

Bread and shoe polish

by Lois Siegel

If you're from Winnipeg and you haven't made a film before, it can be quite exciting to come to Montreal and make one under the auspices of the National Film Board of Canada where filmmakers you've heard about for years are working at your side.

And it's not everyday that two unknown guys like John Paskievich and Mike Mirus from the Prairies get their film chosen for the Short Film Competition of the Cannes International Film Festival. But if you are from Winnipeg you also know that this sequence of events couldn't have been as easy as it sounds. There must have been some Murphy's Law (whatever can go wrong, will) incidents incorporated in the process to make it real to life. "The success balances out with other things," explains Paskievich, director, writer and photographer.

And so it was with his film *Ted Baryluk's Grocery*, a sensitive, 10-minute, black-and-white production, composed entirely of stills, about his step-father's small grocery store in the North End of Winnipeg.

In 1977 Paskievich had an idea for a film, about 2000 photographs taken in and around the store, and some wild sound of conversations recorded in the grocery. He wanted to put together a mood piece. Mike Scott, an NFB producer in Winnipeg, was excited about the possibility of a film. Paskievich was sent to the NFB in Montreal where he appeared one day with three boxes of photos under his arm and walked into Tom Daly's office, apparently unannounced. "Could I interest you in these pictures?" he said earnestly.

Daly, luckily, liked the images, and he and John spent the rest of the afternoon. *Lois Siegel is a teacher, filmmaker, photographer and writer.*



photos: John Paskievich



TED BARYLUK'S GROCERY d. sc./ed. John Paskievich, Mike Mirus d.o.p. John Paskievich sd. rec. Mike Mirus, Leon Johnson sd. ed. Mike Mirus re-rec. Jean-Pierre Joutel animation cam. Cameron Gaul, Ray Dumas studio admin. Charles Lough prod. Wolf Koenig, Michael Scott exec. p. Michael Scott running time 10 min. 19 sec. p.c. National Film Board.



MAKING IT

looking at them.

But that was only step one. It took four meetings with the program committee of the Board over a period of four years to get the film approved.

Paskievich, a photographer by profession, and Mike Mirus, a high school teacher who recorded the sound, kept trekking across country to Montreal with video examples of their ideas. Despite the fact that Daly, Scott, Colin Low, Robert Duncan, John Spotton and Wolf Koenig were all behind the film, the NFB committee, which kept changing each year, was afraid to take the risk of supporting a strange project from an even stranger land.

Finally the Winnipeg Art Gallery applied to the Secretary of State for storyboard money. And eventually, in May,

years. "It's a small store, not big like Safeway - but big enough."

Helen, his daughter, is presented. She helps in the store. Baryluk explains that his heart isn't good, and the doctors have told him to retire. The problem is that Helen doesn't want to take over the store. She is of another generation and wants to move to a bigger city and perhaps continue her schooling.

Baryluk knows he can't force Helen to manage the store, any more than he can force the doctor to say he is young and healthy. "I had my chance, now it's Helen's turn."

His only real concern is that Helen doesn't forget where she comes from - and that she doesn't forget to come home once in awhile. "In Europe people stick together - here the family is not so

important," Baryluk says. He jokes that perhaps they should freeze kids so they don't grow old, and we see a shot of two kids reaching into a cold storage refrigerator for popsicles.

The film says - don't forget your roots, no matter who you are; but it also tells us about people and changes. As the images pass by we see all kinds of people: Polish, Slovak, Filipino, Indian - "all mixed together like soup." And one strong remark reflects an ironic sense of "Canadian Content" - that even the Indians are like immigrants in their own country.

The customers don't file through the store like they would in a sterile, automated, commercial shopping mall, instead they take it easy and relax. One lady opens a carton of milk to sniff it to see if it's fresh. Ted Baryluk asks her if she would do that in a Safeway Store. She replies, "No, that's why I come here."

We see punk kids, one wearing reflective sunglasses, a child showing off dracula teeth, and we meet a singer who gives a little concert for the customers. She was famous in Europe and now works as a cook in Nellie's Restaurant across the street. Baryluk explains, "It's not easy singing an old song in a new place."

As with the photographs of Cartier-

Bresson, we become involved in the lives of the people captured during a particular 'moment' in their lives. Baryluk remarks, "In Winnipeg there's lots to see on the streets - it's better than going to a movie." But he is afraid that the younger generation is moving too fast to take notice. His concern is transferred to the viewer who is taken by his sincerity and the charm of the people in his store.

Typical of "nouveau riche" filmmakers, Paskievich and Mirus said that if they aren't sent to Cannes for the festival, they wouldn't mind being sent to Montreal again. There they can at least enjoy the highlight of their previous stay, the NFB's 99c breakfast special - and probably the spot where they hashed over most of their film ideas - four years gave them plenty of time.

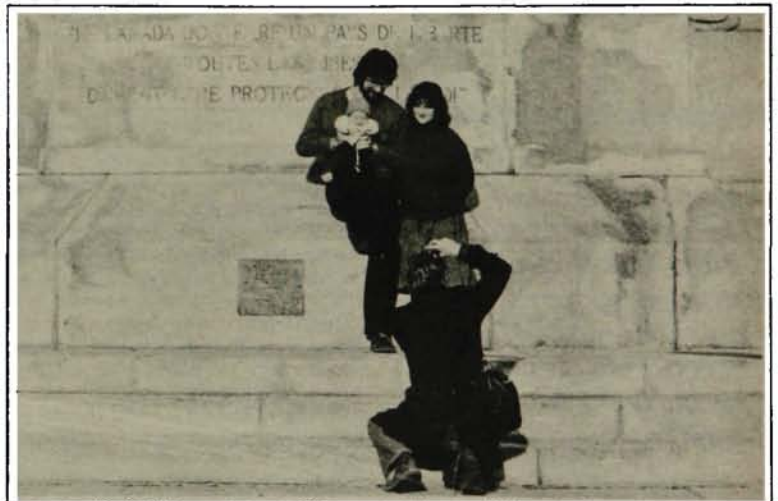
And typical of today's uptight society, when the NFB's P.A. system came on the other day during lunch in the cafeteria, the announcement said, "Attention please. We have just learned..." - and everyone waited in trepidation for the warning of an air raid attack, something urgent about El Salvador, or the explosion of an atomic bomb. But it was 'only' the congratulating announcement to two boys from Winnipeg - their film had just been selected for Cannes... ●



1981, the project was approved by the NFB, by one vote.

Paskievich had a vision and was persistent with it. Although the delay in shooting gave him more time to sharpen and develop his ideas, the one big loss was that Ted Baryluk died before the film was completed, and instead of Baryluk's voice telling us his story, it is Paskievich's.

When the film was finished, NFB distributors saw no theatrical potential in the film. They said it could only be of interest to primary schools in a series called "Knowing Your Neighborhood." Such is life...



● Ted Baryluk (left) who inspired John Paskievich (below) to photograph a grocery, and Mike Mirus (above, with family), who edited the photos and made a movie

Ted Baryluk's grocery is a place where immigrants and the poor come to buy food and to chat. But the film is much more than a mere document of a neighborhood store. It's unusual because it is composed entirely of still photographs which tell a story in sequence. And it is even more unusual because the sound, edited by Mike Mirus, seems to synchronize with everything happening on the screen. The sound is subtle and does not clutter or conflict with the image. And the images not only relate the events of one day in the life of this store and its inhabitants, but they are strong pictures in themselves, and each one could stand alone to tell its own personal tale.

Personal is the true description of this film. It has its own special sense of drama. We enter the life of Ted Baryluk and through voice-over are introduced to his perceptive philosophies.

As we see him open his store at 8 a.m. one morning, we are given a glimpse of his life, the concerns and conflicts he is feeling. In broken Ukrainian/English he tells us that he has run the store for 20

