

## A Land of Milk and Honey

**R**ush hour in Toronto is announced by the restless crowds pouring into the St. Clair East subway station. It's five o'clock and office workers impatiently make their way home to enjoy the last rays of sun on this unseasonably warm April day. For the cast and crew of Peter O'Brian's Independent Pictures' latest production, **Milk and Honey**, however, the day is just approaching the halfway mark.

Before breaking for lunch, co-directors and husband-and-wife team Glen Salzman and Rebecca Yates decide to work over one more scene. Glen walks over to cinematographer Guy Dufaux, (**Decline of the American Empire, Pouvoir Intime, Equinoxe**) and discusses the mood he wishes to create in the scene while Rebecca speaks with actors Josette Simon (Royal Shakespeare Company, England) and Lyman Ward (**Ferris Bueller's Day Off**). There is only minimal consultation between the directors before they move to organize the activity on the set.

In a few minutes Salzman's soft voice calls for quiet and Simon and Ward play out a chase scene through the subway. Once, twice, three times before Glen and Rebecca look around at their tired crew and decide to break for the next hour.

The 50-odd cast and crew members make their way to a secluded, grassy corner to enjoy the midday meal set out for them picnic-style. The buzz of traffic on St. Clair Avenue, only blocks away, is just barely audible in the background as Glen and Rebecca begin to discuss their working relationship.

They have been collaborating together for 12 years now, since making their first film at York University's film school. Always working as a team, they went on to co-produce and co-direct short, dramatic films including **Reaching Out, Introducing...Janet**, and

**Jen's Place**. Rare as directing teams are in the film industry, both agree that this method of collaboration is the most productive for them. Glen is quick to add that they will continue to work together in the future. Rebecca concedes, "When there are two people involved you have to prepare very astutely so we do a lot of rehearsal and talking through with the actors. This way we make sure that there isn't a great deal that can go wrong on the set."

**Milk and Honey** is a project they began developing in 1983. The story focuses on a young Jamaican woman, Joanna Bell, played by Josette Simon, who immigrates to Canada, the land of milk and honey. In search of a better life, she temporarily leaves her eight-year-old son behind. After finding work as a domestic in a rich Toronto household, Joanna brings her son over for a visit only to discover that she can't part with him again. In her battle to keep her son, she becomes a criminal fighting the Canadian immigration system.

The story was inspired by a woman Glen and Rebecca knew who left her own children in Jamaica with hopes of later bringing them to Canada after building a good life for them here. Glen started to write her story down but after numerous revisions with another Canadian writer decided that a West Indian perspective was needed. Jamaican playwright Trevor Rhone (**The Harder They Come, Old Story Time, and Two Can Play**) became a co-writer with Glen and brought this perspective. After a nine-month writing stint in Kingston, Jamaica, a working script emerged. Glen smiles when recalling writing the screenplay with Trevor. "It was a good process. Sometimes it had its ups and downs since we wrote every day for five or six weeks at a time and always together in this small studio apartment. We didn't each work on our own and then bring in what we had. It couldn't work that way for us."

Although **Milk and Honey** touches on the social issue of immigration, it attempts to be more far-reaching. "It is a universal story about human values. About people leaving their kids in search of a better life for themselves and for those kinds," says Glen.

It was this humanist element that appealed to the people at Robert Redford's

Sundance Institute, probably the most influential film development centre in the United States outside of Hollywood. On the basis of Glen and Trevor's script, Glen and Rebecca were invited to participate in a month-long intensive film workshop last summer in Utah. They were one of the seven filmmaking teams from around the United States, Europe and Japan and the first Canadian project ever undertaken by Sundance.

Rebecca remembers Sundance as "an extraordinary experience" that has greatly influenced both her own and Glen's working techniques on this project. Run by the top names in the North American film industry she adds that the most positive element of the workshop was "the open spirit with which everyone worked, no matter who they were. You had the best people in the industry giving their time here and it wasn't to advance themselves but to really work together for everyone's benefit in a giving spirit."

Sundance played a large role in getting **Milk and Honey** into production as in order to procure funding from the Ontario Film Development Corp. to attend the workshop the project needed a prospective producer. Here Peter O'Brian (**The Grey Fox, My American Cousin, and John and the Missus**) stepped in. Glen and Rebecca had presented him with the script in the spring of '86. Although O'Brian was impressed by the "really tight, and well-constructed screenplay which had a great deal of integrity," he was tied up making **John and the Missus** and couldn't commit himself to producing **Milk and Honey** at that time. This commitment came however, when Glen and Rebecca were invited to attend the Sundance workshop last June.

Almost a year after completing the program, the Sundance people continue to offer fresh insights for Glen and Rebecca's project, keeping in close contact via telephone. Judging from the husband-and-wife team's mutual optimism about the time spent in Utah, **Milk and Honey** promises to be a positive experience for Canadian moviegoers when it is released later this year.

Lorena Bekar •

## A Canadian Kennedy

**W**ith only a quick glance, busy commuters would pass by the old Canadian Tire warehouse assuming it is still stacked to the ceiling with fishing rods, paint and car parts.

But open the door to the warehouse and walk around for five minutes and you soon realize it's a world away from sporting goods and exhaust pipes.

In fact, it's Washington in the Kennedy era with duplicates of the Justice department offices of Bobby Kennedy, and J. Edgar Hoover. Down the hall is an exacting replica of the oval office of John F. Kennedy.

Toronto-based Sunrise Films Limited has set up shop to film the \$8 million television mini-series **Hoover vs the Kennedys: The Second Civil War** to air on the U.S. group of independent television stations making up Operation Prime Time.

On the set Canadian actor Nicholas Campbell sits behind a massive wooden desk in his role as U.S. Attorney-General Robert Kennedy. Banks of telephones and teletype machines, stacks of files, a fireplace graced by a prize Marlin mounted over top, wood panelled walls, paintings and photographs recreate the era. Total spending on sets is about \$750,000.

Campbell, in a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up, portrays Kennedy with a more than credible New England accent.

Along with producer Paul Saltzman of Sunrise, Americans Daniel Selznick and Joel Glickman are executive-producers of the miniseries.

Saltzman says it will be an accurate portrayal of J. Edgar Hoover and his power struggle with the Kennedys, promising it will be more courageous than other efforts on the subject. He says it will touch on the sexual affairs of Bobby and JFK and the manipulation used by Hoover.

Selznick, in a press release, says "We will bring to light previously untold facts about Hoover as well as the Kennedys, that were uncovered while researching **Blood Feud**."

Selznick/Glickman Productions made the 1983 **Blood Feud** for Operation Prime Time. The Emmy award winning story portrayed the battle between Robert Kennedy and teamster union president, Jimmy Hoffa.

In an interview with *Cinema Canada*, the 34-year-old Campbell says he didn't know that much about Bobby Kennedy when he first landed the role, but added he took the time to complete extensive research of the part.

Campbell says Hoover, who was FBI director for more than 36 years, and Bobby Kennedy were at odds throughout their whole time in Washington.

• Cinematographer Guy Dufaux measures the light for a shot of **Milk and Honey**

