

## COMING AND GOING

d. David Cherniack, sc. asst. Kay Nagao, ph. Vic Sarin, ed. Arla Saare, sd. Gerry King, sd. ed. Paul Coombe, m. Patrick Godfrey, exec. p. Nancy Archibald, p. David Cherniack, p.c. Canadian Broadcasting Company (1977), col. 16mm, running time 58 minutes, dist. Canadian Broadcasting Company.

One doesn't expect to find much in the way of moving, enlightening film on television. The medium often lives down to one's expectations. David Cherniack's *Coming and Going*, which aired February 7 on CBC's *The Nature of Things*, is an exception.

*Coming and Going* is a sensitive treatment of a serious problem, one that we all will face; dying. Because we hide from the process of dying and limit our contact with death, when we are forced to confront it, we approach death with a mixture of fear and disgust almost as though it were contagious. This attitude causes unnecessary grief and anguish to those who are dying, as well as to those around them. Cherniack attempts to shed some light on the process, to show that dying is a natural phenomenon, and that understanding can help people cope with this difficult time of life.

This *cinéma vérité* was shot in a terminal care ward in St. Boniface Hospital, Winnipeg. It is one of a handful of such wards in Canada, where every effort is made to ease the physical and mental pain of dying. The crew — Cherniack, cameraman Vic Sarin and sound man Gerry King — spent a month on the ward, as participants in this process. Only the last two weeks were spent shooting any footage. Their involvement in the lives of the people on the ward is obvious in the final film treatment of the subject. They were more than observers. They were not grabbing a few shots. They were recording some part of the world in which they, and we, live.

There is a sense of our common humanity which comes from this film. A sense that what is happening on the screen is part of all our lives, and that



photo: David Cherniack

A self-mobile patient in a terminal care ward at St. Boniface Hospital, Winnipeg

we will have to help each other get through it. The only disturbing note is that the helpers are almost all women, but in our society, this comes as no surprise.

*Coming and Going* is a film about people. The images are images of people, occasionally alone, but most often in company. Images of hands, mouths, faces and eyes, revealing emotions. It is the faces of the dying that tell their stories. They change, they wither, they dry up. Even in a few days, Jack Prendergast's face becomes dry and shrunken. When he finally dies, his face is nothing more than a layer of translucent parchment over bone.

Some may be offended by this. We see Jack Prendergast die. He did not get up when the take was finished. He was not nameless. He was not alone. We watch Jack Prendergast die. When his wife leaned over, pressed her face to his and said "I love you so," I cried.

To get inside this situation is quite an accomplishment for both Director Cherniack and Cameraman Sarin. In order to minimize the intrusion of the camera crew, the film was shot almost entirely in available light and radio microphones were used to record sound. Arla Saare's sensitive editing preserves this mood.

But the quality of the film cannot be attributed to mere technical innovations. *Coming and Going* is an intimate film. We are close to the people, their hands and their faces. It is a film of people helping and crying for each other at a very difficult time of life. The images of hands holding hands, hands clasping shoulders, and the faces — pensive, crying, laughing — will live with me for a long time.

Charles Lazer

**COMPLETION GUARANTEES  
BY A CANADIAN COMPANY**

**Motion Picture Guarantors Inc**

Executive Officers: Douglas Leiterman  
Philip S. Hobel

43 Britain Street, Toronto (416) 361-1664  
211 East 43rd Street, New York (212) 682-0730