



A. Ibrányi-Kiss

Carol Betts filming bridge-painters on top of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco for "World of Wicks" in morning fog

Here's hoping she forgives me, but I couldn't figure out a way of avoiding this — CAROL BETTS IS AMAZING! She's not only an excellent cameraperson and the first woman in Canada to make her living at it, but she also happens to be disarmingly attractive as well as a very fine person. Somehow, that combination seems so unusual that even knowing her for several years doesn't lessen my amazement.

So much for that. Far more impressive than my raves are her credentials. Specialising in news, sports and documentaries for four years, Carol has worked for CBC's Take 30, CTV's News and Sportsbeat '72 and '73, UPITN International, ABC International, CFCF, CBLFT, as well as television stations in Montreal, Detroit, Buffalo and Washington D.C. She has covered items including the Attica prison riot, wrestling, the Royal York Liberal dinner riot, Osaka Expo 70, the Federal Election of 72 — the list goes on and on. Most recently, she's been shooting three and four items a day for *World of Wicks* — a lively, off-beat news magazine series aired in Canada and Britain.

As if that weren't enough, Carol Betts was also cinematographer on *Portrait of My Mother* (see interview, Issue No. 14, with Bonnie Kreps, producer/director), *Nothing Smells So Sweet* for Jandu Production, *Flying Colours* for Insight Productions, *CIDA Far East* for the National Film Board; and her own productions — *Actionsports*, *Burma Handicrafts* and *Biplane Madness*.

No-one could seem less like such a person. She tries to apologise by saying, "I still blush when I'm swearing. I'm very shy and soft-spoken. . . . I guess you've noticed that."

Carol admits to having had a very sheltered life. She dated a lot, got married and started teaching Phys. Ed. and English in high schools. "What else could I do? There weren't that many

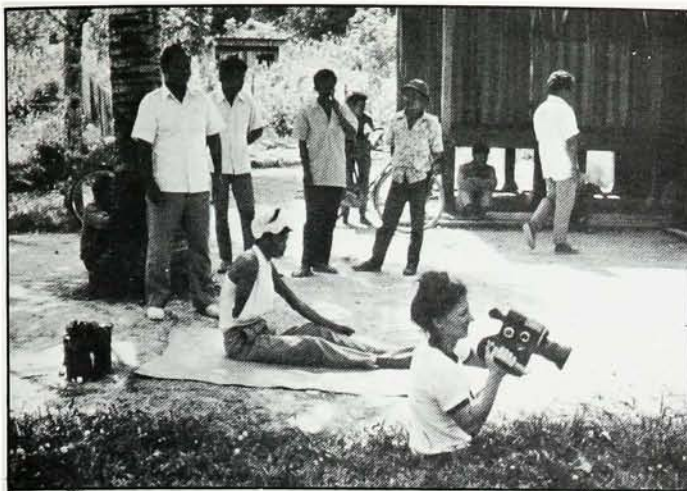
alternatives. I could teach and that seemed to be far more interesting than being a secretary." Today, she's no longer married or teaching, spending most of her time travelling around the world on assignments.

Probably because we first met in feminist groups, she's a bit hesitant about explaining the transition. "I used to rely on my looks, you know. And then I realised that when they would be gone I'd still have decades left — my family lives for a long time. And I didn't want to die a shattered old woman."

But why camerawork? "Why not? That's my question — why not?" Wasn't she a little worried about the physical demands? After all, she's only 5' 3". "If I had sat down and thought about it, maybe. But I knew that in a couple of years cameras would be even lighter." Besides, she had always been interested in photography as a hobby.

So, four years ago, Carol bought a used Bolex and meticulously checked the daily papers for weekend events which wouldn't be covered by regular news teams. Still teaching, but filming on weekends and taking her footage to television news rooms. "I was very lucky — they bought most of my stuff." It was more than luck. "I used to watch the editors working on my footage. They didn't mind as long as I wasn't bothering them. Eventually, they gave me tips and suggestions, like I wasn't holding my shots long enough. Anyway, I started shooting with the editing in mind and they hardly had to touch my stuff."

Her success gave her enough encouragement to take the plunge. She quit teaching, bought a single-system Canon Scoopic and became Canada's first camerawoman. "You know, I thought after four years there would be a lot more women doing this. I'm really surprised there aren't more women in camerawork."



On location in the Far East

Ben Wicks and Carol Betts

Today, she can handle any 16mm camera on the market, and loves to talk shop with others in her field. "Maybe a little too much . . ." Although she doesn't like making comparisons with cameramen, the topic invariably comes up. "I may not have the strength of a middle-aged cameraman, but I have endurance and I'm young. Also, I take care of myself. We interviewed this doctor in New York who wrote a book on athlete's ailments. So we had a talk after the shooting and he showed me some of the exercises he developed. They're really good. I do them all the time. I've learned to use my body as a dolly. My specialty is hand-held and many producers have told me that my work is much steadier than most of the footage they get. I don't want to sound conceited, but that's what they say. I've also taught myself to change F-stops while I'm moving. I can move from one position to another, change the F-stop while I'm moving, and it's terribly smooth. It really looks like a dolly shot."

Yes, Carol has missed out on some jobs because she's a woman; but rarely has she gotten any due to her sex, and she's pleased to have a reputation based on her abilities. There's very little she can't handle — even under very difficult conditions. She has been known to film an interview by placing her camera on a tripod, running into frame to introduce her subject, getting behind the camera for the interview while shouting the questions, and ending the segment by running into frame for the closing.

Her ability to be a one-person crew was partially responsible for CIDA choosing her to film CUSO workers in the Far East. She even amazed herself on that shoot by filming a remote village several thousand feet above sea level in an hour. "That's the only time I had to shoot a whole village! Actually, I had less than an hour because I had to film my

plane departing, run around the village, and get back to the airport to film the next plane arriving. In the 20 minutes in between, I was just running up and down the paths — in this rarefied atmosphere. Everyone told me I would get sick, but I didn't."

Being a woman was actually an advantage on that assignment. Not only is Carol's presence far less threatening than most camerapersons' (particularly for people who had never seen a camera before), but also, "I find it easier to get around customs and immigration — which in places like India and the East means a lot. I shouldn't say this, but I even got to film inside the Taj Mahal without special permission because the guards thought I was just a nice lady tourist making home movies."

Sexism can even be amusing. For example, the CUSO people meeting her at airports in the Far East often formed such a strong image of what a one-woman crew would look like, that they caused terribly embarrassing scenes by greeting heavy-set ladies who, they were sure, were Carol Betts. Nonetheless, Carol handles such situations very calmly. She's even gotten used to people staring while she works, and doesn't mind wolf-whistles on construction sites. "I really like to show teenage girls especially, who might be indecisive about what to do with their lives, that just because you're good-looking or attractive or whatever, doesn't mean you shouldn't also be into your job. I don't want to sound conceited, and I've come off sounding that way. One newspaper reporter wrote "Carol feels that being good-looking is not a disadvantage on her job". Well, really! It sounds so awful. But I like to look attractive and well-dressed when I'm working on a job. And I'd like teenage girls to be able to say, "Well, there's someone who could be married and have a

carol

dotting husband and all that, yet she's doing camerawork" – you know what I mean?"

One of Carol's favourite projects involves teaching camera workshops at the Toronto Filmmakers Co-op. Her approach is quite unique – her students start by using a single-system camera with automatic everything and when they understand the basics of framing and are excited by shooting, then she starts filling them in on the technical information. So far, her method works quite well, and she's due to start teaching another series this fall.

Her latest assignment? Carol just got hired for a shoot she was particularly excited about – making short films on co-op housing for the National Film Board. Kathleen Shannon is producing these for Challenge for Change, Laura Sky is directing, Aerlyn Weissman recording sound, Barbara Matheson on lights, and Carol is the cinematographer with Joan Hutton as her assistant. Shooting now in Toronto, she hopes this break might mean more freelance assignments from the National Film Board once they set up their Toronto office.

Carol Betts' future definitely looks promising. Now that she can pick and choose her jobs, she has more time for producing her own films. Her interests are fairly wide, but basically she's concerned about social issues. "If anybody did a study of how many news and news-magazine programmes are being sponsored by oil companies in North America . . . Well, to me, that says something. I'm more interested in real-life situations than artistic films. I think films should be used for social change." To those ends, she's currently working on producing more of her films as well as writing a book.

Has she been able to win the respect of her colleagues? "After they've seen me working – yes. But they never forget that you're a woman!" Amazing lady . . . □

A lot can happen before you get it in the can

Your casting is perfect, your cameraman the best around, all is ready to shoot . . . then your lead breaks his leg *or* your film stock is faulty *or* the weather turns bad *or* the lab messes up *and* you're in trouble . . . But that's the film game, isn't it? It is, unless you play it smart and protect yourself

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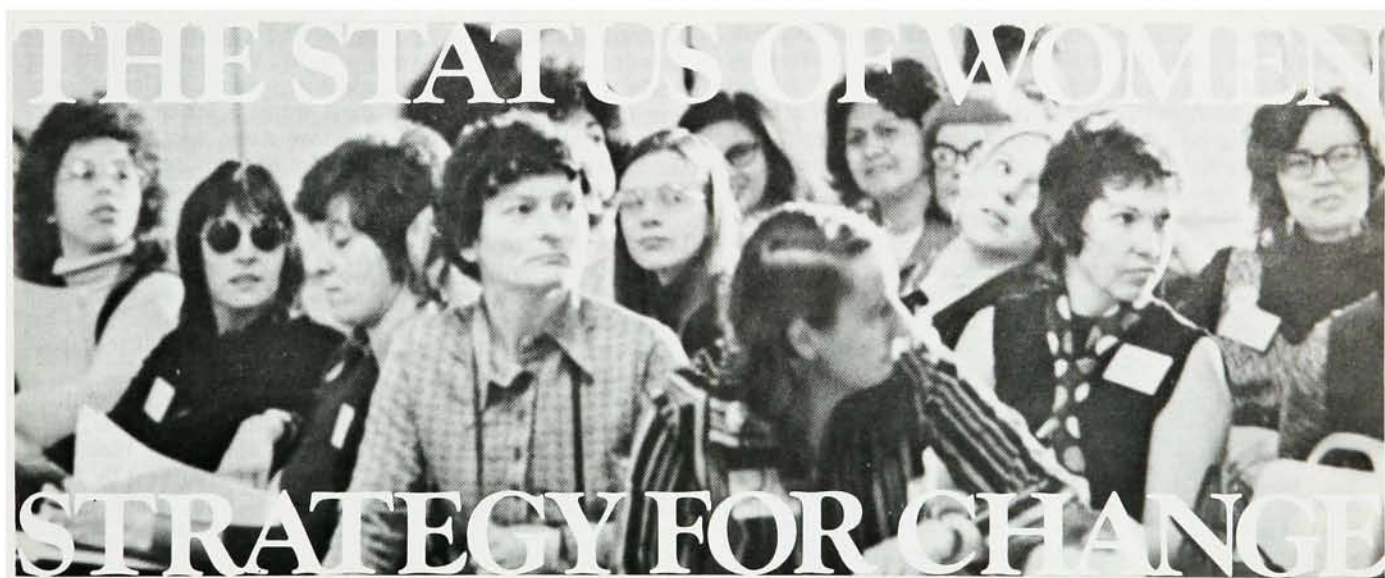
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The film "The Status of Women – Strategy for Change" is an account of a Conference sponsored by the National Action Committee on the Status of Women. This was the first time women from every province and territory had been brought together to discuss the concerns of women.

Some of the speakers are: Florence Bird (who chaired the Royal Commission on the Status of Women), Laura Sabia, Elsie Gregory MacGill, Maryon Kantaroff, Esther Green-glass, Madeleine Parent, Senator Thérèse

Casgrain, Jeannette Lavell, Joan Colpitts, Maryon Younger, Yvette Rousseau, Joan Wallace and June Menzies.

Jeanette Lavell talks about the Supreme Court decision which removed her rights as an Indian simply because she married a non-Indian. The workshop session on the need for more women in politics is shown.

The film is of use in women's studies courses in High Schools and Universities or as an organizational tool for Status of Women groups.