



PHOTO: DOUGLAS CURRAN

Cowboys Don't Cry, but they do need a reassuring hug from Mom sometimes

Anne Wheeler's Cowboys Don't Cry

When the old man tells his grandson that he is going to bury the boy's mother in a beautiful place, he speaks the truth. This is 'big sky' country, the Alberta foothills:

cowboy country whose landscape, if nothing else, Anne Wheeler captures so well in her new feature, *Cowboys Don't Cry*.

The 'cowboys' the title refers to are Josh Morgan and his 15-year-old son Shane (perhaps harking back to the classic Stevens western of the same name with its own version of the father-son conflict). Lucy (mom), played with a gentle sweetness by Rebecca Jenkins, is the rancher's daughter who married her cowboy hero and ran away to join the rodeo.

Ten years down the road she is raising her 10-year-old son in a camper trailer, still following the rodeo circuit with her world champion, bull-riding husband. Dad and the ranch are taboo subjects. When Shane wants to know why he can't see grandpa, we understand that there are certain things a man - Canadian cowboy style - can't do, such as confront the man whose daughter he stole.

As long as Lucy is in the picture we see Josh through her stary eyes. He seems kind of cute: singing along with the corny country songs as they drive to yet another rodeo while mom home-schools young Shane in the back of the camper.

Lucy is dispatched early in the film, a victim

of Josh's drunken driving leaving Josh a drifter, a drinker and a gambler; Shane to pick up his mom's longing for a homestead; and Wheeler with the classic ingredients for an archetypal western which, unfortunately, she fails to capitalize on.

The relationship between father and son disappears in a fog of sentimentality only rescued by an odd moment of dignified restraint. Lucy's burial is a difficult scene, well done. The mourners stand awkwardly around the hole in the ground unable to connect to the reality of her death. Josh is a solitary figure hiding his physical and emotional injuries behind heavy black sunglasses. He seems immobilized; the tears of grief locked away.

Lucy's father (the grandfather Shane has never seen) shows up at her graveside in a pick-up and work clothes, ready to haul his daughter's coffin back to the prairie where she was born. Josh is too numb to argue. Shane and the old man connect and for a moment we are touched as they cling to each other to weather their mutual loss.

Grandpa asks Shane if he wants to come back to the ranch. But Dad still needs his son, and the grandfather leaves, never to see the boy again.

Five years later, Josh and Shane are, in Shane's words, "just a couple of bums." The sleek camper-trailer is gone, replaced by a wheezing van, a slum on wheels that literally can't make the grade. And they're still on the rodeo circuit.

Josh is on the skids. He gets drunk in a bar and tries to sneak out because he's too broke to pay the tab. He can't make money because he's too drunk to ride the bulls. Meanwhile Shane is outside in the parking lot, stealing the parts he needs to fix the van, probably wondering, along with the audience, why he didn't get out with grandpa while the going was good. Josh, at least, knows

why he's with Shane; his son is good for a couple of bucks when he signs him up, against his wishes, for the steer ride.

Thank God for grandpa who, at an opportune moment, drops dead leaving the ranch to Shane. For Shane it's heaven on earth. He's sick to death of the rodeo and he misses his mother. This is her home where she was born and raised, where her gymkhana trophies gather dust, and where she's now buried.

For Josh it's different. This is what he spent his life avoiding. He'd have to get a job and stay put. But Josh can't deny his son's puppy-faced eagerness. Shane settles in to get his education at the local high school where his natural brilliance allows him in short order to catch up with the rest of the class while Dad proceeds to mess up.

Whatever momentum the film had on the road is gone. What follows is a series of loosely connected melodramas that mark time until the inevitable confrontation between Shane and Josh. In the climactic scene, the men fight it out. Shane, weeping, lays the guilt for his mother's death on Josh; Josh, the archetypal male, walks out.

It's not clear why Shane eventually goes looking for Josh. But he does. And thank God he finds him, because that's the signal for the end. And thank God, too, for rich neighbours, mother and daughter, who genteelly lust after these real cowboys, who can bail out the ranch while father and son sort out their confused relationship.

Roberta King •

COWBOYS DON'T CRY *d. /sc.* Anne Wheeler *exec p.* Peter Sussman *p.* Janice L. Platt *line p.* Arvi Liimatainen *assoc. p.* Anne Wheeler *d. o. p.* Brian R. R. Hebb, CSC *p. des.* John Blackie *ed.* Peter Svab *mus.* Louis Natale *p. man.* Tom Dent-Cox *lst a. d.* "E" Scherberger *loc. man.* Murray Ord *p. coord.* Merri Toth *art d.* Ted Kuchera *costume des.* Jill Concannon *ward.* Carla Hetland *hair.* Jon C. White *1st ass. cam.* Peter Wunstorff *stills photog.* Douglas Curran *hd. carp.* Marty Shostak *sd. fx. ed.* Arnie Stewart *diul. ed.* Sharon Lackie, Penny Hozy *ADR ed.* Dale Shelldrake *p. prod.* Susan Gerofsky, John Harcourt *publ.* Jeremy Katz *l. p.* Ron White, Zachary Ansley, Janet-Laine Green, Val Pearson, Candace Ratcliffe, Thomas Hauff, Rebecca Jenkins, Joshua Ansley, Michael Hogan, Janet Wright, Barney O'Sullivan, Wendell Smith, Graham McPherson, Thomas Peacock, Jason Wolff, George Collins, William Korbutt, Ruby Swekla *bullfighters* Ryan Byrne, John Dodds *bullriders* Jim Finkbeiner, Brian Aebly, Dave Malek, Darrell Cholach *stunts* Jason Kiley, Greg Schlosser, Kevin West, Bill Ferguson *rodeo clown* Ernie Marshall *rodeo announcers* Bill Kehler, Ivan Daines. Based on the novel by Marilyn Halvorson. *prod.* Atlantis Films in association with CBC, the Beacon Group; with participation of Telefilm and OFDC, collaboration with Allarcom, 2 & 7 Television, Calgary and TVO.

Ric Beairsto and Harry Crossland's Close to Home

A few years ago I had the curious experience of sharing a West End Vancouver street corner with the young men and women, children some of them, who were available there. I was renting a studio apartment, they

were renting themselves. We developed nodding acquaintanceships during the daylight hours but I never understood much about their world - except that it was awfully damn noisy outside my windows in the middle of a hot summer weekend night.

Some of the same faces I watched get into cars driven by men old enough to be their fathers appear in Hy Perspectives Media Group's production of *Close to Home*. It's a home movie from the sort of homes you'd much rather avoid.

Ric Beairsto (writer/director) and Harvey Crossland (writer/producer/editor) finished the docu-drama about two years ago. Unable to find a Canadian broadcaster they sat back and watched as just about every TV network in North America devoted hours of prime-time to



Jillian Fargey as Michelle, a juvenile street hooker

juvenile street prostitution. CBC-TV vice-president Ivan Fecan saw the video and, in a move that should be typical at the CBC, decided to put it on the air as soon as possible (June 18th, 8 p. m.).

With that in mind please bear with the first half-hour or so of *Close to Home*. It's chock-a-block full of the now stereotypical scenes of drugged-out kids peddling their wares while exhausted street workers fight an uncaring system. The footage was hot when shot, now it's unnecessarily long. You might want to take time out to hug your child during an interminable shoplifting scene but be sure to come back; that's where the film begins to work.

The last 90 minutes provide a revealing look at the adults who, after all, keep the hookers, hustlers and pimps in drug money. In what is perhaps the strongest single scene in the entire film, a jaded young man called Flynn (Daniel Allman) is stabbed by an infuriated, impotent trick. It follows some revealing statistics on juveniles for sale in Victorian London (up to

40,000 at a time!) and is shot in blue-grey mists that would do credit to any Jack the Ripper mystery.

Actually, what's most noteworthy about this film is the style rather than the content. Most docu-dramas, particularly those made on a relatively low-budget, tend to be strong on docu- and a little limp in -drama. *Close to Home* is the opposite.

Tobias Schliessler is not a TV news cameraman and, since the purple thread holding the docu- and the -drama together is the research of a television journalist (Anne Petrie), this is a slight shame. However, whatever is lacking in the "journalism" segments is more than compensated for by fictional vignettes like the one mentioned above.

Likewise the pseudo-real dialogue (several scenes involve streetworkers, lawyers and so on playing themselves) is informative but a little short of gripping. Beirsto and Crossland's scripted scenes are consistently good and often brilliant. They're not afraid of minimal writing, best in a scene between Flynn and his mother (Micki Maunsell). She can barely talk while trying to stuff \$200 in the boy's pocket; he responds with a highly articulate tearing-up of the cash.

As a study of a contemporary social problem *Close to Home* is a worthwhile film which, unbeknownst to anyone but the filmmakers, broke some ground two or three years ago. Watch it for that reason alone or, rather, with your kids.

As contribution to the CBC's prime-time schedule it's a major achievement. One suspects there are dozens of good films lying around the country which were too fictional for the network's Current Affairs department and too factual for Drama. If Fecan's decision to broadcast *Close to Home* is a sign of things to come, then filmmakers such as Ric Beirsto and Harvey Crossland will have a market for more innovative projects.

Mark O'Neill •

CLOSE TO HOME d. Ric Beirsto p. led. Harvey Crossland assoc. p. Jon Stoddart sc. Ric Beirsto, Harvey Crossland cam. Tobias Schliessler art. dir. Annie O'Donoghue Assoc. ed. Jill Haras orig. score Ken Hemmerick, Richard Baker research Ann Petrie l. p. Daniel Allman, Micki Maunsell. Produced by Hy Perspectives Media Group with the financial assistance of Telefilm Canada. running time 57 min.

Randy Bradshaw's

Ramona

Two recent Canadian-made series for children recently debuted. One shows the problems facing Kidvid, and one shows its potential. *Captain Power* has proven controversial, because of its tie-in with Mattel Toys, who made the "interactive"

devices that are used with the program, and for the violent nature of its *Star Wars*-inspired scenario. Atlantis Films' *Ramona*, on the other hand, will likely be held up as a positive example of

what programming for children can achieve.

Beverly Cleary was for many years reluctant to allow her stories about eight-year-old Ramona Quimby and her family to be adapted, in spite of

the popularity of her books. She was perhaps concerned that her tales of the mischievous third-grader would be turned into a sort of distaff *Leave it To Beaver*, or would be otherwise slicked

16 of this year's Academy Awards were won on pictures filmed with ARRI cameras.

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