

COMING AND GOING

d. David Cherniack, sc. asst. Kay Nagao, ph. Vic Sarin, ed. Arla Saare, sd. Gerry King, sd. ed. Paul Coombe, m. Patrick Godfrey, exec. p. Nancy Archibald, p. David Cherniack, p.c. Canadian Broadcasting Company (1977), col. 16mm, running time 58 minutes, dist. Canadian Broadcasting Company.

One doesn't expect to find much in the way of moving, enlightening film on television. The medium often lives down to one's expectations. David Cherniack's *Coming and Going*, which aired February 7 on CBC's *The Nature of Things*, is an exception.

Coming and Going is a sensitive treatment of a serious problem, one that we all will face; dying. Because we hide from the process of dying and limit our contact with death, when we are forced to confront it, we approach death with a mixture of fear and disgust almost as though it were contagious. This attitude causes unnecessary grief and anguish to those who are dying, as well as to those around them. Cherniack attempts to shed some light on the process, to show that dying is a natural phenomenon, and that understanding can help people cope with this difficult time of life.

This *cinéma vérité* was shot in a terminal care ward in St. Boniface Hospital, Winnipeg. It is one of a handful of such wards in Canada, where every effort is made to ease the physical and mental pain of dying. The crew — Cherniack, cameraman Vic Sarin and sound man Gerry King — spent a month on the ward, as participants in this process. Only the last two weeks were spent shooting any footage. Their involvement in the lives of the people on the ward is obvious in the final film treatment of the subject. They were more than observers. They were not grabbing a few shots. They were recording some part of the world in which they, and we, live.

There is a sense of our common humanity which comes from this film. A sense that what is happening on the screen is part of all our lives, and that



photo: David Cherniack

A self-mobile patient in a terminal care ward at St. Boniface Hospital, Winnipeg

we will have to help each other get through it. The only disturbing note is that the helpers are almost all women, but in our society, this comes as no surprise.

Coming and Going is a film about people. The images are images of people, occasionally alone, but most often in company. Images of hands, mouths, faces and eyes, revealing emotions. It is the faces of the dying that tell their stories. They change, they wither, they dry up. Even in a few days, Jack Prendergast's face becomes dry and shrunken. When he finally dies, his face is nothing more than a layer of translucent parchment over bone.

Some may be offended by this. We see Jack Prendergast die. He did not get up when the take was finished. He was not nameless. He was not alone. We watch Jack Prendergast die. When his wife leaned over, pressed her face to his and said "I love you so," I cried.

To get inside this situation is quite an accomplishment for both Director Cherniack and Cameraman Sarin. In order to minimize the intrusion of the camera crew, the film was shot almost entirely in available light and radio microphones were used to record sound. Arla Saare's sensitive editing preserves this mood.

But the quality of the film cannot be attributed to mere technical innovations. *Coming and Going* is an intimate film. We are close to the people, their hands and their faces. It is a film of people helping and crying for each other at a very difficult time of life. The images of hands holding hands, hands clasping shoulders, and the faces — pensive, crying, laughing — will live with me for a long time.

Charles Lazer

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EXPLODING THE MYTH

d.. Rick Maden, sc. Stan Shibinsky, Stephen Dewar, Dennis Winchar, ph. Fritz Spiess, Les George, Paul Van Derlinden, Harold Ortonburger, ed. Richard Unruh, sd. Richard Unruh, tech. advisor Henry Botchford, m. Corlynn and Miles Ramsay composed theme song, "Give Me a Chance," exec. p. Stan Shibinsky, p. Harve Sherman, exec. prog. dir. Henry Botchford, p.c. Bob Schulz Productions Inc., col. 35mm, (year) 1978, running time 28 minutes, 50 seconds.

There is a myth that anyone who is different, whose looks and behaviour deviate from ours, who belongs to any group that cannot clearly be labeled as *us*, immediately becomes *them*, and loses title to status as a human being.

That myth is exploded with the force of a missile, in *Exploding the Myth*, a fine little film produced by Harve Sherman and directed by Rick Maden, both of Bob Schulz Productions. *Them* in this case are the mentally retarded, and in making that statement, I myself have phrased another myth: that retardation is mental. It is not. Retardation is a learning handicap. The damage is done to the brain, a physical entity, not to the mind. Retardation is not mental illness.

Eight such myths in all are exploded as the film exposes an issue society, for the most part, would prefer to avoid. The myths are that retarded people are 1) dangerous 2) should always be segregated 3) that institutions are the best place for them 4) that they should not mix with normal children 5) that they will always be dependent 6) that group homes bring property values down 7) that they are strictly limited in their scope and 8) that only normal people should have full rights. The beauty of the film's crafting lies in its confrontation of each myth, and its direct annihilation of that myth. This is the myth — not true — this is the fact.

Perhaps the hardest thing for "normal" people to accept about retardation is its direct assault on the idea of man as intellectual animal. Our brain is our



Todd Smith, age 7, appears in *Exploding The Myth*

proudest possession and the one thing which holds us above all other animals. Retarded people are an embarrassing reminder that this symbol of superiority is in fact at the mercy of nature's whims. Any number of tiny flaws before delivery of a child and — wham — intelligence is wiped out.

The film's uniqueness is that it brings retarded people actively into the picture. They are interviewed and offer opinions on themselves and their social conditions with astounding clarity and insight. They are not viewed as distant entities, and social workers and caretakers don't stand around shrugging their shoulders and sighing, "What can we do with them?" They participate and offer suggestions, and they make perfectly good sense. They are treated as individuals with a handicap no different than handicaps of any sort. They take longer to learn, and they don't learn as much — that's all that's wrong with them.

They have a lower IQ of course, but within that IQ is the same range of abilities, talents, hopes, dreams as anyone with a higher IQ, and when they are encouraged for their abilities instead of put down for their weaknesses, their achievements are remarkable. For in-

stance, the Famous People Players, a Las Vegas professional puppet show, is manned by retarded people. Also there is the case of the Pocock Family of Toronto and their daughter Teresa. The Pococks were told that Teresa was so severely retarded she would never be able to speak. They decided to keep her, work with her, and now she is fluent in both English and French and can read and write legibly and articulately.

Bob Schulz Productions is mostly a commercial advertising production house, and some might say that there is still much evidence of this in the film. The final scene of teary-eyed, slow-motion running and jumping through parks, while a theme is belted out in the background, is a trite too cloying and sentimental. Also, in many ways, the film has a certain commercial flavour in that its message is hammered home and its points doubly underlined. But then explosions were never meant to be subtle. And sometimes that is what is needed to get through the caked-on layers of human prejudice.

The film works. It awakens. Perhaps the selling of awareness should be no different than the selling of any product.

Krystyna Hunt



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