

Jayne Eastwood

Canadian actress at the crossroads

by Peggy Kelly



● Any actor's equal: no need for feminism in acting, Eastwood argues

A Canadian actress found herself stalled at a major intersection in her life. Career, family, religion: each pointed in a different direction. Poor health made her feel older than her 36 years; she resolved to start exercising. And so began a brand new approach to life for Jayne Eastwood, actress, artist, bon vivant, and thoroughly non-athletic individual.

Hog's Hollow, a little valley in York Mills, Ontario, conjures up images of lace curtains in dormer windows, lilacs and a swing in the backyard. This was home to Jayne and two elder brothers, Tony and Richard. The Eastwood family's only daughter enjoyed the trappings of her upper-middle-class childhood —

summers at a cottage in Muskoka, winters skiing at Collingwood — until puberty and enrollment in York Mills Collegiate created a minor crisis.

"I didn't fit in very well at all," Eastwood recalls. "It was really full of the Kitten sweater set, all these chicks driving their own Thunderbirds to school. I was like a fish out of water until I ended up going to art school."

Northern Secondary, located light years away from suburban York Mills, seems to have carved a definite shape upon her impressionable psyche in those formative years. Eastwood still works in pastel and acrylic paint, and often attends life-drawing sessions. In progress is a pastel portrait of Wayne Gretzky inspired by a magazine photograph of the famous hockey player's profile.



● On the *Balconville* set: Terry Tweed, Eastwood, director Mark Blandford, Steve Watts

Eastwood's open, ebullient personality belies her WASP background. She puts out incredible energy and emotion. She talks loudly, is full of good-humoured tales and laughs a lot. The rich, throaty voice is the Eastwood trademark.

Millions of Canadians became familiar with Eastwood's gutsy voice and comedic style through dozens of radio and television commercials. Since 1970 she's made 30- and 60-second spots for the likes of Sani-Flush, Scope, Facelle Royale, Paris Pâté, Toyota and Wintario. Eastwood also appeared in the familiar Molson Golden gang commercials with friends Gilda Radner and Andrea Martin.

"I really got overexposed. They ask for 'Jayne Eastwood types' now."

This year Eastwood expects to earn 40

percent of her income through various commercials.

"You can learn a lot about film from commercials, about doing take after take and staying fresh — amazing discipline."

In 1970 Eastwood appeared in Don Shebib's classic Canadian feature film, *Goin' Down the Road*. Her character, Betty, falls heavily for a crazy Maritimer just arrived in Toronto from down east with his best buddy, both filled with dreams of making it big in the big city. Betty gets pregnant, married and dumped before the plot climaxes.

"Shebib was a doll to work with. Many people thought that we weren't even actors, that he'd just gotten us off the street. It was that [New York] Actors' Studio kind of acting, a lot of improvising,

Peggy Kelly is an Ottawa freelance writer.

completely truthful, with a lot of underplaying."

In Eli Rill's 1969 Toronto acting workshop, Eastwood took to this improvisational style like a fly to honey. Her complete honesty, her ability to let it all out was a director's goldmine. In a 1975 interview Allan King, who directed Eastwood in two C.B.C. dramas, *Last of the Four Letter Words* and *Can I Count You In?*, called her "an extraordinarily generous actress - she gives you so much to work with." Eastwood won the 1976 ACTRA Earl Grey award for Best Actress for her portrayal of Hardy, a woman who struggled with cancer, in *Last of the Four Letter Words*.

"If I do get a really heavy role," says Eastwood, explaining how she approaches a part, "I like to lighten the character up every once in a while with that little bit of comedic relief just because I believe people are extremely two-sided. They just can't be heavy all the time. Allan King used to wonder how I could be joking on the set and then five minutes later screaming and crying in front of the camera. I told him not to worry, that was my method."

Her personalized working method recently drew comments from *Balconville* director Mark Blandford during Gary McKeehan's video production of the Fennario play.

dressing rooms during intermission. It was clear from Eastwood's electric replay of one memorable performance that she enjoyed the pressure of improvisation.

"One night we did this 1940's office musical. Gilda Radner, Valerie Bronfield and myself were the three typists in the front. Eugene Levy was the groovy boss. Gerry Salzberg was the good-looking guy who sells doughnuts. Everybody comes in with a song. Gilda, Valerie and I were actually rhyming on the spot. We were in synch all the time. [sings] 'Doughnuts and coffee...' The audience was standing on the tables screaming for more! I will never forget that as long as I live. It was like a piece of brilliance you get once every twenty years. Seven people just clicked. It was unbelievable."

Eastwood got her start in Toronto at Theatre in the Dell. Night club agent Vida Linder saw her performance and subsequently arranged for an audition with Lorne Michaels and Hart Pomerantz. Eastwood landed a part on the *Hart and Lorne Terrific Hour*. She has continued to make Toronto her home base with husband David Flaherty and daughters Olivia and Alicia. Eastwood and Flaherty are organizing a production company with David's brothers, Joe and Paul Flaherty, both Second City writers. The name Alderson Productions

wife in the Bigot Family, a regular *Bizarre* sketch. The series, touted as the top-rated comedy in the U.S.A., was sold to American cable systems this year. In August Eastwood travelled to Calgary for a cameo role in Richard Lester's latest film *The Next to Last Train Ride*, a comedy starring Beverly D'Angelo.

Between April 24 and May 20, Eastwood put in plenty of overtime taping *Balconville* at CJOH television studios in Ottawa. Fifty hours of tape were exposed to complete the 90-minute drama which premiered on September 10 in the Video-video arena of Toronto's Festival of Festivals. Eastwood claimed that although director Mark Blandford never wasted a second, "he was shooting the prettiest video show I've ever seen. He shot it like film. That takes time."

The post-production method was a new experience to producer Gary McKeehan and Blandford. The original one-inch master tape was transferred to both three-quarter inch and half-inch formats. Time code on the half-inch tape assisted Blandford in editing *Balconville* at his Montreal facilities over two months of the summer. The edit decision list was then fed to the ISC computer in Ottawa by editor Chris Mallam and then was assembled on the three-quarter-inch format. Assistant director Louise Turcotte-Gerlach and

missed the audition so I went flying in there an hour and a half later and asked 'What's this play about anyway? Who is this guy Fennario? Is he Italian or what?' They were just hysterical because people had been going in there, holding the script, saying 'David Fennario is God!'"

Eastwood claims that of all the media, filmmaking is her true love.

"Film drives me crazy. My heart starts to pound on a film set. It gets in your blood. Even that standing around for eight hours. I love watching the problems the grips can solve."

Since *Goin' Down the Road*, Eastwood has co-starred with Len Cariou in *One Man* (1976), a fast-paced thriller by Robin Spry about a concerned television reporter, playing role of the strong traditional wife, Alicia. In 1982 she had a minor part in David Cronenberg's *Video-drome*. Describing her perception of the changes in film production over that 12-year span, Eastwood says:

"Shebib [*Goin' Down the Road*] treated us like kids sometimes because we didn't know very much. But he didn't know that much either. We thought we were shooting a home movie. When I worked for Cronenberg, it really seemed a lot more bigtime. I found a more professional element going on. When I did *One Man* Robin took the time to rehearse us for about three weeks. It



● One Man's woman: Eastwood and Len Cariou in the 1976 NFB thriller



● The original home movie: Joey (Paul Bradley) cheers up new wife Betty in *Goin' Down The Road*

"Could you keep your voice down? We can hear everything in the control room", queried Blandford. Eastwood replied, "Can I whisper my jokes? That's how I work." People understand that need to keep yourself real hyper and silly. If you get real serious you're dead."

Crazy about comedy - "I love those laughs" - she was part of the original Toronto cast for the Second City revue when it first appeared in 1973 and now claims it was the most satisfying and most draining production she's experienced.

"All that improvising scared the heck out of me. I finally quit because I didn't feel I was enough of a writer."

During every performance the Second City cast elicited ideas from the audience and threw together a sketch in their

was chosen from the Flahertys' mother's address in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Along with Dick Vesucci, the three brothers have written a baseball comedy feature for N.B.C. Future plans include a move to Los Angeles.

Recently Eastwood has worked on a five-minute radio program with Melanie Soloman and David Pritchard. Pritchard and she have been friends since they attended high school together. Eastwood was a fan of Pritchard's off-the-wall nighttime radio show on Toronto's CHUM-FM, and his award-winning programs on the Beatles and the Rolling Stones.

Last summer Eastwood taped several comedy sketches with John Byner for CTV's *Bizarre*, where for the past three seasons she has appeared as Byner's

Masters Workshop prepared the twenty-four audio tracks in Toronto.

McKeehan says the CBC will air *Balconville* in April or May of 1984 and an American PBS station may run it in September, 1984. According to McKeehan, pay-TV companies TVEC and First Choice are potential Canadian purchasers. The Canadian Film Development Corporation, he says, was quick to invest in *Balconville* which captured the 1979 Chalmers Award for outstanding Canadian plays.

Eastwood, living in Pittsburgh when the stage production took Canada by storm, was still oblivious to the play's success when she tried out for her part last year.

"I was rehearsing at the St. Lawrence Centre. I got the times screwed up and

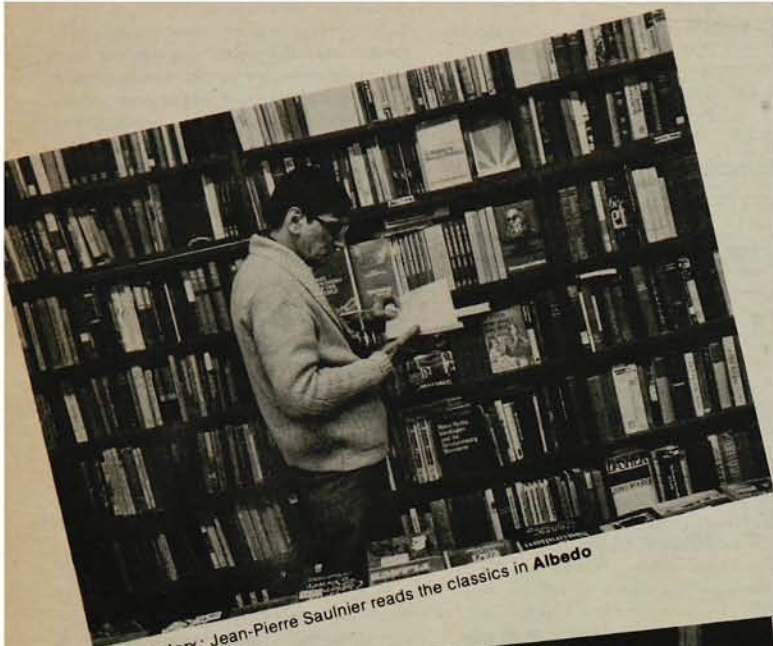
was a much more leisurely pace. Now there seems to be more money in films. It's just getting more Hollywood."

Eastwood denies there's a need for feminism in the field of acting, where she says she's treated as any actor's equal and hired for what she is, an actress, a female product of North American culture. She agrees with Allan King's assessment of her image.

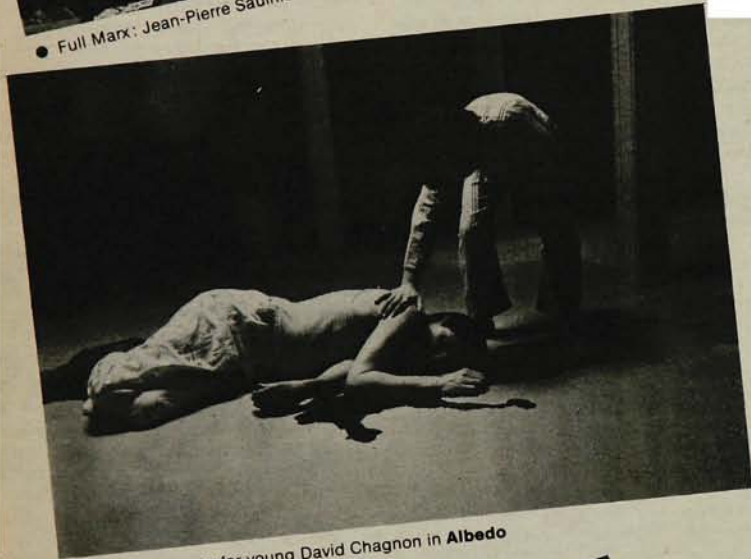
"Jayne tends to present herself as the tough whore with the heart of gold, but there's tremendous vulnerability and poignancy waiting to be tapped too."

"I think most women are a combination of the two," says Eastwood. "I'd like to think I have an edge as well as being soft."

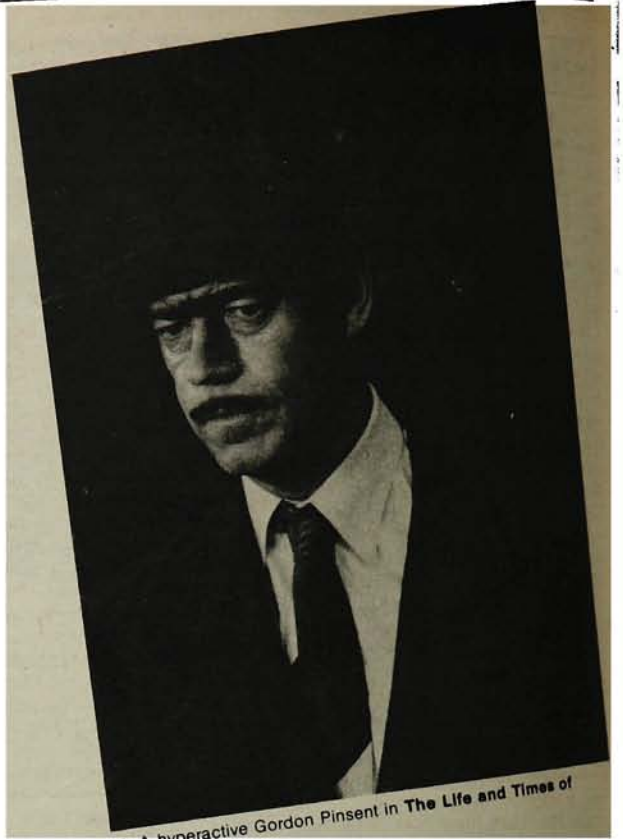
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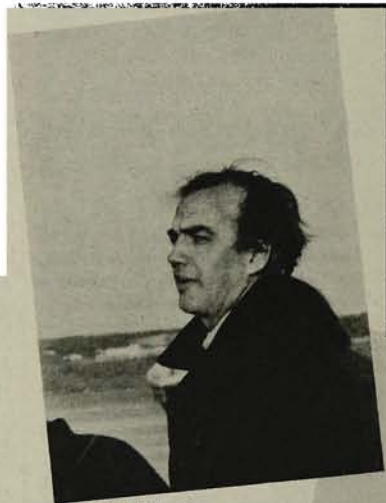
● Full Marx: Jean-Pierre Sauinier reads the classics in *Albedo*



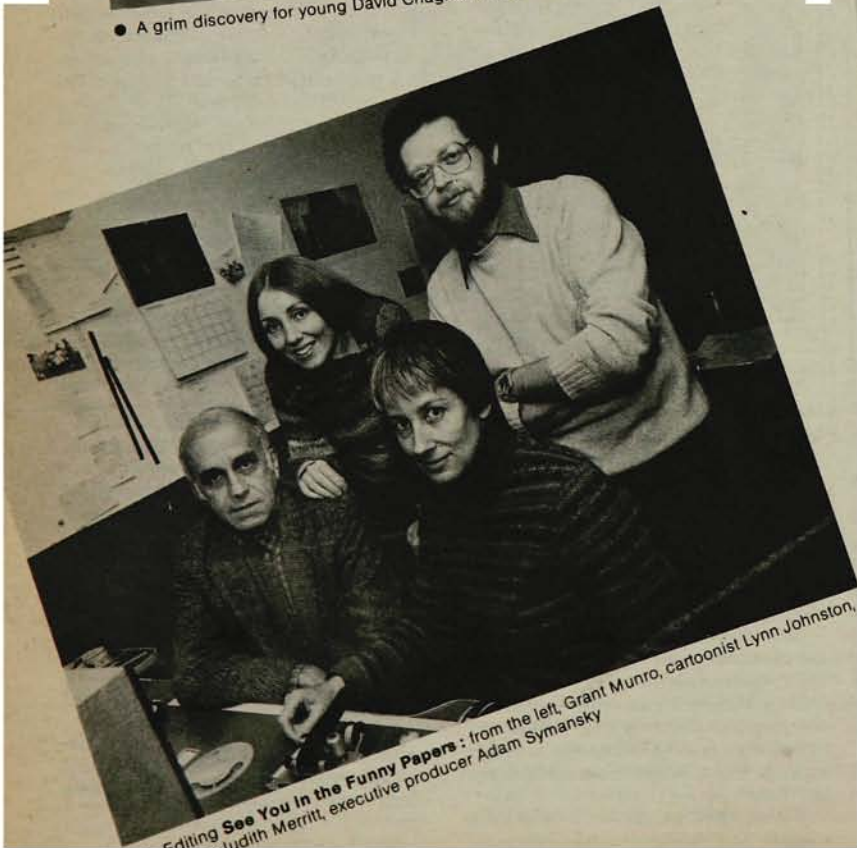
● A grim discovery for young David Chagnon in *Albedo*



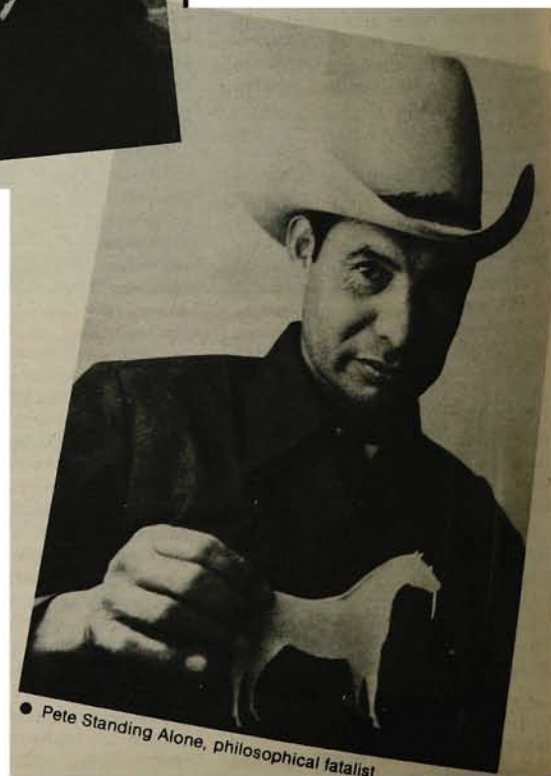
● A hyperactive Gordon Pinsent in *The Life and Times of Alonzo Boyd*



● Colin Low



● Editing *See You in the Funny Papers*: from the left, Grant Munro, cartoonist Lynn Johnston, editor Judith Merritt, executive producer Adam Symansky



● Pete Standing Alone, philosophical fatalist

by Seth Feldman

Skip Blumberg's recorded voice answers his phone with pretty much the same words as your average answering machine. Calling long distance to New York, I was not pleased to be put on electronic hold. Halfway through his salutations, I muttered the sort of expletive one mutters in such situations, waiting for the beep-tone.

Blumberg is an American video documentarian. His recent work has been on rather off-beat athletic events (*The 21st Annual Indian-Eskimo Olympics, Pick Up Your Feet; The Double Dutch Show*). It's eye-level, emphatic, entirely non-condescending work that nevertheless displays a great deal of formal integrity. The material is also very funny.

At the end of the beep, I went about the business of inviting Blumberg to the 1983 Grierson Film Seminar (Niagara-on-the-Lake, November 6-11). His work is not only a joy in its own right but, with its video freedom and its engaged director speaking out from behind the camera, it is a break from what I am beginning to think of as Lesson One Documentary. We have all seen Lesson One. These are the films made to last for ten years of screening to incredibly ignorant (preferably captive) audiences. The fallacy is that these are films born nine years old. Their directors are just discovering the dangers of acid rain and the possible threat posed by nuclear war. They are also discovering montage, talking heads and public domain footage - sometimes simultaneously.

One cure for Lesson One documentaries is the social commitment and workaholic zeal that Grierson himself would have prescribed. An example is *Downside Adjustments* by Mary Jane Gomes and Emil Kolompar. *Downside Adjustments* is a record of the planned recession as it affects one family, one community, one industry, Canada and the world. In fact, what makes the film work is its ability to operate on all of these levels simultaneously. The portrait it paints is of automated factories, the rich growing richer and people falling out the bottom of the economy. The jackals of this Darwinian landscape are (surprise) the banks, whose main function today is to strip the bones of Windsor, Ontario, a place where the system once worked.

Also under the heading of Griersonian Fanatics are two people who more or less invented the production and distribution systems to go along with their work. During the 1930s, with almost no production going on in English Canada, Gordon Sparling began making newsreels at what was otherwise a film processing laboratory. Sparling's one-man Film Board lasted for well over a decade and is, in a sense, still in operation. *The Fencer's Art*, begun by Sparling in 1936 has just been completed by Ottawa filmmaker Mich Mitchell. It will highlight Grierson's retrospective in Sparling's honour.

Ron Hallis invented his Film Boards more recently in the newly independent nations of Mozambique and Zimbabwe. A Canadian with long experience in Africa, Hallis is providing one of the few looks at the continent to be sponsored and approved by Africans themselves.

The 1983 Grierson film seminar

Farewell to lesson one

Hallis' presentation of political and cultural studies at the Grierson seminar is designed to provoke questions concerning the role of Westerners in depicting life in the Third World. Answering some of those questions is a film by Australian documentarians Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson. *First Contact* records the oppression and eventual slaughter of New Guinea natives by Australian miners. The treatment of native peoples pretty much followed the pattern laid down in North America. But because this bit of history happened only 50 years ago, the protagonists are still around to offer their conflicting testimony. Their home movies also survive.

If this year's Grierson seminar has a focus then, it is around these attempts to go beyond Lesson One in depicting something the viewer didn't know while simultaneously driving home something she/he knows all too well. But equally important is the means of disseminating all this. For years, the seminar has been showing video and films made for television without really differentiating the works from theatrical film documentary. This year that will change with a two-day intensive look at the spectrum of television possibilities.

Skip Blumberg will be part of that examination. So will Norman Cohn. Cohn, who works out of a studio in Hunter River, P.E.I. does tapes by the series. His most recent series, on an old age home, is composed around Zen-like contemplative long takes, each taking advantage of the video camera's ability to generate an awesome sense of presence.

A third part of the video spectrum has been so close to so many Canadians so as to be taken for granted in discussions of documentary achievement. Yet for two years now, *The Journal* has been producing 35-minute feature documentaries equal to anything three times their length. Like most television reportage, the work seems more or less anonymous. In reality, one of the people most involved is producer Bernie Zuckerman, the man who will be at Grierson to talk a bit about reinventing the electronic documentary.

I've also invited Allan King - an easy choice as his film *The Wasp and the Butterfly*, is already set as this Fall's documentary / event / fight / scandal. Beyond the questions so far raised about

the film's treatment of those who participated in it is, perhaps, the equally interesting question of why King chose video to both record and disseminate his psychological probe of the unemployed.

Another easy choice was Barry Pearson and Les Rose's *The Life and Times of Edwin Alonzo Boyd*. *Boyd* is the most entertaining English-Canadian production of the year if for no other reason than its hyperactive exploitation of the television docudrama format. By way of comparison, Grierson will be bringing at least one European television director (thanks to the CBC's Les Lawrence and Input, the international festival of films made for public television).

If these television productions seem like rather elaborate strategies for the avoidance of Lesson One, then what television does in the way of workaday social service programming provides a different sort of answer. *Rape: Face to Face*, for instance, dutifully recounts the information in any pamphlet found at any rape crisis centre. But the film's directors - Christian Bruyre, Nick Kendall, Keet Neville and Tom Shandel - never let this factual material become disembodied from the highly charged confrontations that take place between rape victims and a group of inmates convicted of the crime. Like *Downside Adjustments*, *Rape: Face to Face* conveys the oppression of a social malaise that has escaped the control of both its victims and its perpetrators.

Another TVO production, Kit Hood's *Don't Call Me Stupid*, would also, at first glance, appear to be an elongated public-service announcement. The program is a straightforward account of a group of low-income women who organized a school in which they can be taught the primary education long ago denied them. Why then is this basic treatise on urban social work such an incredibly moving homage to human dignity? And why was the program's conclusion - the women receiving their diplomas - the most moving moment in all my previewing for Grierson?

The seminar's third area of concentration this year is on a series of documentary portraits and biographies. Three of them are by three of the NFB's best-known directors: Grant Munro, Colin Low and Jacques Leduc. Munro took on a reluctant and unexpectedly complex subject in his film, *See You in the Funny Papers*.

While coups of talk-show hosts have sought to mold Lynn Johnston into the image of the harassed but smiling housewife of her comic strip, Munro has been able to hint at some of the strains on a person whose life hasn't been - and isn't - all that funny.

In *Standing Alone*, Colin Low revisits the man who served as his guide to Plains Indian culture 30 years ago. With an avid interest in his people and a keen sense of Low's filming them, Pete Standing Alone is in turn tragic, fatalistic and marvelously witty.

Strangely, Jacques Leduc's *Albedo*, encompassing as it does so much that is difficult and obscure, is, like Munro and Low's work, quintessentially a one-to-one interchange with a single human: the Montreal photographer and archivist, David Marvin. Unlike the other two filmmakers, Leduc attacks his subject with a variety of stylistic devices, ranging from an abstract stage production to a documentary within a documentary on the rise and fall of Griffintown, the Montreal slum with which Marvin was obsessed.

A fourth NFB production at Grierson is Jan-Marie Martel's *One of Many: Dr. Nhan*. The film's subject is an elderly Vietnamese acupuncturist who is unable to practice under the B.C. medical code. The manner in which she accepts her frustrations and the skill with which Martel reconstructs Dr. Nhan's biography help transcend the more immediate tragedy of a wasted skill.

And then I chose Micheline Noel's *Marguerite en mémoire* and Marilu Mallet's *Journal inachevé* as complementary probes into the sensibilities of two enormously gifted women. Noel's films captures the last months in the life of Marguerite Duparc, producer of a long list of features in Quebec and wife of Jean-Pierre Lefebvre. Begun before Duparc's terminal illness, the film was never meant to be an obituary. True to her spirit, it retains an enormous love of life and growth.

Marilu Mallet's work focuses on her life as a Chilean refugee in Montreal and the breakup of her marriage with Michael Rubbo. It is an impatient, perhaps unstructured, film in which Rubbo, like the industrialist in *Waiting For Fidel*, demands some sort of direction from an unwilling director. Mallet, like her ex-husband, demands the freedom to finish the work in her own space and time.

Grierson's other autobiographical work this year will be Blaine Allen's *Yukon Postcards*. The director, seated in a recording studio, recalls his experiences in a Northern mining community - whether they happened or not. The film asks us to question its own testimony, and perhaps the testimony of the films we will see during the week.

Finally, I am told, every event needs a star. As far as I am concerned, the above paragraphs have mentioned 25 of them (and there are still some selections to be made). That said, the best known figure at Grierson this year will be the veteran Swedish director, Mai Zetterling. Ms. Zetterling will be coming to Grierson with her new film, *Scrubbers*, a depiction of women in a British prison. The film is, like much at Grierson this year, not a documentary in the strictest sense of the term. Far more important though, is the fact that Ms. Zetterling brings her talent and experience to a group of people and films that together are opening new windows and letting out Lesson One.

See you in November.

York University film professor Seth Feldman is the programmer for the 1983 Grierson Film seminar.