

# SPOT LIGHT

## on prudence emery

*As producers become increasingly aggressive about selling their films during the production period rather than waiting for a film's release, the role of publicity has become more and more important.*

*Prudence Emery, publicist, has had the lion's share of the big co-productions done recently in Canada. The interview below is an effort to capture the spirit of the lady - her apparently boundless energy, her professional attitude, and her thoughts about her own job and the production scene as she has experienced it.*

I worked for Expo in Montreal, the Corporation and Visitor Services. And then I did the Press visits that Expo sponsored, which meant setting up everything. You know, when the guests arrive at the airport, their food, their booze, their tours, their speakers, but not press kits. Just the basics. For *Time* magazine, I did a big set-up - a two-day visit - but I also took around celebrities, like Hugh Hefner, Liberace, Twiggy, and Edward Albee, whom I got to know very well; we've been friends ever since. So I had this funny mixture.

That was a good experience. I discovered I had a talent for organizing which I hadn't known before. This is vaguely how I got into PR.

Then I got on a plane in January '68, just a charter flight to London, 'cause I love Montreal and I thought I'd really like to stay in the city. And in England, I was invited down for the weekend to Sir Hugh Wontner's home. He was the Chairman of the Savoy. His daughter happens to be married to my cousin, Victor Emery, who everybody remembers as Canadian bobsled champion. (I mean, that's some years ago. He's a gold medal bobsledder.) And I told a funny story at lunch, and at tea time, everybody discreetly withdrew from the sitting room, and Sir Hugh asked me what my plans were. I said I was going skiing and then going back to Montreal. He said, "How would you like to come and work at the Savoy?" So I said, "OK", without a thought. And I stayed there 5 1/2 years.

**Cinema-Canada:** *And you stayed there 5 years, and then decided to come back?*

**Prudence Emery:** I decided to come back because working at the Savoy was like being on a ship at sea in first class, forever. Which means it was quite unreal. I met every famous person in the world... Noel Coward, Liza Minelli; and the staff was super. But you know, every year the same people came back and I sat in my office and had a staff of debutantes; and all they did was exchange recipies and boy-friends as far as I could see. We were there just to keep the press out of the corridors and help them if we could. It was glamorous, but it wasn't very creative.

And all of a sudden, I thought, "I want to do something else." And I wrote to various people, including Bill Cunningham. He was an old friend, and he wrote back and said, "We're starting this network Global Television. Can you fly over for an interview?" So, I did, and I got the job.



photo: Lois Siegel

**Cinema-Canada:** *Did you work at Global long?*

**Prudence Emery:** I started with them in July before we went on air. That's July '73. I was Manager of Public Relations. I set up all the Press visits

across Ontario, and we had a good time, actually. That was really fun.

When we started, we had 17 independent producers working for us. This was Al Bruner's pipe dream, and Al Bruner is a wonderful ideas man. But he wasn't a good practical man, in terms of administrating something. But he's wonderful, and a good salesman. The people that were around him at that time just couldn't control the financing properly. The original concept was good because it gave a lot of employment to a lot of people. In the beginning we got all the Quebec films. I was down here viewing, non-stop, I can't remember how many Quebec films. We had them all dubbed; we viewed them on our network, which was wonderful exposure for Quebec because it had never had so much exposure in Ontario, which is a big market after all.

Once we went on air, it was sort of turning peculiar. You know, people became 'territorial rights' conscious. Then a journalist wrote a very bad review in *Variety* of our entertainment show called "Everything Goes". In fact, it was a terrific showcase for a lot of kids who had not been used in Toronto by the CBC, and one of those kids is now on NBC Saturday Night, Danny Aykroyd. We gave them a lot of exposure, and they were working hard; it was a good straightforward entertainment thing. But this review in *Variety* killed a lot of sales.

I went and saw the president, Al Bruner, and said, "Let's write to the editor and tell him what we're really doing."

By that time he knew, though I didn't, that the take-over was coming and that things were in a very bad way. And he said to me, "I think you had better cover yourself. There's a job going at Inn on the Park as a PR." I thought I was being fired and was very upset. So, I came down to Montreal for a week, and I went to the Film Board and they offered me a job. Then I read in the *Globe and Mail* that I had resigned, which really pissed me off 'cause nobody had consulted with me.



As it turned out, it was to my benefit because from that, I got my first film offer.

Dick Schouten, whom I'd known from previous years when he was with *Time* phone me up when I got back to Toronto and said, "Do you want to work on a film?" So I said, "sure".

That was **Black Christmas**, my first film, and then somebody else offered me the job at the Zoo, So I did **Black Christmas** and then I went to the Zoo.

#### *Sounds appropriate.*

The Zoo. The Zoo was wonderful. Except for the politics. I started before it opened, and I had a wonderful time because I did a lot of creative input, i.e., I took a lot of photographs and put together a slide presentation. I want on the road; I went down to Rochester, I went down to Buffalo, I went to the automobile clubs and I gave presentations to all these people. Travel editors, bus tour operators, Kodak people, all in order to interest them in the Zoo, and they were very enthusiastic about it. And that was fun. I really had a good time then.

I was not only doing publicity, but I was doing marketing. And that was fun. And it's important because it is very applicable to films.

#### *What do you market at a Zoo?*

Well, I was marketing the Zoo in terms of going down with these presentations. A study in San Diego determined that the market area for tourist attractions like the zoo is within a 75 miles radius for day trippers, and then for a week-end trip it's a little further out. So, I just covered what I considered was that area. So I was making people – the media and travel operators – aware of this great project and they would eventually bring bus tours and all that to the Zoo when it opened. And it worked.

#### *And what happened in terms of politics? Why did you leave?*

Well, those politics were just a mess. They had an original Board that had worked 9 years to get the Zoo going; rather establishment Torontonians. And then, they fired the boss and it wasn't handled very well. He was almost like another Al Bruner, by the way. He was the ideas man, but he was not good at administration.

Anyway, then this new Board got a campaign going which in my opinion

was bad, was not based on facts. But they somehow appealed emotionally to the membership, the Zoo Society, and we had a meeting and an election. They had a very slick lawyer. Zap! They got rid of all the old board.

Now, I was still there, hired by the old Board, and I was therefore, in their eyes, connected to the old Board. And there were nasty things...like, they thought I was leaking stories to old Board, which I was not, I was just trying to do my job.

After a while they got this new American in. I found out later that they did put pressure on me to resign, because they couldn't fire me. And this American would come to my office and say, well, subtle things to my assistant (who was a good friend of mine); Well, have you kicked her out yet?" And one day a man came in to measure my office for a new wall – I mean it was really like something that you read. Nobody told me anything. and then... I won't go into the sordid details, but it was nasty.

So I resigned and I thought, "Phooey on this. I'm going to go out West – I'm from Victoria – and see if I like the West Coast." I packed my car, sublet my flat, drove across Canada, had a wonderful time, went to my Uncle Bill's ranch, rounded up cattle. Terrific. Got to Vancouver and got a phone call. Would you like to do publicity for **Breaking Point**? So I said, "Sure". I flew back, and then that sort of got things rolling in filming.

I did that, and then Harold Greenberg, at that point, was going to do **David Copperfield**. So I went back to Victoria where we were hoping to film and I did location hunting. Al Kasha came up from Los Angeles and we went around the city and looked at locations. He was wonderful, a really terrific guy. And then Harold meant to come, but he got sick that year. Then, of course, the project fell through because of the Americans. I understand that the Americans wanted their credit, of course, because they wrote the film. I guess in the point system, in terms of tax write-off, they couldn't get it so the whole project folded.

I flew out another time to set up the **Breaking Point** world premiere party. A film which fortunately rapidly disappeared from the screens...

#### *What it was like working on **Breaking Point**.*

It was Bob Clark, the same director, who did **Black Christmas** and who is very nice. We had fun because we had some kooky stunts and one of the photos went around the world... when we set the guys on fire, and they jumped into the lake. A nice crew. I don't recall any terrible hassles. You know, I like to enjoy myself, right? And for me, it's necessary to have a good laugh. The pressure was terrific, but I like the pressure because it's stimulating, and you know that when it's over you will have worked hard and then you can have this nice holiday. I recall **Breaking Point** as a pleasant, easy experience.

After **Breaking Point** I went back home and I heard that Sophia Loren was going to be in British Columbia. So I drove down to Los Angeles. I wanted to go to California, so I thought I could get a tax benefit like this, and include the trip. I'd written to Zev Braun in advance and I phoned him. He said, "Who?" I said, "It's Prudence." "Ah", he said, "phone Dale Olsen at Rogers & Cowan", a big PR firm. So I went and saw this guy, Dale Olsen. I said, "I've done this and that, and I know all your gang in London because I used to work with them in London." He said, "Sure, you've got the job." So I thought, Terrific! I drove back to B.C. Then, of course, Sophia got ill and the whole project finished and my year was up out West. I'd given myself a year.

So I got in my car, I was in Vancouver and got a phone call... "It's on!" So I phoned and I asked, "Am I still on?" and they said, "Yes, but it's in Montreal." So I drove across Canada again, unpacked in my flat in Toronto, stayed a night, and came here. So there we are.

We are now starting **Angela. The Uncanny** I did simultaneously. Then there was **The Disappearance**. Then there was a lull, about five months, except for 3 days work on **The Disappearance** to put together a press book. And now we are here. So I came down actually for a holiday, but which coincided with the last four days of Sophia Loren, to wrap it up. And Denis Héroux said, "Prudence, we want to work with Claude Chabrol." I said, "Denis, I have committed myself to **Coup d'Etat**." He said, "Well, I don't mind. You at least launch it, and I have Robert Lussier who is very good, who can take over from you when you go." So I said, "Ok." And Denis, I adore, anyway. He's a lovely person to work for.



## SPOT LIGHT

So I did that, then I went back to Toronto and did **Coup d'Etat**, and then came back here to do **Tomorrow Never Comes**.

*What's involved in promoting a film?*

Well, first of all, you have to do the initial Press Release. I get them done in French too. With **Tomorrow Never Comes**, I'm learning a great deal because I'm not only just doing Canadian publicity. I mean, on **Angela** I also did American publicity too. I got Sophia Loren into *Time* mag. I also got **Disappearance** into *Time* mag, but they never followed up in England with a photograph. Which really pissed me off because *Time* mag was there... thinking, you know, that I'm not doing my job very well. But what could I do?

With **Tomorrow**, I'm having to do a great deal more writing, because I'm working through Michael Klinger's PR guy in London, Fred Hift. Hift does publicity and he also contacts about 130 distributors around the world, so the information I send him goes out to all these people. There are photographs, production notes, column items, and I have to do, you know, little featurettes, and that's hard work.

Fred Hift handles international publicity, if you like, and I do Canada. If I set up something for John Osborne with the *New York Times*, there again, they have another guy in L.A., Chuck Moses. He's giving me people to call up in terms of bringing some Americans up here next week to get more American coverage. John Osborne did an interview with the *New York Times* this week. So this is good experience for me because I'm broadening my experience outside of just immediately Canada. It's important for the industry too, that I can have these contacts outside.

I mean this is quite fun, because it's international. I'm beginning to realize the importance of international promotion of the film. It goes hand in hand with international marketing which is something I don't think Canadians have really thought seriously about until recently.

*It would seem that, although you deal with the press, who in turn writes for the public, the thrust of your work is aimed at marketing the film, aimed at the distributors and the world sales. The movie-going public seems to come second.*

I think the Canadians are beginning to realize the value of publicity during a shoot. On the other hand, I don't know how valuable that is when the film comes out. Do people remember that Susan George gave an interview in the *Gazette*? I think publicity during the shoot is valid for a number of reasons; one, packaging the information which will go to the eventual distributor. Two, egos. Three, it's very important for the investors to see articles in the newspaper because they want to see something and say, "Hey, that's my movie, you know?" Obviously, it's good for the stars to have their faces in the public eye as often as possible. Now, whether or not, as I say, that particular article will bring people to the cinema, I have no idea.



photo: Lois Siegel

*I mention it only because we hear more and more often that films have completely recouped before they have been released; I'm thinking of **Angela** for example.*

You think the producers are making films for the distributors... I can't see any harm in that. I think it's good business, and it's a big time business now. Investors will reinvest in the next picture if they understand that their money is going to be recouped so rapidly.

If the distributor likes the idea of the film, he obviously has to judge the market; therefore, the audience has

to be taken into consideration. Then again, the distributors use my information when they prepare their own advertising and publicity. So there is a follow-through once the film gets into release.

*Are you concerned about the quality of the films you work on?*

P. That's a good question. I will be quite honest; we need work, so if it's an exploitation film, it doesn't matter to me because I'll just do my job as professionally as I can. I'm hired for that purpose. Of course, it would be wonderful to be involved in what they term an "artistic film", but artistic films seem to have a problem in distribution, I don't think we've really done anything that could be labelled as such. We haven't done any Antonioni-kind of stuff here but it doesn't matter, because it's as important that we're getting the experience.

I think that the films I have been fortunate enough to work on have been pretty good feature films, good commercial feature films. We've always seemed to have good casts - I mean, you can't get much better than Sophia Loren and John Huston and John Vernon and Steve Railsback. I got to know John Huston very well; in fact, he was going to direct a film in Toronto this summer, and he wanted me to do the publicity. I was very, very flattered, of course. It fell through, but... the joys of working on a film are maybe making one or two friends. That makes it all worthwhile despite all the "angst" that accompany any kind of production because of the pressures.

*How do you handle it when you have to present people to the press who are difficult or just plain loathsome. Do you cover up for them?*

No. I don't work like that. I work very straight. I don't believe in super-hype. I believe in straightforward facts. First of all, if you try and cover something up, they always find out, so what's the point, right? I prefer to just give factual information. Now I know that some producers like to super-hype. But I don't agree with it. You know, big adjectives, prestigious blah blah blah. I really don't go in for that. That guy is what that guy is like, and I don't see how you can cover something like that up, really, because the journalists are intelligent people.



*But you must have difficult times...*

There have been times. Take Oliver Reed. He has a reputation for being an extravagant liver, shall we say, and my first interview with him and Les Wedman of the *Vancouver Sun* was a perfect example. But, I wasn't surprised.

Oliver wasn't working yet and he was enjoying himself. And he works with Reg, his friend and his stand-in. They've been together for 6 years. I think they work as a team because, after all, don't forget, it must be very boring for an actor to give interview after interview after interview. So I think that he and Reggie have a little game they play. Occasionally he turns to him and says, "Shut-up, Reg", and this is kind of shocking, you see, to an interviewer. That day, gin was spilled and notes were thrown in the air and so I phoned Michael Klinger and said, "Listen Michael, I'm going to tell every journalist that if they want to interview Oliver Reed, they have to do so at their own risk. What's more, I want an insurance taken out on me." He just thought it was funny because, after all, Oliver is good copy, and in fact, I found him to be very cooperative and just very, very amusing and very creative. It's just to avoid the boredom that he just likes to do kooky things; he's been super and he hasn't been nasty. He's been really great.

Besides, people are only temporarily nasty. I think anyway that films do expose people. It's like the primal emotions, you know. Actually, that's why I like films because you're in a kind of a microcosm and you're living a six-week tightly knit set-up where you're working very hard, very close to these people and it's... what is it like? Not like an orgasm because that's kind of pleasurable. And it isn't always pleasurable. It's like living extremely intensely for six or seven or eight weeks and that's wonderful because you can get on a high on that. And people are really down to their basics and that's terrific. And it can be nasty and it can be a high, you know. You get the whole range of everything in the context of that intense, intensified period.

*How's the pay?*

Well, I get paid on a weekly basis like anyone else, but I'm non-union so I don't get overtime. I started off my first film at \$250 a week, and I've added on every single film ever since.

All of a sudden I realized what the crew were making. You know, the coffee boy in some films with overtime was making \$600-\$800 a week. That's incredible. I mean, I've never made that much per week. But from now on, I will charge so much per day. And, to live comfortably, it would take a minimum of three films a year.

After my experiences in England in my magic job for five years, I do not want to work in a bureaucratic environment ever again: fifty-two weeks a year with two weeks holiday! So, I'm prepared to earn less money. If I only do three or four films per year, I'm obviously going to make less than if I had a permanent job, but I don't mind because I really like the time off and I would like to travel some more. Films are bureaucratic but you know it's going to end. So you can put up with it. If there's a nasty situation you know, well, this film is only for 3 or 4 more weeks so I don't care, I'm just going to get on with it. But if it were a permanent job and there was a conflict of personalities, that would be disaster.

I want to be a free agent is what I'm saying. I want to be independent. I'm going to try - it's an experiment for me to try and support myself in the film industry so I'll continue to do so as long as people hire me to do films in Canada.

On the other hand, I'd like to go out on location abroad. This is another aim of mine. I would like to work on location; David Hemmings mentioned about doing *Vol de Nuit* in Brazil and he said offhandedly, "Well, you can work on that, if you like". Now, that would be wonderful, to go and work on a film in Brazil. That would be my ultimate aim: to get out of the country on to locations somewhere else in the world.

*How much difference is there for you between working in Toronto and working in Montreal?*

In Toronto, it's much easier. It's a centre. Take CBC for example. On *Coup d'Etat* I had two national items on CTV and CBC in Toronto. You know the little bit at the end of the news where they have to do a little humorous thing or whatever? I know the girl who does that, but she can't do it in Montreal because she's in Toronto, and she wouldn't send a crew all the way here just to do an item. So in terms of national cover-

age, it's easier for me out of Toronto.

When I'm in Montreal I feel really pissed off that I don't speak French better. One of my plans is, in January or February, to go to Aix-en-Provence and just immerse myself because I don't want to spend the winter in Trois-Rivières. I had signed up for a course at Laval before Expo and then the job came up and they said, "You had better start now". I'm impressed with the bilingualism here, and I can converse on the subject of the film in French because I know what the jargon is. But I cannot work fulltime in terms of writing my own releases; I have to have somebody translate them...

*Is the Quebecois press sympathetic?*

They've been very good. - They're not so interested in **Tomorrow**, as they were in **Blood Relatives**, but then that was Claude Chabrol who is a gem. He was just wonderful.

They're very supportive. I always speak to them in French first. I try and then I say, "Parlez-vous anglais?", and if they say, "No", I say "oh, ok", and then I just think it out very slowly. And actually, I like doing it. I like the French press. I like the verve. The French-Canadian have much more verve than English-Canadians. They really do.

*Have you ever had a real bad shoot?*

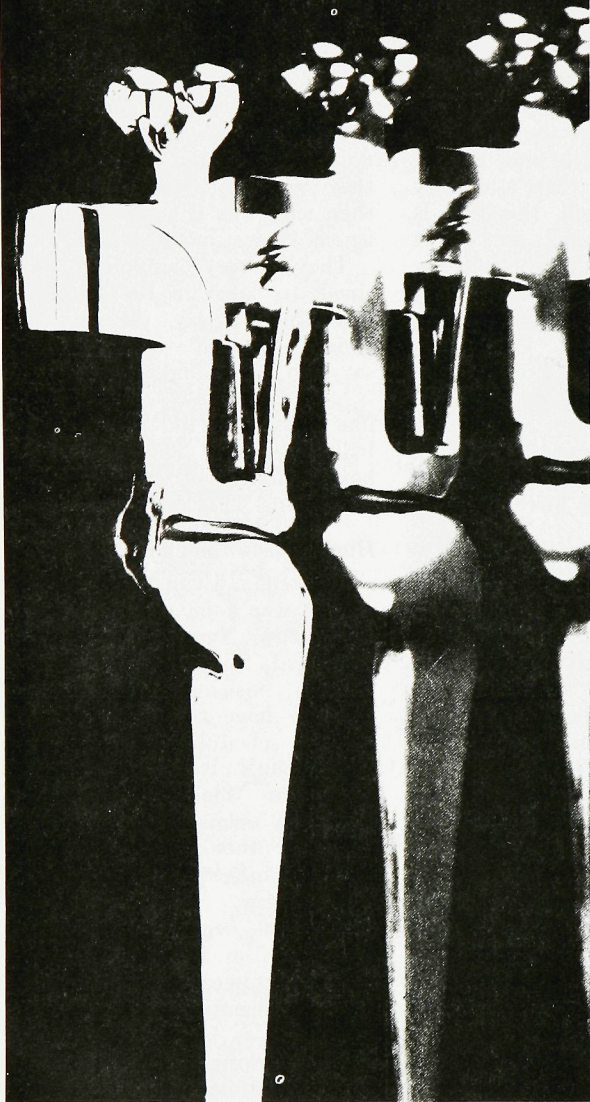
Not really. I can tell you that **Coup d'Etat** was a joy. I can tell you that **Tomorrow Never Comes** is a very pressured film, mostly because the weather has influenced the shoot a lot. We have to shoot out of doors, and the schedule changes nearly every day because it's been raining for a long time. That creates a few problems in terms of having to cancel. Like the other day, I had to reschedule five interviews. So let's hope it doesn't snow.

This has been, I will tell you, the toughest film I have worked on but that's also because I am now working on an international basis and a great deal more is being demanded of me. We're working with Klinger who is an international guy. He's very keen on publicity and he is tremendously demanding. But that's ok, because if I can survive this film, I shall be much better at my job. Klinger even said, "Prudence, by the end of this film you will be the best public relations lady or publicist in Canada".

**Connie Tadros**



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**Michel Moreau**  
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Society has always regarded the mentally deficient and the mongol as "retarded". This film presents them to us simply, from another angle. Mongol children, who can teach us a great deal, are scrutinized directly, minutely and systematically by the camera.

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**french-colour ● 20 minutes ● 1972**

If you adopt an animal, you become responsible for it. This is the story of a young boy who finds, looks after and heals an injured duckling. He then sets it free.  
 (Prize: Canadian Film Award)

### White-tailed Deer

**Bernard Beupré**  
**english-colour ● 11 minutes 48 seconds ● 1976**

This film is intended to make known the deer-yard work of the biologists of the *Service de la Faune* of the *Ministère du Tourisme, de la Chasse et de la Pêche*.

### UMIMMAQ

**Bernard Beupré**  
**english-eskimo-colour ● 26 minutes 50 seconds ● 1976**

The musk ox has been imported into Québec and everything suggests that this animal, whose habitat is the tundra, will be able to survive here without difficulty. For eight years now animals have been raised at Umimmaquatik, where they are doing well and reproducing. In the film we witness the realization of the aim of the experiment, the adaptation of the musk ox to the Québec tundra.

### Wildlife no 1

**Bernard Beupré**  
**english-colour ● 26 minutes 50 seconds ● 1976**

Film to make known the work of the research workers and biologists of the *Service de la Faune* of the *Ministère du Tourisme, de la Chasse et de la Pêche*, dealing specifically with land wildlife.

### Wildlife no 2

**Bernard Beupré**  
**english-colour ● 26 minutes 50 seconds ● 1976**

Film to make known the work of the research workers and biologists of the *Service de la Faune* of the *Ministère du Tourisme, de la Chasse et de la Pêche*, dealing specifically with aquatic wildlife.