mirror of hindsight blurs the details until what's left is a tale with familiar beats: marriage, kids, divorce, death in

the family, job stress, job success. This isn't true of everyone, of course — particularly not Neil, who spent much of his 20s homeless and is now a local politician — and it's undeniable that out-of-work Lynn's life is miles apart from the comfortable world of Nick or Bruce (there are too few women in the series, and only one person, Symon, isn't white). But when Apted asks these men and women how their lives have gone, and what they might have done differently, they largely resist the notion of regret, no matter how rocky the road has been. Is this a matter of the fabled British stiff upper lip, or were the stories different seven years ago, or seven years before that? It speaks to the power of Apted's film — and the humble, exceptional power of an ordinary life story — that *56 Up* is both an exceptional standalone documentary and an excellent teaser for the series as a whole. You'll get the Cliffs Notes version of each subject's life here, but don't be surprised if you wind up wanting to see the rest. ■

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OZ: THE GREAT AND POWERFUL [CC,DV] (PG) ★
Fri. - Sat. (11:30 1:00 3:00) 5:00 6:30

DEAD MAN DOWN [CC,DV] (R) Fri. - Sat. (12:15) 4:15 7:15 10:15

21 AND OVER [CC,DV] (R) Fri. - Sat. (11:55 2:40) 5:10 7:45 10:05

THE LAST EXORCISM PART II [CC] (PG-13)
Fri. - Sat. 8:00 PM 10:35 PM

JACK THE GIANT SLAYER [CC,DV] (PG-13) ★
Fri. - Sat. (12:20 PM) 9:45 PM

JACK THE GIANT SLAYER IN REAL D 3D [CC,DV] (PG-13) ★
Fri. - Sat. (12:50 3:05) 4:25 6:50 7:20 10:20

DARK SKIES (PG-13) Fri. - Sat. 9:40 PM

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SAFE HAVEN [CC] (PG-13) Fri. - Sat. (12:45) 4:05 7:05 9:50

A GOOD DAY TO DIE HARD [CC,DV] (R)
Fri. - Sat. (12:40) 4:20 6:45 9:20

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21 AND OVER (R) Fri. - Sat. (1:45) 4:30 7:30 9:50

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12:15PM 2:40PM 5:00PM

THE HOBBIT: AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY (PG-13)
12:20PM 4:00PM 8:00PM

THE HOBBIT: AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY (3D) (PG-13)
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UPCHARGE ALL TICKETS 7:20PM

JACK REACHER (PG-13)
12:35PM 3:55PM 7:00PM 9:50PM

THE LAST STAND (R)
12:25PM 2:50PM 5:15PM 7:40PM 10:10PM

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MOVIE 43 (R)
11:55AM 4:55PM 10:15PM

RISE OF THE GUARDIANS (PG)
11:50AM 2:20PM 4:50PM 7:10PM 10:00PM

SKYFALL (PG-13)
1:30PM 4:40PM 7:50PM

TWILIGHT SAGA: BREAKING DAWN, PART 2 (PG-13)
12:30PM 3:45PM 7:05PM 9:55PM

WRECK-IT-RALPH (PG)
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