

The five-day love affair between wonderstruck Yukoners and Bell Productions was chaperoned by a Whitehorse firm, Locations North, and Yukon government film commissioner Kevin Shackell. The remaining two-thirds of the "Hollywood" film were shot in British Columbia.

Yukoners will watch the upcoming CBS flick mostly to see the brief screen debuts of friends and relatives. But what they're really looking for, in the future, is a film production that sets out to capture a fuller picture of life in the Klondike — its stunning beauty, its wild and literally woolly folk.

Canadian producers in particular should give the idea some thought.

Chris Scherbarth •



• Sandy Wilson directs *Mama*

## Circa '59

**E**tobicoke, at the west-end of Toronto, seems almost like another world. The home of Mattel and Domtar, the city is littered with street names such as the prophetic Diesel Drive and the ironic Treeview Avenue. Yet, in this city of suburban row-houses and vast industrial plants, there's nothing to hint at the near-miraculous time warp taking place behind the rail yards at Father Redman Catholic School.

In the auditorium, the set designers and technicians are decorating the hall with paper cut-out snowflakes and silver garlands for the school's Christmas concert. The year is 1959, and the stage is set for one of the last scenes in Sandy Wilson's forthcoming CBC movie, *Mama's Going to Buy You a Mockingbird*. As stagehands busy themselves with last-minute preparations, a slow stream of extras in period costumes drift into the auditorium from the temporary make-up department set up nearby in the school's weightlifting room. After a long while, the transformation is complete. When young Tess (Rosa Anderson-Baker) finally lip-synchs to *Silent Night*, you could almost swear that you were back in 1959 — present-day Etobicoke seems very far away.

Watching this Christmas concert, many facets of the modern world do seem very far away, and one of them happens to be the subject of *Mama's Going to Buy You a Mockingbird*. The film is about a family coping with the father's death from cancer. Unlike the book by Jean Little on which the film is based (which takes place in the present), the film is set, perhaps not coincidentally, in the same year in which Sandy Wilson's first film, *My American Cousin*, was set.

"There's something very alluring about 1959," says Wilson. "It's the end of the decade. The year Buddy Holly died and the year Elvis went into the army. It was the end of the first golden age of rock 'n' roll, before we got into the tumultuous '60s and lost our innocence." The '50s seem to have a very strong appeal to Wilson, but its attraction is not rooted solely in nostalgia for the good old days. Whereas the novel dealt largely, though by no means exclusively, with the modern technology surrounding present-day cancer victims, Wilson, along with screenwriter Anna Sandor and producer Bill Gough, was most interested in the personal side of the story. "We wanted to give it another dimension. In 1959, people thought of cancer very differently — there was a sort of non-comprehension about the subject. By setting the story when we did, we found ourselves able to tell a straightforward story from a 13-year-old's point of view."

The 13-year-old in question is Jeremy (played by Louie Tripp), who along with Kate (Linda Griffiths) and Sarah (Marsha Moreau), make up the family at the centre of *Mama's Going to Buy You a Mockingbird*. And just as the family learns to come together in a time of crisis, Wilson has come to depend on her cast and crew to help her articulate the chief concerns of her film. Says Wilson, "It's a very personal film, but for me there's a real challenge in the fact that it's not my story. I think working with other people has really led towards a shared vision. It has made things easier for me. Working as part of a well-organized team means that there aren't any unexpected surprises. On *American Cousin*, I felt I was flying by the seat of my pants. In comparison, this shoot is a lot more organized and secure."

Meanwhile, on the stage, Rosa has finished her rendition of *Silent Night*. The auditorium is abuzz with activity as the crew busily prepares for the next

set-up in the school cafeteria. It is now unquestionably 1987, and 1959 is buried in the past and safely committed to film. But even as stagehands move props and lights into the hallway and the 90-odd extras mill around, relaxing after being straitjacketed into period costumes for the last couple of hours, there's a real sense that something both truthful and emotional has been captured.

Greg Clarke •

## Raxlen with Horses

**R**ick Raxlen is no longer 'on location' with his first feature *Horses in Winter*. That 'easy' part is over. Instead I found him at another location that is, by many, considered of equal importance to the actual puzzle that is the finished film — the editing room. Here, surrounded by images and sound, and lit by that mystical little Steenbeck screen which makes the film live, the game-plan will finally be put together, the puzzle taken to its near completion.

*Horses in Winter* was shot in 20 days in August on locations in and around Montreal and in cottage country near Lake Aylmer, in Eastern Quebec. The PBR Richard production, in co-operation with the Main Film Co-op in Montreal, was shot by a relatively small 10-person crew and used some 20 actors.

The minuscule \$65,000 budget includes a Canada Council grant and private investment. The film is in the initial stages of post-production and Raxlen is now evaluating his material and designing the editing plan that he thinks will work best.

The notion of a film puzzle may have more relevancy and reverberations here than in other works, for, as Raxlen describes the basic story and storytelling process, *Horses* has no straight and easily executed narrative. "It's the story of 40-year-old Ben Waxman living in a tense and disjointed urban environment in 1986, looking back on the wholeness of a perfect summer he spent at his parents' cottage in 1953. The film will be told in a collage method with the focus shifting randomly between the two time periods, with about two-thirds of the film set in the child's world."

The film was shot from a script but it is the intuitive sense of the editor that will bring the specific design to it. It seems that Raxlen's evaluation process will have to take this into account, as he generally ponders where each shot will actually fit into the finished work. He points out that "the film includes different conflicts: in the boy's life it's the overheard idea that the parents will sell the cottage and send him to camp. This makes him run away from home to stay with his friend George, the Indian man. In the older man's life, it's the tension of his city life, an especially cluttered one since two sons from a previous marriage are visiting him. There are also parallel movements in both stories — the trip out of town, the problems."

On the Steenbeck one sees endless images of the beautiful Eastern Townships with their rolling hills and rich greenery. "This is little Ben's idyllic garden of fishing, swimming, picnicking and general freedom and wholeness. He fundamentally does what he wants," Raxlen says. "The older man is bothered by responsibilities, money concerns, sharing time between families — constant battles with the environment, with life. The puzzle of adult life can't seem to be resolved whereas the life of the child seems total and whole."

But that's what editing is about — sort of. Making a film total and whole, in a little room which tends to become your whole life. In this case, and for this film, there is further irony to be mined here. The editing 'suite' is located in, and part of, the Main Film co-operative on St. Laurent Boulevard in Montreal. And Rick Raxlen is president and one of its founding members. Outside the room, on this particularly busy day, I found one filmmaker-member cutting his own film negative, another member working at the computer, and three others arranging the projection system for a free screening, where anyone can bring and show their film. Raxlen can draw on these people for opinions, just as he drew on the membership for many of his crew positions. "Everyone got paid, although not the high industry rate. It was a real co-operative effort and everyone



seemed to enjoy themselves," he says.

So, Raxlen's whole life will revolve around this locale for a few months, even to the extent of seeing and hearing himself on the screen. For Raxlen plays the 40-year-old Ben, a filmmaker-coordinator of the same *Main Film*. His real-life three-year-old daughter plays his screen daughter. "This is a somewhat autobiographical piece, but my own experiences are only a jumping-off point from which to explore common issues," Raxlen says. Nonetheless, his presence as the on-screen storyteller and central consciousness in the film is very similar to his actual role as director/editor. This makes the 'life-cinema' puzzle that much more complex. Art imitates life, but only the film can be put together in a whole.

Rick Raxlen describes his own career in terms of "a pendulum swing from a period making more conventional short dramas and documentaries for the National Film Board (1968-76) to a period of more personal work in freelance writing and graphic art in Los Angeles, and then experimental film and video in Montreal. Now the pendulum swings back to a more conventional drama, but always within my own personal style." His best known works from these periods are *Legend*, a short NFB drama which won a Canadian Film Award, and experimental work titled *Autobiographical Juvenillia*, and a new-tech video, *Divine Right*.

The final image I see on the screen draws me back to the film and away from concerns of its construction and execution: an early '50s car, crowded with an early '50s family, heads off for an *après-picnic* drive back to the cottage, down the long, dusty, country road and into the lush, green hillside of the Townships. Do I remember my family's picnics being too pretty?

Don Terry •

## Shoot Me! Shoot

Re-exploring Vietnam war scars has been a hot topic on North American moviescreens recently, but it's a Canadian film that will examine the inner conflict some Americans faced when deciding whether to join the fight or not.

*Shoot Me!*, a \$3 million feature film from Toronto-based Lauron Pictures, examines a side of the war that left a social and psychological imprint in Canada as well as in the United States and Vietnam.

It's the story of Michael Posen, played by Canadian Denis Forest, a Harvard Law School student who comes to Canada for the summer of 1969 to work as a camp counsellor. It's a story that looks at his struggle of conscience as he faces the prospect of being drafted to fight in Vietnam.

During an interview with the blond, slightly built Forest, he explains that "it's an incredible pressure Michael goes through."

Forest says one way of looking at *Shoot Me!* is to consider it a counterpoint to the rash of recent movies about U.S. troops fighting in Vietnam. "What about the guy who didn't go to war?" asks Forest, who played a young Henry Ford II in the television mini-series *The Man and the Machine*.

Acting as a catalyst for Michael is troubled 12-year-old Ronald Schubert, played by Gareth Bennett, who ultimately helps his American counsellor



• The gang from *Shoot Me!* gets shot

photo: Elizabeth Feryn

find answers to his gnawing inner dilemma. A strong bond develops between the two as they struggle to resolve their problems.

The film's title is not a line from a rough-and-tumble combat scene as some might suspect, but from the game "Shoot Me!" Ronald plays with other campers.

Executive producer Ronald Lillie says the screenplay, which was written by Jay Teitel, is a story that needs to be told, particularly at a time when the United States is feeling good about itself.

"It's human nature I guess to forget the lessons of the past. I think America has largely forgotten how horrible it felt in Vietnam. I think that nation was sickened by it for a long time."

Lillie terms *Shoot Me!* the other side of the Vietnam story. But at the same time he adds it's a tale that outlines the development of powerful relationships between the principal characters.

Actress Kelly Rowan plays Cynthia, a Canadian counsellor who falls in love with Michael. Rowan, who played Lorilee in Alliance Entertainment's feature film *The Gate*, tries to help Michael solve his problem over the war, a problem compounded by the fact that his father is a law professor with strong pro-war opinions.

While Rowan explains in an interview that her Canadian character struggles to understand the political and social issues facing Michael ("We didn't have to face decisions about having brothers and uncles leave for war") she stresses that *Shoot Me!* is also a love story.

Director/producer Bill Johnston agrees that the movie works on many

levels including strong and realistic relationships between the counsellors and kids, while presenting a clear Canadian perspective on the war and U.S. draft resisters.

"At the time (of the Vietnam war) I don't think any of us knew how hard it was on any of them."

As you travel along dirt roads past deep blue lakes and damp forests on a typical fall day to view the making of *Shoot Me!* it's hard to equate the serenity of the Canadian wilderness to the bustle of moviemaking or, for that matter, to the horrors of the Vietnam war. But it's at fictional Camp Adawak, set in the western portion of Algonquin Park, that most of the shooting was done.

The crew has the cabins and halls of the camp awash with reminders of 1969 that along with a sound track featuring rock music from the period, will recreate the era.

*Shoot Me!* was made with the financial help of Telefilm Canada, the Ontario Film Development Corporation and about \$1 million from distributor Norstar Releasing Inc.

Lillie said a private investment group decided not to invest in *Shoot Me!* after proposed tax changes were announced June 18 by Finance Minister Michael Wilson. Lillie added that it wasn't an isolated incident within the film industry.

Sudden changes in the support and structure of the Canadian film industry are particularly harmful because it takes so long to put deals together, he explained.

*Shoot Me!* is due to appear in theatres in the fall of 1988.

John McClyment •

• Vicki Barkoff and Kevin Tierney in scene from *Horses*



photo: Achraf Chhib