

# Where There's a Willow...

Hung:  
"We cannot live in the past."

Anh:  
"But the trees have their roots  
and the rivers their sources."

Hung:  
"Still, we must learn how to  
bend like the willow in a storm."

from *The Way of the Willow*

Except for the film crew Mirabel Airport is virtually empty. Like the countryside beyond the window, the vast inner landscape of the terminal building – all concrete, chrome and glass – seems to extend into infinity. Sunlight sets ablaze the row of international flags suspended above, and fashions new patterns of light and shade on the acres of shining tiled floor.

But for director of photography Bob Miller, the sunlight is proving to be a fickle friend – and time is running short. As another lumpish cloud moves in he readjusts his light meter, while a few paces away soundman Delano Jureidini gives gaffer Dave Young a hand with the fill lights, quipping as he flips the switch, "And the soundman said, 'Let there be light – and there was light!'"

There is an atmosphere of mounting excitement. As production manager André Lauzon briefs the RCMP and Canadian Armed Forces officers on their roles, smartly dressed Vietnamese interpreters and Canadian Immigration officials begin to post themselves at the Immigration counters. Just then the intercom announces the landing of Wardair Flight 900 from Bangkok.

Behind the vast plate glass window we observers wait expectantly. "Have you ever seen a planeload of refugees arrive?" asks writer/director John Harrison, as the first shuttle bus heads towards us. "No? Well it's something you can't prepare yourself for." You can only be struck by the contrast of the airport's slick grandeur to the slow parade of dazed individuals now approaching the electric doors, entering, clutching their worldly possessions – an assortment of plastic bags, straw baskets, frightened small hands fastened to parents for dear life... On their feet everything from socks-and-thongs to sneakers.

If you are surprised by the Western parkas, baseball caps, jeans and woolen sweaters, you are not surprised by the faces: a rare few are hesitantly excited and curious about the film crew before them; but the majority reflect immeasurable weariness and loss. "Welcome to Canada / Bienvenue au Canada" says the huge sign few, if any of them, can read.

While the stream of people continues the interpreters spring to action, shepherding the crowd into orderly rows for processing. The moment has come. Harrison gives the signal. Quickly Vietnamese actors Ding Ngoc Mo, Huynh Thi Mai Lan, and La Tung Huw begin to move across the tiles to become part of the crowd. The camera follows. And

by Teri Coburn

**Not your average student film, by a long shot. For these students, "The Way of the Willow" is more than a revelation in filmmaking: it's a lesson in life.**

suddenly, they are no longer Mo, Lan and Huw (pronounced "we"). They are the Tran family – Hung, Anh and three-year-old Huw. And like the Vietnamese refugees around them, they too have just arrived to reconstruct their lives in a totally foreign land. On the other side of the Immigration counter, beyond the door, their Canadian sponsors anxiously await them.

And their story begins...

For several reasons *The Way of the Willow* is an extraordinary film project. This 30-minute, 16 mm docu-drama tackles the complexities of the refugee/sponsorship rela-

tionship by focusing on two families: the Vietnamese Tran family, and the Renshaw family from Montreal. It follows them as they first meet at Mirabel Airport, through the three-day indoctrination process at Longue Point military base and the subsequent two-week adjustment period as the Tran's move into their new apartment and, with the help of their sponsors, begin to learn of Canadian life.

At first, the scale of the project is misleading. A feature film perhaps? A CBC movie special? In fact, it is a Concordia University production deriving most of its support from the National Film Board. While the university is providing some equipment and studio space, the NFB is contributing \$47,754 worth of in-house lab and recording facilities, and related services – including the help of official consultant Stephan Wodoslawsky, a producer in the NFB Drama Studio. The Secretary of State is contributing \$6,000, and a private foundation another \$6,020 to the project.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Canada, Guy Ouellet, was so "deeply impressed" by the international relevance of the script that he forwarded it on to UNESCO in Geneva with his "highest personal recommendation." The result was an additional \$2,500. Add to that \$10,000 from the Canada Council and the budget totals \$72,274.

Those making the film include: Concordia professors (and producers) John Harrison and Bob Miller, a class of third-year film production students, and a group of non-student actors and technicians. The students are working for course credit. The non-students involved are volunteering their services to see the non-profit venture completed – hopeful that eventual sales of the film will result in revenues which can then be applied to the payment of their deferred salaries; in which case they

would be paid on a one-unit-per-function basis, each unit representing 6.6 percent of the producers' net.

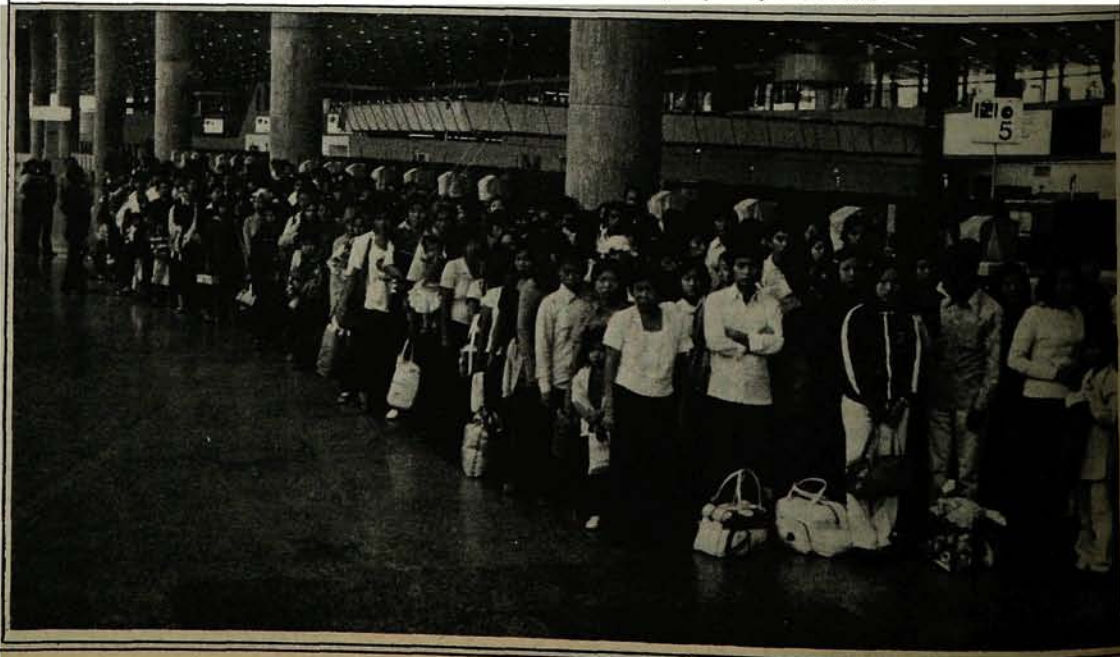
Clearly, any romantic notions of filmmaking the students may have had were quickly dispelled when shooting began in mid-October. "People don't know what they're getting into when they first get involved in film. It's really a romanticized thing. Certainly this film is teaching us that it isn't all glorious!" states student (continuity person) Loreen Pindera.

Now, the students are all too familiar with six a.m. lighting tests, week-night meetings and rehearsals, and weekend shoots that start on Friday night and end in the wee hours of Monday morning.

But for those addicted to the project the rewards are worth it. "I'm a student of Third World Studies as well as Communications," explains Pindera. "So a lot of my interest is in the international perspective and cross-cultural events. I got very involved in the research and found out a lot about the process of the Vietnamese coming to Canada; their processing at the military base, and what it's like for them finding jobs... So this project is very close to my heart. The more I did, the more it became a film that *had* to be made, instead of just something that would be fun to make."

Concordia professors, Nancy and her husband Ralph Allison, are cast as the lead Canadian sponsors (Nancy and George Renshaw) in the film. Nancy Allison believes that, in addition to the inter-cultural relevance of the script, "it touches people on a personal level. I remember the first time I read it. I had a few minutes after class and I was sitting in the student centre at Concordia having a coffee and reading it over. And when I got to the part where the Vietnamese woman (Anh) is running out into the snow in her bare feet, it was just so moving that I found myself sitting there with tears running down my cheeks... So

● For these new arrivals, modern Mirabel Airport is a far cry from the refugee camp they have just left behind





I hope that it has that effect on people who see the film for the first time."

If it does, much of the credit must go to co-producer/writer/director John Harrison.

In the spring of 1980, Harrison was considering possible film projects for his production class. Instead of the students making individual small-scale films, as they had done the previous year, he was intent on involving them in a larger project that they could all collaborate on - something that would give them a real taste of what filmmaking is all about.

"In that year," he explains, "the thing that was most significant in my life was getting involved with the Vietnamese situation through a sponsorship program. There were things that happened in that situation that were very important to me: the point, for instance, when you realize that 'Boat People' haven't been 'Boat People' all their lives - that they have very significant lives.

"I thought that this would be a very exciting kind of exploration so I drew up a rough story outline and presented it to the class... For five years I had been teaching that you can make films in a certain kind of way, and now there was a chance to try and prove it..."

Along with the outline he presented research questions; and for the next three months both teacher and students did their homework, questioning not only Vietnamese, but sponsoring groups and government officials as well. Harrison then approached his colleague Bob Miller (with whom he had team-taught the same group of students the previous year), to act as co-producer and director of photography. Miller agreed.

From the outset, despite the teachers' involvement, the project was student-oriented. Certainly Harrison welcomed the opportunity to have some creative control over the material, but "More than anything else I really wanted to do something collaborative - as much as the students didn't believe it at the time. They believe it now, but at the time they sort of felt that teacher-as-authority-figure-versus-the-students thing.

"I remember in the first class saying to the students, 'We're going to treat this script the same way we treated your scripts last year - that is, I'll write a draft and you must feel free to make criticism. If you don't... we all lose. You must comment and you must contribute.' And 99 percent of them did!"

Loreen Pindera is frank about the students' reaction. "At the beginning there was some fear that maybe it was John's film and not the students'. How much input would we really have? And why would Bob do the camera work instead of a student? What ended up happening was that John and Bob at some point weren't teachers anymore. It was established right at the outset that we were a crew together."

The students' enthusiastic response was probably generated by Harrison's general attitude towards them. "I can remember when I was 20 years old, and one of the problems is that people don't listen to you. And you've got all this stuff inside you - granted not all of it makes

sense, but some of it does; and you've certainly got feelings. So you've got to have somebody who's going to say 'It's OK to blab, it's OK to make mistakes, it's OK that not all of your ideas are perfect, but you may have a few good ideas amongst that grab-bag of what you feel.'"

The students were forceful in making their feelings known. Says Pindera, "In a series of classes we held we'd sit and give John hell for what was in the script, and then he'd accept or reject it. But he took all the criticism, and then would go and revise the script and come back. We went through five drafts. But we really felt we had had an input into the script development."

If the project is giving the students a chance to apply what they have learned, it is also giving their professor a chance to apply what he's been teaching.

"I've always taught the notion that film is an opportunity for exploration. It's an opportunity for indulgence, for making money, for a lot of things that people use film for; but every time you make a film, what you're really doing is exploring a subject... When you take a film that deals with cultural diversity you fragment two cultures, you analyze

the cultures, then you reconstruct them. And in the process of doing that you come to understand more about your own culture, and more about another culture... And for me, that's what's most rewarding about this situation."

#### Location: Longue Point Military Base

It is mid-November, one of Canada's bleakest months. As a Canadian Armed Forces officer waves you through the entrance you are impressed with the wide open spaces of this military base in the middle of the city. The grounds are rock hard, crusted with snow, almost treeless. Numerous large, low buildings are regimentally lined up under the gray sky. Across the parking lot you spot the crew's Tilden truck parked beside Barrack 154.

Inside the air is hot and dry as you head along the wide, bare corridor toward the sound of activity at the far end. On either side are the long, narrow dormitories, each room containing roughly 12 bunks. It is here that the refugees spend their first nights in Canada.

It is just nine a.m. but the set is ready. Second a.d. Rudy Barichello is briefing

an interpreter, who will, in turn, explain to the bewildered group of Vietnamese extras just what they will do. The crew members are chatting, between bites of bagels and cream cheese, about last night's late wrap: how it wasn't worth going home because of the early call today, so "We sort of made a tent out of a couple of polecats and the sound blanket, and six of us slept in the truck." All in the line of duty.

Other comments include enthusiastic outbursts about the rushes: "They're just great! They look like feature stuff. The lighting is fantastic!" Accompanied by Harrison's qualification, "But I warned everyone to be careful, so we don't start getting lazy."

Certainly no one is lazy this morning: least of all little Huw. Because he appears in so many scenes he is almost always on set. It is no easy task to keep a three-year-old simultaneously entertained and quiet for hours on end during takes. But actor Ding Ngoc Mo is a child's best friend. Watching them as they sit cross-legged on the floor, fashioning a Zorro costume out of gaffer tape, garbage bags and styrofoam, it is hard to believe that Huw spent eight months of his life in a refugee camp in Thailand.

During the filming itself the child consistently steals the limelight. As Mo explains, "He loves to pretend." And he obviously thrives on all the attention his film family lavishes upon him. This morning Huw is raring to go, and as first a.d. Val Nathan gives the ready call he rolls his mischievous eyes and suddenly preempts the director by leaping to his feet singing "Aksin! Aksin!"

Meanwhile, wardrobe mistress Maureen Allman is conscientiously attending to the extras. She confesses it is a delicate task, and wonders what these new Canadians feel when they are asked to remove their good clothing to don the apparel of refugees. But they understand. And they smile. Whether it is standing under hot lights in winter coats for yet another take, or bundling out into the Arctic night (parents and children both) for their long ride home across the city, they are infinitely patient and gracious, and usually full of humour and enthusiasm.

In addition to acting, Mo, in his capacity as cultural consultant and Vietnamese liaison, plays a crucial role in the relationship between the extras and the production. He assists with the interpretation and briefings, helps find the extras, and given his knowledge of Vietnamese culture is able to advise the director on details of the script, dress, props and acting.

Because of the number of Vietnamese needed, and the film's considerable budget restraints, the extras are volunteers. Mo confesses, "I did feel a little reluctant about asking them at first. I didn't feel it was right... On the other hand, I knew there was a reason, so I was quite torn. However, when I approached some of them on a personal basis they felt great about it. The most humble people are the most beautiful people - because they said that they feel grateful about Canada. And participating in a project that is made by

● At Longue Point military base East meets West, past meets present, as the Tran's consider their future

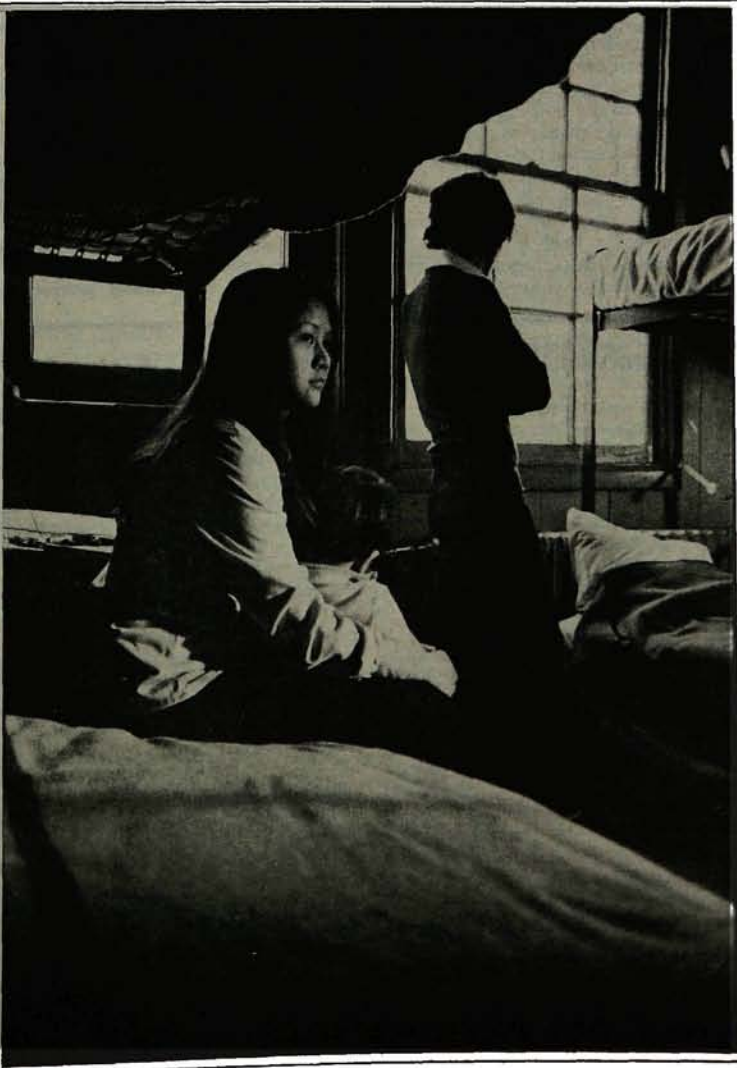


photo: Peter H. Budden



Canadians to talk about the refugees... Well, they feel it is, as I do, more or less their duty, and a way to show their gratitude."

But doesn't the shooting at Longue Point military base revive some painful memories for them? At this Mo smiles: "Longue Point to them is the gate to heaven; so it is not a place for mourning. If you asked them to go back to Vietnam to be filmed, then they might feel badly!"

The last scene of the day – the shower scene – prompts a flurry of activity as the set-up moves one floor down. While waiting for the crew to set the lights the rest of the team scatters. Some head for the convenient dormitories for a brief nap: student Maureen Allman confesses that Longue Point is her "favourite location because of all the beds!" At the door of the shower room Harrison, Mo, and a group of students ponder the cultural implications of the shower scene – where Mo explains the differences between Eastern and Western attitudes towards exposing oneself in public: the question of public shame versus private guilt...

Further down the corridor the Canadian Armed Forces medical assistant, who will 'officiate' the shower scene, speaks of his personal experiences with the thousands of refugees who have passed through the base. Then, stepping into the action like a natural, he begins dispensing shampoo to the three 'refugees', Mo included, who are about to take their first Canadian shower.

**M**irabel Airport and Longue Point military base are only two of the production's many diversified locations. And with each



● For Vietnamese actress Lan, and young Huw, the story they act out could well be their own

change of locale the crew comes into contact with a new community and a new set of challenges.

Canadian Immigration and airport officials, the RCMP, the Canadian Armed Forces, and many others are all playing a role in the making of the film. Consequently, much of the project's success depends upon skillful public relations and technical expertise.

While shooting at St. Andrew's and St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in downtown Montreal the crew had to literally come to grips with the difficult task of lighting a Gothic chancel. As choir master Wayne Riddell conducted a full choir rehearsal, Delano Jureidini rolled sound from the pulpit.

At Labat's Brewery (the workplace of George Renshaw in the film) the crew arranged two huge lighting set-ups at either end of the bottling plant. Then, wearing protective glasses and ear plugs the students carried the camera equipment down into the centre of plant operations amidst regular hosings of the factory floor and the occasional explosion of a beer bottle from the conveyor belt. The factory workers stopped and started the conveyor belts at the

director's request, and the plant manager gave up his office for the film. Amazingly, none of the pythons (huge electric cables) wrapped in garbage bags and stretched across the wet floor short-circuited, no one was hit by flying glass, and none of the fuses blew. The final reward of the shoot was free beer in the company cafeteria, and a week later, back at the University, a screening of rushes that surpassed all expectations.

Mo, who produced and directed films in Vietnam before coming to Canada, and who has since worked in Canadian film, considers this student crew to be exceptional. "I have never seen a crew so united, that works so well together, in all my film experience. There is a unity of spirit and of heart that I feel very strongly in this film."

Both he and Nancy Allison are also impressed with Harrison's first shot at directing. "He is not a method-acting director," says Mo. "He works very much from the inside." For Nancy Allison it is Harrison's "willingness to work around the script for that nuance of relationship between people" that gives his direction a special quality.

Aside from the normal production

headaches of trying to find financing, scouting for locations, attending to P.R. and publicity, coping with vehicle rentals, equipment breakdowns, power failures, bad weather and time constraints, the production's biggest problem has been extras – "finding Vietnamese extras!" Concerning the budget Harrison emphasizes, "That hasn't been a difficulty. People have understood it. It's not going to be a very slick production in the sense of having famous professional actors and what not – that would be a different movie. But that's not the level we're thinking at anyway."

For him, "The main advantage to the material is the commitment that everyone has to it – that even the extras have. And that generates collaboration, good ideas, enthusiasm, and participation."

#### Location: The Tran Family Apartment

It is late. All the cast and crew want to do is shoot the last scene of the day and go home to bed. The actors are ready, the lights and camera are set, props and clothing have received continuity's OK, and sound is ready to roll. There's only one hitch. The neighbours won't turn down their stereo – and it's bringing the walls down. So once again production manager André Lauzon heads next door to try and negotiate a settlement. "Invite them to come in if they want. Maybe if they see the set-up they'll co-operate," Harrison suggests.

Soon Lauzon reports back to say that yes, the neighbours will come in a few moments. (In an aside to one of the crew he repeats what the woman next door had responded to: "Yeah, well, s'pose we could take a look; but we don't think much of them Chinese people...")

Following the neighbours' departure, all is finally quiet. You can't help but wonder if perhaps the closeness of the

## Nature of the Project Raises Questions for the Industry

*The Way of the Willow* may well be the largest student film project ever attempted in Canada. Unlike so many other student labours of love, which are shelved after a couple of screenings in the university auditorium, indications suggest that this film – given its subject matter and dramatic format – may find a significant audience.

The project also illustrates that for certain Canadian filmmakers commitment to the subject and the craft is more important than profit, that film can be entertaining and still be socially responsible, and that Canadians don't have to disguise their country or emulate others for their stories to be acceptable.

Still, the nature of this film production will be questioned by some members of the film industry's private sector. Small, independent production companies, which are struggling to make films despite the high costs of professional salaries and production materials, are in direct competition for funding and distribution. They are bound to resent a university production which uses an unpaid student crew, which is depen-

dent upon the NFB for most of its support, and which is directed and produced by volunteer professionals.

Within the college and university sector itself there are some who maintain that 'student' films of this nature undermine the success of smaller, conventional student projects by competing – with unfair advantage – for the same awards, and inhibiting other ventures from getting off the ground.

In the face of criticism it is difficult to judge where priorities should lie. Lacking a national film school in Canada, or trade schools in film production where students would be constantly applying what they learn, students must rely on their college or university experience to give them the necessary tools to 'make it' in film. Frequently it is difficult, and often impossible for them to get first-hand experience with film production companies. If production companies won't hire them for lack of experience when they graduate, how else are they to get that experience?

Then again, if professors like Harrison and Miller take it upon themselves to

design a project, secure funding and support, and launch a full-scale production despite the risks, what assurances, if any, do they have of success? Or, conversely, what is the price to be paid for failure? ACTRA, for example, is presently insisting that director Harrison (a member of ACTRA), along with the other non-students involved in the project, be promptly paid for their work on the film according to the union pay scale – regardless of how willing they are to defer their salaries to see the project through. However promising the film's sales potential might be, there are no guarantees.

If this project fails to fit into an established category it must be hoped that the industry will find some way to accommodate it – and others like it. Because, for the students involved, it is proving to be a once-in-a-lifetime, hands-on opportunity. Canadian producers complain that most film graduates are ill-prepared to meet the demands of real film production. This project is a good example of how one program is giving its stu-

dents that first break so hard to come by on the 'outside'.

### The Way of the Willow

p./d./sc. John Harrison p./d.o.p. Bob Miller a.d. Val Nathan (1st), Rudy Barichello (2nd), Avra Goldenblatt (3rd) p. man. André Lauzon unit man. Richard Carriere, Nicole Joron (1st asst), Carol Lynn Meland (2nd asst), Celine Pelletier (3rd asst) g.a./cam.op. Dave Young asst.cam. Marc Landau (1st), Helen Yee (2nd) key grip François Garcia grips Neil Woolward, Paul Van Emmerick best boy James Peto art d. Alison Burns ed. Alfonso Peccia, Arto Tavukciyan (1st asst), Maureen Allman (2nd asst) sd. Delano Jureidini boom Alex Vachon sd.ed. Lisa Frankfort cont. Loreen Pindera loc. scouting Trish Irwin, James Peto, Lisa Frankfort, Alex Vachon stills Peter Budden props Marc Lalonde ward. Maureen Allman, Barbara Victor (1st asst), Camille Gueymard (2nd asst), Rita Vani (3rd asst) p.s.c. Diane Lalonde, Gwen Campbell make-up Fernanda Tavares p.a. Shimon Greenbaum consultants Ding Ngoc Mo, Stephan Wodoslawsky (NFB), Monica Armour pub. Marc Lalonde (Eng.), Celine Pelletier (Fr.) L.p. Huynh Thi Mai Lan, Ding Ngoc Mo, La Tung Huw, Nancy Allison, Ralph Allison, Kate Williams, Grace Findley, Jane Hackett, David Mills, John Bourgeois, Scotty Hannah, Corporal Murray Helm, Alan Glazer p.c. KentCom Productions in cooperation with Concordia University.



quarters is contributing to the closeness of spirit everyone is feeling. That, and the sense that what is being shot today is the heart of the film.

Much effort has gone into authenticating the set – the Tran family's apartment, rented and furnished for them by the sponsors who have brought them to Canada. There is the simple, yet adequate furniture, the portable black-and-white T.V., the necessary kitchen utensils, and the more personal touches: pictures on the wall of Montreal tourist sites, a calendar of Canadian landscapes, a vase of yellow chrysanthemums on the coffee table...

Most notable however, is the family's Vietnamese altar in an alcove of the living room, and the freshly painted, multi-coloured mural of a Vietnamese fishing village on the wall. But at this moment all eyes are on the kitchen, as the crew prepares to shoot the next take. Little Huw, seated in the middle of the kitchen floor with Harrison and Mo, is getting briefed. It is to be a complicated scene and he is in a delicate mood – perhaps sensing his potential to make or break the take with his performance.

As the expectant crew holds its breath a hand signal is given to roll the sound and camera. (By now everyone has learned that to call "rolling" or "action" will only prompt Huw to parrot the calls and wreck the take.) Scanning his audience for reactions Huw finally acts out his demanding part with a sense of melodrama that results in a quick cut and a lot of laughs. "Hay lam?" he demands. "Yes, yes hay lam!" (very good) his fans respond with encouragement – as they prepare for Take Two, Take Three, Take Four... Until finally it's "Cut and print!" At the enthusiastic burst of applause Huw catapults with delight into Mo's arms, cheering "Hay lam! Hay lam!" with the rest of them.

For the final shot of the day Lan kneels before the coffee table in the living room, Huw at her side. Her composure and intensity of expression are transferred to Huw, who is suddenly equally serious. Slowly Lan raises her hands from her lap. Huw follows her with a dark-eyed gaze. Gently she snaps the head off one of the yellow blossoms before her and floats it in a cup of water. Gracefully she stands, turns, and bearing the cup in her hands proceeds toward the altar. Then, setting it before the porcelain Buddah, between the photographs of her relatives (and that of her baby son who died before making it to Canada) she lights the incense standing in the bowl of rice and begins to pray.

But the incense fails to smoke and the shot is cut. As Lan returns to the coffee table for the retake, Harrison tries to conceal a burning cigarette behind the incense to achieve the desired effect of smoke rising. Finding that it works, the camera rolls for Take Two. This time, just as Lan reaches for the flower Huw suddenly decides to improvise. In a small reverent voice he asks her something in Vietnamese. She responds, and continues acting out her part. As this Vietnamese exchange continues the crew is spellbound, wondering what is being said and why the director hasn't called



• Director John Harrison briefs Lan in preparation for the next scene

"cut." But Harrison has caught Mo's eye and read the message in it. So Lan proceeds to the altar, the smoke rises, she prays, and the shot is completed.

The set is suddenly electric as Lan explains what Huw has said. "He asked, 'Why do we have an altar?' And I answered, 'To worship Buddah.' Then he said, 'Why do we worship Buddah?' And I told him why."

Hay lam, indeed.

**F**or the students one of the hardest things about the project is "working with so many different personalities, people with different ideological perspectives – learning how to co-operate," says Pindera. "For instance, you might be afraid that someone else won't work hard enough, or feel as committed, and then all your effort will be wasted. You have to put so much faith and trust in everyone else."

But for her and her colleagues the film is a turning point in their understanding of film production. "I've worked on other films, but I never had the sense of being a filmmaker. This film is allowing me to synthesize so many different aspects of film production and the concepts of drama – what goes into making a story."

Given what is going into the making of this story, one can only hope that the final telling of it will reach the widest audience possible. Like UNESCO, those in charge of refugee activities for Montreal's YMCA are especially enthusiastic. They hope that the film will find its way into schools accompanied by an educational package which would assist teachers in answering some of the questions raised by the subject matter. In their view the film's dramatic format, focus on family, and cultural exploration

of the refugee/sponsorship relationship will draw in and sensitize audiences – and ultimately, go a long way towards combating racism.

#### Location: The Montreal General Hospital

It is a frigid, blustery night in early January. A caravan of cars, generator and equipment trucks, a Winnebago, and a van pull into the outdoor parking lot of the General. High above the bright lights of the city, on the side of the mountain, in a blizzard, the production prepares to shoot the film's most difficult and critical scene.

Eight 10-K lights are set, a dolly track is laid, fresh snow is shovelled over the ankle-deep brown slush, and the rented ambulance is positioned centre-stage with its red lights flashing. A heating pad is tucked around the camera motor and crew members jog from foot to foot to keep warm... Finally, after hours of preparation the stage is set.

From behind the ambulance, into the eerie glow of the flashing red light, her

jet black hair torn by the wind, comes Anh. Oblivious to her surroundings, overwhelmed by the sudden harsh realities of her adjustment to Canada, she flees the hospital where her son is just recovering from a near-fatal accident. In shock – leaving her things behind in her escape – she walks with her coat flapping open, barefoot through the snow. Suddenly Hung rushes into frame, accompanied by the family's sponsor George Renshaw. After a moment's struggle Hung manages to lift his wife out of the snow, and as George grapples to wrap a scarf around her frozen feet the three exit behind the ambulance...

Three takes later it's a print, and Lan's feet are soon being vigorously warmed by crew members in the van. But tonight, the jokes fall a little flat – for the shoot is over.

Despite the cold, and the frantic activity of the midnight wrap, the dramatic intensity of the scene just shot lingers long after the lights are killed and the slush-covered cables are loaded into the trucks.



photo: Peter H. Budden