

Graham Parker's *Anne's Story*

In a film dealing with the rape of a little girl and its effect on her as a young adult, there is enormous dramatic potential just waiting to be realized. Unfortunately, in *Anne's Story*, a recent CBC television movie directed by Graham Parker, this potential remains just that and the film never rises above the merely interesting.

Anne is a child of six visiting her grandmother's farm for the summer. One day her uncle follows her into the barn and rapes her. Fearing his threats, she tells no one and becomes quiet and withdrawn. When her father comes to get her at the end of the summer and announces that he and her mother are getting divorced, she says nothing. As a young woman, the effects of the trauma are still with her as she struggles to become a country and western singer. To escape her boozing mother she marries a young man but her inability to respond sexually soon causes the marriage to fall apart. She moves back home and there meets Matt, a kind and gentle man to whom she eventually reveals her secret. They start to travel together (platonically) as a singing duo, until finally Anne overcomes her past and begins a physical relationship with him.

It doesn't take undue cynicism to find the script, written by Grahame Woods, a little too simplistic and tidy to be truly satisfying. The story of the girl with the tragic past who meets a sweet and sensitive man who changes her life is a familiar formula. Still, the plotline might have worked (again) if it were not for some other major shortcomings of the film.

The first problem is the film's style and editing: scenes are much too brief, the pace choppy, and events occur before they have been given proper time to develop. For example, Anne's husband-to-be appears in only a few scenes before he asks her to marry him and they are off to Niagara Falls for their honeymoon. Likewise, Anne's relationship with Matt up to the point when she tells him about her past, is hastily presented and the viewer is left to infer a great deal.

The film's elliptical style is appropriate, however, for the two scenes dealing with the rape itself. The scene in the barn is cursory and the rape occurs off-camera. Only Anne's fear before the assault and her uncle's violent threats afterwards are shown. When, years later, Anne tells Matt about it, music overdubs the dialogue and within a few shots she has told him and is crying in his arms. Director Parker is to be commended for his handling of these scenes; an approach that explicitly avoids exploiting the trauma and sensationalism of rape which other films – equally well-intentioned – fail to do.

Where Parker fails – and in a major way – is in his presentation and development of Anne's character. A quiet and introverted person like Anne reveals herself in subtle ways; nuances and gestures take on heightened importance as keys to understanding her character. Consequently, time and a sensitive shooting style are required. But Parker



● It takes an understanding man... Brent Carver and Karen Woolridge in *Anne's Story*

provides neither. While brevity and a sense of distance were necessary for the two key scenes above, these elements work against Anne's character by inhibiting viewer identification. The film certainly elicits sympathy for Anne, but sympathy is an outwardly directed emotion; what Parker fails to do is establish a sense of empathy, which is inward. This drama about rape (strangely) has very few emotional scenes – intense or otherwise – and thus keeps the viewer distanced from the material.

The acting in the film is good, but not exceptional, as none of the performers are really given a chance to show what they are capable of. Karen Woolridge, as Anne, handles the dramatic and musical demands of the role equally well, giving as sensitive a performance as the material allows while displaying a quality singing voice. The same holds true for Brent Carver, as Matt, who comes across well despite his very undemanding role. The supporting cast is also convincing. So there is little doubt that the film would have benefitted if these performers

ANNE'S STORY d. Graham Parker p. Bill Gough sc. Grahame Woods a.d. Michael Zenon 2nd a.d. Alan Harmon cam. Vic Sarin des. Arthur Herriott unit man. Neil Browne cont. Carol Fisher cast. Marsha Chesley, Tina Neal p. sec. Susan Howard l.p. Brent Carver, Elva Mai Hoover, Karen Woolridge, Hardee Lineham, Cicely Thomson, Timothy Webber, Robert Haley, Terri Cherniack, Ned Conlon, Michael Donaghy, Martin Donley, Jessie Fyfe, Jack Jessop, Reg Dreger, James O'Regan, James McHugh. air date: September 18, 1983, on CBC running time: 90 mins.

had been given the opportunity to more fully develop their characters.

Like much CBC drama, *Anne's Story* so safely treads the middle ground it ends up being neither boring nor engrossing. This 'happy medium' approach may suit some material, but in this case only serves to betray the potential of its subject matter. The film successfully avoids melodramatics and other such pitfalls, yet fails to achieve or even explore the inherent dramatic intensity of its story.

Linda Gorman ●

Jennifer Hodge's *Home Feeling: Struggle for a Community*

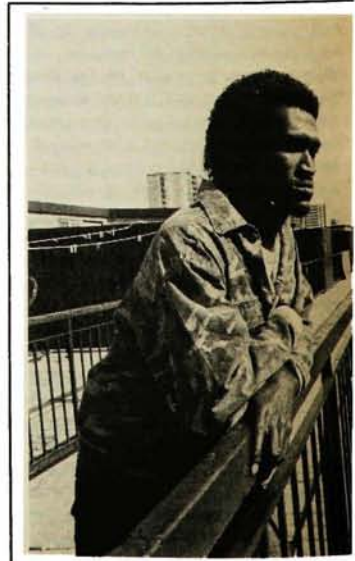
Cinéma vérité filmmaking has always been a powerful tool for political action. This is certainly the case with *Home Feeling: Struggle For A Community*, Jennifer Hodge's most recent work. The film is a controversial one and it caused a great deal of media flurry this summer when its public screenings became the scene for outbursts of community unrest. The film looks closely at explosive issues in the Jane-Finch area of Toronto, an area of high unemployment, racial ten-

sion, and growing dissatisfaction with the powers-that-be.

The Jane-Finch corridor was a 1950s attempt on the part of Toronto city planners to move the urban poor and new immigrants out of the city and into public, high-rise housing 25 miles from the city's centre. Jane-Finch is now somewhat of a suburban nightmare characterized by high-density housing with 60,000 people crammed into an area the size of six square city blocks. At least 15% of this population is West Indian, and filmmaker Hodge focuses on the plight of this visible minority, especially in terms of employment, culture shock, and police-community relations.

Some of the most poignant moments in the film are those which reveal what it's like to be a new immigrant, unfamiliar with the culture and struggling against all odds to make a life. One Jamaican woman, Rosemary Brown, talks openly of working for seven years to bring her children to Canada, only to find that she and they no longer know one another after such a lengthy separation. Other interviewees talk about the difficulties of being unemployed, and/or stigmatized by living in Ontario public housing. The film gives an incredibly intimate portrait of people struggling to keep their pride in the face of high adverse circumstances.

But the film also focuses on police-community relations, and here it has struck a sensitive nerve. Exploring charges of police harassment, the film raises the troubling question of racial discrimination. "This is the people's side of the story," Hodge told *Now* reporter Stephen Dale, "the story of those who are never heard and don't have access to the media. When police want publicity they call the papers. These people can't do that." To me, it is obvious in the film and in the community's reaction to the film, that the police represent the dominant culture, are the frontlines, so to speak, of that culture. Hodge herself admits: "In many ways they represent the powers in society, the agents of employment, of social planning, the people who control these people's lives. Not surprisingly, then, they are the target for much of the rage in the film. Perhaps justifiably so. In their interviews with



● Jane-Finch resident Greg Bob

John Harrison's Thanks for the Ride

Thanks for the Ride, a half-hour dramatic adaptation of Alice Munro's well-known short story, is the National Film Board's latest, and one of its best, ventures in producing dramas. This Ontario Region production may even make a lot of people at least temporarily forget their hostility towards the Board's dabbling in drama.

The Board has long enjoyed an international reputation for producing excellent documentaries and animated shorts, and a national reputation for dismal dramas. But in the last few years, the much-spurned "beached whale" has produced or helped produce some excellent dramas: *Bravery in the Field* and *First Winter* won Oscar nominations; *Les beaux souvenirs* carried on the grand tradition of *Mon Oncle Antoine*; the recent regional productions – *The Pedlar* from Manitoba and *The Gossips* from francophone New Brunswick – are competent dramatic pieces; and, of course, the Board played a seminal role in that national showstopper, *Empire, Inc.*

Maybe it is because writer/director John Harrison has followed the NFB's mandate of showing a real slice of Canada to Canadians and the world that his quiet but intensely moving drama works so well. Harrison has lavished attention on capturing the flavor of the cottage country around Georgian Bay which forms a meaningful backdrop for the story. The rich, authentic soundtrack evokes a real sense of place; Rene Osashi's remarkable yet subtle cinematography captures its essence.

Unlike so many dramas which are beautiful to look at but whose story limps along or dies – *Two Solitudes* springs to mind – Harrison's finely struc-

tured script paces the action and the character development in a most believable way.

The major character, David Sullivan, sensitively portrayed by Carl Marotte, is a 19-year-old rich kid who isn't quite sure who he really is. One Saturday night at the end of the cottage season, David goes cruising with his hyper-horny friend, George, who wants to find "a few local tarts and poke them." They do just that. But this seemingly routine adventure into the dynamics of sexual power-playing with Vicky, a bitter survivor of summer quickie 'romances', has a deep and telling effect on the naive David.

The story itself is 14-carat Alice Munro. Characters struggle for some sense of self-knowledge via their relationships and are confronted by a world that changes very little and where even minor personal changes are paid for with major pain.

Harrison has wisely reshaped the story to fit the film medium and he placed it in a contemporary setting. To gain authenticity and get a flavor of the language and mentality, he discussed the story with several groups of teenagers from the region. The research shows. The banter is natural and real. (And painful: George doesn't want to go to the movies because a *Canadian* film is playing.) Harrison also utilizes parts of Munro's dialogue as when Vicky's down-trodden mother, played with disturbing realism by veteran actress, Clare Clouter, explains how "lovely it is for people to have things."

The real strength of the film, however, comes mainly from the stylish direction of Harrison, whose film *Way of the Willow* garnered First Prize at the 1982 New York Film Festival. His camera is constantly on the move, catching a nuance here, a subtle gesture there, always omni-present without being obtrusive.

To help get the over-all fine performances from his young actors and actresses, director Harrison rehearsed intensely for several days before going on location. This is not often done on

low-budget dramas, with sometimes disastrous results. Here the time, money and energy spent pays off. The actions seem natural, and the characters comfortable and spontaneous with one another.

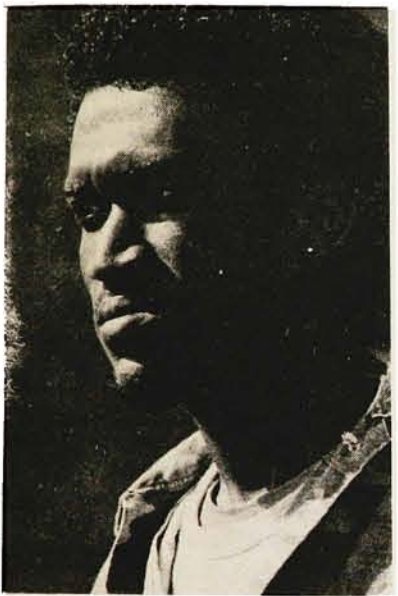
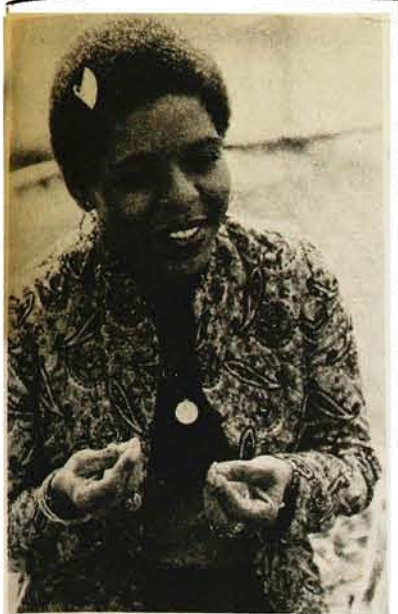
Perhaps the only flaw is a technical one; the night scenes produced in the lab do not meld with the real night-shot scenes. This is a small blemish on a film that has already impressed several CBC producers, and at least one independent, enough that they are considering hiring Harrison as a director.

Thanks for the Ride is a powerful story evocatively told (Alice Munro herself liked the film version). The film works on its audience in part because Harrison has dealt head-on with the 'truth' of the story's theme – dealing with one's sexuality – even in the sex scene where the characters are faced with powerful realities, and where the director might have backed away. Harrison's honest approach will, unfortunately, limit the film's academic use as it will most likely be banned in many schools, thereby depriving a very large high-school audience from seeing and discussing one of Canada's finest short dramatic films.

Still one can always hope the CBC will showcase *Thanks for the Ride* in prime time this fall so that a wide spectrum of Canadians can see a little more of themselves and their country as reflected in their art.

Tom Shoebridge ●

THANKS FOR THE RIDE d. sc. John Harrison p. John Kramer p. man. Louise Clark 1st a.d. Steve Wright 2nd a.d. Donato Baldassarra d.o.p. Rene Ohashi asst. cam. John Habson art d. David Moe asst. art d. Rudy Barrichello cont. Diane Parsons cast. Walker-Bowen wardrobe Julie Ganton wardrobe asst. Judy LeGros ed. rec. Bryan Day boom Marc Chiasson gaffer Marris Jansons best boy David Hynes grip Chris Dean hair Judy Cooper-Sealey make-up Suzanne Benoit gennie opt. Ira Cohen p. asst. Steve Chapman, Dan Dunlop flatbed Bill White 3rd a.d. Roman Buchok crafts serv./p. asst. Lydia Wazana p. sec. Sonya Munro p.c. N.F.B. running time 28 min. 16mm colour L.p. Carl Marotte, Peter Krantz, Lesleh Donaldson, Melissa Bell, Michael Tait, Nikki Deboer, Clare Coulter, Rita Tuckett.

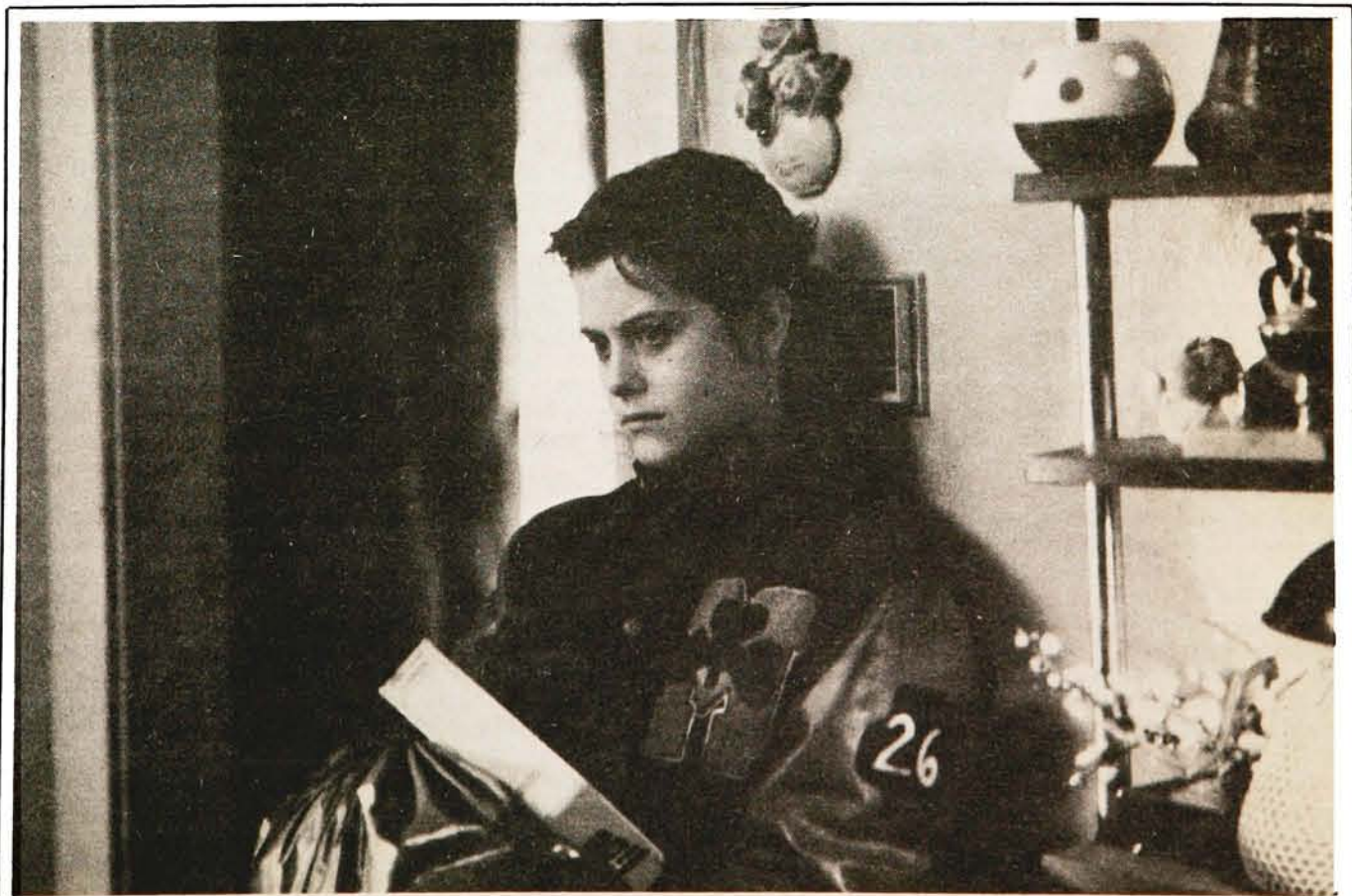


● "The people's side of the story," as told by Toronto's Jane-Finch area residents Greg Bob (top) and Rosemary Brown

the film, the police convey a stiff uptightness, a stodgy and insensitive law 'n order defensiveness that is difficult to empathize with. The film would have been better, and less easy to label as biased, if it had included more discussion with members of the force. My suspicion is that this wider portrait would have been even more revealing.

But finally, the problems of Jane-Finch are much greater than police harassment. While this is a contributing factor to the difficulties outlined in the film, it seems unfortunate that Hodge has focused so much of the film's analysis here. The claim that Jane-Finch has the potential to be either a "multi-cultural mosaic" or a racial disaster area "like Miami or Brixton" is a serious one which deserved a deeper examination of the root causes. Much of that examination is implicit in the film, but its structure is weighted toward the one issue of police relations. Despite this, the film has served to motivate members of the community towards organized efforts, and to alert a much wider society to incredible problems in great need of solutions.

Joyce Nelson ●



● Lesleh Donaldson plays a bitter survivor of summer quickie romances in *Thanks for the Ride*

HOME FEELING: STRUGGLE FOR A COMMUNITY d./sc. Jennifer Hodge exec. p. John Spotton p. John Kramer assoc. p. Judy Legros a.d. Roger McTair cam. Henri Fiks ed. Steve Weslak sd. Doug Ganton mus. Leroy Sibblis narr. Charmaine Edmead re-rec. Terry Cooke 16mm, colour, running time: 70 minutes p.c.: National Film Board, 1983.