

Back's "Crac" Shot

by Joan Irving Herman

He planned to stay home and watch the Academy Awards on TV with the family. Should his name, Frédéric Back, be in the envelope for *Crac*, the film's executive producer at Radio-Canada, Hubert Tison, would accept the Oscar. But the Academy refused to give the ticket to anyone else. (The story goes that an Oscar disappeared last year after an eastern bloc "official" accepted in the place of the filmmaker.) So Frédéric Back was there to climb on stage in a hastily borrowed tux to say his quiet thank you's and salute Quebec.

No need to add that more people will have viewed Back on television and perhaps wondered about the French-speaking filmmaker with the black eyepatch, than will have seen *Crac*, his swinging tale of a charmed old rocking chair that refuses to be discarded or forgotten.

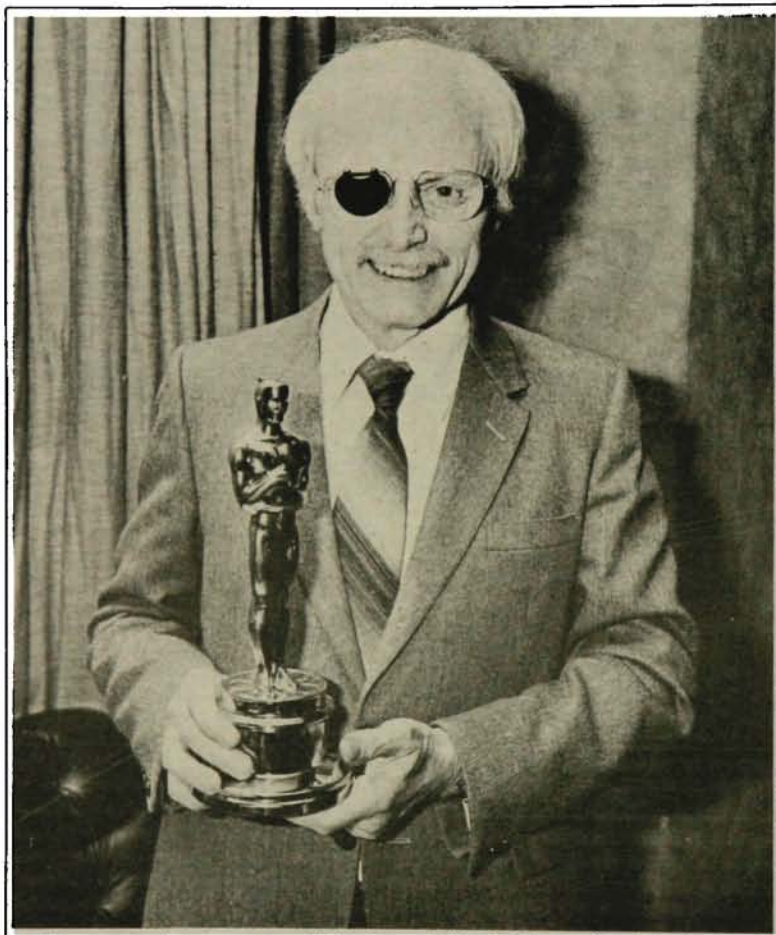
It is colored pencil animation but that is no adequate description of the color and vividness of images Back's technique evokes. Like his several other award-winning films, made at Radio-Canada in the animation department, *Crac* was commissioned as a film for children. The films are distributed on the children's circuit of the UER, or European Union of Broadcasters. Back is one of those few filmmakers who is not piqued whatsoever by the fact of having made all his films for the children's market - because they are not *only* for children.

"My films are my gift. I put the very best of myself, of what I believe very deeply, into my work," says Back.

"I decided some time ago that I didn't have enough talent to make revolutionary films. Therefore I would make films that communicate something, films that renew and give new life to the viewer. So you see, filmmaking is not just an occupation for me."

"Awards are important because they confirm that I have succeeded and that I have a reason to make another film." But the ceremony surrounding those awards, and certainly the west coast elegance of Academy Awards night.

Joan Irving Herman is a story editor in the CBC Drama department in Montreal. She worked on Empire Inc. now shooting in Montreal.



● With his Oscar for *Crac* this year, Radio-Canada animator Frédéric Back

Photo: Guy Dubois Photography

in winter. The couple, for they had decided to marry, settled in Montreal.

Back tells this story without embellishment. Ghylaine is, he says, a spirited woman who has greatly influenced his work. She introduced him to life in Quebec as it was then, "so different from today."

"In the country everything was done by hand. Everybody had work. They didn't make much but the distribution was just. They had the forests to live off and they lived well by the forest."

Caught in the expanding city by his teaching post at the Ecole du Meuble, where he replaced Paul-Emile Borduas and where he taught under the direction of the leading educator Jean-Marie Gauvreau, Back rather quickly realized he could not teach and continue to paint. He abandoned teaching.

With two children who avoided the system of art education in Quebec - one who taught herself drawing and now makes her living doing batik, and the other who studied in Switzerland - Back deplores our art schools, where "the teachers are busy just amusing themselves and where there is no possibility of the disciplined and structured approach to studying art."

In 1952, when television was getting underway in Montreal, Frédéric Back began to free-lance in the graphic arts department of Radio-Canada. He'd done every job at the network that required the skills of drawing and design, and had contributed animation inserts into a couple of long-running programs, when Hubert Tison recruited Back into the animation department he was organizing (1968). (Back was also known for his work with painted glass and mural paintings; he had completed a number of large commissions, including the stained glass mural in the Place des Arts metro.)

Viewing a retrospective of Back's films made over the past decade requires little more than one hour of your time. But these lusty short films will have restored the spring in your step.

They don't fundamentally differ in theme; the stories most often describe being in Eden and being lost from it. The child is lost, love or nature is discarded and destroyed, and it is found. The old family rocking chair ends up in a museum of contemporary art. It is the only object there that speaks to the children who

hold remote enticement for Frédéric Back.

Born in Strasbourg in 1924, he lived his early years in a third floor apartment that looked out over the 11th century Notre-Dame Cathedral, and, behind to the Château Rohan (the Rohan family motto: King I cannot be, duke I disdain, Rohan I am). As World War II closed in, his father, a musician, moved the family to the western region of France. In Rennes, Frédéric attended art school (beaux-arts) where his boyhood ability to draw was disciplined under the eminent illustrator Meheut.

"I had dreamt of being a peasant but that was going to be difficult during those years, so I turned to my passion for painting. The love of the land and nature is still very much part of me, as you can see in my films."

For three years, Back had studied with the fervor of someone who knows he won't be able to hold out against fate and conscience forever, and the school was finally bombed by the Germans then occupied as a hospital.

Disillusioned by the war and by the attitude of the French, Back began to think about the cold picture-book land he knew as Canada. In 1948, with no visa, he boarded a flimsy hulk of a Japanese freighter that drifted for days in the North Atlantic with no power. When he arrived he met the woman he had been corresponding with for seven years - his pen-pal, arranged through the Normandy-Canada society, and the most important reason he came here.

Ghylaine left the rural Laurentian village where she taught school to children who often came to class bare foot

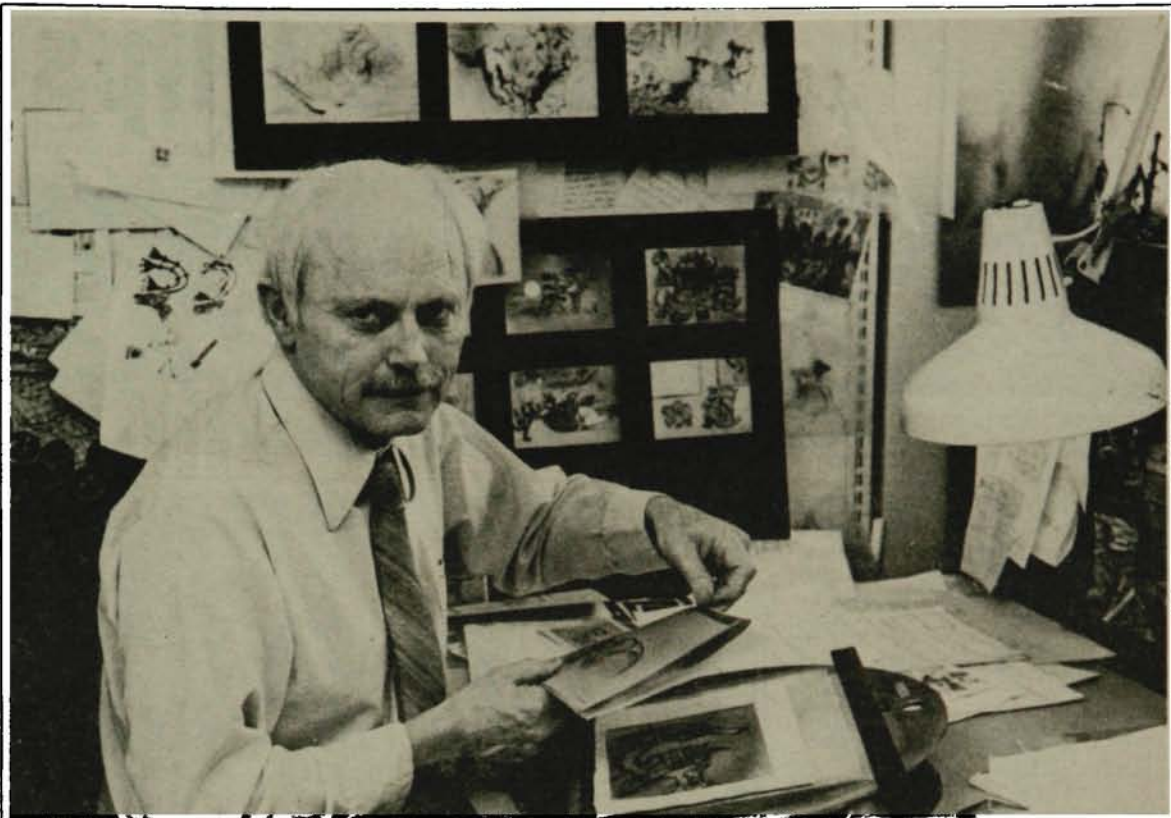
AWARDS

visit and who are unsure of the aesthetic they encounter in the abstract paintings hung there.

"We've been through realism and hyper-realism in art and now we find it was a dead end. Looking back to the traditional painters we can accept that many were not great painters yet they left us images of what life was like then. They witnessed and recorded their era. *Crac* isn't an attack on contemporary art though I am sometimes dismayed at the lack of feeling in non-figurative art."

"Most people," says Back, "want above all to be original. To me this is exaggerated. What is important is to say things that reflect the way people live day to day. People are extraordinary, they are fantastic! Many may find this banal but they shouldn't think that way. We are surrounded by the miracle that we wake up to every morning. We have our health, we are not in jail... This is what my films are saying. Really they are not extraordinary."

Frédéric Back is just that kind of humble man; nevertheless it is shocking to hear him disparage his drawing talents after having viewed *Inon ou La Conquête du feu* in which he animated the Algonquin legend of the animals' search for fire using bold flat lines and smoky colors that reminds one of



● "10-hour days huddled over the animation disc in his metal-walled cubby hole of an office..."



● *Crac*

are busy with old posters and bits he has clipped over the years in support of his concerns.

And once again he wants with a passion to finish a film that will say it all. It is his first 30-minute film; he estimates he'll be working on it for three years. That means three years of 10-hour days huddled over the animation disc in his metal-walled cubby hole of an office at Radio-Canada. Working gruelling days to complete *Crac* last year, he had an accident using fixative in an unventilat-

ed room and lost the use of one eye. Though he tires more easily now, the drawings are accumulating.

"It's based on the magnificent story by Jean Giono about a sheep farmer who loses his wife and daughter and goes to live in the mountains. There he passes his days planting trees, until he has reforested an entire mountain.

"The story has an application in everything that man does," says Back. "Our daily actions do, finally, have an impact on others and on all that surrounds us."

Like his other films this will be a transparency of Back's thoughts and feelings, though *L'Homme qui plantait des arbres* (*The Man Who Planted Trees*) is real in another sense, too.

On their 54-acre farm near Lachute, Quebec, Back and his family have over the years planted 8000 trees. In those trees live 74 species of birds. Says Back, of his reforestation project, "It is the only good thing I will have accomplished in my life."

Not only, Monsieur Back, not only. ●

the drawings in the caves at Lascaux. Is he being playful?

Perhaps a little.

"Working alone and having the advantage of time, I can continually work on and improve my scripts. Every detail in each film is considered many films. And if need be I can put a project aside till I come across the solution. *Crac* waited six years for its present ending. I had the idea for the film - actually my 12-year-old daughter gave it to me - before making *Tout rien* but the only ending I could come up with for the rocking chair was in an antique store. The ending in the museum is much more interesting, for the contrast it provided.

"Too many people work spontaneously, not giving enough thought to the film script which is the most important element," says Back. "I look for ways to shock the spectator, in the positive sense, in order to hold the attention. You've got to catch the spectator's attention and you can do that by structuring the content and also the color and drawings, movement and music so that each element in the film plays off the other," he says.

"Films that are empty of content are just another kind of pollution. I'm opposed to pollution."

Well, we all are, or were. Few of us actually fight the old battles these days, unlike Frédéric Back whose office walls



● *Tout Rien*

FESTIVALS

Cannes Clips

Photos and text by Bruce Pittman

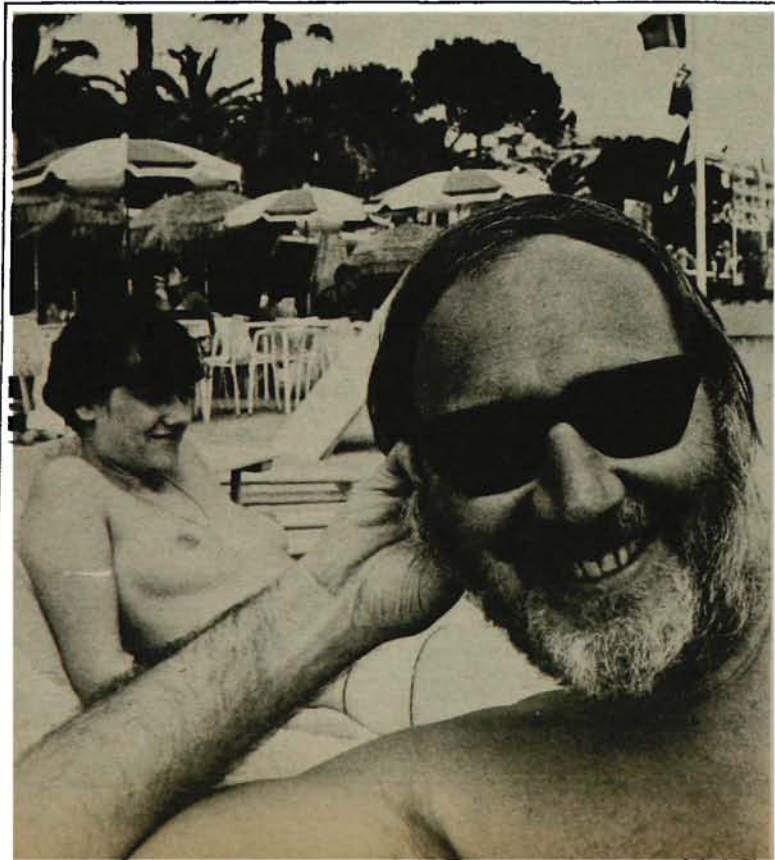
MAJESTIC

☆ The dictionary defines "majestic" as "stately, royal, august..." This is not a word that can therefore be applied to the Cannes Film Festival. It is merely the name of a very expensive hotel.

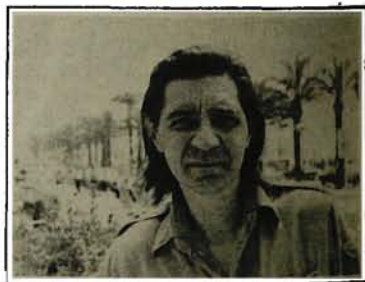
These two lovely girls are posing on the Carlton Hotel pier to promote a film. (For the life of me, I can't remember the title.) This type of event occurs about every 12 seconds during the run of the festival. ◇



This is Ken Wlaschin, director of the National Film Theatre in London, taking respite on the beach—a favorite Cannes pastime. He swears he doesn't know the lady. ◇



This gentleman is Jean-Pierre Lefebvre whose seventeenth feature *Les fleurs sauvages* was officially selected for the Directors' Fortnight and won the FIPRESCI award from the international film critics. ◇



This is a typical festival scene. Location: the exclusive Hotel du Cap. The participants: the world's most super agent, Swifty Lazar, standing on the left; Robert Evans, one of the world's biggest producers; and an unidentified lady on the right. Evans is about to direct a film called *Cottonclub*—which Mario Puzo was paid a cool million to write. Here, Lazar is mentioning an actress to whom Evans should talk. The lady looks like she is about to cross her fingers under the table. Ah... Hollywood. ◇



Various federal and provincial government film agencies pooled their resources this year to run this effective and efficient booth in the Palais du Festival. The staff was always ready to help. (Special thanks to Jean Lefebvre and Jacqueline Brodie for their many years of organizing Canadians at Cannes.) ◇





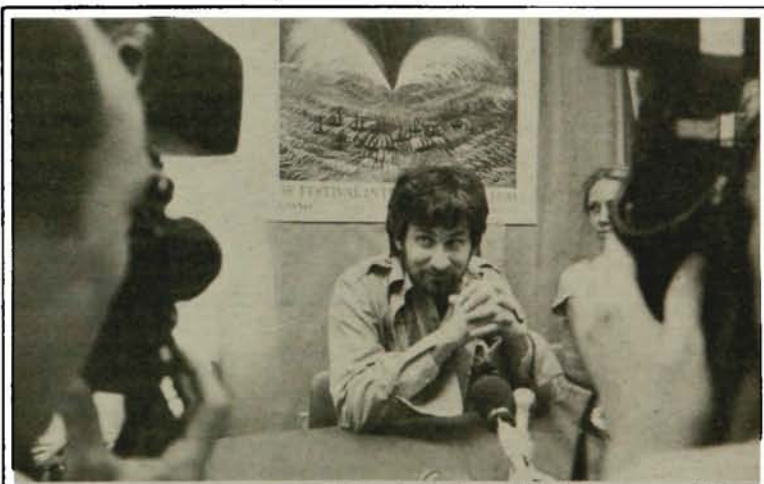
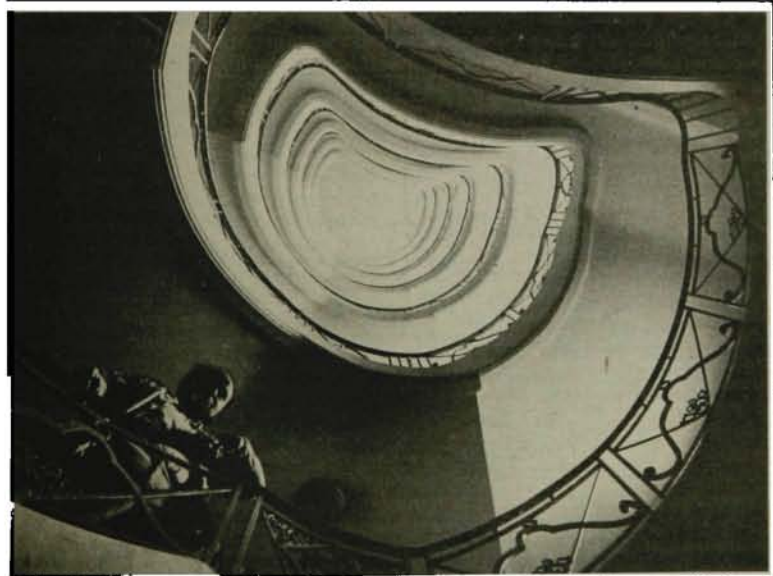
⊠ This is the Palais du Festival where the main festival holds its competition. The theatre is magnificent, the projection immaculate. A great and rare place to see films properly.

This is what is politely called a "photo session". The subject is Ann Margaret: she's the one in the middle of the two-hundred photographers taking intimate photos.



This is Marco Ferreri photographed on the staircase of the Martinez Hotel. He is a very good director whose films are invariably cut or banned in Canada. Among them are La grande bouffe and La dernière femme. His latest, Poo-Poo, Ca-Ca, Do-Do may have trouble too.

Frederick Forest and Marilou Henner were in Cannes to promote Wim Wenders' Hammet. This film will need a lot of promotion.

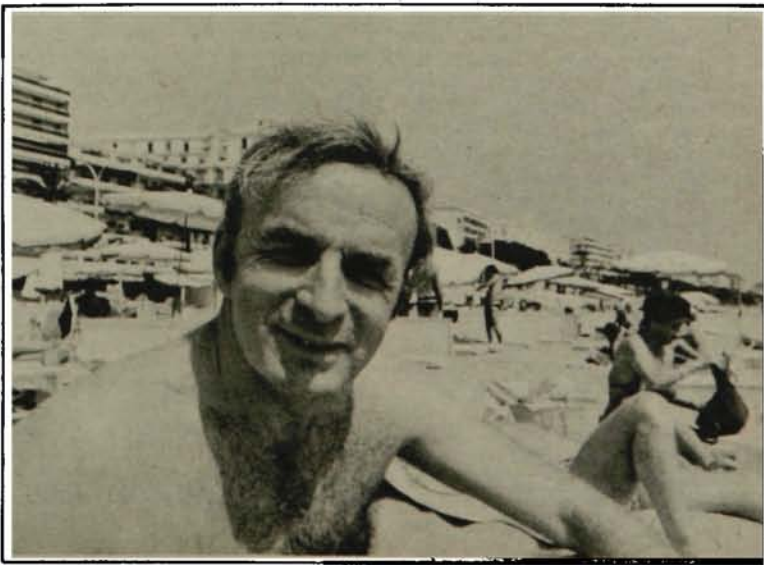


⊠ This is a picture of a relaxed and happy man - rare at the festival. His name is Steven Spielberg and his film E.T. was the hit of the festival. After two weeks of mostly dreary, long, boring films, E.T. woke everyone up. A good caption might be - why is this man smiling?



This is not a lady, but one of the lovely men who populate the streets of Cannes at night. Cannes can be very deceiving this way. Like the movie ads - what you see is not necessarily what you get!

⊠ This is your correspondent from Cannes, Marc Gervais, busy tracking down a story. Nicest guy at the festival - except that he caught a cold and couldn't file his report for this issue. (Watch for it in No. 86).



Michael Grant

by Mac Bradden

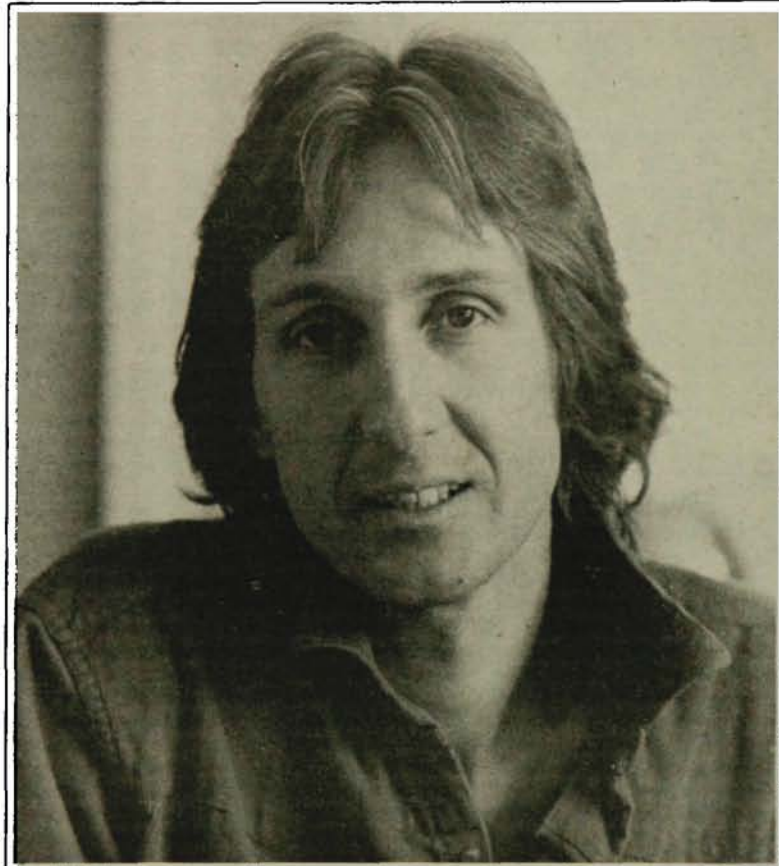
Michael Grant was born in Toronto in 1952. He read at Upper Canada College and then attended the University of Western Ontario where he was a prolific student filmmaker. After some years' subalternship to Budge Crawley he joined Deanne Judson to mount the Canadian-U.K. co-production Ragtime Summer in 1976. A couple of years later, having no luck at producing other directors' films, he produced and directed his own quirky drama, The Brother's Keeper. That experience, coupled with his business acumen, enabled him to launch the Genie-nominated feature Head On (due soon from Astral). This interview followed an afternoon of pond hockey at Grant's Mt. Albert home.

Cinema Canada: How, at age 27, did you manage to pull off your own feature film?

Michael Grant: Most of the experience I'd had in the five or six years previous was related to producing feature films. A little trial and error, and a lot of learning from other people, taught me what economic structures were necessary to satisfy investors, to package a motion picture. I started trying it with other directors. My own desire has always been to direct, but for some reason I set about learning how to actually make it happen, first. I was prepared just to produce for a while. But a couple of experiences trying to produce for other directors fell apart, principally because of my relationships with the directors or their agents. Next time out I decided to direct myself. Then, whatever else might fail, at least the director wouldn't fall out of the deal.

Probably the factor most helpful in getting the film off the ground was the climate in the economic community at the time. There were 45 features the year I made *Head On*, a lot of interest in investing. It was the thing to do. Another year, I might not have made it. Even in that very good year, there were guys with projects, more experienced filmmakers than I, who just didn't luck out. There are so many things that crop up, trying to make a feature, that the cards have to be a little bit with you.

Cinema Canada: Given, then, the odds against succeeding with any film the first time out, why go so offbeat? Did you think *Head On's* originality would



Photos: Mac Bradden

enhance its chances?

Michael Grant: Definitely. You know, we make low-budget movies out of a country whose feature films aren't highly recognized throughout the world. We're competing in the American market, so we're up against bigger budgets, more star value, all those things. I believe it's important to get your first movie noticed. Apart from making a good movie, one way to do that is to make the movie unusual. Offer something different. If you're going to compete on the big screen, you've got to make people decide to spend \$4.50 on your movie instead of on Jack Nicholson's. If you don't have a star to stack up against Jack Nicholson, then the word of mouth about your film, and your ad campaign, have to put forward an idea that clicks over in people's minds, that makes them say, "Yes, I'm interested in that subject," or "That sounds curious," or "Bizarre!" - whatever attracts them to give you their money, instead of Jack Nicholson.

I'm a firm believer that small movies from small countries arouse interest if they're unusual, or if they offer something that movies from the bigger, more recognized countries or filmmakers don't. So *Head On* was an effort to present a subject that was intriguing,

perhaps even risqué. You need an attention-getter when you're working with little budgets and limited star-power.

Cinema Canada: The mass marketers have largely looked askew at your film. Now do you think your skirting convention paid off?

Michael Grant: Oh, there's no question that the guys who have 6,000 theatres in places like Wick, Texas, know that their audiences, by and large, won't like the movie. Jimmy (Sanderson) and Sledge (Paul Illidge) and I didn't give that audience too much weight when we were writing it. It was aimed at a minority audience and will be, I believe, greatly appreciated by that minority audience. It surprised everybody in the test run in Winnipeg.

I want to emphasize, too, that *Head On* has already exceeded my expectation of reward. It's been a very complete experience, everyone's dream of a grown-up meccano set, making a movie with my friends. I'm also confident that the investors will come off reasonably well. The film only cost \$1.3 million, and it's selling for probably the same dollar-per-minute value as other Canadian films that cost five and six and eight million.

The pay-TV market is where you count the dollars on these medium-performance films. Getting millions at the box office for these films is a pipe dream. Besides, investors get back so little of the theatrical gross. Twenty percent is the standard guess, but now with the cost of money to enter and promote yourself in all the different markets, and with so many people collecting the money ahead of you, the investors are probably getting less than fifteen percent. After we've all had our moderate theatrical runs, I believe we're all going to have about the same dollar value on the secondary markets. And mine only has a million to get back. It convinces me of the wisdom of trying to make movies for less.

Cinema Canada: Did the low budget horizon inhibit the choice or scope of your subject?

Michael Grant: No, the key to the subject, really, was to touch a spot in people that they had, perhaps, wondered about but not had a look at. The idea of heightening sexual experience through fear was beginning to appear in some commercial situations; you know, Helmut Newton photography, attractive women wearing medical gear or leather, things we associate with sado-masochism - introducing an element of fear to accompany sexual arousal. That interests me because so much of the male psyche is taken up with the reproductive drive. It's an evolutionary leftover, the strong sexual drive to ensure we perpetuated the species. But in modern-day society, sexual interaction comes pretty easily - too easily, maybe, in most cases. So there's no counter-balance to the huge drive. With this residual sex-drive, then people start to explore more and more bizarre things to heighten the sexual experience. The ultimate sexual experience (this is a subject that's been approached in lots of films from *Mr. Goodbar* on down), the ultimate orgasm is death, or the resolution of the fear and sexual tension at the same time. So that's what *Head On* started into.

Cinema Canada: Coming and croaking in one big bang?

Michael Grant: Not bad.

Cinema Canada: Your promotional tag line for the festival showings in Toronto and Berlin was "Head On is not a love story." Now, for the commercial cut that was test-marketed in Winnipeg, it's become "Games can go too far."

Michael Grant: We said "it's not a love story," originally, because the line suggests to people that it obviously is a love story in some ways. And it is, in fact, a story of a man and a woman and their relationship. Trying to decide whether or not it's love is part of the intrigue of

the movie, because the relationship is so bizarre. It's probably quite unlike that of most people in the world. There's also a sort of threatening feel to "Head On is not a love story." The question arises, "Well, then, what is it?" The idea, of course, was to get people to the theatre to find out.

"Games can go to far," has, again, that threat to it, indicative of the relationship. It's a threat to the well-being of both persons involved. It has a very strong negative aspect to it. Their relationship is a clash of dangerous electricity. And that dangerous electricity was, I think, my key to get to the audience, to involve them emotionally.

I think you can scare the shit out of an audience, or make them laugh like crazy, or cry like hell. And each of those opens a little door inside us that leaves us vulnerable to what's coming at us.

If I sit you down in front of the big screen, and in 15 minutes I start to get you really scared, then I've opened that little door. Whatever I put on the screen, then, is going to flow through that little door and get inside and rough you up a bit, and get you emotionally involved in the movie. If I don't entertain you in that fashion, don't make you laugh or cry, or scare you, the movie'll never get to you.

Cinema Canada: *Is the film manipulative?*

Michael Grant: Yes it's manipulative. Subtly, of course. That's the art and craft of making movies, skillful manipulation, a dramatic structure that sets up appetites and then satisfies them, and also, of course, using the visual medium to its maximum potential.

You know, there have been lots of studies about our physiological responses to certain visual images. There are established facts about how you respond to certain colours and certain lines, certain angles and certain forms, low horizons and high horizons. Red versus blue, and diagonal versus horizontal and vertical, and how we respond to these physiologically, that is the meat of visual manipulation in the movies.

Be aware of what that frame is presenting to the audience, what it's doing to them emotionally, because you can manipulate them. You can set up a frame and make them respond in a certain way, just by virtue of the fact that the frame has certain visual statistics. Some filmmakers are much more oriented toward that form than others. And those are the guys who, for me, are making very powerful movies right now, because they understand the power of the medium. Nicholas Roeg is one, Alan Parker another. Those are people who really understand the power of visual manipulation.

Cinema Canada: *It's conventional wisdom that sex and violence are sure bets in a movie. Your subject is sex, and your treatment of it is, psychologically at least, brutal. Yet there's no overt portrayal of sex or violence on the screen. Why hold back?*

Michael Grant: Well, if I'd gone too far with the sex and violence, it would have overshadowed the other aspects of the characters and of the film, the emotional aspect of the relationship, for example. I think the film maintains a better unity and balance by being restrained in terms of how explicit the sex and violence is allowed to get. I think sometimes we're more frightened of what we imagine than of things we can actually see and come to terms with. I tried to make a film that was more

haunting because I restrained myself, than one which just gave you a charge for the 30 seconds you actually saw it portrayed on screen. Instead, I gave you a charge that wasn't satiated, and maybe you had to carry it with you when you left the theatre.

Cinema Canada: *Are you surprised at the lack of opportunity you've had to shoot other films since you finished Head On?*

Michael Grant: Oh, I guess, like everybody, I thought "I'll make this movie, and things will happen, and my whole life will change. People will start knocking on my door." I guess most people making movies have that fantasy.

In the case of *Head On*, when I was still at the cutting stage the film was



shown to the pre-selection committee for Cannes - and their reaction was very strong.

"Oh, fuck, great!" I thought, "These people are going to recognize what good work I've done, how hard I've worked. Someone's going to come ask me to do another movie."

But, of course, that hasn't happened. You can't expect anything from the film industry. It has a natural course it will run, and that course is a product of how the financial community is reacting, how good the properties are, how hard people are pushing. What the economic thermometer is like outside the film industry, the whole state of the economy, that affects us, too.

Oh, I don't see any point to complaining. Things'll go the way they go. We filmmakers and would-be filmmakers can only try our hardest to come up with the best movies we can.

Cinema Canada: *Is the market there for Canadian films as long as they're good enough, or is there a distribution problem?*

Michael Grant: There's definitely a distribution problem. As the first part of your question implies, the most important thing is to make films of high quality. That has to come first. But the distribution systems in North America make it very difficult, or impossible, for small, independent Canadian movies to get exposure in the marketplace. There are economic reasons for that, and all those economic reasons make sense, but they don't make it any easier to get your movie out.

There are many possible solutions, and in Canada, I think, the light bulb is just going on in our heads - we're realizing we've put all this money into production, and then none into distributing and promoting the movies.

I think that's the next step in the

Canadian industry. We learned how to make the movies, and now we'll learn to distribute them. We'll start putting money into that.

Then maybe the next step will be to put the money where we really need it - into the properties. The proportionate amount of money allotted to property in the Canadian movies of the past five or six years is out of whack.

Cinema Canada: *We haven't put enough bother into starting off with properties that are good enough in the first place?*

Michael Grant: Right. Working for Budge Crawley really taught me that lesson. Lots of people might suggest Budge spends too long on things, but the point is his emphasis is on the property, how good it is. And whether something was at the script stage or even at the editing stage, as with *Everest*, he'd never rush it. He'd give it every opportunity to come out its fullest, to be the best it could. And he came up with some high-quality movies as a result, one of them recognized with an Academy Award.

And look at Fellini, or Kubrick or Coppola. Those guys aren't turning out a film a year.

Cinema Canada: *Two years after you shot Head On, you've now re-cut it. Was that part of your distribution deal?*

Michael Grant: Yes. After I'd been to Berlin with the film, my artistic desires were somewhat satiated. I felt the film really needed to be re-cut before it could be commercially distributed in the United States. I wanted to tailor the film to paying customers in North America to maximize the number of dollars I can return to the investors. I am, after all, the producer of the movie, too.

So, last September, Astral looked at the version that was in Berlin, and I discussed with them what direction I wanted to go with the cut.

Then, I re-cut the film with Stan Cole. Astral approved, and that closed the deal.

Cinema Canada: *You decided to tailor the film to a paying North American audience. Is that something you have learned how better to do since shooting the film?*

Michael Grant: Yes. I spent six months writing *White Magic* with Jim Sanderson, and when we were writing that screenplay, we spent a lot of time studying video-tapes of American commercial successes. There was a consistency, a definite dramatic structure to all those movies, as far as how they fed the audience - how they aroused an appetite, and how and when they satiated it. Then I began to look from these films back to early writers and dramatists. Herodotus, Homer, you know. I could see that they realized a chronological revelation of the facts didn't interest the reader as much as an artificial structure which manipulated his reactions.

So, as a result, Stan Cole and I were able to impose on the film a dramatic structure that history told us would make the film more entertaining and interesting to the broad audience, conventions that have held through Greek theatre and Shakespeare and on up. And, having now obeyed these conventions, I agree it's a better film.

Cinema Canada: *So White Magic will be a more conventional film from the word go?*

Michael Grant: Structurally, yes. Struc-

turally, it's a classic comic conflict. Stone-Age man exists on earth today - at the same time as we're in an incredible, technological, electronic age. And here we are just an airplane ride apart. I mean, these people are from 2,500 or 3,000 years ago, in the evolutionary sense. So you stand one of them beside one of us and it's like having a time-machine. And, of course, it's a classic structure for conflict. I lift this Stone-Age man out of the Amazon jungle, and in 15 hours or so I can have him standing on the corner of Bloor and Yonge. It's as if I were to take you and drop you on Mars. Maybe you can breathe all right, but everything, absolutely everything is foreign to you. Can you survive it?

It conjures up cliché images, you know. Stone-Age man has paradise while



we have a human jungle - or vice versa; we have an electronic paradise and Stone-Age man was bored to tears. But there's more humanity to the situation than that. This character's a real, live guy, like you and I. He might be terrific or he might be an asshole, but he's a definite character. And so are the urban individuals he interacts with.

Because the situation is a natural comedy, I hope to open that same little door in people through laughter that, in *Head On*, I opened through fear. I want to get that door open so I can get in and enlighten the audience.

In this case there's a sort of journalistic urgency to get through to people. You know, there's a great rainbow of cultures on earth today that's being threatened with homogenization by the advance of technological society.

A fellow named Richard Meech and I are working on a series of TV shows on vanishing cultures with David Mayberry-Lewis, head of anthropology at Harvard. And so we're confronted with this interface between our society and theirs. How can they maintain their cultural integrity in the face of the forceful advance of a world view? This variety of cultures is something I believe will be absent from the earth in many respects in the next 10, 20 or 30 years. So, in a sense, it's evolution before our very eyes, and we have the opportunity to record it and to learn from it. We have a chance to learn from their world view, alternatives of how to see the world and the universe.

Cinema Canada: *Quickly, anything else?*

Michael Grant: Yeah, I want to do Stephen Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*. It's an insightful poke at Ontario WASP Society. That's me.

I'll probably shoot the whole thing at night - black humour, you know. ●

"Individual women have been and done everything that individual men have done at some time or other if only to prove that they could."

— Jane Marsh,
pioneer woman director

(quoted by Barbara Halpern Martineau, "Before the Guerillieres," *Canadian Film Reader*)

Trailblazers

Women technicians may be an exotic species in the male-dominated film industry, but they are not a new phenomenon. Forty years ago, women sound and camera operators were being recruited, along with women producers and directors to fuel the wartime propaganda machine that was to be the National Film Board (NFB) under Grierson. Judith Crawley and Sally Macdonald were brought in as 'camera' and 'sound' respectively, to shoot films on nutrition, daycare and folk traditions with directors Evelyn Spice Cherry, Gudrun Parker and Laura Bolton. Margaret Perry, who, after the death of her husband, bought herself a camera with the insurance money and taught herself photography, worked at the Board as camera operator before going on to become a one woman show — writing, shooting, producing and directing films out of the NFB unit in Nova Scotia.

As Judith Crawley pointed out,

"There was no sex prejudice against women. There was no one else around and the thing was if there was a human being who seemed to have some command of the situation and the ability to do something, then that human being was drafted. Sex didn't enter into it. If you were there and you could do it, by all means do it."

The stipulation for women, however, was that they not allow their biology to interfere with their filmmaking. Grierson, Crawley commented, did not approve of families and demanded absolute commitment and dedication, regarding marriage or pregnancy among his women staffers as personal affronts. Crawley relates the story of being engaged to shoot a film with Gudrun Parker on daycare:

"We were all set to go and she phoned me up one day in great embarrassment, and said, 'I'd like you to have lunch with me.' She gave me a lovely belt she had bought and said, 'I've got bad news. Grierson has discovered that you are pregnant and says we won't have a pregnant cameraman. So I can't have you on the job.'"

The wartime receptivity of the film industry to women proved to be short-lived. It had been, from the very beginning, contingent on the shortage of creative manpower — a result of the war effort. Like their sisters in the farm, mining and manufacturing sectors, the services of women in the film industry were no longer required once the war was over and the men returned. The well-concerted movement which effected the massive retreat of women into the home took its toll at the NFB. Whether through attrition or conscious policy (Crawley and Sally Macdonald disagreed on the point), the women who had occupied positions at the Board during the war were quietly replaced by men.

Brenda Longfellow works as an assistant film editor. She organized the film production workshop for the NFB's Studio D last fall.

Women in Gear

by Brenda Longfellow



● Susan Trow

The cold-war hysteria which plunged the NFB into a series of crises at the end of the war (and which culminated in the removal of Grierson), changed the political climate at the Board. "People became cautious," noted Crawley, "afraid of innovation. The encouragement of women suffered as a result."

Crawley eventually hung up her camera altogether to become writer-producer at Crawley Films, later to be joined by Sally Macdonald who would work primarily as editor for the next 30 years. Women camera and sound technicians slowly disappeared from the film scene, creating a hiatus which continued until the early 1970s.

Behind the Man Behind the Camera

While female technicians may have endured an ephemeral existence, women have never been entirely absent from the film industry. They have always occupied certain positions: make-up, hair, wardrobe, administrative support — those support functions traditionally associated with women's work. These so-called 'women's ghettos' continue to provide for the largest concentrations of womenpower within the

Combined membership statistics from Association of Canadian Film Craftspersons (ACFC) (63 women out of a total membership of 205) and IATSE Technical (50 out of a total of 400) reveal that 60% of total female membership is concentrated in wardrobe and make-up with 27% fairly equally distributed among continuity, hair and set dressers.

Nor does the public sector appear any more amenable to facilitating the entry of women into non-traditional positions. The Equal Opportunity Study published by the NFB in 1978 noted that 59% of all women at the Board



● Mary Armstrong

film industry.

In the higher-paid, higher-profile technical positions which have a great deal to do with the nature of the final product — sound or camera operators — the number of women, while increased in the last five years, remains minimal.

International Association of Theater and Screen Employees (IATSE) 647 has four women camera operators and assistants out of a total membership of 200. The Canadian Association of Motion Picture and Electronic Recording Artists (CAMERA) maintains a slightly better showing with 10 women out of a total of 100. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) has no female camera persons on staff, out of a total of 70 cameramen and the NFB has two out of 13. Female sound recordists are an even rarer breed, the Canadian Film Sound Society reporting only eight out of 60.

The Feminine Mystique

But if the numbers are insignificant, the challenge posed by the group of women who have crossed the frontier of 'no women allowed' is not. There is something subversive about the image of a woman confidently operating a camera or adjusting levels on a Nagra.

were employed in administrative, clerical and secretarial positions. Only 19.6% of female employees were engaged in production as compared to 34% of men, and of these only 6.6% were employed as technicians as compared to 26.5% of men.

Job category breakdowns at the CBC reveal a similar pattern with 69% of all female employees concentrated in administrative support categories; 30% are involved in production (of the latter, 43% are engaged as production assistants); and only 6% of total female employees are involved in technical positions as compared to 43% of men.

Like female rock bands, the effect is uncanny and exciting. Which is not to say that changing the gender behind the equipment automatically ushers in a feminist vision of filmmaking. Obviously, the latter demands the development of a women-identified consciousness and a work environment in which women have the opportunity to contribute to the decision-making process.

The emergence of a new generation of women sound and camera operators, however, does provide a critical element in the evolution of woman's film practice. All too often, one tends to define the latter in terms of women directors or of particular subject matter, ignoring the fact that the majority of directors are dependent on a knowledge of technique developed over the last 90 years in the context of an institution dominated by male perceptions and visions. The increasing mastery of technique by women working in conjunction with directors open to creative interchange and innovation would, indeed, constitute a very real potential for the future.

Coming from backgrounds as varied as medieval studies, English literature, still photography or teaching emotionally disturbed children, today's women sound recordists, camera operators and assistants may be seen as the just descendents of the NFB pioneers under Grierson. While largely concentrated in independent documentary production which, in the majority of cases, provided the point of entry and the training ground, some have succeeded in crossing the more resistant barriers of the feature film industry and several have established their own production companies. Stationed on the front line of production, with a collective experience that runs the gamut of Dracula documentaries in Bucharest to television reportage of the Middle East War, they are proving on a daily, practical basis the fallacy of myths that a woman can't: that she is physically too weak, or that the technical mastery required is beyond her grasp.

With reference to the 'physically weak' argument (and apart from the fact that the development of lightweight equipment is undermining its legitimacy), all of the women interviewed were engaged in some regular physical regime as a means of developing the muscle structure required for their work. Zoe Dirse, assistant camera at the NFB remarked, "The thing is knowing your limits." She tells the story of being challenged to lift a 90 lb. camera by a fellow student in a course given by the Canadian Society of Cinematographers (CSC). She refused and suggested the challenger attempt it. "Of course," she adds wryly, "he couldn't."

Women have historically been isolated from technology by a sexual division of labour and a socialization process which discourages women from gaining a familiarity with machines. Not surprisingly, many of the women interviewed admitted to certain inhibitions in confronting the technology of filmmaking. Said Dirse,

"I grew up on a farm and had been around tractors but I was always more directed into the kitchen and garden with my mother. So when I got to the point of putting a camera together, I didn't know what all the screws and bolts were and all the tools you have to use. And there were guys who knew this stuff. From taking woodwork and machine shop."

Photos: National Film Board

Susan Trow, camera operator at the NFB adds,

"I have had to confront my own fear of technical things and I still do from time to time. I'll pick up a piece of equipment and say, 'This is mindboggling.' But I've grown up with that kind of conditioning. Now I'm fascinated by technical things. It's just a question of getting over that intimidation."

In any event, an absorption with technology was never the single most important factor inspiring the movement of women into technical positions. More often, the reasons cited were that working in sound or camera provided financial security and a means of realizing social and creative ambitions. As Aerlyn Wiseman, sound recordist, explains,

"I'm not a techy. I don't spend hours playing with my equipment. I keep it in shape and do what I have to. But that's never been the most absorbing thing about filmmaking for me. I wanted to go out in the real world and deal with people. Sound was a way of doing that. It's only a vehicle."

Breaking In

"Women feel they have to work harder at it. There's this feeling, 'I've got to be better than he is in order to be accepted, in order to make it.' There's this drive to show them that we can do it too."

— Susan Trow

Most of the women arrived in filmmaking by a number of circuitous routes, having already embarked on one career or other. Zoe Dirse, for example, was engaged on a film for emotionally disturbed children because she had worked in the field for two years. Aerlyn Wiseman wrangled her way into a job as sound recordist with a student documentary crew, having never been introduced to a Nagra before:

"I needed the money. I was trying to work my way through medieval studies at the University of Illinois and I heard of this job paying \$2.50 an hour which was more than you could make waitressing. They asked me if I knew how to record and I lied. But I learned very rapidly where to plug the mike in, what a crystal generator was and how to turn the machine off and on. I just proceeded from there."

While a number of the women had attended college, university or CSC courses, the majority started by experimenting with the machinery on their own and then set out to gain experience in the 'real world'. A difficult prospect, it seems.

Getting the first break is a major obstacle for anyone trying to work in the film industry, but for women who, for the most part, are denied access to the informal mentor system — the old boys' network which brings in and grooms new technicians — the obstacles are doubly difficult. With the exception of Studio D (the women's studio at the NFB), which has endeavoured to promote women technicians and with which both Trow and Joan Hutton, assistant camera, credited getting their starts, the majority of women relied on their own considerable resources. Take Deborah Parks, assistant camera, for example.

"I had done a lot of sewing in high school, so I set up a Barney-making business (a Barney is the cloth coat used over a camera to muffle noise).

I'd phone up cameramen. 'Hello. I'm an assistant but I make barneys.' They'd drop their equipment at my place and I'd meet them. I built up quite a rapport and they started thinking of me when they needed an assistant."

Or Carol Betts, camera operator:

"I was teaching English at college and realized this wasn't what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. So I went out and bought a Bolex, and some short ends and started doing local stories for TV news on spec: covering events and bringing the film in. I learned how to react quickly. Just picking up the camera and doing it allowed me the freedom to do what I wanted and to experiment."



● Petra Valier

If starting is one thing, getting hired is quite another. People in positions of hiring — usually male producers and directors — tend to hire male technicians who have had the advantage of being similarly favoured by other male directors and producers. For women, this creates a kind of double bind situation as Deborah Parks explains. "The excuse is usually that women are not experienced enough. But how can I get the experience if I'm never given a chance? I'll never have the confidence to shoot 'til I do it."

Breaking into the charmed circle poses problems for women who must overcome the reservations of directors and producers for whom a woman technician is often an unknown or dangerous element. Many, indeed, are reluctant about hiring women, particularly for location shoots, fearing the questionable 'propriety' of being isolated with a strange woman.

Zoe Dirse relates the story of being refused a job by a director who felt she couldn't handle the travel to exotic places, all of which she had already visited.

"I later ended up working with this same director, and he regretted not having hired me before. It was funny, he had to meet me to realize I could have done the job. His official reaction was just to say 'no' based on the fact that I was a woman. Seeing that I was capable and competent — I was probably the first woman technician he had worked with — was kind of an education for him."

The problem of gaining acceptance, however, does not stop short of being engaged by a director or producer. There is the whole delicate area of establishing a working relationship with film crews, which have traditionally functioned on a dynamic of male camaraderie and which, naturally, have a certain interest in preserving the territory.

"Anyone new," says Wiseman, "is subjected to the 'checkout', but for women it's different. There are a lot more preconceptions."

"You've got to prove yourself more if you're a woman because people are watching for it," adds Dirse:

"At first, there are always people around trying to help you carry and you just don't do that. They wouldn't do it for a man and it's not their job. They have to learn too. That's the first thing someone will turn around and point their finger at. Oh, she can't do the job. We won't hire her."

Defining a new working relationship is, however, a two-way process, and it's not only the male crew members who have had to make the social adjustments demanded by the entry of women into



● Debra Parks

the field. Women, as well, have had to make certain psychological accommodations, as Trow points out,

"I've had to do some adjusting myself to being in a position of authority. It's role reversal for women. I've often wondered how does this man feel about being my assistant. But I've never felt resentment."

Changing the Balance

There is every evidence that a new dynamic is evolving as women attain a certain visibility and prove the potential of their contribution. Ingrid G. Cusiell, sound recordist, points out that many directors "are now discovering that women bring something special to a film." "Especially on a feature film," adds Dirse, "if you have five men on the camera crew then a woman can bring a really nice balance."

John Walker, director, who has just completed a documentary on artist Georgia O'Keeffe with Wiseman on sound and Parks as camera assistant commented that:

"Too often we neglect the emotional, passionate side of filmmaking. Filmmaking is not just a technical medium, particularly with social documentaries. It's dealing with human beings, relating to the subject you are filming. Women can make that contribution. They aren't afraid of expressing their feelings. I find I get a lot more valuable input on a film from a mixed crew."

One particularly encouraging sign is the increasing collaboration between women technicians and women directors with films such as *P4W*. Janis Cole and Holly Dale's splendid documentary on the Kingston Prison for Women. Aerlyn Wiseman, who recorded sound with Nesya Shapiro on camera, insisted the all-women crew was instrumental in producing the final quality of the film:

"My God! people say, 'how did you

get people to talk to you?' It meant developing a good trusting rapport, making those ladies feel comfortable. And that involved all of us. We all contributed."

Future Predictions

"I can't understand why there aren't more women. Being a technician is the most fantastic thing..."

— Joan Hutton

What about the future? Is the current revival of women technicians again an ephemeral phenomenon? Most of the women interviewed claimed they did not see many encouraging signs among younger groups of women of a pronounced desire to enter the field.

"It would be marvelous to work with other women," says Ingrid G. Cusiell.

"But there aren't that many. It's a hard and lonely job. There's so much demand to build a reputation and that takes years as a technician. And there's the investment you have to make in the equipment which gets very restrictive."

"There's also the emotional and lifestyle demands," adds Wiseman, for whom a traditional family scene "is simply not in the cards."

"Certainly I've thought of having children," adds Trow, "but the system really forces you to make a choice and that's frustrating because men can always have both. Women in this kind of work simply don't have the support systems that would make it possible."

While enrollment of women in film production courses has in fact increased, the numbers are still far from encouraging. York University, for example, had only three women graduating in 1981 as compared to 11 men; Concordia had one as compared to 13 men; Ryerson 19 out of 87 and Sheridan College 13 out of 28. Of these, the overwhelming majority tended to secure employment in media-related industries as writers or producers.

Why the continued under-representation of women in technical positions? Can the responsibility be laid at the doors of the film schools? "Not really," says Marjorie Morton, director of production at Concordia.

"Women themselves are making those decisions. Women tend to see film as an expressive medium and, as a result, opt more for studio courses — experimental filmmaking or animation. More often than not, they tend to get alienated by the egos and personality politics of large crews and prefer working on their own."

Obviously enhancing the development of women technicians would demand the increased commitment of all sectors of the film industry — schools, unions, public and private institutions. A difficult prospect given the current climate of economic restraint and unemployment. One possible solution might lie in the development of apprenticeship programs specifically geared to meeting the needs and interests of women, programs like the month-long Film Production Workshop organized at Studio D last Fall which proved to be enormously successful.

For there is a need. "And for women prepared to meet the challenge," says Cusiell,

"the doors are open. Women always have to be better but if they are knowledgeable there is a place. And it's proven that women can do the job."

The Crawley Era

by James A. Forrester

Crawley Films began as a hobby for Frank Radford Crawley, the athletic son of a straightlaced Ottawa accountant, Arthur A. Crawley. For some long lost reason Frank Radford was known to family and friends alike as "Budge," and it stuck with him for the rest of his career.

Arthur A. gave his son a movie camera for his birthday to study his swimming style: "That was the Stuart-Warner. I remember it well. It cost \$75 and was crackle black. It had no diaphragm so you would change the f-stop by rotating a metal disc in front of the fixed focus lens. It would be a 25mm lens, with this rotating disc in front, but the big attraction was the 64 frames-per-second speed."

One wonders if Arthur A. would have given such a present to his eldest son if he could have foreseen in what direction it would lead over the next 40 years. Pandora's Box had been opened in this strict Methodist household.

Crawley became an accountant and joined his father's firm, while he continued to experiment with filmmaking on the side during the 1930s. In 1933, he purchased a Kodak Cine-Special which had recently come on the market: "It had a big attraction; you could run 33 feet on a wind, but it wasn't a reflex camera. You could view and focus, but as soon as you started to shoot, it would drop down and you couldn't see. So you had to allow for parallax, and it was diagonal parallax, which is a little tricky."

With his camera Crawley would make a number of black and white industrial films with intertitles, as well as amateur films with titles like *Glimpses of a Canoe Trip*, which won honourable mention at a N.Y. competition in 1937.

The following year Budge married Judith Sparks, who was literally 'the girl next door' and the scion of another old Ottawa family. At the suggestion of ethnologist Marius Barbeau of the National Museum, they went on their honeymoon to Ile d'Orleans and of course they made a film about the island.

The same year (1938) John Grierson arrived in Ottawa at the invitation of the Canadian Government to study government film production. This "Presbyterian public relations man," as Rachel Low described him, hit bureaucratic Ottawa like a proverbial bomb shell. Things began to happen in sleepy old Ottawa

James A. Forrester is a free-lance writer who is presently completing a book on Budge Crawley. He is also the Audio-visual Co-ordinator for the Lake Ontario Regional Library in Belleville, Ontario.



● Crawley holds the slate during the shooting of *The Retail Management Series*

and the opportunities for an ambitious young filmmaker looked brighter.

The arrival of Grierson and the fact that the Crawley's film *Ile d'Orleans* won the Hiram Percy Maxim Award for Best Amateur Film of 1939, ensured that Budge would not have to remain an accountant much longer.

"The money was put up by Hiram Percy Maxim who invented the Maxim gun; that's where he made all his money - on the machine gun business. He funded the competition," Crawley recalls.

With the coming of World War II there was an urgent need for training films, and Crawley Films was pressed into service:

"You see we were founded before the Film Board. I did a lot of work for the Film Board. In the early war years we did a lot of stuff for the Army, Navy and Air Force. I'd go to Bagotville and shoot on the deck, low-level flying in old Ansons. I remember photographing the first Lancaster that Clyde Pangborn flew to London. That flight was the morning of Dieppe and we were in a PBY and he passed us in the Lancaster."

In 1939, the NFB consisted of John Grierson, Ross McLean and a secretary, so anyone with an interest in film was

conscripted immediately. The Crawleys in turn took over the top floor of the family home at 540 The Driveway, turning a billiard room into a film studio.

Grierson and the British technicians he brought with him were comfortable with 35mm equipment, which was the professional standard and they sneered at 16mm film, calling it "shoe string". The Crawleys continued using 16mm, in spite of the fact that they had to edge number the film by hand with white ink and a fine pen.

Budge recalls, "The Film Board was down on John Street and we had a Bell Tele land line from 540 The Driveway to the Film Board. We did a lot of narration and shot interviews there in the early days... things called discussion trailers. We had a Mauer recorder and it was done with a galvanometer, and the recording was optical. You would process the sound track and we used Kodak positive film which was very slow. It was a double expanding sound track."

A little known aspect of Canadian film history is that Crawley Films introduced 16mm synchronized sound to filmmaking in Canada. Grant Crabtree, one of Crawley Films' first employees, stated that the NFB borrowed the camera set-up perfected by himself and Rod

Sparks. The NFB crew shot a film in Western Canada and then claimed years later that they had invented the system.

Like many young enterprises which evolve spontaneously, Crawley Films was founded in 1939, but did not become a limited company until the end of the war. Crawley Films grew to a staff of six during the war, working mainly on films for the "war effort", but also completing sponsored films for industry as well as cultural groups like the Canadian Geographical Society.

By 1946, Crawley Films had evolved from a tight-knit group of family and friends into a small business; comprising Budge, Judy, Cecily Sparks, Rod Sparks as well as Grant Crabtree and Dorothy Munro. The company had outgrown the cramped quarters at 540 The Driveway and an old church hall at 19 Fairmont Avenue was purchased.

At the end of the war, government contracts began to taper off and Crawley Films found it necessary to return to sponsored filmmaking in order to survive in the private sector.

Budge remembers: "It was hard to sell because people didn't want to buy films. All you could do was go out and hustle. You knew that if you put in a certain amount of time you could sell a picture, but your volume would be 12 to 15 thousand dollars a year gross and your film costs might be two or three thousand."

It becomes obvious from talking to Crawley that his enthusiasm for film, coupled with his hustling business style sparked the company during its earliest period. That is until the arrival of Graeme Fraser in 1946.

A large part of the credit for the survival of Crawley Films over the past 40 years must go to this man. Business Screen stated that Fraser had "sold more film than anyone else in the world," which may sound like hype but in the area of sponsored films, it is not an overstatement.

In time, the company developed into two separate entities with Fraser supervising the sponsored films or industrial documentaries and Crawley concentrating on the feature films and the entertainment side of things.

An interesting footnote to this history is the fact that A.A. Crawley, while he may not have approved of his son's career choice, supported the company once it was underway. When he became convinced that film was more than just a hobby, his holding company Orme Bannon Ltd. became sole owner of Crawley Films, which ensured that the company had financial backing.

The company grew slowly at first and retained the feeling of an extended family for a number of years after the war. The people who worked there

Photos: Crawley Films

HISTORY

remember spending long hours for little pay, but the whole group was learning mostly by trial and error. As a group they lived together, worked together and relaxed together, so it is not surprising that a number of the ex-alumni of "Crawley College" met their wives and husbands while working there.

Filmmaking is by its nature a collaborative process and so often it is difficult to give credit to all those who contributed to the making of a film. This is especially true of the film *The Loon's Necklace*, which was produced over a number of years, until it won Film of the Year at the first Canadian Film Awards in 1949. As director George Gorman suggested, "Everybody who worked at Crawleys had a hand in the making of that film." The prize that year was a painting by one of the Group of Seven, donated for fifty dollars, and for some inexplicable reason the prize was never collected by Crawleys.

The Loon's Necklace was made on speculation and it was only after it won the award that Imperial Oil decided to sponsor the distribution. It went on to win many other awards, but the increased recognition also brought with it a business load which put a strain on the co-operative spirit of the organization.

By 1949, Crawley Films had 33 employees and that's when the company spirit began to change. The founding members like Grant Crabtree began to resent the influx of freelancers and the importing of talent, particularly from England. The community feeling began to come apart and some of the original employees felt exploited.

Most of the profits were turned back into the company, which is the best way to establish a business, but the process did cause some ill will among certain employees who felt that they were more than just employees.

Tom Glynn who was General Manager for years recalls the Annual Meeting at Crawleys with some retrospective amusement. And former Music Director Bill McCauley remembers the standard line Budge gave to any employee who asked for a raise: "You are the best staff member we have, but you know we bought all this equipment so maybe next year..."

However, while the pay proved to be on the subsistence level, Crawleys was a great training ground and a backdoor into the National Film Board. Looking on the positive side, anyone who worked at Crawleys was getting paid to go to film school.

In 1950, while a very young Claude Jutra was accepting the award for Best Amateur Film at the CFA, Crawleys received recognition in the Sponsored Film category. This award was dominated by the company for many years, and reflects where the energies of the company have been directed.

Budge has always had an uncanny ability to spot talent in amateurs and give them the opportunity to demonstrate that talent. Both Chris Chapman and Bill Mason began their respective film careers at Crawleys, as did a long list of actors and actresses including Genevieve Bujold and Christopher Plummer.

Women were given an opportunity to develop at Crawleys; usually starting as researchers or assistants before moving on to television or other companies. Betty Zimmerman who now heads the International Service of CBC Radio began as a production assistant, a title which covered a whole gamut of duties.

In keeping with the attitude towards women during the 1950s, most were never given the opportunity to become directors - with one exception. Sally MacDonald worked very capably as a producer/director for years in the industrial sponsored side, turning out films on a wide range of subjects.

During the early 1950s, Judy Crawley undertook a long range series of films produced for National Health and Welfare and eventually sold to McGraw-Hill Films in New York. The series was called the *Ages and Stages Series* and each film covered a particular stage in a child's development, with each episode having a catchy title like *The Terrible Twos* and *The Trying Threes*, etc. A unique element in the series is the fact that she used her own children for the

in London. Peter, who directed *The Rowdyman* in 1972, recalled his earliest years in Canada during a Cinema Canada interview: "I started as an apprentice in the J. Arthur Rank training program... before I came to Canada in 1955. Here I worked at Crawley Films, which was another great place to learn in those days, because you had to do everything from edge numbering right the way through."

A major change occurred in 1954, when the new wing was built onto the front of the old church hall and an office was opened in Toronto at 21 Dundas Square to make television commercials.

In 1958, when Imperial Oil received a special Canadian Film Award for "its encouragement of high standards in Canadian Film Productions," Crawleys

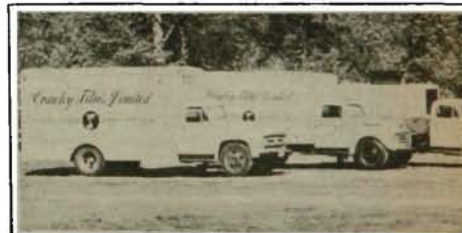
with the director and editor Rene Bonniere for one year of location shooting along the North Shore from Tadoussac to the Straits of Belle Isle.

The subject of the 13 half-hour programs may seem a little recondite for a commercial company, considering that Crawleys was already involved in a major TV series. However, the Crawleys had a keen interest in Quebec dating back to *Ile d'Orleans* in 1938 and *Canadian Power* made in Charlevoix County the next year. The series is mainly of ethnographic interest today, but it had a profound effect on the subsequent films made by Perrault - in particular, the film trilogy *Pour la suite du monde*, *Le règne du jour* and *Les voitures d'eau*.

Following the critical, if not financial, success of these two endeavours Budge



● Above: Crawley shooting *Newfoundland Scene* (1951) with his trusty Cine-Special. Right - top to bottom: Conferring over a script, Lorne Greene and director Stanley Moore; narrating *Pride of Possession*, Kate Aitken and Fred Davis, while Bill McCauley (seated) and Tony Belts look on; the Crawley Films' mobile unit.



films. Chris Chapman remembers Judy "with a frying pan in one hand and a pencil in the other."

Judy's contribution to the establishment of Crawley Films cannot be overlooked. For the first three decades of the company Budge and Judy were thought of as a team as recognized by the special Canadian Film Award which they received jointly in 1957. She acted as a balancing influence on Budge, as did his father Arthur A., and between the two of them they kept Budge's sometimes misdirected enthusiasm in check.

Budge won the Film of the Year Award again in 1952 for the *Newfoundland Scene*, which was once again sponsored by Imperial Oil. Most of the footage was shot by him with assistance from one of Crawley's best cameramen, the late Stanley Brede. Budge used his faithful Cine Special during the filming and he managed to damage his eye during a particularly violent storm.

As the demand increased for sponsored films during the '50s, more technicians with experience were brought over from Europe, most notably Peter Carter's father Donald, who had worked for Gaumont British Instructional Films

began to build a film studio in the Gatineau. The studio was built in preparation for the production of a major television program. *The R.C.M.P. Series*, a 39-episode series financed by Crawley, McConnell Ltd., the CBC and the BBC.

The series is very dated today when viewed in relation to the changing image of The Force (from "We always get our man!" to "Cheque book justice" in 25 years). However, it did give an opportunity for many Canadian actors to perform in an international production which was shown in Britain, Australia and eventually syndicated on U.S. television. Don Francks played the clean-cut Constable Mitchell and there were countless roles for Murray Westgate, Frances Hyland, Douglas Rain, Lloyd Bochner, Toby Robins, Eric House, Bruno Gerusi, John Drainie, Tom Harvey, Chris Wiggins, Cec Linder, Jack Creely, John Vernon, Tom Kneebone, and Martin Lavut, as well as Larry Zahab who metamorphosed into Larry Dane.

The St. Lawrence North Series (*Au Pays de Neuve-France*) was produced simultaneously with *The R.C.M.P. Series*. On January 12, 1959 the creator and scriptwriter Pierre Perreault left Ottawa

contracted to make 130 five-minute limited animation cartoons in the *Tales of the Wizard of Oz Series* for Videocraft of N.Y. By the time that the hour-long final special *Return to Oz* was completed and aired on February 9, 1964 on the G.E. Fantasy Hour, Crawleys had 40 animators including Bill Mason and Norman Drew (who now runs his own animation studio) working there.

Vic Atkinson, who was art director on the series, has criticized Budge for not keeping this nucleus of talented animators working together. However, one of the main reasons that the animation department was neglected, was the dedication Budge demonstrated for the idea of producing dramatic feature films.

In 1962, Rene Bonniere convinced Budge to bankroll David Walker's feature-length script called *Staircases*. The story concerned a mild-mannered man whose well-manicured lawn suddenly erupts in mushrooms. The point of the film had something to do with ecology, but was ahead of its time in voicing a concern about the environment. (If it were re-released today, I'm willing to bet that we would get some

academic trying to convince us that the film was a Structuralist message about herpes!!

Released as *Amanita Pestilens (Poisoned Love)*, it only found an audience once at the 1965 Berlin Film Festival, where it was sold to West German television and beamed into East Germany for rather obscure political reasons. *Amanita Pestilens* had a number of minor distinctions to its credit, including the first screen appearance of Genevieve Bujold, the first Canadian feature filmed in colour and the first feature shot simultaneously in two languages (French and English).

This \$300,000 bomb, rather than discouraging Budge, prompted him in typical fashion to invest money in another feature. He put up \$150,000, matched by a Canadian investor, plus \$250,000 from Walter Reade, the U.S. theatre/distributor, to produce a film version of the Brian Moore novel *The Luck of Ginger Coffee*. Robert Shaw and his wife Mary Ure starred in the film with *The Empire Strikes Back* director Irvin Kershner guiding it through an eight-week shooting schedule.

Once again, Budge managed to spot talent waiting to be developed; particularly in the case of Kershner, who had previously only directed two B-movies, *The Hoodlum Priest* and *Stakeout On Dope Street* (both films shot by Haskell Wexler). And Robert Shaw was virtually unknown in the film world, although he was an author and stage actor in England.

Shaw, Ure and Kershner lived in the Gatineau, not far from the Crawley House while the film was being made in Ottawa and Montreal. There is an unconfirmed story that Shaw was so impressed with Budge Crawley's persona that he patterned his portrayal of Henry VIII after him in *A Man For All Seasons*.

So in 1965, Crawleys had a critical winner, taking the CFA for Best Theatrical Feature; but any financial gain was wiped out by the loss on the previous feature and some "creative book-keeping" on the part of Walter Reade. There was also criticism of the film because it had Canadian personnel only in the supporting roles and the technical crew. However, the company has always had a very continentalist point of view, a possible reflection of Budge's own personal outlook.

The sponsored film division was very busy in the years immediately preceding Expo '67, cranking out films promoting the idea behind the festival and encouraging people and groups to participate. *Quality of a Nation*, which contained statements by famous Canadians as produced for the E.B. Eddy Company, as well as *Come to the Fair and Saskatchewan Jubilee*. Although the later film was not designed to promote Expo, it still serves as a very good example of the style, and it does not seem as dated as some of its contemporaries.

The year before the Centennial itself was frantic with activity. Crawleys contracted to produce a number of Pavilions including the Kodak and Canadian National, as well as acting as consultants for the Canadian Government Pavilion. It consisted of a revolving theatre, with five four-minute films on the history of Canada; the best one being Michel Brault's *Settlement and Conflict*.

Motion, a film by Vincent Vaitiekunas for the CN Pavilion was well received and went on to win a number of awards. It was subsequently released theatrically by Warner Bros. following the event. In

fact Vaitiekunas is one of the most consistently creative individuals who has worked in the sponsored division. He has produced some excellent examples of the genre including *Multiplicity (CP)*, *For Want Of A Suitable Playhouse (Shaw Festival)*, *The Sun Don't Shine On The Same Dawg's Back All The Time (Canadian Open/Seagrams)* and *Canada at 8:30 (Volkswagen)*.

By 1969, Crawley Films had completed 1800 motion pictures, 600 TV commercials, 100 slide shows and garnered 180 national and international film awards. The company was the busiest commercial producer of educational and documentary films in North America—second in the world.

The next year Budge became involved with a feature production, when he was

and an alternating male and female lead playing the Danish prince. Needless to say, it did not play in Preoria or anywhere else for that matter. Perhaps the strangest of all was his involvement as producer/distributor of Murray Markowitz's ode to lesbianism, *August & July*, a 90-minute romp in the country. Even Budge admits that the poster which depicted the two women kissing, was the best thing about the film. While the casual observer considered Budge Crawley to be the Godfather of Canadian Filmmaking, by 1974 he seemed to have become a soft touch for every aspiring filmmaker in the country.

However, Budge Crawley redeemed himself to a great extent by once again rescuing material from another film; in this case, *Everest Symphony*, a Japanese

tions had the rights to the book previous to Budge, but they decided that it wasn't possible to make a film. This assessment did not dissuade him and he has been struggling along with the project ever since.

Budge's contribution to the development of a viable feature film industry in this country cannot be overlooked and should not be downplayed. In my attempt to be as accurate as possible in telling the story of Crawley Films, I have possibly done him an injustice by emphasizing the negative factors which led to the decline of the company. It is very difficult to put Budge in a proper political perspective, because he is and always has been "a hardcore individualist", as one person put it so succinctly. In a country where conformity is practically enshrined in the Constitution, he stands out like the proverbial sore thumb.

The history of Crawley Films and Budge Crawley were inextricably wound up in each other until the sale of Crawley Films to Atkinson Film Arts on Wednesday, May 12, 1982. Budge is still out there hustling to make his feature *The Strange One* and I, for one, hope that he manages to find the right script, which has become something of a holy grail for him.

In the beginning, he could have taken the easy road and continued as an accountant in his father's business and today he would be sunning himself in Florida with his contemporaries. (Personally, I can't see him slowing down long enough to sit anywhere). Instead, he chose to strike out in a bold new direction, which he is still following even after all these years. His instinct for the possibilities of the new medium have been unique and his experience spans the gulf between silent amateur films and Pay-TV (no mean feat in itself).

Always the maverick, the loner, Budge has paid for his outspokenness in criticizing the powers that be in a country as overgoverned and overregulated as Canada. Sometimes he conjures up images of Peter Finch as the Mad Prophet in *Network* with his line, "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore!" It is interesting to speculate what the Canadian film industry would be like today if more people had listened to him. Budge's assessment of the ineffectiveness of the capital cost allowance in creating a stable feature industry has been vindicated ten-fold by the disasters of the last two years. He has always had the best interests of the film community at heart, particularly when he saw government bureaucrats, unscrupulous hustlers and bankers teaming up to make a fast buck.

I think that the history of Canadian filmmaking would be very different today if more people had the fortitude to say what was on their mind, rather than going along with the prevailing mood or current trend. Budge Crawley stands out because he approached the question of establishing a feature industry from such a personal perspective, and he was willing to invest so much of himself and his own resources. Operating outside of the Montreal-Toronto axis, he not only managed to survive, but prosper during the good years. How can you criticize a man who is willing to invest everything he has in an idea he believes in?

In the end, Budge is a solitary figure, who says what he thinks and, in retrospect, if some of what he has said is contradictory, there is always a gem of wisdom hidden in the bravado. He is a figure to be admired for his courage and, above all, his determination.



● A 'regular' on the speaking circuit, Crawley discusses film in Winnipeg with Des Loftus of the Secretary of State's office (1970s)

brought in by Maclean-Hunter to rescue the ill-fated Festival Express Film, a documentary of the concert tour which was scheduled to travel across the country by train. Out of the footage of Janis Joplin, The Band, Ian & Sylvia, Robert Charlebois, Sea Train and The Good Brothers in concert mostly in Toronto at the CNE, would come the 1974 rock documentary *Janis*.

Budge spent most of his time acquiring rights to further footage from around the world and trying to pry the Festival Express footage loose from Toronto lawyer and film distributor, Willem Poolman. Sandra Gathercole, who worked at Film Canada at the time, remembers Crawley chasing Poolman and herself around the streets of Toronto in a Keystone Cops scene. Poolman had the footage Budge needed and he was determined to hang onto it, so a chase ensued with Poolman loosing Crawley by pulling his car into a parking lot and lying on the seat. In the end, Budge found the film stored in the Jack Frost Foodlocker in the west end of Toronto. The rest is history, as they say.

In the interval between the Festival Express and the release of *Janis* in 1974, Budge served as producer on a number of independent features. He acted as executive producer on Peter Carter's first feature *The Rowdyman*, starring and written by Gordon Pinsent, in 1972. The same year, he took another chance on Rene Bonniere and Richard Leiterman and lost when they shot the Thog Theatre Troop's experimental version of *Hamlet*. The play which was based on the original folios, had no sets

film about the expedition to place a skier on the famous mountain. Budge had the experience to see that the focus of the original film was all wrong, because it examined the expedition rather than the skier. This situation is not surprising considering that the cameraman did not like the skier Miura and refused to shoot any close-ups. It is not widely known that Crawleys had to shoot this material and match it with the original photography as they were piecing together *The Man Who Skied Down Everest*, which became the 1975 Academy Award winner for Best Documentary Feature.

Even during the production of this outstanding film there were problems, as the film editor Bruce Nyznik recounted. Lawrence E. Schiller, a Mars Bar munching Hollywood con man managed to convince Budge that he was a film editor and it took legal action to get the bulk of the film away from him. The finished film, however, bears the credit "Editorial Concept and Direction by Lawrence E. Schiller," which is testimony to his effectiveness as a wheeler-dealer.

Next, Budge and Bruce were in New York with the work print of the film, when a cab driver drove away with the print in his trunk and was never heard from again. Crawley Films had to make a claim to the Hartford Insurance company to pay for the cost of rebuilding the film from scratch.

From 1968 on, Budge has been concerned with a personal project to make a film version of Fred Bodsworth's novel, *The Strange One*. Walt Disney Produc-