

good idea at the right time. You see, often the true genius comes up with an idea too far ahead of his time. What I hope is that I can just come up with it at the right time.

*It sounds like you're efficient enough so that if you get an idea at the right time, it'll be done while the right time is still in existence.*

I don't know if that is true about myself but I hope it is because that makes successful films.

*Do you think you would have accomplished what you have right now had you stayed in Boston?*

No. If I had stayed in Boston they would never have made me a director. It's unfortunate that whatever level you enter an institution at it determines your future. I was lucky enough to enter here as a director. If I hadn't, I never would have gotten my chance.

*Do you think the women's unit (at NFB) offers women this chance?*

Absolutely. I think Kathleen Shannon put herself on the line. It was one of the first projects she approached the program committee with for approval and she must have said "If you have faith in me, you have to trust my judgement." So they said OK. And I think the women's unit is going to attract more and more people now. Somehow it is a little bit more comfortable, not so high-powered. There aren't only women in it now, there are some men too.

For me the Film Board has given me the chance to make the films I want. There's nowhere else in the world like it. At that TV station you couldn't make any film you wanted to make. But here, with the right circumstances, you get an idea and you can make the film. And you can make it as long as you want it and you can finish it more or less when it's ready to be finished.

That whole film (*I'll Find A Way*) was shot in five days and it was quite a low budget film. I know exactly how to

make these children's films in the most efficient manner and I think I could teach people. But if you're making a film about kids or with kids you really should be enthusiastic and you can't be enthusiastic for a lifetime. So it's better to leave it and come back when you feel like it.

Now I'd rather do dramatic films for adults; I'm going also to be working on the Commonwealth Games, which is a challenge.

*What's your role?*

Paul Cowan is the director and he has four directors working with him and I'm one of them. Here we'll see if, in fact, the female sensibility is different from that of the male. I'm the only woman director and I'm going to be following one or two athletes.

*So you have a suspicion that it is different, that sensibility?*

I think so, although a lot of people get angry when you tell them that, especially men. Women are more interested in feelings. That's why Nadia's such a good film, because she talks about feelings and she talks about what hurts her. I think that if more women start making films, the films will be different. I know there have been excellent films made at the Film Board that tell you everything about a situation but they don't have that feeling, they don't touch as much. For me, that's what makes a good film, a film that deals with emotions and can touch you.

*Did you ever think of winning an Academy Award?*

Never. Would you think of an Academy Award? I have a healthy fantasy life and everything, but that was never a part of it.

*Once you've done that, what is the next?...*

The next is... well now it's a part of my fantasy. I'd like to win another one. □

## I'll Find a Way

d: Beverly Shaffer, ph: Hideaki Kobayashi, asst. ph: Joan Hutton, ed: Ginny Stikeman, re-rec: Jean-Pierre Joutel, sd. ed.: John Knight, sd. rec.: Ingrid M. Cusiel, m: Larry Crosley, Administration: Jane Kenderes, exec. p.: Kathleen Shannon, p: Yuki Yoshida, p.c.: National Film Board (1977) col: 16mm, running time: 23 minutes, 20 seconds.



Nadia with her parents.

Academy Awards for documentaries and short films are just as unrelated to actual merit as in the other more prestigious categories, so it's absurd to talk about whether Beverly Shaf-

fer's *I'll Find A Way* really deserves the Oscar it has just received. It's embarrassing the way the NFB publicity people have reacted to this latest accident of Beverly Hills politics with such unprecedented hype, and have made 10-year-old Nadia di Franco the hottest new Canadian media star since Craig Russell.

Fortunately for all concerned, however, the Oscar couldn't have happened to a nicer film.

I suppose it's being a poor sport to interrupt the celebration by pointing out the unerring stupidity with which the Academy has systematically ignored for the last thirty-six years the best documentaries from the best documentary studio in the world. The last and only NFB documentary ever

to be so honored was Churchill's *Island* from the "World in Action" series during the early years of World War II; the most recent Oscar given a "Canadian" documentary not produced at the Board (*The Man Who Skied Down Everest*, that inept trim-bin epic from a couple of years back) only made things worse.

But let's look at the new Oscar in a positive light and see it as more than a pat-on-the-back for Shaffer and her fine series of films for and about Canadian children, or even for the indomitable women of Studio D (the Women's Studio that doesn't like to be called that anymore) who struggled to find a way through the bureaucracy for Shaffer to make her films. Let's also see the Oscar as the belated recognition of the work of all the Terence Macartney-Filgates and the Michel Braults who, over the last forty years, have built up that NFB tradition of excellence of which *I'll Find A Way* is simply the latest expression.

But to return to Nadia, how can you go wrong with a brave, cheerful little girl in a wheelchair? Well, it's very easy, and Shaffer is to be commended for avoiding all of the pitfalls of mawkishness and mush inherent in the subject. This little film has just enough delicacy, restraint, and intelligence to keep you from hating yourself for falling for it head over heels. The probable reason the film is able to avoid the Baby Seal Syndrome is that its emotional appeal comes not from any heavy-handed sentimentalizing on the part of the director, who keeps visual rhetoric to a minimum, but from Nadia herself, who serves as off-screen and on-screen narrator for the film.

It is clear that Shaffer chose her star with great care. It is through Nadia's tough, un-self-pitying perspective that we see her world and this perspective is respected scrupulously by Shaffer and her crew. Nadia refuses to let us feel sorry for her any more than she herself does; she guides us around her environment with both spunk and humor as well as with the self-conscious formality we might expect of a little girl confronted with an eight-legged sync sound unit. A natural ham, Nadia also has the maturity to treat her job of revealing her world to us with the utmost gravity. She asks nothing of us in return but to "act normal" in front of handicapped children and to install

ramps in buildings, but the moral investment she elicits at the same time is a very heavy one indeed.

So far I've used words like "restraint" and "respect" in referring to the film and, of course, these rather vague attributes are rooted in structural principles. Echoing Nadia's own self-consciousness of her role, the film is also very much aware of its own position, halfway between Nadia and the spectator. Nadia's interaction with the camera, the crew, and the spectator, becomes as much a subject of the film as Nadia's life itself. I'm not speaking only of the unpretentiously Brechtian shots at the outset which show Nadia talking over her part with the crew and the mul-



The show-stopping smile: Nadia.

tipl takes of her opening lines which follow, clapper and all, but of the self-reflective tone which pervades the entire film — in the self-serious voice on the sound-track illuminating the events as they unfold, of the flirtatious gleams occasionally flashed our way during scenes of otherwise great sobriety.

The added dimensions which this tone brings to the film confirm, once and for all, how mannered and artificial the "naturalistic" children of the Anglo-saxon cinéma-vérité of the sixties really were; in Allan King's *Warrendale*, for example, where there's the constant pretense that the camera really isn't there.

As far as antecedents go, *I'll Find A Way* is much less reminiscent of *Warrendale* than of that other Oscar-

winner of twenty-four years ago, Lindsay Anderson's *Thursday's Children*. That film's very similar sense of distance is, of course, more the result of the awkwardness of the cinéma-vérité technology at that very early stage than of any aesthetic decision in itself, but the effect is quite the same. Anderson's pioneering study of deaf-mute children learning to communicate owes its continuing power, not to the intensities of catharsis and forced intimacy as in *Warrendale*, but to a kind of self-reflective formality encouraged by the classroom context of the film.

In both films, it is possible to observe with detachment the particular mechanics of the teacher-pupil relationships, and the special complex of familiar "normalcy" and impenetrable otherness, marginality, which makes such children ideal subjects for the non-fiction cinema. Anderson's children were younger than Shaffer's so that his teachers are much closer to the centre of his film: with Shaffer, the hardworking young women who are usually visible in the background have a much more peripheral role, functioning more as resource-people, skilfully encouraging rather than insisting upon the astonishing initiative and independence which Nadia delights in showing off for the camera.

Children can tell when they're being respected and it's no wonder that they love this film. Adults are very fond of it also, but for them, certainly for me, there is the added level of two nagging, unstated questions suggested by the film. First, how is it that society cannot afford to give all its children, "normal" or otherwise, the opportunity to develop Nadia's unusual self-reliance and maturity, in a learning environment like the film's Sunnyview School where the teacher-student ratio seems nothing short of luxurious? And secondly, more darkly, will our society continue to provide Nadia with this chance to blossom so prodigiously as she moves into her adult years? Or is the single glimmer of pain which Nadia suppresses when she talks about the times she "feels bad" more representative of her future than the overstated enthusiasm with which this remarkable little film is otherwise filled to overflowing?

Thomas Waugh

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