

ON THE RECORD:



● Slim Obsession (1984)



● Ready For Slaughter (1983)

by Gail Henley

The year 1985 marks the 10th season of For The Record – the CBC's primetime flagship series of drama specials.

When John Hirsch became head of TV Drama in 1974 he brought with him a deeply felt belief that art has a social responsibility. It was his vision that drama could be relevant to mainstream Canadian experience in the way that only current affairs were at the time. Hirsch recruited Ralph Thomas and Stephen Patrick, then working as current affairs producers in Toronto and Halifax respectively. They were immediately excited by the potential of drama to explore the news stories that formed the political and social nexus of the country and in 1975 the first season of five "journalistic dramas" went into production. "John Hirsch took enormous risks and the CBC took enormous risks, and that went down the line. It put an obligation on Ralph and I, as producers, to take risks," says Stephen Patrick.

The first on-air season, in 1976, created a sensation and caused an immediate public echo. Outstanding were, *The Insurance Man from Ingersoll*, about government and union corruption, directed by Peter Pearson, and *A Thousand Moons*, about a Metis matriarch, directed by Gilles Carle. Right from the beginning, For The Record established for the CBC a vigorous voice in contemporary drama. "The first season of For The Record attracted tremendous attention to CBC drama," says Hirsch. "We accomplished what we had intended: to focus attention on important political and social issues."

The launching of For The Record sent excited reverberations throughout the artistic community. "I'm very proud to have started and been associated with For The Record," says Hirsch. "It was an extraordinarily productive time. I created a whole new opening that allowed young actors from the alternate theatres in Toronto to find work in television films. R.H. Thomson, now a major actor, had his first television acting role in an early For The Record. I brought in the best directors from Quebec, Gilles Carle and Claude Jutra, to work in English-Canadian television when they had not even done the same for French-Canadian television. It was a wonderful climate, at that time. Taking risks with new writers, always discussing what programs we should be doing, taking more risks with subject matter. It was a breeding ground; new people came in with fresh ideas and an ability to carry out those ideas. And I'm extremely proud to

have been instrumental in helping Ralph Thomas, who is now a major Canadian film director, to make the transition from documentaries to dramatizations."

After the first season Stephen Patrick left, and Ralph Thomas continued as executive producer for the next two seasons. The dramas that Ralph Thomas produced were remarkable for their courage in taking on powerful industries and revealing the political machinations he perceived at the heart of the problems affecting society. Most who remember the productions of the second season simply repeat the titles as if they're great symphonies: *Maria*, *Someday Soon*, *Dreamspeaker*, *Hank*, *Ada* and *Tar Sands*. It was an unprecedented year for the CBC. At the Prix d'Italia, *Dreamspeaker* got a standing ovation, people reportedly stood up and wept; Alberta premier Peter Lougheed sued the CBC over *Tar Sands*; and Washington requested to see *Someday Soon*, to understand why Canadians were so upset about the Garrison Dam. "We were doing news stories that needed to be dramatized," says Hirsch, "because they touched some political or social flaw that needed further exploration."

In 1978, Hirsch left as For The Record was going into its third season, and John Kennedy became head of TV Drama. Ralph Thomas stayed on as For The Record's executive producer. That season, *Dying Hard* was the journalistic drama that skewered politics and big business. It illustrated worker abuse in a story about a St. Lawrence, Nfld. mining company's indifference to the health of their workers. There was endless debate in the press over the fine differences between docu-drama and journalistic dramas, and the ethics of dramatizing contemporary events on television when actual transcripts of the conversations among the real-life central figures in these events either did not exist or were incomplete. The CBC's out-of-court settlement of the *Tar Sands* lawsuit with Peter Lougheed ended the debate; Ralph Thomas left as executive producer and with his departure went the tradition of journalistic dramas.

For the next four seasons, from 1979 to 1982, Sam Levene was For The Record executive producer and oversaw the production of 22 episodes. A noticeable change was that the shows became what Sam Levene terms "topical dramas," dealing with important social as opposed to political issues. Highlights of this period of For The Record were *One of Our Own* on Down's Syndrome; *The Winnings of Frankie Walls* on unemployment; *A Question of the Sixth* on euthanasia; *A Far Cry From Home* on wife-beating; *Running Man* on homosexuality; and *Blind Faith* on TV evangelism.

Although there was a distinct change – less emphasis on political issues and

Gail Henley is a screenwriter living in Toronto and author of the novel *Where The Cherries End Up*.

For The Record's 10 distinctive years

more emphasis on social issues – the shows themselves were no less hard-hitting and their impact on the public was tremendous. For The Record had re-established its original mandate – to produce dramas dealing with issues that touched people's lives in this country in a real way. Under the tenure of Sam Levene, this middle period of For The Record achieved significant growth. The profile of For The Record remained high and a concerted effort was made to remain ahead of the time with stories about society's changing attitudes and concerns.

John Kennedy and Sam Levene were responsible for improving work opportunities for women in For The Record. Seven of the 22 episodes in this period were written by five different women writers: Carmel Dumas, Anne Cameron, Florrie Adelson, Margaret Atwood, Anna Sandor. Kennedy and Levene gave Vivienne Leebosh her first opportunity to work as a producer of drama; and promoted Maryke McEwan from script editor to producer. Anne Frank was encouraged to produce *A Far Cry From Home* which in 1981, in the sixth season, garnered an audience of 1.6 million viewers, the largest of any For The Record show to date. "For The Record radically changed for women over ten years. At the beginning, would there have been a show on wife beating, produced by a woman?" Kennedy asks.

The most interesting aspect in this period of For The Record was the emergence of a unique form of distinctly Canadian drama. "This country became extremely good at doing intelligent, entertaining, contemporary drama and For The Record is a representation of that," says Kennedy. Although American TV also took contemporary themes as hooks for made-for-television movies, the Canadian dramas maintained their own integrity and strengthened their identity by the unique treatment of the stories. For The Record dramas went counter to the conventions of established television drama formats. On the same social issue, an American TV drama would create an artificial dramatic reality and invariably resolve the issue emotionally to the detriment of the issue itself, but at the same time reinforcing the mainstream ideology. The difference in For The Record shows is the intention to present new insight on the issues. It is less important whether viewers agree or disagree; what is important is to relate to the situation, to understand the dynamics of the situation, and to make decisions based on expanded knowledge. For The Record dramas are information-laden, whereas the American counterparts are emotion-laden. The typical protagonist/antagonist relationship on all American shows produces the predictable viewing that predominates in prime-time.

On For The Record, a teacher/guide appears on an equal basis to the central protagonist/antagonist relationship of the drama, and this important educational aspect allows for the mechanics of a solution to be central to the theme. Yet no one has ever criticized the shows for being didactic, because they're skillfully crafted. The situation of a protagonist/antagonist confronted with a teacher is exciting. It illustrates a third option, and whether the troubled person will choose that option or not. The conclusion is not built into the plot. For The Record's limited run of five or six news shows per season between February and March also challenged audience viewing expectations. "Not having a smooth ending has sometimes affected the enjoyment index of For The Record," says Oleh Iwanyshyn, CBC audience research officer. "If the audience hated an ending, they penalized the show." However, as viewer acceptance of dramas on social issues increased, such exceptions decreased. On the whole, the enjoyment index of For The Record has been extremely high.

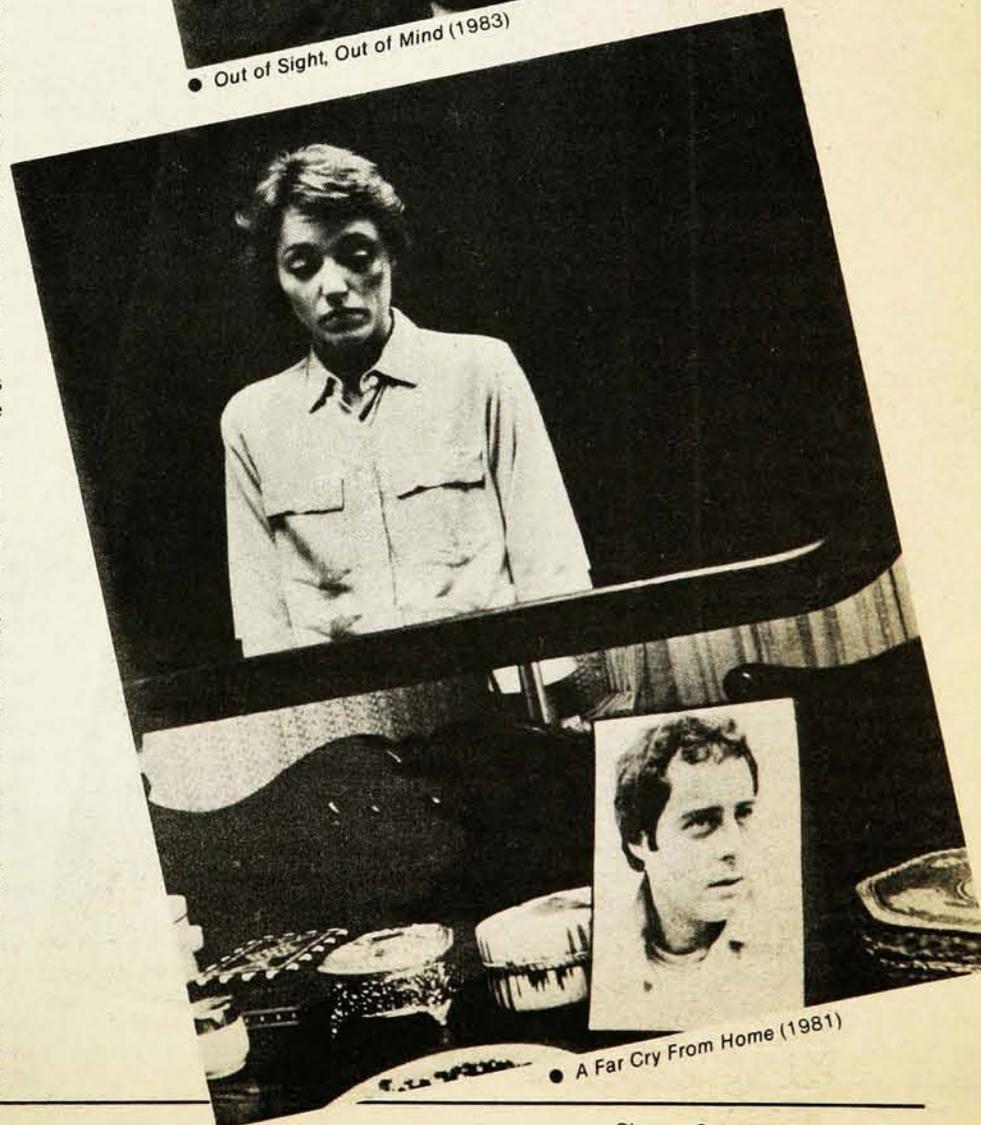
But the index that best exemplifies the uniqueness of For The Record dramas is the R/D Index, which measures how relaxing or demanding a show is. "Most American shows tend to get a much more 'relaxing' level, 0 to +20. They seldom fall into the negative area. Yet, For The Record does this year after year, show after show, and not by accident. The producer does not want the viewer to sit passively, but to be involved, to think. It is demanding viewing. This series is unique because it is structured to appeal to thinking viewers," Iwanyshyn says. For example, audience research has shown that current affairs and news programs such as *The National* and *The Journal* are less demanding viewing than many For The Record shows.

The different treatment of social issue dramas is also reflected in their differing impact on American and Canadian societies. Sensationalizing wife-abuse in *The Burning Bed* produced public response in America that took the form of a rash of burning-bed murders following the telecast. "The *Burning Bed* was manipulative and exploitative," comments For The Record producer Maryke McEwan. "In my opinion it's morally wrong to screw around with it." The impact on the Canadian public after *A Far Cry From Home* was broadcast was for more positive. Associate producer McEwan received countless letters from women thanking her for the show and saying they now understand the constructive alternatives available to them.

Here, the relationship of protagonist/antagonist/teacher is perfectly delineated. The battered wife is not only up against a husband but her own troubled



● Out of Sight, Out of Mind (1983)



● A Far Cry From Home (1981)

For The Record: A filmography

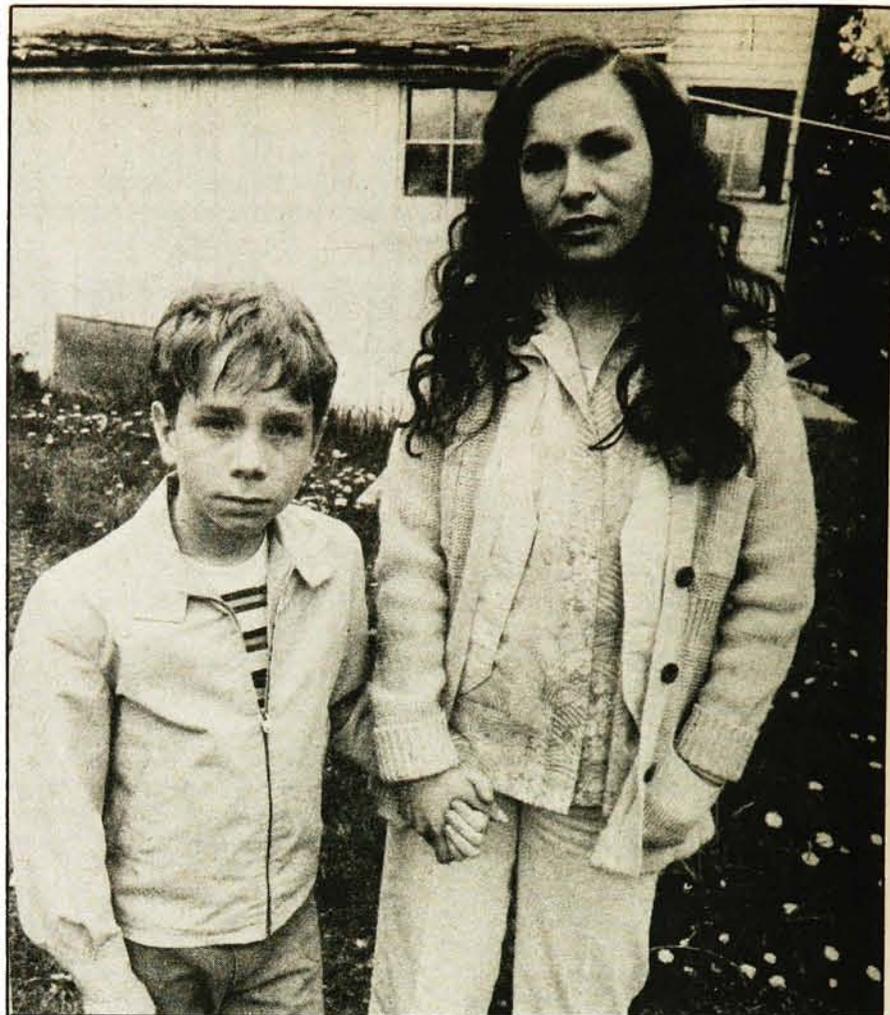
- 1976 – Executive Producers :**
Ralph Thomas & Stephen Patrick
The Insurance Man From Ingersoll
Nest of Shadows
A Thousand Moons
Kathy Karuks Is A Grizzly Bear
What We Have Here Is A People Problem
- 1977 – Executive Producer :**
Ralph Thomas
Maria
Someday Soon
Dreamspeaker
Hank
Ada
Tar Sands
- 1978 – Executive Producer :**
Ralph Thomas
A Matter of Choice
Scoop
Dying Hard
Seer Was Here
- 1979 – Executive Producer :**
Sam Levene
Cement Head
Don't Forget 'Je me souviens'
Home Coming
Certain Practices
Every Person is Guilty
One Of Our Own
- 1980 – Executive Producer :**
Sam Levene
The Winnings of Frankie Walls
Harvest
Maintain The Right
A Question Of The Sixth
Lyon's Den
- 1981 – Executive Producer :**
Sam Levene
A Far Cry From Home
Snowbird
Running Man
Cop
Final Edition
- 1982 – Executive Producer :**
Sam Levene
An Honourable Member
By Reason of Insanity
High Card
Becoming Laura
Blind Faith
- 1983 – Executive Producer :**
Sig Gerber
Ready For Slaughter
Out of Sight, Out of Mind
Reasonable Force
Moving Targets
- 1984 – Executive Producer :**
Sig Gerber
Kate Morris, Vice President
I Love A Man In A Uniform
Hide and Seek
Slim Obsession
Rough Justice
Change Of Heart
- 1985 – Executive Producer :**
Sig Gerber
The Boy Next Door
The Front Line
Tools Of The Devil
Where The Heart Is

situation and what she must do about it. "Are you sure you can't settle this between yourselves?" a policeman asks the badly bruised wife at the kitchen table. The answer is so apparent it doesn't need a response. Her own awakening and realization is what has been dramatized. When the protagonist goes through the procedure of leaving the house under police escort and entering a shelter for battered wives, viewers are taken through the steps of a course that can be taken and shown what can be expected if this option is exercised. A real shelter was used, Interval House on Huron St. in Toronto, and the extras were the actual women and children in the shelter at the time. The show, as so many in *For The Record*, had a two-fold effect: good drama – *A Far Cry From Home* won the Silver Award at the International Film and TV Festival in New York in 1981; and social significance – a Senate committee requested a screening of *A Far Cry From Home* to help in the preparation of the 1983 white paper on wife abuse.

Sig Gerber took over as executive producer of *For The Record* in 1983, in its eighth season, and will be responsible for launching the series into its second decade. "To stay unique," says Gerber, "we have to strengthen our shows in our original direction. The tradition of *For The Record* is for stories with an emphasis on truth, fairness, serious research, all combined with entertainment."

Certainly the dramas in the last few seasons have been diligent in their responsibility to show honest portrayals. In 1983, *Ready For Slaughter* won the Rockie for Best TV Drama at the Banff International Television Festival. The detailed delineation of the role of the farmer's wife, portrayed by Diana Belshaw, was the most enriching aspect of the show. Nothing in *For The Record*, one soon realizes, is left to chance. Every aspect of the drama was scrutinized for truth and honesty. "We're always trying to break new ground in drama," says Maryke McEwan, who produced *Ready For Slaughter*. "Exploring different characters, struggling with new ways of dealing with things that have become cliché." The role of the farmer's wife was written into the script based on what the research revealed. However, during the shooting on a farm in the Bruce Peninsula, a local women's group called Concerned Farmwomen, approached the producer and expressed their concern about the portrayal of the farmwoman in the script. When the script was shown to them, they were satisfied with the fairness of the depiction. "They're partners on a farm. The job on a farm is seen as a partnership between a man and a woman," says McEwan, "and our research which had been done prior to the shooting had helped shape the correct image of the farmwoman in *Ready For Slaughter*." *For The Record* has been at the forefront of CBC's effort to correct the image of various characters presented on television and to establish better role-models for viewers.

"What we're looking for," says Sig Gerber, "are not shows that have big headlines, but favour issues which on the surface are fairly small, yet in the way we execute our telling of the story, over the course of an hour, add up to something very significant." Some may argue that this is as much a reflection of the present climate of the CBC as it is of the change of direction of *For The Record*.



● Declaration of native women's rights: Eric Hébert and Margo Kane in *Where The Heart Is* (1985)

Hit list: For The Record's foreign sales

HIDE AND SEEK

(biggest sale ever of any one hour drama)
Australia, Finland, Holland, Malaysia, Singapore, USA, Brunei, Hungary, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Czechoslovakia

I LOVE A MAN IN A UNIFORM

Home video South Africa

KATE MORRIS

Australia, Finland, Holland, Malaysia, Singapore, USA, Brunei

ROUGH JUSTICE

Home video South Africa

SLIM OBSESSION

Germany, Bermuda, Bahamas, Trinidad, Norway, Finland, Yugoslavia

READY FOR SLAUGHTER

Trinidad

REASONABLE FORCE

Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Philippines, Albania, Israel, New Zealand, Bermuda, Hungary, Norway

OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND

Curacao, Jamaica, Philippines, New Zealand, Home video South Africa

MOVING TARGETS

Trinidad and Tobago, Gibraltar, Denmark, Norway, UK Cable, Bulgaria, Home video South Africa, Ireland, Czechoslovakia

BECOMING LAURA

Norway, Denmark, Finland, Curacao, Iceland, West Germany, Philippines, Trinidad and Tobago

BLIND FAITH

Holland, Curacao, Iceland, Denmark, Jamaica, Philippines, New Zealand, Trinidad and Tobago

BY REASON OF INSANITY

Curacao, Trinidad, Jamaica, Singapore,

Philippines, Israel, New Zealand, Home video South Africa, UK Cable, US Cable, Scandinavia Home Video

HIGH CARD

Curacao, Sweden, Israel, Singapore, Philippines, New Zealand

FAR CRY FROM HOME

Caribbean, Mexico, Jamaica, Ecuador, Trinidad, Mexico for Central America, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia, Czechoslovakia, Iceland, Hungary, Philippines, Columbia, Curacao, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Belgium, Norway, Bahamas, US Public, UK Home video, Home video South Africa, Australia, US Home video

FINAL EDITION

Trinidad, Mexico for Central America, Columbia, Ecuador, Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, Curacao, Israel, Romania, Denmark, Czechoslovakia, Ireland, Albania, Philippines, New Zealand, Norway

RUNNING MAN

Finland, Trinidad, Argentina, Paraguay, Columbia, Uruguay, Mexico for Central America, Columbia, Ecuador, Norway, Curacao, Iceland, Jamaica, Philippines, Sweden, Bermuda

SNOW BIRD

Denmark, Trinidad, Mexico for Central America, Columbia, Ecuador, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Curacao, Philippines, Scandinavia, New Zealand (two runs), Bermuda

COP

Trinidad, Mexico for Central America, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Columbia, Ecuador, Curacao, Israel, Philippines, New Zealand, Home video South Africa.



● Kate Morris, Vice-President (1984) probed sexual politics in the boardroom

"There are so many stories to be done now," says John Hirsch, remembering the first exhilarating seasons of *For The Record*. "I can think of five subjects that should be touched immediately because of the political significance." For instance, *For The Record* has not done a story on abortion. Hot issue or not, it needs further exploration and that was one of the original mandates of *For The Record* – to dramatize stories that point to political and social flaws and that touch the lives of people in this country in a real way. One possible approach would be to consider hiring a team of writers – two men and two women – half pro-lifers and half pro-choice – and see what a taut *For The Record* drama could come of it. But there are problems, both within the CBC and outside.

"It's likely that the CBC feels it's not in a position to rock the boat because of the extraordinarily conservative times," says John Hirsch. Yet to avoid challenges such as exploring these stories is simply not utilizing the series to its optimum. In the past 10 years *For The Record* has proven its solid performance record, and the ability to do shows on important themes. This performance record must continue to be enhanced: the vigor of *For The Record* is an indicator of the vigor of the CBC as a whole. It is no time for the CBC to be timid.

Independent producers, having gained new arrogance from the government subsidies injected into the private sector, have served notice they are able and willing to produce privately such established programs as *For The Record*. But as John Kennedy cautions: "The independent production community is a profit-oriented community. And Canada is not a market that can easily support drama programming of any kind."

For The Record is one of the few opportunities on television for individual Canadian voices to be heard. The

structure so easily, so enviously can do something that no one else in this country has proven they can consistently do – produce high-quality programming for a small price and set the standards for the independent pictures of this country.

"The actual amount for drama production has been reducing but the amount for *For The Record* has stayed the same within the budget," says Kennedy. "That represents support in lean times."

For The Record is showing four new dramas in its 10th anniversary season, between February and March 1985. One of the most courageous shows of this season – and characteristic of the best impulses that propel *For The Record* – is the drama *Where The Heart Is* (broadcast Feb. 24) that deals with Canada's shocking violation of internationally agreed-upon civil and political rights in its steadfast resistance to change the legislation on native women's rights. The drama was based on woman who lost her status as an Indian when she married a white man, and in the face of Canadian indifference to her plight (and that of an estimated 100,000 women like her) took her case to the United Nations. Written by Suzette Couture, her first script for television, and directed by Carol Moore-Ede, with an all-Indian cast, *Where The Heart Is* will, like *Someday Soon* or *A Far Cry From Home*, be instrumental in its impact on lawmakers in changing legislation. Like the 1978 National Film Board-produced Indian feature *Cold Journey*, *Where The Heart Is* is another outstanding example of Canadian distinctiveness in public broadcasting. And that's for the record.

Ultimately, with its distinguished dramatizations of individual battles to change the injustices in the system, this is where *For The Record's* heart is.

For The Record's honor roll

SLIM OBSESSION

Columbus International Film Festival 1984, Chris Bronze Plaque

A THOUSAND MOONS

AMERFEST, USA 1983, (Association of Media Educators in Religion), Best Program on Giving and AMER Golden Eye Award; American Film Festival 1983, Red Ribbon (2nd) in Drama/Fiction Category.

THE WINNINGS OF FRANKIE WALLS

AMERFEST, USA 1983, Best Program on Life Changes and AMER Golden Eye Award; ACTRA 1981, Earle Gray Award – Al Waxman.

READY FOR SLAUGHTER

Banff International Television Festival 1983, Best Drama Special; ACTRA 1984, Finalist Nominee, Best Television Program.

A FAR CRY FROM HOME

Columbus International Film Festival 1983, Chris Statuette (1st in category); International Film and Television Festival, New York 1981, Silver Medal, Drama Category; ACTRA 1982, Finalist Nominee, Earle Grey Award – Mary Ann MacDonald.

REASONABLE FORCE

Columbus International Film Festival 1983, Honourable Mention.

FINAL EDITION

Banff International Festival 1981, Best Drama Special; ACTRA 1982, Best Television Writer – Tony Sheer.

ONE OF OUR OWN

1st Festival, Council for Exceptional Children, USA 1983, Certificate of Merit; American Film Festival 1981, Best Narrative Film, Blue Ribbon; John Muir Medical Film Festival, Walnut Creek 1980, Honourable Mention; Yorkton International Short Film and Video Festival 1979, Best Actor Award – David MacFarlane.

CERTAIN PRACTICES

Genie Award 1980, Best Drama Over 30 Minutes; Special Award, Bill Gough and Martin Lavut.

EVERY PERSON IS GUILTY

Genie Award 1980, Director, Paul Almond; ACTRA 1980, Best Writer in Dramatic Program – Ralph Thomas and Roy MacGregor.

SOON DAY SOON

Prix Futura – Berlin 1979, Honourable Mention, Drama Category.

DREAMSPEAKER

International Film Festival, San Antonio 1978, Best Drama; Canadian Film Award 1977 (now Genie), Best TV Drama, Craft Awards: Best Director – Claude Jutra, Best Supporting Actor – Jacques Hubert, Best Performance – George Clutesi, Best Music Score – Jean Cousineau, Best Screenplay – Cam Hubert, Special Jury Award – Ralph Thomas, Producer.

TYLER

World International Festival, Montreal 1978, Best Television Drama.

THE INSURANCE MAN FROM INGERSOLL

Canadian Film Award 1976 (now Genie), Craft Award: Best Supporting Actor – David Gardner.

MARIA

American Film Festival, New York 1982, Blue Ribbon – Category: Labour Films.

RUNNING MAN

Canadian Film Award 1981 (now Genie), Craft Awards: Performance – Chuck Shamata, Direction – Donald Brittain, Sound – Ed Chong; ACTRA 1982, Finalist Nominee, Earle Grey Award – Chuck Shamata.

HARVEST

ACTRA 1981, Finalist Nominee, Best Writer – Rob Forsyth.

MAINTAIN THE RIGHT

ACTRA 1981, Finalist Nominee, Best Writer – Tony Sheer.

A QUESTION OF THE SIXTH

ACTRA 1981, Finalist Nominee, Earle Grey Award – Lawrence Dane.

SNOWBIRD

ACTRA 1982, Earle Grey Award, Supporting Role – Robert Christie.

BLIND FAITH

ACTRA 1983, Earle Grey Award – Rosemary Dunsmore, Finalist Nominee – Best Television Program.

OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND

ACTRA 1984, Finalist Nominee, Earle Grey Award – Robert Joy.