

At home with Richard Condie

AN INTERVIEW BY GREG KLYMKIW

It's a Sunday afternoon. It's very hot, and I could be sitting in an air-conditioned movie theatre watching Hulk Hogan's silver screen debut in *No Holds Barred*. Instead, I'm supposed to trot over to Richard Condie's house. I think I'm probably going to have a better time with Richard. "NO RING. NO REF. NO RULES," proclaims the Hulk Hogan ad copy. I'm not swayed. Condie is a Winnipeg-based animator whose work has delighted audiences (including myself) all over the world. His last film, *The Big Snit*, was nominated for an Academy Award and copped a Genie Award for Best Animated film. I'd be a fool to blow my deadline for 90 minutes of Hulk Hogan kicking ass. So I drive over to Richard's house.

Richard cracks open some Perrier and we go up to his study to pass the time of day. I'm sure he has better things to do. Unfortunately, I don't, so I'm thankful for this brief vacation from the emptiness of my existence.

And so it goes, as Kurt Vonnegut would say.



Cinema Canada: Where were you born?

Richard Condie: Vancouver.

Cinema Canada: How long have you been in Winnipeg?

Richard Condie: I don't know. You mean the total amount of time?

Cinema Canada: Yeah.

Richard Condie: I don't know. I guess I lived in Vancouver for a total of six or seven years. I've been in Winnipeg most of the time.

Cinema Canada: Where did you do most of your school? In Winnipeg?

Richard Condie: Yeah.

Cinema Canada: What high school did you go to?

Richard Condie: The one just down the street. Kelvin High.

Cinema Canada: Did you go to the University of Manitoba?

Richard Condie: Yeah.

Cinema Canada: What did you study there?

Richard Condie: Everything.

Cinema Canada: Everything?

Richard Condie: Yeah. Well, back then you could take anything. It was a different system. You didn't have to specialize. So I took everything. You know, from atomic physics to English. You know, it was just a general Liberal Arts.

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Cinema Canada: So you didn't get involved with those Fine Arts people that much?

Richard Condie: No, it was a different kind of education, a different kind of art. Although I wish I had.

Cinema Canada: Why did you, uh, were you...

Richard Condie: No.

Cinema Canada: No?

Richard Condie: No.

Cinema Canada: No, Okay. Why, uh...

Richard Condie: No.

Cinema Canada: Why, uh...

Richard Condie: Where's my Perrier water?

Cinema Canada: Over there. Why'd you say you wished there was something like a Fine Arts program?

Richard Condie: There was.

Cinema Canada: Oh, there was. But you didn't bother with it?

Richard Condie: No, and I can't remember why, although... I don't know, I don't remember. I, uh, no. I don't remember. I'M INNOCENT.

Cinema Canada: When you were a kid, did you ever figure you'd be an animator?

Richard Condie: No.

Cinema Canada: Did you watch cartoons?

Richard Condie: I imagine I did, yeah. I don't remember watching them constantly, but I did draw cartoons constantly.

Cinema Canada: What sort of stuff did you draw?

Richard Condie: Same stuff. Hasn't changed. I haven't improved.

Cinema Canada: How old are you?

Richard Condie: No, I'm not...

Cinema Canada: You're not gonna tell me?

Richard Condie: Yeah, I'm gonna tell you. I'm 46.

Cinema Canada: Did you watch any movies when you were a kid? What movies did you like?

Richard Condie: I must have watched movies.

Cinema Canada: Do you remember any?

Richard Condie: *The Wizard Of Oz*. I still like that.

Cinema Canada: How many times have you seen it?

Richard Condie: Eight or nine times.

Cinema Canada: Any movies back then, other than *The Wizard Of Oz*, that sort of made your life?

Richard Condie: What age are we talking about?

Cinema Canada: Anywhere between six to 12.

Richard Condie: I can't remember any. There must have been some Disney things I liked. I could make some up.

Cinema Canada: Nah.

Richard Condie: *The Magnificent Fence*.

Cinema Canada: Which film?

Richard Condie: No, I made that up.

Cinema Canada: What were your favorite TV shows?

Richard Condie: When?

Cinema Canada: When you were watching the movies you don't remember watching.

Richard Condie: I'd like to say SCTV, but that wasn't on then.

Cinema Canada: Did you ever watch *Forest Rangers*?

Richard Condie: No. Never heard of it.

Cinema Canada: That was a great series. It had Gordon Pinsent prancing around in an RCMP uniform.

Richard Condie: No, I don't remember it.

Cinema Canada: It was a great Canadian TV series.

Richard Condie: I have no knowledge of *Forest Rangers*.

Cinema Canada: Leave It To Beaver?

Richard Condie: Oh sure, I saw that... Wally... the Beaver. I don't remember anything.

Cinema Canada: That's too bad.

Richard Condie: I don't know.

Cinema Canada: I'm trying to delve into your deep, dark past. To create a picture for our readers.

Richard Condie: It won't be very interesting.

Cinema Canada: I could make something up.

Richard Condie: Sure. I'm just trying to think of something interesting.

Cinema Canada: Well, uh, how about...

Richard Condie: I was raised by squirrels. They found me floating down the Assiniboine River in a basket. Then I went to university right after that.

Cinema Canada: That's incredible.

Richard Condie: Are you recording this?

Cinema Canada: Yeah.

Richard Condie: Verbatim?

Cinema Canada: Every word of it. Including my own stupidities.

Richard Condie: Oh great.

Cinema Canada: Now, when you were a kid... I'm sorry about all this kid stuff, but I'm trying...

Richard Condie: I'm being a kid constantly, anyway. So, take me back.

Cinema Canada: What did you like to do?

Richard Condie: Nothing abnormal.

Cinema Canada: What were the normal things?

Richard Condie: Nothing seems that much different. I now have the knowledge of an adult, or some of it.

Cinema Canada: But you were drawing pictures and stuff like that?

Richard Condie: And just generally acting like a kid.

Cinema Canada: Did you ever...

Richard Condie: ... throw bricks through windows? No, I didn't do that. Now I do, but not then... why only yesterday...

Cinema Canada: Do you ever remember sitting in school while the teacher lectured about the square root of something and you were reprimanded for doodling away?

Richard Condie: Sometimes. I hated school.

Cinema Canada: Did you hate university?

Richard Condie: I wasn't wild about it.

Cinema Canada: Would you recommend it to anyone?

Richard Condie: No. Go to air conditioning and refrigeration school, stay away from university. No, of course I'd recommend it to anyone who wants to go.

Cinema Canada: What was the first time anyone cut you a cheque for doing something creatively.

Richard Condie: I did some *Sesame Street* stuff. I also did a K-TEL commercial, but nobody really wants to admit to that.

Cinema Canada: Why?

Richard Condie: It was awful.

Cinema Canada: Really?

Richard Condie: Yeah.

Cinema Canada: Was it fun to do?

Richard Condie: No.

Cinema Canada: Really?

Richard Condie: Well, one was kind of interesting. It was with the serrated knife, where some guy was demonstrating how sharp the knife was. He was cutting all kinds of things, including a shoe, and while he was cutting the shoe, he almost cut his thumb off. I got closeups of that.

Cinema Canada: Was there a lot of blood?

Richard Condie: In the closeup, yeah. He was then supposed to cut a piece of meat in "x" amount of seconds, so we continued with the commercial while the guy wore this flesh-colored thing over the wound. Then we were all immediately rushed to the hospital.

Cinema Canada: How long have you been smoking cigarettes?

Richard Condie: Since age two, and I hope to continue for another 80 years. I even smoke in my sleep.

Cinema Canada: How many packs a day?

Richard Condie: Just one pack.

Cinema Canada: What's your brand?

Richard Condie: *Matinee Extra Mild*.

Cinema Canada: You couldn't have always smoked *Matinee Extra Mild*?

Richard Condie: No, at age three, I changed brands.

Cinema Canada: Do you like American cigarettes?

Richard Condie: No.

Cinema Canada: Don't you like the smell?

Richard Condie: No, not really.

Cinema Canada: How about *Camels*, unfiltered?

Richard Condie: Any cigarette is good when you don't have any. I've got five-year-old Chinese cigarettes which I smoke occasionally.

Cinema Canada: Do you smoke when you work?

Richard Condie: Actually, I smoke when I fret. If I'm drawing, I'll have a few cigarettes before and after, but when I'm really getting into it, I don't. Sometimes I'll light one up and I look over and there's just this long ash sitting there. When you're drawing, your concentration is fixed and there isn't anything else. You just get into that space and you don't care what cigarettes you put into your mouth.

Frames from Richard Condie's film *The Big Snit*.



Cinema Canada: Do you have any other vices or happy habits?

Richard Condie: I drink six or seven Cokes a day.

Cinema Canada: Diet Coke?

Richard Condie: Oh no, I need that sugar and caffeine for my fuel.

Cinema Canada: Have you tried "Jolt Cola"?

Richard Condie: That's too much. I like the taste of Coca-Cola.

Cinema Canada: Coke Classic?

Richard Condie: Oh yeah, that new Coke is awful. I knew they'd take it off the shelves after six months, and I think they took it off after five.

Cinema Canada: How about R. C. Cola?

Richard Condie: No, I have brand-name loyalties.

Cinema Canada: What other brand names are you loyal to?

Richard Condie: Peanut butter.

Cinema Canada: Skippy?

Richard Condie: No, what kind is it?

Cinema Canada: The stuff with those two stupid bears?

Richard Condie: Squirrel peanut butter.

Cinema Canada: What was your first contact with the National Film Board?

Richard Condie: The mid-seventies.

Cinema Canada: Of all the films you've made, do you have any personal favorites?

Richard Condie: Not really. Although, I really like the stuff I did on that IMAX film, *Heartland*.

Cinema Canada: You used a whole bunch of multi-images and split screen for that, but you only filled the screen once? Why?

Richard Condie: It was like playing the movie screen like a piano.

Cinema Canada: Do you ever imagine you'll make an IMAX film where you do fill up the screen with single images for the whole film?

Richard Condie: Oh yeah.

Cinema Canada: Are you going to be working on an IMAX film soon?

Richard Condie: Possibly.

Cinema Canada: Was it fun to do the IMAX?

Richard Condie: The sound mix was really fun. We had six channels and 30 tracks. It took us four hours to mix the first 14 seconds. It was really hard, but really exciting.

Cinema Canada: I guess it's really fun making cartoons?

Richard Condie: Parts of it are. There are parts I like and parts I hate. Some of the day to day drudgery is a real pain, though.

Cinema Canada: Do you ever want to do a live-action film?

Richard Condie: Yeah, maybe.

Cinema Canada: What stops you?

Richard Condie: The realization that I've never done it. Maybe it'll happen, maybe it won't. I've got a few more things to learn about it.

Cinema Canada: Would it be possible to transfer what you do in animation to a live-action format?

Richard Condie: Yeah. There isn't any essential difference. It's all sound and picture. If I were doing a live-action, I'd still storyboard it.

Cinema Canada: Have you seen any films recently?

Richard Condie: Yeah, I just saw *Field Of Dreams*. That was really superb, a really transcendent film.

Cinema Canada: What else have you liked recently?

Richard Condie: Nothing. I don't have time to see movies.

Cinema Canada: You don't have time to see movies? What do you do?

Richard Condie: What do I do? Other than work?

Cinema Canada: Yeah.

Richard Condie: Well, I like to stick as many pencils in my mouth as I possibly can, without swallowing. I stick the pencils in my mouth and I hum the Korean National Anthem. Other than that, I like to play music.

Cinema Canada: Oh yeah, you own a synthesizer.

Richard Condie: Well, it's actually a keyboard sampler. It's everything. It's the most important invention since the wheel.

Cinema Canada: Why is that?

Richard Condie: I don't know.

Cinema Canada: Earlier today you showed me this noise you created on that thing which sounds like Jimmy Stewart. What other noises have you created on the keyboard sampler?

Richard Condie: Oh, I don't know. I've been doing it for years. Anything that can be created.

Cinema Canada: Do you ever use these noises you create in any of your films?

Richard Condie: Once in a while. I used some of the noises I created on *Getting Started*.

Cinema Canada: How long have you been working on your latest film, *The Apprentice*?

Richard Condie: I don't know.

Cinema Canada: What's it about?

Richard Condie: I don't know.

Cinema Canada: I just need a little high-concept here.

Richard Condie: Well, it involves two fools, and one is an apprentice to another one.

Cinema Canada: Because it takes so long to grind out an animated film, do you find you have a whole mess of films you want to make, but don't have the time?

Richard Condie: Oh yeah, no sooner have I handed in a proposal before I just want to scrap it to get on to the next one.

Cinema Canada: Would you ever want to make a feature-length animated film?

Richard Condie: It's hard enough to do 10 minutes. But, sure. Why not? You never know.

Cinema Canada: What are your favorite Disney features?

Richard Condie: *Alice In Wonderland* and *Pinochio*.

Cinema Canada: *Pinochio* makes sense, but what about *Alice In Wonderland*? For me it doesn't have as much magic. It's kind of dry for my liking, whereas *Pinochio* is incredibly terrifying and moving. It seems more of a rush.

Richard Condie: Actually, I think they're all wonderful. I don't know why I picked those two.

Cinema Canada: I guess when you're making films, you're always creating other worlds.

Richard Condie: Not necessarily, especially if you pattern your films after this world.

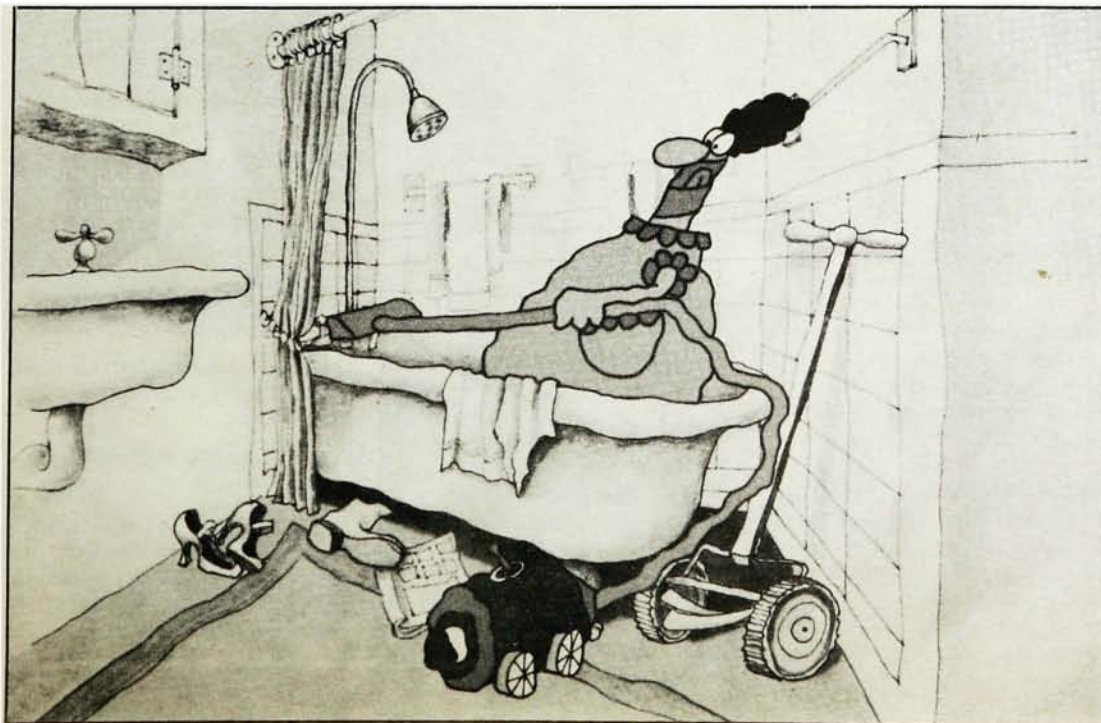
Cinema Canada: Are your films patterned after this world?

Richard Condie: Some of them. Especially *Getting Started*. And *The Big Suit*. If you look at those films, you realize they're not another planet. It's this world.

Cinema Canada: What do you think about Spielberg?

Richard Condie: I don't think about him.

Cinema Canada: What? Wouldn't you agree that he's the closest modern equivalent to Disney.



Richard Condie: I guess so. *E.T.* has heart, but those *Raiders* films have more action in them. They don't really touch the heart.

Cinema Canada: *Although in Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom, someone gets their heart ripped out.*

Richard Condie: Yeah. I know and I found that extremely touching.

Cinema Canada: *Your films have been seen all over the world and have won tons of awards. Does any of that faze you at all?*

Richard Condie: It doesn't have any effect. It's a momentary recognition of something that happened in the past. It's appreciated, but it doesn't have any effect on the present.

Cinema Canada: *The Big Snit was nominated for an Academy Award. That must have been fun?*

Richard Condie: Yeah, it was fun. The only strange thing was when they were driving me to the awards in a limo and there was this TV in the limo. And on the TV, there were these people getting out of their limos 20 minutes ahead of me. That was really strange. It's like everybody says.

Cinema Canada: *Have any of your films been self-financed?*

Richard Condie: No, I have no money. And I have no idea how to raise money, so if everyone would just send me a thousand dollars...

Cinema Canada: *So you'd never like to get into that end of producing a film?*

Richard Condie: No, I wouldn't know the first thing about it. I would never have the courage to knock on someone's door and ask them for money.

Cinema Canada: *When you work through the NFB, they're the producer. Have you ever worked with a producer outside of the NFB?*

Richard Condie: Yeah, Roman Kroitor. He produced the IMAX film, *Heartland*.

Cinema Canada: *When you're making a film through the NFB, obviously there's a budget. Are you aware of the ins-and-outs of that?*

Richard Condie: I know what I have to stay within.

Cinema Canada: *So you keep track of that?*

Richard Condie: No.

Cinema Canada: *Winnipeg is so tiny, yet per-capita, there seems to be one hell of a lot of great animators in this town. For that matter, there seems to be a huge amount of filmmaking, period. Given the size of Winnipeg, don't you find that odd?*

Richard Condie: Maybe, but the NFB Prairie Office has really done a lot to encourage filmmakers in Winnipeg.

FILMOGRAPHY

Oh Sure	1975
John Law and the Mississippi Bubble	1978
Getting Started (Awards from Zagreb, Tampere, Cracow. Bijou Award - Cdn. Short Film and Television)	1979
Pig Bird (Award at Zagreb)	1981
The Big Snit (16 International Awards including; Genie Award, Academy Award Nomination)	1986
Heartland (Animated sequences)	1988
The Apprentice (working title, in progress)	

Cinema Canada: *Who are your favorite Canadian animators? Living or dead.*

Richard Condie: There's just so many, a whole bunch of them. I don't really want to single one person out. They're all wonderful.

Cinema Canada: *Who do you make your films for? How aware are you of the potential response of a future audience?*

Richard Condie: I suppose at the early stages, when I'm thinking about the story, I am the audience. I get a lot of enjoyment out of developing the story. But then I actually have to make the film, and by that point, I'm making it for the audience, not for me. I actually have to

From Richard Condie's *Pigbird*.



make the film and I usually don't want to because the themes that initially amused me are in the past and I want to move on to something else. But I can't. I have to make the movie. If it was possible to make one film a day, I would like that a whole lot better.

Cinema Canada: *What kind of car do you drive?*

Richard Condie: A Honda.

Cinema Canada: *What year?*

Richard Condie: 1985.

Cinema Canada: *Have you ever driven a big boat?*

Richard Condie: You mean a car?

Cinema Canada: *Yeah, a big gas guzzler.*

Richard Condie: I've never owned one, but I've certainly driven one.

Cinema Canada: *You like smaller cars?*

Richard Condie: I guess so, yeah.

Cinema Canada: *You've done a lot of travelling. Where are your favorite places?*

Richard Condie: It all depends on what mood I'm in. It has more to do with my mind than the actual location. I like Vancouver a lot.

Cinema Canada: *Do you actually like the pace of Vancouver?*

Richard Condie: Oh yeah.

Cinema Canada: *Do you like Winnipeg?*

Richard Condie: Yeah, I love the prairie, especially thunderstorms. I chase thunderstorms.

Cinema Canada: *In your car?*

Richard Condie: Yeah.

Cinema Canada: *Why?*

Richard Condie: Thunderstorms are beautiful. The more violent the better.

Cinema Canada: *What kind of music do you like?*

Richard Condie: It depends on the mood I'm in. I like Ravel. I like country and western. Whatever I'm in the mood for.

Cinema Canada: *What music do you play when you're working?*

Richard Condie: I don't always play music. I record thunderstorms. I have to have some sort of sepulchral atmosphere.

Cinema Canada: *Who were some of the people at the NFB who encouraged you?*

Richard Condie: Michael Scott was quite encouraging. Some of the old philosopher kings like Colin Low, and more recently Roman Kroitor. I've had some really good influences and good teachers. Ches Yetman has also been very encouraging.

Cinema Canada: *I gather it's a great working atmosphere at the NFB?*

Richard Condie: I work at home mostly. You can't smoke at the NFB anymore.

Cinema Canada: *Really? How does anyone get any work done there?*

Richard Condie: I don't know. I dread the thought of not being able to smoke when I work.

Cinema Canada: *Aside from the K-TEL commercials, have you ever done any others?*

Richard Condie: I did one for the Manitoba Motor League. That was a pretty good one.

Cinema Canada: *You don't really like doing commercials?*

Richard Condie: I'd do one for a million dollars. Seriously, though, I'm not good at them. I'm not good at someone saying, "Here, do this."

Cinema Canada: *Why don't you go to the people at Coke to do a commercial?*

Richard Condie: I certainly like Coke.

Cinema Canada: *Do you have any retreat from your home, a summer cottage or something like that?*

Richard Condie: No, but there are a lot of ways to retreat. I like to go out into the prairies and listen to the quiet.

Cinema Canada: *If you weren't animating films, what would you be doing?*

Richard Condie: I can't speculate on what I would do. I don't have any skills. I don't even have any animation skills. So I don't know what I'd do. I'd like to have a job moving OXO cubes from one part of the room to another. •