

Early this year, the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre compiled a new catalogue, *Films By Women*, listing 73 films made by independent women filmmakers. Already, an appendix is desperately needed – there are so many women entering this field now.* One of the better-known Canadian women directors is Bonnie Kreps, whose films *After the Vote* and *Portrait of My Mother* have been shown extensively in festivals throughout the world and whose “feminist Ann Landers” column appears regularly in *Chatelaine*. Yet, this same woman recalls that “After having worked towards the better part of a Ph.D., I got to the point, literally, where after two years of being a housewife, I came to one fine noon – in bed, next to my two-year-old, watching cartoons. She was bored, I was watching, and I said My God! What are you doing? And I couldn’t figure out why I shouldn’t be doing it. I was so freaked, I leapt out of bed. I remember it vividly, that was the turning point. And just then *The Feminine Mystique* came out. It was a godsend, absolutely, in terms of defining that problem with no name. Betty Friedan had it. She named it. Terrific!”

worked myself carefully into what I thought was a dead-end. But I got completely fed up and said Fuck it! I don’t want to be a professor. I don’t want to write papers that nobody wants to read. I want a larger audience.”

That larger audience was first reached by Bonnie when she submitted a radical feminist brief to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. Her presentation shocked and excited both the media and the public. “I had tried to look liberal, I even put on stockings, and the effect was that out of East York – which is where I was living – came this straight-looking housewife – which is what I was – who said all these radical things! It became somewhat sensational, and this was in the days when anyone who came out as a radical feminist hit the papers all over the place because they wanted to know what her man is like.” It was as a result of all these interviews and publicity that Bonnie got a job as a researcher for CTV’s W5 programme. “I was the token everything,” she recounts laughingly, “I was the token feminist, token leftist, the one with all the contacts in the student movement. . . . The first thing I got to do was a piece on the Black Panthers. I got to go



BONNIE KREPS : FEMINIST FILMMAKER

A. Ibrányi-Kiss

How had Bonnie Kreps gotten to watching cartoons with her two-year-old? Her saga takes many strange turns. . . . Born in Copenhagen, Denmark, she was raised in Europe, schooled in the United States, has been a radical leftist and feminist all her life, married for 15 years to a physics professor, and almost became a professor herself after studying comparative literature and theatre for twelve years in several universities. Why had she abandoned such a promising academic career? “I was writing all these papers. . . . I was told they were brilliant blah-blah-blah and I finally realised that the number of people in the world who would be interested in reading my papers, or who would be capable of understanding what they were all about, because they were so esoteric. . . . I came up with a number of about 400. (laughter) That’s not enough. I had

back to California even though I was just a researcher because I was an O.K. radical out there to a lot of people. I had been involved in campus politics and the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley even when I was a frustrated housewife. So that was really great.”

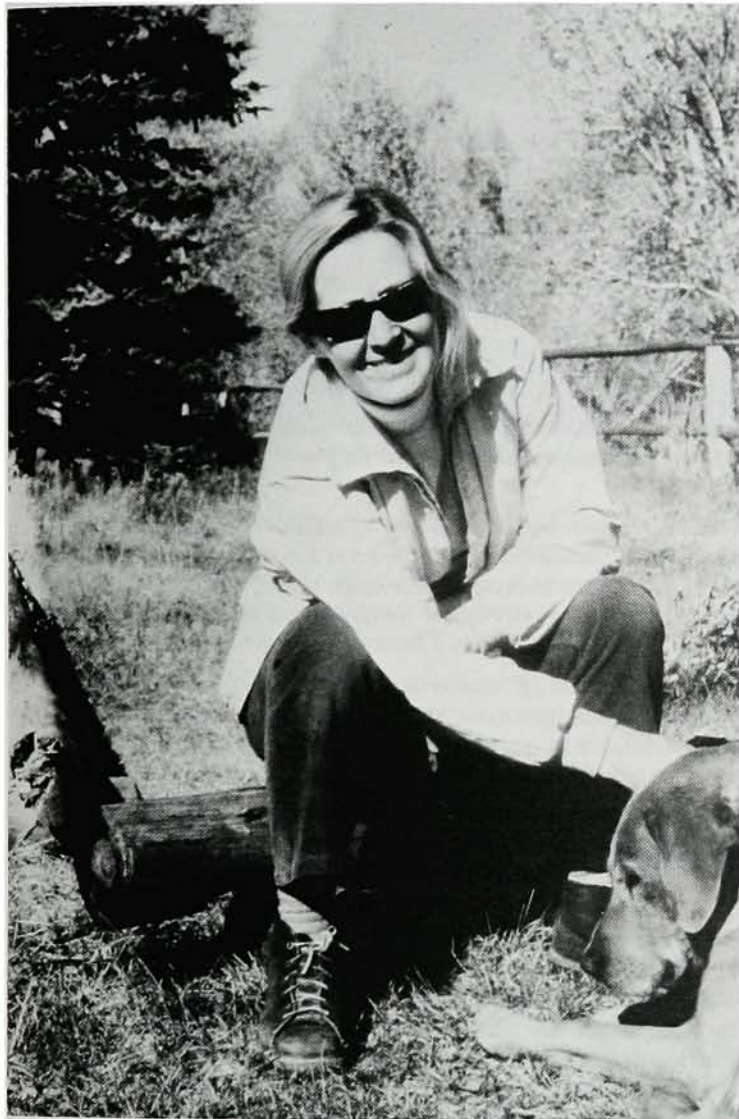
From 1968 through 1971, Bonnie worked at CTV as associate producer on several hour-long specials before doing one of her own, *New People for Old*, concerning brain control and genetics. She also worked as associate producer on the *Our World* half-hour series. But it was while working for W5 that she got to make *After The Vote* – the basic Canadian feminist film, which has been shown widely in North America and used extensively for feminist organizing. It was partially the experience of making this 20-minute film that convinced her to be a filmmaker – not a reporter. After three years with CTV, she quit to go into partnership with David Lee. “We were going to do a million dollar great movie with Reiner Schwartz and we had wonderful meetings and couldn’t raise any money. Of course.”

Her second film, *Portrait of My Mother*, was originally

*A Special Note is needed here for any and all women filmmakers sitting in the wilderness with brilliant epics and no distribution. If you have any films you would like to see included in this catalogue and subsequently distributed by the CFMDC (a non-profit group returning 70 per cent of film revenues directly to the filmmaker!) please contact Kathyne Wing, 406 Jarvis Street, Toronto or call (416) 921-2259.

intended to be a one-hour film about four women called, **Our Mothers, Our Sisters**. The inspiration came as a result of an exhibit at the University of Toronto in 1971 of women's photography. "It was so different, it hit me right in my gut. There was a lot of nudity but it was organic, beautiful. No boobs. It was so political in a beautiful way." This aesthetic inspired Bonnie, especially concerning older women. "You never see women who are past their function, who are no longer sex objects. They're leftovers. I didn't want to make a blatant overt political statement, I just wanted to film four women who were leading strong lives."

The fund-raising started, and ended with grants from the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council. The grand sum total was only \$4,000 but it was something – and the crew



Inger Koedt in Portrait of My Mother

started filming Bonnie's own mother, Inger Koedt, a beautiful woman in her fifties who is a great outdoorswoman. She loves hiking, mountain climbing, canoeing, and all these other "so-called men's things. I wanted to show that a woman could be into so-called men's things but not in a stereotype men's way and could also want to bake her own bread; and I wanted to show women of all ages relating to each other without any men around." The film was beautifully shot by Carol Betts on a single-system Canon Scoopic, edited by Judy Steed, directed by Bonnie Kreps with tremendous assistance from Roz Michaels. What was originally shot on a ratio of 5 to 1 became less than a 3 to 1 ratio when **Portrait of My Mother** became a half-hour film unto itself. It has been sold to the CBC, shown in festivals around the world, and is still in great demand.

In the meantime, Bonnie Kreps continued working in the feminist movement. She was one of the organizers of Toronto's New Feminists, wrote a handbook on the Canadian Movement: *Guide to the Women's Movement in Canada* and

was one of the organizers of the short-lived Women's Communications Centre. Short-lived partially because it was funded through the Local Initiatives Programme, and short-lived mainly because most of the media women involved got tired of administrating and wanted only to get back to work again after four months. The Centre did produce another handbook, *What was That!?* co-written by Bonnie and Lorna Tener but, "I don't enjoy organizing. I can do it, but it's not really where my head is at."

Especially now, with an hour-long film in the works and a Canada Council grant to live on while she's trying to raise money for this feminist farce called **Waking Up in Canada**. Co-written and to be co-directed by herself and Roz Michaels, the film starts with Sleeping Beauty (Gayle Chernin, hopefully) waking up thanks to her fairy godmother and venturing into that big, real world out there. At this point, she's still a doll, but she gets involved with the Movement. And things start to click, until finally she goes to the looking glass as a person not a preening doll, and turns it around to show a world filled with sleeping men. The film is going to be both dramatic as well as a partial documentary about the women's movement in Canada today. Basically, it will be about two things: "One, that the woman's movement is large and functioning and filled with strong loving women doing loving things together, and two – that women have a raucous and ironic sense of humour. It's not joke humour, but it's very funny." The theme of the women's movement being a mirror to a rather sick society, and of women being behind the looking glass, will run through the film. When it gets made. And it, too, will be made by women.

As well, a full \$10,000 of the planned \$50,000 budget will be spent on training apprentices working on the crew, since there is a great need for women with technical skills in filmmaking. Hopefully, **Waking Up in Canada** will be finished in early 1975 so that it can be a major representative for Canada during International Women's Year. Things are humming. . . .

There's really no way to end this article, because the film is still to be made, Bonnie is still working on it, and in the larger context – the involvement of women in film can only increase. Do all women filmmakers make feminist films? "It's hard for me even to imagine being a women's filmmaker without being into some kind of feminism. If you're a woman, and you want to make films about women, even if you don't make overtly feminist films with some heavy political statement, you are in the same boat. It's the one revolution I really trust because it's really basic."

And Men's Liberation? "I have very passionate feelings towards those few men who are trying to change their roles, because they have no brothers for support. It would be nice to have a movie about them. I wish they would make one."

Carol Betts, camerawoman

