

## Yorkton second thoughts

Gary Nichol is quite justified in complaining (*Cinema Canada*, No. 129) that his film, *A Gathering in Denendeh*, was not mentioned in my notes on the award-winners at the Yorkton Short Film and Video Festival. He is justified too in making the same complaint on behalf of Alan Booth's *Ice Roads*, *Cages* and *Le Vieillard et l'enfant* were also missing. For these omissions I apologize without reservation. Some of these omissions are clearly my own responsibility. Others are more puzzling.

In December, 1985, the month after the Yorkton Festival, *Cinema Canada* asked me to write about the Yorkton award winners. I had been a pre-selection juror at the Festival and had watched these films, as well as the one hundred and fifty-odd non-winners in October. I was not present at the screening of the award-winners referred to by Gary Nichol in his letter to *Cinema Canada*.

I accepted the invitation to write about the award winners, not, as Gary Nichol seems to believe, out of any expectation of overpayment, but, as Gary Nichol seems determined not to believe, out of a strong commitment to the Canadian short film industry. His anger at being omitted is quite understandable, but his flight of fantasy into the realm of psychoanalysis in which he erroneously comments upon my motives, abilities and intentions is a little harder to forgive.

I wrote about the films using my own notes and the official Festival press-release as my guide. If you've got one of these press-releases you'll be able to check that the last three of the titles omitted were listed on the last page of the press-release. My copy was missing that last page. It's no excuse, but it is an explanation. I did write notes on *A Gathering in Denendeh*, and submitted them to *Cinema Canada* with the rest of my article. Why these notes did not appear in *Cinema Canada* I have no idea,\* but I have attached them to this letter with little hope that Mr. Nichol will like them. I have also attached some few words on the other three films.

I hope that I have not offended Allan Stein by being honest about the extent of my recollections of *Turn It Off*, winner in the music video category.

I am reminded of one of the most valuable lesson Aesop taught me when I had just learnt to read; "Kid", he said. (in Greek, of course) "don't jump to conclusions." I am more than happy to admit that I look forward to meeting Gary Nichol at any time. Perhaps we'll be able to be civil enough to each other to realize how much we have in common.

**Chris M. Worsnop**  
Toronto

\*(Neither do we - ed.)

**A GATHERING IN DENENDEH**, 59:30 mins, d. Gary Nichol, p.c. Gary Nichol Associates. The people of the Dene Nation in the MacKenzie Valley made elaborate preparations for the visit of Pope John Paul II. The film shows the remarkable devotion of the Dene, a quality that becomes clearer as they learn that the Pope is not going to be able to make good his intention to fly in to their gathering because of fog. It is a quiet celebration of optimism, piety, and brotherhood. (*Special Jury Award*)

**ICE ROADS**, 27:50 mins, d. Alan Booth, p.c. Yellowknife Films. Overland transportation in the N.W.T. in winter is not easy, and this film shows exactly why. The people who drive the trucks and the man who started it all explain the dangers and the rugged pleasures of it all. The film is a wonderful example of the out-of-the-way story with a good human angle to it. It responds better to the care and time investment of the documentary filmmaker than to the hurried glance of the T.V. news reporter. (*Certificate of merit*)

**CAGES**, 24:00 mins, d. Michael Scott, p.c. Atlantis. *Cages* is yet another in the series of drama half-hours from Atlantis. Michael Scott directed this adaptation of the Guy Vanderhaeghe short story. It's a hard-edged story of an all-male household in a mining community. The three central characters are full of conflicts, unrealized ambitions, and each has some sort of "cage" that hems him in. The performances are earthy and realistic. The script is good, although the language is a bit toned down from the original story. (*Certificate of merit*)

**LE VIEILLARD ET L'ENFANT**, 51:17 mins, d. Claude Grenier, p.c. NFB. Gabrielle Roy's story of a childhood summer in Manitoba is sensitively caught in this film about the gentle relationship between an old man and a young neighbour girl. It's a mood piece throughout, and a good one too. (*Certificate of merit*)

## Embittered critics

To be an independent filmmaker is not an easy job. I live and work out of Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. Here in the territories we have to deal with the additional problems and costs of travelling a land the size of Europe (i.e. return airfare from Yellowknife to Frobisher Bay is about \$1,700). We have wild and unpredictable weather, six to eight months of winter and temperatures that often dive below minus 40 degrees. We work with aboriginal people whose sense of time, though unique and refreshing, is quite different from the budget-oriented considerations of a producer racing to meet his deadline.

When our company, Yellowknife Films, was chosen to produce the film for the Northwest Territories Pavilion at Expo '86, we were excited. It gave us the opportunity to amalgamate decades of northern experience and make a statement about the land we cherish.

It proved to be quite the challenge making the 16mm film on a budget of \$134,000 (which includes the blow-up to 35mm). For 10 months our travels took us from the Nahanni to Ellesmere Island and points between. We nurtured the film through dozens of meetings, research trips, script rewrites, and our concept held fast through the 15 months it took to bring it to the theatre. We were determined to communicate to the world audience the spirit of this land and its cultural uniqueness. When audiences and both the northern and southern press declared the film a success, we felt that all the logistical and financial nightmares had proven worth it in the end. However, with one slash of the pen, Peg Campbell in the July issue of *Cinema Canada* has succeeded in negating that feeling.

I especially take great exception to Ms. Campbell's comment that there was no artistic direction in our film, *The Emerging North*. I was present on 95 per cent of the shoots as director. As well, we were frequently in contact with the writer when unforeseen circumstances warranted rewrites. I went to Tsukuba Expo '85 to view and research the world-fair genre of film. I was present in Vancouver with the writer and editors for most of the post-production.

The critic said that the film "did not give much of a sense of the N.W.T." The fact that the people of the Northwest Territories, native and non-native, are pleased and proud of this filmic entry into the world forum indicates that it does give a sense of the Northwest Territories. Has she ever visited the Northwest Territories? Perhaps she would not like it here.

In reference to the lack of extensive credits in the film, our contract indicated what credits were to appear on the screen. However, there are full credit sheets available in the pavilion for those media people who wish to make informed statements. (I am enclosing the complete credit list).

The article in *Cinema Canada* also states that although the audience appeared to be enjoying the film we were doing "a gross disservice to furthering audience awareness of good filmmaking and the distinctly indigenous and creative film community that exists across Canada." Yellowknife is in the Northwest Territories, Canada. We are indigenous filmmakers. Some very well-known and talented craftspeople worked on this film. What possible disservice are we doing to the filmmaking community?

Films are for audiences and they have been enjoying this one. The *Vancouver Sun* gave *The Emerging North* a five-star rating. I suggest that because Peg Campbell infers at the beginning of her critique that she doesn't think any of the films at Expo were good, perhaps *Cinema Canada* should have attempted to get a less embittered critic.

I believe that we did well with one of the smallest budgets for a film at Expo '86. Criticism is something we all have to go through in order to understand our errors and, as always, I see problems in the film. However, I don't think that *Cinema Canada* should sponsor this type of shallow lambasting.

**Alan Booth**  
Yellowknife

**THE EMERGING NORTH** d. Alan Booth p. Alan Booth, Lanny Cooke sc. Lanny Cooke cam. Alan Booth, David Geddes, Doug Cole loc. sd. Terry Woolf, Rick Gustavsen, Lanny Cooke cons. Frank Mayrs, Greig Upton cons. p. (Van.) Patrick Ramsay ed. Raymond Hall, C.F.E. sd. des. Patrick Ramsay asst. ed. Tina Schliessler sd. efx. rec. Richard Hurst mus. Michael Conway Baker finale: Charles Wilkinson throat singing Courtesy of Films North Inc. drums Fort Norman Drummers fiddle Frank Cockney guitar Charlie Panigoniak drum song Wilson Peltissey add. syn. efx. Ed Dolinski add. sd. ed. Robert Reece stock shots Department of Culture and Communications, Government of the N.W.T.; Gulf Canada; Yellowknife Films sd. re-rec. Barry P. Jones blow-up: West Coast Film Optical Ltd.; col., Alpha Cine Service sponsor Petro Canada p.c. Yellowknife Films, Yellowknife, N.W.T., (403) 873-8610

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