

## On Location

Toronto

### Love and Hate

The Bayview/Shepherd neighbourhood is tidy, with well-ordered houses gleaming in the sun. Children skip rope and play soccer in a schoolyard. The suburban idyll is jarred by the arrival of a convoy of equipment trucks and vans. A film crew has arrived to recreate reality and to remake east into west for the shooting of *Love and Hate: The Story of Colin and Joann Thatcher*.

The real-life story of Colin Thatcher, the former Saskatchewan provincial cabinet minister who is now serving a life sentence for the murder of his wife, is being brought to the small screen in a four-hour CBC mini-series directed by Francis Mankiewicz (*Les Portes Tournautes*) and produced by Bernard Zukerman. The film stars Kate Nelligan and Kenneth Welsh. Gemini-award-winning writer Suzette Couture has adapted the screenplay from journalist Maggie Siggins' book, *A Canadian Tragedy*.

Today's scene involves Colin Thatcher (Kenneth Welsh) who must speak to his children Regan (Noam Zylberman) and Stephanie (Vicki Wauchope) while separated from them by a schoolyard fence. The kids from the school fill in as extras. A voice calls out patiently, "Don't look here little one" as a child inadvertently looks at the camera. As Thatcher stares through the fence at his daughter running towards him, the menacing character is imbued with a sense of vulnerability.

Afterwards, Laura, Yixin, Leila, Elizabeth and Courtney, who play jump rope in the scene with Stephanie, excitedly tell me, "We tried to be active and busy so it would show in the film." Already they've learned the difference between play and playing at it.

In his Winnebago, Welsh is freed from his Thatcher bulk. I ask him how he achieves the facial similarity to Thatcher. "I got Mario, the makeup guy, to devise this plastic piece," Welsh explains. "It goes into my lower jaw and bulges out. The mouthpiece changes my way of speaking. Thatcher's voice has a certain consonance, and it's because of his jaw structure, which this helps me with. The trouble is I keep leaving it everywhere. I take it out of my mouth to have a bagel or something and I leave it in somebody's van or seat or the pocket of my suit."

Welsh's part calls for a difficult mix of controlled tension and explosive anger. "So I keep going further and further, but you have to avoid melodrama because it's very easy to fall into that. But as long as the emotion is true and the anger is deeply felt then two things happen. You get a sense of reality and you get a sense almost of sympathy that's hard to come by in this script."

He recalls a conversation with DOP Vic Sarin. "Canadian acting tends to be a little too cool. We envy American actors who can blast away and reveal all no matter what they're doing. We Canadians are kind of cool and restrained and polite about it all."

When screenwriter Couture first read the Siggins book, she barely made it to Christmas dinner because of her reluctance to put the book down. "My reaction was so strong, so visceral, I thought if I can get this in the screenplay, this momentum and this tension and this terror for Joann, then I think I'm capturing something important." Couture's evident concern with the larger issues continued as we spoke in a car parked by the shoot.

"My bias is still for Joann in the sense that I find it heartbreaking that everyday I read a newspaper or listen to the news and some woman has been shot dead by a boyfriend because she wanted to leave or was in an untenable marriage and wanted a separation. Let's not forget that around the same time the whole idea of domestic violence drew hoots and catcalls from the House of Commons. No one gets angry and says this terrible thing happened. I wanted to say look at this. Look at this terrible thing."

For Zukerman it "was a fascinating story on many different levels. What it said about the justice system. Here is a guy who clearly felt he

was above the law and he got away with it for a long time. The civil legal system could not cope with a guy who refused to play by the rules. When you look at all the material in the media, Joann Thatcher was forgotten. Colin was the big name. We'd like to redress that to a degree and also to say something about family violence."

Nelligan is dressed in character in white slacks with a bright, watermelon-coloured sweater. Her hair is styled in a longish pageboy; her makeup is very simple. "I usually take a very documentary approach... after I read Maggie's book I recognized her. She was such a controlled woman by Maggie's account. I began to be worried about that much control for four hours. I felt that I probably wanted to be more accessible than she would have been to the outside eye. The point is that Maggie didn't get a chance to see her within the context of the family."

Nelligan continues her reflections on Joann Thatcher. "She's more ordinary than a lot of women, and I'm very attracted to that. I like that. I don't think she has an unusual range. I think that ordinariness is fascinating."

Even the commonplace can elevate itself into fascination. As Zukerman says, "People complain that this is a boring country, but there are wonderful stories here. It's a complex country. You can go to any part of it and find fabulous stories waiting to be told."

Teresa Tarasewicz •

### Highway 61, near Sudbury Roadkill

Today's the last day of production, the tail-end of a frantic, wild, and intense 15 days of almost non-stop shooting for Bruce McDonald's first feature film, *Roadkill*. (And Canada's first feature-length rock 'n' roll movie, Bruce would add.) I can't remember the last time I had a good sleep, haven't eaten in three days, and estimate that over the course of production I've smoked over 900 cigarettes and consumed about 180 coffees. I'm feeling a little rough. I'm the co-producer and production manager on *Roadkill*. It's my job. It's what I do.

Joey Ramone, myself, and my girlfriend Joanie are crammed into my car and trying to sneak past the Victoria Day parade that is seriously hindering our chances of getting to location on time. A cop who looks just like Burt Reynolds catches us and orders us to stay put. "But we've got Joey Ramone in the car!", I try, and for some odd reason the cop lets us through. There was either a break in traffic, or the *Ramones* are finally reaching mass appeal. We continue our high-speed-chase-style cruise to location, radar detector on and tape-deck full blast, and arrive just in time to see our transportation captain (Evan Siegel) being taken away by the police for unpaid parking tickets.

I follow the cruiser into town and meet them in the station, but when I reach into my pocket to get my money, the whole pocket empties, and onto the floor spills a bundle of fake American twenties, some sort of food substance, a pack of rolling papers, and a very suspicious-looking plastic baggie. I reach down and pick everything up, but as I straighten up I smack my head on the lip of the counter and nearly pass out. I kind of blither away to the cop and explain my way around my personal effects, and he just shakes his head and looks at me in disgust. "I bet you don't even have any permits, do you?" I sheepishly counter with the snappy and desperate excuse. "My brain is the size of a pea!" Evan and I head back to location, and by the time we get there, everyone's ready to do the first shot.

Bruce McDonald, D.O.P. Miroslaw Baszak, and camera assistant Lily Tannis are huddled behind the camera, fine-tuning the blocking of the scene with Joey and Joanie. I learn later that Joey was impressed by the fact that Miroslaw had a foreign accent, that he thought it really fit in with the kind of shoot we had. Geoff Murrin, the art director, and Valerie Buhagiar, the lead actress, are humming a *Ramones* song and hard-wiring the fake cab meter to my car. Inside the car sits the other actor in the scene, Larry Hudson, sweating like a horse and practising his lines, as gaffer/grip David Healey adjusts the interior lighting.

D.O.P. Vic Sarin (left) and director Francis Mankiewicz

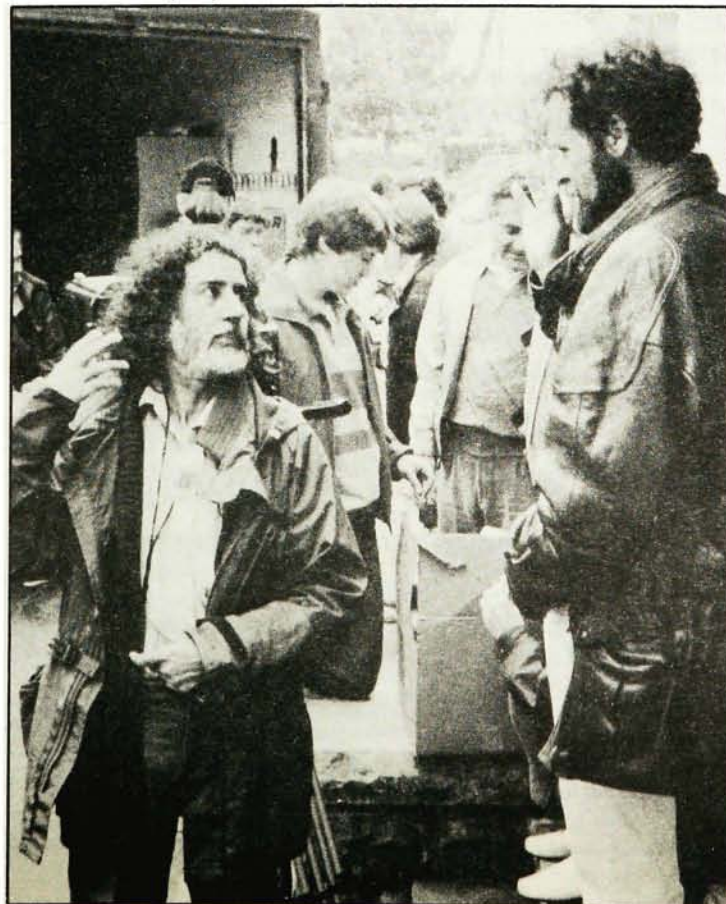


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