The Wish
Roll camera, wheelchair

J ericho Beach is one of those places that make Vancouver the only sensible place in Canada to spend summer. To the north lies English Bay and, beyond its steel-blue waters, the mountains of West Vancouver. To either side are hills and valleys of human flesh gloriously disregarding recent warnings about the dangers of too many UV rays. And, approaching from the diving dock, a group of wheelchair users, their silver spokes glinting in the midday sun.

It’s lunchtime on the set of The Wish, a half-hour drama destined for 98.99 broadcast on the CBC Family Pictures series. Many of the people on the beach blankets turn to look at the passing brigade of wheelchair consultants and extras. Some glance up and then look away, not sure what to make of the procession. Somehow people who can’t walk in the sand seem a little out of place at the beach.

That’s partly what The Wish is about, our able-bodied attitudes and reactions to those who ‘walk’ with their arms or, in the case of more severe handicaps, with electric motors. It’s the story of 16-year-old Allison Bates (Candace Ratcliffe, Cowboys Don’t Cry) and her relationship with her parents (Merrilyn Gann & Gray Rogers). Allison has been in a wheelchair for a year and a half following a skiing accident. The story, by first-timer Leigh L. Wilks, begins on Allison’s 16th birthday. With the gift of scuba lessons and equipment, her mother challenges her to start using her body again.

The show is a production of Christian Bruyere’s Face to Face Films Ltd. (Face to Face, Dad and Kids, Walls and Shelley) and is directed by Roy Hayter (Our Last Saturday and Lies from Lutetia). Bruyere found the story while teaching a writing course at the University of British Columbia. He guided Leigh L. Wilks through a breakneck schedule of rewrites so that shooting and post-production would be specifically for the disabled.

No Blame
Suisa, Shaver and Martin

I n the corridor of a new office tower in downtown Montreal, Danielle J. Suisa, dressed in white for the current heat wave, sits in the director’s chair and speaks in French to her calm crew. Cameras and sound roll, elevator doors open and close as extras walk in and out, here and there, trip to the edges of the small, crowded set. Helen Shaver, in the lead role of Amy Donaldson, a successful city magazine fashion editor, sits deeply, Amy has just learned from her doctor (played by Jan Rubes) that she is a carrier of the HIV virus. She sinks to the floor. She is seven months pregnant.

No Blame, budgeted at $1.7 million, being shot on 16mm and edited on video, is a coproduction of Suisa’s 3 Themes Inc. (Canada) and Hamster Productions (France) in association with the Venture Entertainment Group. It is billed as the first made-for-television movie on the subject of a woman with the AIDS virus. Suisa, Shaver and Donald Martin, on whose story the film is based and who co-wrote the screenplay with Suisa, deem the film to be about, above all, ‘fear’. Martin placed the scenario amidst the lives of the affluent, while North Americans in order to punctuate the fact that AIDS can affect anyone—and does.

No Blame is a project which got off the ground quickly. Martin, working as a publicist (formerly for Helen Shaver), novelist and screenwriter in Toronto, was having dinner with Helen Shaver’s agent Michael Oscar when the subject of AIDS came up in conversation.

They discussed the true story of a woman who had wanted to become pregnant but tested positive for the HIV virus. The story became the starting point for the screenplay No Blame. Martin allowed himself three days locked away in a room with a word processor to write the first draft.

Accomplishing what he’d set out to do, Martin then asked his agent to send the script to Suisa with whom he’d become acquainted through his work as a publicist and journalist. Coincidentally, on that same day, Martin bumped into Suisa at the corner of Yonge and Bloor in downtown Toronto, told her about the script he’d written, and personally sparked her interest. She promised to read it as soon as she got back to her office in Montreal. One and a half weeks later, Suisa purchased the option on the screenplay and No Blame was set in motion towards production. Within the four days that followed, Suisa made a deal with producer Nicole Godin of Hamster Productions (France) which became the first of two projects. Hamster Productions, pri