

(production assistant – Craft) is an unsung heroine who rises each day at 5:30 am to prepare the tea, coffee, and diverse munchies that keep cast and crew going on the long days (in addition to becoming a 1920s floozie when some further extras were needed for the boxing match). Location manager Alice Albiston carries on stoically trying to summon scores of extras on a shooting schedule which changes daily because of weather. Production manager Peter d'Entremont and assistant Robin Sarafinchan deal with the thousand problems stemming from shooting in a functioning museum while crowds of curious visitors are flocking through the sets.

The Bell Ringers has now wrapped and the dailies look quite promising. Post-production kicks into gear almost immediately since, according to CBC series producer Brian O'Leary, the series is scheduled to be telecast between January and March of 1989. The town of Sherbrooke slowly returns to normal, and self-professed beachcomber Sam Roddan returns to B. C. to comb some more beaches. Who knows what he'll find next?

Christopher Reardon •

Toronto Looking For Miracles

Woodland Park on the outskirts of Toronto. The sun is blazing, the heat is intense. Unhappy policemen in full uniform are guarding the entrance to the park. It's not a crowd that they're trying to beat off, but the grinding heat wave. Driving down the gravel road leading toward the wooded interior, Lucie Hall, director of public relations and creative affairs at Sullivan Films, meanders her way toward one of the sites of Kevin Sullivan's latest made-for-television feature film, *Looking For Miracles*. We arrive at a shady spot in the woods, the humidity in the air is rich with the scent of pine. Scurrying about are young boys in full summer garb, except that the fashion of the day is circa 1935: sailor caps, undershirts, heavy woolen shorts, designed by Martha Mann. The crew, camped in the woods, concentrates on the scene unfolding in a canvas tent, under the guidance of producer/director/writer Kevin Sullivan. He is steering a dramatic confrontation between the Head Counsellor of Camp Hochelega, Ryan Delaney (Greg Spottiswood) and the streetwise punk Ratface (Noah Godfrey).

The direction is gentle but firm, the crew's attention focused but relaxed. Only some off-camera tension is expressed by the parents who are concerned about their children's

welfare. Soon lunch is served and, as in camp, the morning activities are set aside in order to indulge in the ravenous and restless appetites of the community.

Looking For Miracles is the third major dramatic production for the award-winning Sullivan Films, internationally acclaimed for its mini-series *Anne of Green Gables* and *Anne of Green Gables – The Sequel*. The story is based on the memoirs of playwright, journalist, author and president of Paul Newman's food business, A. E. Hotchner. Set in the summer of 1935, at the height of the Depression, the comedy drama is about two estranged brothers who develop a lasting bond in the midst of adversity. Ryan Delaney 16, intent on entering law school, is saddled with the responsibility of taking care of his younger brother Sullivan (Zachary Bennett) who had been farmed out to relatives. Ryan grudgingly allows Sullivan to join him at Camp Hochelega, where he has talked his way into becoming Head Counsellor, despite his lack of experience and phobic fear of water. He threatens his helpless younger brother lest he disclose his insecurities. In the course of the summer travails, the two brothers have obstacles to overcome; Ryan must earn credibility and Sullivan must achieve a sense of belonging. Ultimately, despite the terrorizing antics of Ratface, the falling-out with the camp's benefactress, the loss of Ryan's scholarship and other dilemmas, the brothers recognize their need for one another.

A simple story, another *Meatballs* with a bunch of funny gags strung together? Not so, according to Kevin Sullivan. "Camps started in the '20s and '30s, based on stuff like Grey Owl that was popular at the time. They were focused on recreational education and opening up the kids' minds to the wilderness, in a very romantic background to the story." In one scene shot at night, a flaming arrow shoots through the air to light a bonfire. Obviously a source of inspiration for the story is childhood enchantment.

Given only five weeks in which to shoot the film, Brian Thomson, the director of photography, accustomed to the methodical and careful mapping of shots on commercials, is coming to terms with the speed and spontaneous nature of the shoot. This is his first feature and as a father he is delighted to be involved with quality children's programming. He is intrigued by the unpredictable and surprising performance of the children, a challenge to any crew.

Encouraging, coaxing, and coaching the children off-camera is Janet Green. A graduate of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts and a veteran at training child actors, Ms. Green attempts to evoke from the young performers motivations for difficult emotional scenes, eliciting from them spontaneous performances. Often the children must harken on their own memories of painful moments and longing desires, to suggest a mood for a scene. "Children do not have the training of a seasoned



Director Kevin Sullivan and crew on the set of *Looking For Miracles*

actor," she claims. Adult actors may trigger themselves into a reaction through tried techniques, whereas children lack the methodological discipline for creating and evoking the dramatic effect required by a scene. At daily rehearsals with Jan Green, Zachary Bennett and Noah Godfrey are gently encouraged to discover their characters and reserve their restless energies for the scenes at hand. Through feeling rather than by rote, the children prepare themselves for the direction of Kevin Sullivan. The crew have unanimously acknowledged the fine performances of the young actors.

For Greg Spottiswood, 23, who has been more accustomed to the rigours of the stage than those of the camera, co-starring with Zachary Bennett, 8, has been particularly rewarding. "Zach immediately brings things down to a one-on-one level, so that you forget that there are people all around you watching your every move," he praises his co-star. Though Spottiswood plays a role seven years younger than himself, he is not concerned about the age difference. He attributes this attitude to Ryan having first-time experiences at Camp Hochelega, which in effect, permit his character to be played with the incredulity of the uninitiated. Spottiswood looks at his role in *Looking For Miracles*, his feature film debut, as a milestone in his career. One senses that he hopes that this role will do for him what *Anne Of Green Gables* did for Meagan Follows.

Looking For Miracles is a co-production and CBC and Disney Films. Kevin Sullivan and his co-executive producer Trudy Grant, hope to establish an ongoing association with Disney, which will oversee the production of a continuous series of feature-length films. Sullivan, at first, saw his involvement with this production merely as its producer, but the more he became involved with plotting the story, the more he realized he wanted to direct it as well. To give the script its final polish and dramatic pulse Sullivan turned to writer Stuart McLean.

Initially, consideration was given to placing the story in a contemporary setting but it was dropped since it would have given the drama a harder edge than was necessary. The choice of retaining the setting at the height of the Great Depression was to lend it a storybook feel, and credibility to the hardships endured by the Delaney family and lend it the aura of a fable.

Inbuing the sets and costumes with '30s realism are the accomplishments of Art Director Carmi Gallo and Costume Designer Martha Mann. Gallo meticulously researched the rustic setting of Camp Hochelega – cabins, canvas tents, Indian bonfires – and in Toronto, she searched for streets with working-class tenements to replicate a '30s environment. According to Sullivan, such period street scenery is quickly disappearing from the city's landscape. Martha Mann combed department store catalogues from the era in order to accurately reproduce the fashions of the day. Unlike the fairly uniform casual summer fashions of today, which serve to mask class distinction, Mann's endeavours made her particularly attentive to divisions of social caste. She had few samples of original clothing from the era since poor members of society had few clothes and wore them until they had to be thrown away. Mann worked in close collaboration with Sullivan as he plotted the arc of his characters, so that she could convey through her designs the subtle changes and transformations required by the script.

The infectious optimism of Kevin Sullivan carries the cast and crew through the drudging heat. There's an intimacy on this shoot, a feeling that a visit by a reporter is something akin to Visiting Day at camp. The proceedings are temporarily interrupted but the life of the summer community must go on. After all, it's all for the sake of having memorable experiences under the rubric of organized mischief.

Looking For Miracles is expected to air this month on CBC.

Candida Paltiel •