

striking thing about being in this country is not just the physical hardship of it, but the fact the physical hardship is not a question of choice, it has to be endured."

This war, in which donkeys carry weapons to be used against tanks, where highly trained Soviet forces battle against rebel factions, is a war which evolved from a civil contest into a fight against domination by foreign invaders. The Soviets did not bargain on the traditional Mujahideen commitment to *jihad* or *badal* (blood for blood). *Witnesses* explores the idea of commitment to a concept, an individual, a people, and an ideology. In days of facile political correctness and limousine liberalism it is difficult to come across genuine examples of courage which aren't bludgeoned by media sensationalism. Of course, the situation in Afghanistan was markedly different by the very dearth of any major media coverage. This lack makes *Witnesses* all the more startling. Burke's sensitive treatment of the position of both the Afghans and the outsiders.

The Soviet troops were plagued by widespread drug addiction and alcoholism which contributed to the low morale. A Russian mother tells of the guilt she feels at having written letters to her son inciting him to fight in the spirit of patriotism. Were it not for her words, she feels, perhaps he would still be alive. She joins the group of "cemetery mothers" in Russia who gather to mourn over the graves of their sons who were killed in Afghanistan. Several Soviet defectors tell of their breaking points as the killing becomes personalized to them over time. One of them composes a poem about a young girl he saw murdered during the feast of Ramadan. Ludmilla Thorne, an American woman, fought the reluctance of several governments in order to aid Red Army defectors, being held in Afghanistan, obtain asylum in the West.

Often, the words of the witnesses carry an impact beyond the graphic images. A verbal description of a phosphorus attack by Soviet helicopters refers to heat so tremendous that the very rock ignited. Another tells of a massacre where the Soviets threw gasoline with chemical additives into irrigation ditches which were shielding villagers fearing conscription. One hundred and five men and boys were burned alive. Juliette Fournot, a French doctor, provides a haunting description of a helicopter gunship circling but not firing. When asked what the helicopter was doing, a village woman replied that it was choosing which village it would attack later that day. Why then did the villagers keep going on about their business instead of evacuating? The practical reasons of everyday living prevented them from going. There were crops to tend, foods to be prepared. Yes, one village would be bombed, but people still had to live.

Independent filmmakers and journalists were often the only ones covering the war. The use of

8mm video equipment allowed for greater mobility especially in those areas not readily accessible to conventional filmmaking. Along with the assault rifles and the mountain howitzers, video equipment was hauled to the battlesites, frequently by mule. The Afghan Media Center trained Afghans to cover the war themselves by working in compact three-man crews. Their cameras were invaluable for recording the final months and providing the world with a record of an unseen war.

Teresa Tarasewicz •

WITNESSES *exec. p.* Kitson Vincent *p.* Martyn Burke, David M. Ostriker *CSC d./sc.* Martyn Burke *ed.* Darla Milne *d.o.p.* David M. Ostriker *CSC narr.* Martyn Burke *cam.* Francis Granger, Pascal Manoukian *2nd unit cam.* Francois Darquennes, Christophe de Ponfilly, Juliette Fournot, Bruce "Pancho" Lane, John McGill, Winston Upshall *sd.* Chris Armstrong, Chris Barton *p. man.* Adrian Sheepers *unit. man.* Julie Martin *p. asst.* Vicky Fusca *p. sec.* Elena Campisi, Pat Turner *researchers* Victor Loupon, Terese Nehrbauer, Johanne Samuel, Bob Summers, Claire Weissman, Bernard Wolfrom *p. off-line* Avalon Classics *on-line ed.* Bernie Clayton, PFA labs, Toronto *mus.* Carlos Lopes, Aidan Mason *mix.* George Novotny *graphic design* Nina Bevendge *foley artist* Terry Burke *sd ed.* Gary Vaughan *trainees* Shannon Terletski, Sheila Rogerson *consultant* Rosañne Klass *ed. sup.* Richard Neilsen *dir. of research* Robert Roy *co-p.* Martha Fusca *cameraman killed in action* Kabir Ahmed. Produced by Stormway Productions Inc.

Sandy Wilson's Mama's Going To Buy You A Mockingbird

As far as disease-of-the-week movies go, *Mama's Going To Buy You A Mockingbird* is pretty standard fare. One of only a handful of features produced by the CBC each year, the film clocks in tear-jerker mileage quite handily (it's cancer), pulling the same emotional threads of family melodrama – the loss of domestic space and the family unit, an uncertain future – and lumping those themes (with equally clunky and overwrought symbolism) with a boy's coming of age. Foolproof and a little lacklustre.

Directed by Sandy Wilson, *Mockingbird* (like Wilson's *My American Cousin*) coasts on a historically pregnant era, the pre-'60s, before the fall from innocence. Life is unblemished. The parents are groovy (they dance to Fats Domino), the daughter cherubic and the son, well, he's just at the awkward stage. The Talbots are a model of hygienic happiness. So when Pop gets cancer, Wilson plugs the tear-jerker into overdrive. While wane, bruised smiles measure fatherly fortitude, the family deals with all the "signals" that tell us the jig's up. Cherished



Marsha Moreau, Linda Griffiths and Louis Tripp

possessions are given away, dad extracts promises from son to "remember this moment," they pull out the super-8 camera just one more time to record (i. e., preserve) the family portrait intact.

Using mock super-8 footage of backyard tomfoolery, the film opens with the same studied effort of portraying casual family life – transient, small but happy incidents in the comfortable domestic sphere. Set against, later in the film, the spectacle of cancer, these tiny, "meaningless" moments are given privilege in *Mockingbird*. Cracks about Aunt Marjorie (marvellously underplayed by Martha Gibson) and her lousy cooking, an owl-watching episode and squabbles among siblings are studiously offered as signs of intimacy – to count us "in" as part of the family. So that we'll share the drama of John Talbot's cancer and the process of the family's rehabilitation into "normality" (the son's tacit position as the new "head of the family"), we're obliged to also share in Jeremy's growing pains.

Tess Medford, played to be the loser at school, is actually a very attractive and interesting young woman. You can't imagine what she'd want to do with Jeremy, the real geek. But she's the "love interest" and Jeremy finally softens up; she likes the Brontës but isn't so bad. For Wilson, puberty is poignance and that's the biggest untruth of all. Tess, a realist, is cast as a romantic in Jeremy's moist-eyed discovery of her abandonment as a child. Parental absenteeism, the most heinous crime for the relatively pampered Jeremy, earns his

sympathy, overturns his reluctance. So when the adult love of John and Kate Talbot is severed, Wilson compensates with pube attractions – and all the hopes that their adolescent urges ripen into a mature and loving relationship.

From its core of puberty, death and the family, *Mockingbird* extrudes this kind of sentimentality and condescension and expects us to bond emotionally with the film – if you can identify with a white, middle-class 12-year-old. Unremarkable as it is unadventurous, it is also no surprise – the CBC affirms and entrenches a particular view of the politics of family life into a televised, consumable form that rarely gets beyond the white, middle-class family (like that's all Canadians are) and expects that is what we want and need to see. When things get complicated, cut to a father/son rendition of *Blueberry Hill* or the recurring *Mockingbird* theme. Or a commercial. By design, the film plots out its unambitious motives and, textbook style, executes the story quite economically, neatly avoiding all the bumps and crevices that flaw but make better films more convincing.

Helen Lee •

MAMA'S GOING TO BUY YOU A MOCKINGBIRD *p.* Bill Gough *line p.* Joe Partington *d.* Sandy Wilson *sc.* Anna Sandor *story cons.* Jim Osborne *1st. a. d.* David Webb *unit man.* Bing Kwan *des.* Milt Pacher *set dec.* Al Laurie *cost.* Ada Kangyal *makeup* Mario Cacioppo *graphics* Bert Gordon *des. coord.* Steve Cudmore *ed.* Bruce Annis *d.o.p.* Ken Gregg *lighting* Ian Gibson *sd.* Dave Brown *cast.* Linda Russell *cont.* Mark Corbeil *prod. sec.* Twila Linden *l.p.* Linda Griffiths, Geoff Bowes, Louis Tripp, Marsha Moreau, Rosa Barker-Anderson, Martha Gibson. A CBC production. *running time* 97 minutes.