



Advance Australia

The movies, mate : Part Two

In the Queensland gemfields

by Barbara Samuels

Queensland - June 28, 1984 :
"It's the death of the local picture show."

Airborne again. Melbourne to Brisbane is a traditional DC-9 plane ride, but Brisbane to Emerald most assuredly is not. A Fokker F27 with seating for 36 passengers flies into the brilliance of a Queensland sunrise and then climbs north, right up through the tropic of Capricorn. Pretty fair drama in itself, but I'm still waiting for a glimpse of Australia's biggest movie star - we're 10 minutes away from landing, and that famous arid wasteland hasn't yet put in an appearance. A glance at the inflight map straightens things out. Although the earth below has turned a shade of deep rust, this part of Central Queensland doesn't quite belong to the "Great Red Heart" of the Australian interior: the true outback lies another hundred miles to the west.

But I'm not complaining. There are suggestions of desert everywhere in this landscape, crossed with an amazing blend of mountains, bush and very fertile farmland. The vista is mesmerizing, even though it seems ludicrous that a Canadian who's travelled west of Ontario should find herself awestruck by this image of sheer space. And there is a passing resemblance to the western provinces here, although the terrain is rawer, harder-edged than anything I've ever seen at home. Last frontiers come to mind, and not for the last time, either.

Emerald's runway is a strip of charcoal-coloured asphalt, and a concrete bungalow serves as the terminal. As we taxi in, a member of the ground crew approaches the plane clad in what I've come to understand as the national male uniform: a polo shirt, shorts, knee socks and loafers. He wheels an aluminum staircase up to the door as though it was a supermarket shopping cart. As I wait to disembark, I realize I've no idea

Cinema Canada contributor Barbara Samuels recently toured Australia at the invitation of the Australian Film Commission.

The second of an exclusive three-part Cinema Canada special report on the Australian film industry today.

where I am or what's supposed to happen next, and this is suddenly very appealing; my one and only shot at Living Dangerously in the Central Highlands. It's got possibilities, but they all dissolve when I'm greeted at the foot of the staircase by Glen Elmes and Paul Turner, the manager of Radio Station 4H1 and the son of the Shire Council chairman respectively.

The arrival of a Canadian "journo" (as I'm soon to be billed in the Central Queensland News) is not an everyday occurrence here, particularly when she's come to track down a peripatetic movie producer. Hence the warm welcome at the airport. There's a quick mapping out of the itinerary: Emerald is apparently not the end of the road. Paul Turner loads my luggage into his car and we head off down the highway - several hundred miles of it - towards Moranbah.

"John Dingwall's showing *Buddies* up here tonight," Paul says. "He wanted you to be there."

The extended trip offers a terrific opportunity to take in the scenery from ground level. And it still recalls the Canadian west, except for those omnipresent gum trees. That intense black asphalt characterizes the highways, too, but here it's littered with the flattened bodies of dead kangaroos. "Same story every morning," Paul tells me, and points toward the nose of his car. As is the case with every other vehicle we've passed so far, the grille is fronted by a grid of metal tubing. "Bull bars," he explains. "Protects the car if you hit a roo."

"Why not avoid the roo altogether?"
"You can't. They come out at night to eat the new grass by the roadside. Hop right in front of the cars. The impact can wreck the fenders or blow the radiator, and sometimes the thing goes right through the windshield and into the back seat."

"What do you do then?"

"You get out of the car. Fast."

I am to spend a fair part of the many drives I'll take through the Highlands scanning the bush for live kangaroos, but they never materialize. The corpses on the highway are my only glimpse of Australia's national mascot.

Halfway to Moranbah - quite literally in the middle of nowhere - Paul slows down as an American sedan heading in our direction does the same. Both cars execute wide arcs, and pull over on opposite sides of the road.

We climb out of our respective vehicles, and presentations are made on the shoulder of the highway - the new arrival is Paul's father Jim, who's here to take over escort duties for the rest of this cross-country odyssey. It's another transfer of luggage, and then both cars head back where they came from - Paul's off to Emerald, and Jim Turner and I make for Moranbah.

This warm-hearted extrovert provides me with a few surprises. Aside from his status on the Belyando Shire Council, he is also a local real-estate magnate, and in a state widely regarded as Australia's most conservative (Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen's right-wing National Party has ruled Queensland for 27 years now), Turner actually stood for a local Labour seat during the fiery, short-lived era of Gough Whitlam. He is sadly nostalgic about the experience.

"Everyone thought it didn't make any sense," he recalls. "Here I was... a 110% capitalist if anyone ever saw one... standing for *Labour*. People couldn't understand that my position has always been the same. I'll work for whatever helps the community most. And if that meant Labour back in the '70s, then that was where I went." He shakes his head at the memory. "It was a difficult time; Gough

knew he was in trouble. He came up to this region to support my campaign, and they were really hard on him. We lost the election, but I knew I was on the right side. And when it's all said and done, that's what really counts."

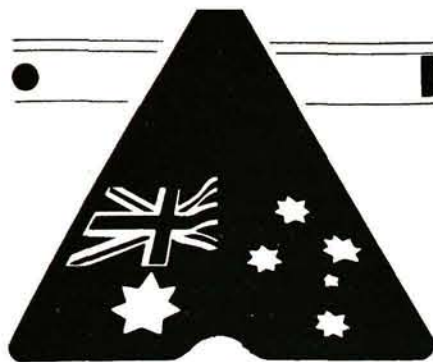
Jim is not quite what I expected. And neither are these supposedly pastoral surroundings. This part of Central Queensland is coal country - Alberta's biggest international competitor, in fact - and Moranbah itself is a 10-year-old mining town. The surrounding terrain has been divided up among the giant Australian-owned BHP and various multi-national conglomerates, and the coal companies have torn into the task with a vengeance. The mining here is of the open-cut or "strip" variety, and the monster-sized machinery used to break open the earth has left the exposed rock seared with mile-long teeth marks. This lunar landscape stands shoulder to shoulder with pastureland and sun-coloured wheatfields, and the juxtaposition is positively eerie.

Once in Moranbah (an orderly little town of new houses, new stores, new roads), the search for Dingwall is on. It is not undertaken by phone, or prearranged meetings, or particulars of any sort at all; Jim pulls into a parking lot when he thinks he spots Dingwall's van.

Wrong one. I soon find out that word of mouth is faster than the speed of light up here; since the travel agency staff haven't spotted our man and the local haberdashery hasn't seen him since yesterday, it's safe to assume he hasn't arrived. Jim views it as an opportune moment for a tour of the town, and offers a backgrounder on Dingwall as we drive.

"He's been travelling around this area with his sister Denise," he explains. They live in their van, move around with all their equipment. He's showing the movie all over this area because a lot of the ordinary folk up here invested in it. John's gone back to an old Australian tradition and become a 'picture show man.' Been a long time since that kind were around."

With that mysteriously impeccable timing you only find in rural environments, we return to the haberdashery just moments after the arrival of John



Advance Australia

and Denise. There's a requisite round of hello, how-are-you's, and then Jim suggests we all adjourn to lunch. To my surprise, many of Australia's smallest towns boast outstanding Chinese restaurants; Moranbah is no exception, and as we settle in over spring rolls and curried shrimp, the John Dingwall saga begins to unfold.

He's a rotund, engaging man, one of Australia's more established writers and best-known abroad for the *Sunday Too Far Away* screenplay. But what is he doing in the middle of Queensland with a projector, a print and his sister?

"I've spent \$25,000 of my own money in advertising on this picture," he says, "and this is how I'm getting it back. I've opted to act as my own distributor and exhibitor because the established distributors and exhibitors are taking too much of the cake from Australian films. So the prospects for Australian investors to get some kind of return on their money are lousy. When I looked at the figures and reflected on the personal commitment I'd made to my investors, I decided to do my own distribution. I made a vow to myself: until they're well on their way to getting their money back, I won't make another film. And if I can't make a profit with *Buddies*, then I shouldn't make another film."

Dingwall is aware that some of his compatriots have politely suggested he's in need of a long holiday, but the scorn doesn't faze him. *Buddies* is his first shot at producing, and represents what he terms "a highly personal reaction to American influence in the film industry." After a year's service as chairman of the Writer's Guild of Australia, Dingwall resigned and set out to make "a distinctly Australian movie. I felt that what we have here is important to the rest of the world, and I wanted to bring that out. It's the simplicity; we're still in touch with the earth. So I hired a car, set out from my hometown of Rockhampton on the Queensland coast and drove straight through the Central Highlands right on to the sapphire fields."

I stop him cold.

"Sapphire fields," he repeats. "Some of the best gems in the world come out of this area. You'll see them tomorrow. Anyway, the first thing I saw was a group of Thai buyers seated at a table in the post office. They had a set of scales, a pile of sapphires, and a case full of cash in the back room. That was my first image, and it stuck with me. It's a cash economy up here: people stake out a 'claim,' pay the government A\$200, and whatever they find in that earth is theirs. Buyers from Bangkok buy the stones and then ship them back to Thailand for refining. It's a unique environment, because people come from all over the world, all walks of life, and just disappear into the fields. Bank robbers, murderers, accountants, housewives... people actually come up here for their three-week annual holiday and never leave. They sell their property in Brisbane or Sydney and set up camp in the gemfields."

Dingwall spent several weeks in the region, hanging around the local pub. "I just watched people. I couldn't figure out why they were all so relaxed and happy, why they'd given up well-paying jobs in the city to come live in these makeshift shacks. And finally they told me; they said 'Because we're free here.'"

He based the two principal characters in *Buddies* on a couple of miners he encountered in the pub. "I got into their car, went out to their claim with them and we talked all night. They both got fairly drunk, and I noticed that under the mateship, there was a certain animosity. And that's when they'd call each other 'buddy.' After three weeks in that environment, I knew what I wanted to write about."

The process of raising coin for *Buddies* is very much in tune with the rest of the picture's history: Dingwall combined major chunks of investment with individual commitments from gem and coal miners in the Central Queensland area. "At one point," he says, "I was out on the sapphire fields with an enthusiastic miner, and we were flagging down other miners who signed \$2,000 commitments on the back of their trucks." And he traces his determination to get *Buddies* made back to the same spirit that rules the region. "Queenslanders are determined to 'have a go' at life, regardless of the odds. That's the feeling in the

called *All The Rivers Run* is concluding tonight, and the population has for the most part stayed home to watch TV.

At eight-thirty-five, they decide to run the movie. John and Jim welcome the crowd with short introductory speeches, and I can't help staring at the screen behind them: Dingwall's sewn together two bedsheets to create a remarkably uniform 2.35:1 surface for the wide-screen 16mm print.

Denise has laid out a table of lobby cards, stills and posters for sale at 'intermission' - "which comes," Dingwall whispers to me as he sets the projector going, "when I have to change the reels over."

He settles down to watch the film for what must be the thousand and third time, and actually seems to enjoy it.

What the Moranbah crowd lacks in size it makes up for in enthusiasm. *Buddies* receives a warm reception from this town of coal mining families, and people wander into the night with smiles on their faces. And Denise has done a brisk business in the souvenir department: a gaggle on 14-year-old girls leave the hall clutching some beefcake stills of star Colin Friels.

There's another screening scheduled here for tomorrow night, so the projector and screen are left in place. "We

now," Dingwall reminds me. "You should be looking for the Southern Cross."

I take a stab at it, but the sky is awash in misplaced stars. Dingwall tries to direct the search.

"See the black hole right there?" He's pointing straight into the cosmos. "Now tilt your head sideways and look about four feet to the left."

"Four feet to the left," Denise repeats in wonder. "We're dealing with billions of light years here, and he's talking about four feet to the left."

I actually find the bloody thing: four points of light glimmering down on the Southern Hemisphere.

Dingwall's grinning at me. "Our water goes down the drain differently, too," he says. "Welcome to Australia, mate."

June 29 - July 7:

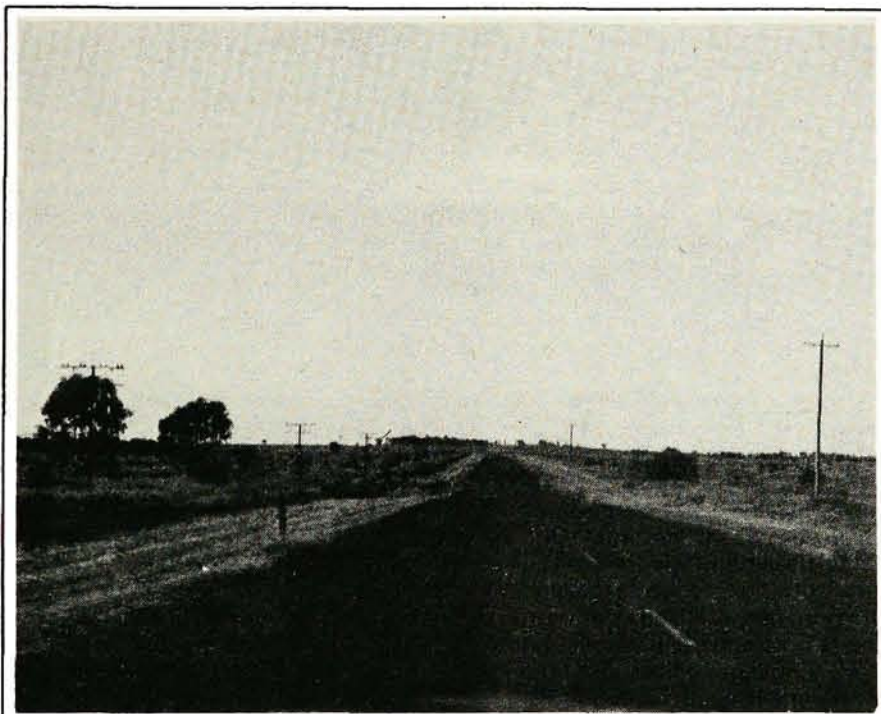
The Gemfields and beyond

I take leave of John and Moranbah next morning, and - halfway to Emerald - of Jim, who deposits me back in son Paul's car for the rest of the journey. In town, the younger Turner hands me over to Glen Elmes, and then it's more highway: this time, we make for the gemfields.

While Emerald is an apparent misnomer (there are no such precious stones in this area), the state of affairs in Anakie is perfectly described by the town's name - especially when pronounced with an Australian accent. The place is famous both as the gateway to the sapphire fields and the site of a once-ultra-rowdy pub; when we stop for lunch, I'm told stories of horses at the counter and gun-toting prospectors, but at this moment, the establishment's as calm as an English tea-room. It is, however, as good a setting as any for Glen to fill me in on the history. From what he says, the whole area's a kind of nutsy 'last stand' for desperadoes, fortune-seekers and rugged individualists. It's no exaggeration to suggest that America's wild west has been relocated to Central Queensland.

As we drive along dirt roads to Rubyvale - yes, they do find some of those among the sapphires - Dingwall's crazy backdrop comes to life. The fields are covered with makeshift living quarters, and from the looks of them, the architects should be shot. One house consists of corrugated iron sidings propped against a bus, and a few feet on, half a shack balances on the edge of a pit. But the dwellings as such don't count. The main event are the digs, and they're just about everywhere: giant anthills dot the fields like a pox. Some of the claims are active, and flanked by bulldozers - others have been bled of their riches and abandoned. Although there's no real activity here at the moment, a sense of frenzy still hangs in the air - this is 'make it or break it' territory, and God only knows how many generations of dreams are buried in this dirt.

At Rubyvale, Glen introduces Pat Gregory, the councilwoman for the area who's currently battling to retain the traditional use of the gemfields and prevent further incursions by home-steaders. Gregory is a feisty, startlingly beautiful woman of 60 who once owned the fabled Anakie pub and hotel; she now handles the more sedate Caravan Park nearby. An Englishwoman by birth, she emigrated to Australia with her husband in the 1940s, and when he found work flying survey planes, she accompanied him - first as a mechanic, and



● Mad Max territory: the hard-edged, sheer space of Central Queensland

gemfields, and that's also my sentiment about the film. I'm going to show this movie my way, and get the money back for my investors. I'm convinced it's the only way to do it."

It's ten past eight in the evening, and Moranbah's community centre is holding about a quarter of its capacity crowd. Dingwall stands at the door beside the ticket taker and peers out into the night. "Let's give them another 10 minutes," he suggests to Jim Turner. The Shire chairman is agreeable. He's spent a fair amount of time spreading the word on the *Buddies* screening throughout his constituency, and was hoping for a better turnout. The local travel agent remarks that Dingwall's timing could be better; a major Australian miniseries

should do better then," Dingwall muses as we walk to my motel.

"You never know," Denise adds pragmatically. "Some nights there's hardly a turnout, and other nights..."

"Other nights we're filled to overflowing. We opened in Rockhampton and took a lot of money in three sessions. I mean, cinemas are closing all over the Australian interior. In one town, we actually had to reopen the movie theatre in order to show *Buddies*. It's the death of the local picture show, and that's a hell of a tradition we're losing. We've got to turn that around."

My glance heavenward is meant to be philosophical, but I can't take my eyes off the sky. Never much of an astronomy buff, it's still obvious to me that something's definitely wrong here.

"Where's the Big Dipper?"

"You're on the other side of the world



Advance Australia

then as a geophysicist. She is another soul who was converted to the gem fields lifestyle on sight: "We saw the Anakie Hotel was up for sale, and decided it was where we wanted to be. I fell absolutely in love with the region."

That passion has endured. This is Pat's territory, and she takes over as tour guide with a flourish, even managing to convince a Thai sapphire buyer to pose for a picture once she assures the woman that I am not an Australian journalist. In a Rubyvale gemshop, the jeweller displays a rainbow of gems and knocks me for a loop when he identifies them all as sapphires: instead of the ice-blue colour traditionally associated with the stone, this collection runs from the dull black of an unpolished gem to a piece with the clarity of a diamond. And there's a range of green, yellow, orange and pink hues in between. I recognize with some resignation that the fever has hit me.

It is quite literally a dazzling afternoon, and it ends in Gregory's private claim. She has staked out territory in the fields so that tourists can "have a go," and I don't even wait for an invitation. In a flash, I'm down in the orange dust on my knees, scratching at the "wash" with my fingernails. The fields are like Las Vegas in the raw, and like Vegas, the kick is in the *doing*. No sapphires this day in Queensland, but a great deal of truly unbeatable fun.

Time for another small-scale odyssey. It begins with a bus ride across the Highlands to the sea - Emerald to Rockhampton. Then up the coast to Mackay and a flight out to Lindeman Island, an exquisite piece of dirt lodged smack in the midst of the famed WhitSunday Passage. There is a steely logic at work here: Queensland is also the site of the Great Barrier Reef, and I don't intend to leave this country without paying my respect to the fish.

So for a few blissful days, the Australian film industry learns to do without me. The only movies in the picture here are those extraordinary Jacques Cousteau specials running twenty-four hours a day underwater, and the screenings are private to boot. The whole region is a fantasy of azure seas, lush rainforests and the sensation of waking each day to the sound of wild cockatoos arguing with kookaburras. The end of the financial year comes and goes as I grab some snorkelling gear and dive in amidst the coral.

It's a dirty job, but someone's got to do it.

Sydney - July 8-9:

"With Australian films, we've got to start from scratch."

Back to the city again, and just in time for the Australian Film Commission's (AFC) annual dinner. Barry Cohen (the Minister for Home Affairs and the Environment, under whose portfolio the film industry falls) uses the occasion to deliver the news: the investors have gone for the 133% tax incentive, and come through in force.

"Between budget night (August '83) and June 30," he states, "more than \$45 million was invested in feature films under the new arrangements. A further \$16 million was underwritten. The relative newcomer to the filmmaking scene - the television miniseries - attracted

\$38 million in investment and a further \$3.5 million in underwriting. Together with the \$13 million invested in documentaries and \$12 million for one-off television dramas, the total raised exceeded \$100 million, with an excess of \$20 million underwritten for investment in the current financial year."

The tally is impressive: 27 features, ten miniseries, 73 documentaries and 18 one-off television dramas either are or will be in production in response to the tax incentives. According to the trades, the '84-'85 year is shaping up as the hottest yet for the Australian film and TV industry, and it is duly noted that most of the productions set to go were backed by a presale, a guarantee or the involvement of an established marketing or promotional organization. Government money - state or federal - was also part of the commitment package.

But the nature of the product is the final giveaway, and the list of "definite starters" is a very mixed bag. I'm looking for the presence - or the absence - of particular names, and an example of both is immediately apparent. David Elfick's Palm Beach musings are behind him; *Emoh Ruu* is a go. But David Williamson has his worst fears confirmed, because *The Perfectionist* is not.

What Cohen terms "a more rigid adherence to commercial criteria" is reflected in the new hunger for distribution guarantees. It's inevitable that Australian distributors will again be taken to task for discrimination against less "marketable" domestic product, and if Johnathan Chissick is any exam-

ple, they seem braced for it. As the General Manager of Hoyts Theatres, he's well-acquainted with those feelings, but doesn't hold much store by them.

"We run a business," he states flatly. "Our goal is to make as much money as we can. If we distribute Australian pictures, it's because we feel they're commercially viable. Producers have got to realize that it's easier for me to buy a picture from Orion or Coppola than to distribute an Australian film. American films come equipped with a reputation - advance notices, word of mouth, the whole business. With Australian films, we've got to start from scratch. It's much more work, and we've got to feel that it's worth it."

Hoyts' distribution arm has long been linked to its chain of theatres. What's relatively new is the hook-up on the other side; the Hoyts-Edgley association has become a major presence on the production scene. Chissick details the background and the reasons.

"Edgley was involved in *Man From Snowy River* (which we bid for and got), and we decided it would be a good idea to form a production entity. *One Night Stand* was our first feature, and it was disappointing, so we pulled it out. *Coolangatta Gold* is now in post-production, and we think it's going to be huge in Australia - we're very optimistic about foreign sales, too. *Burke and Wills* is next - Grahame Clifford (who did *Francis*) is going to direct. It's a budget of \$9 million. We're now looking for product for next year, and we can't find any... the scripts are generally awful. We want to make commercial pictures

that will work both at home and abroad, and if we can't find them, we'll sit back and wait."

Hoyts' sensitivity to the home video market is obviously marked. Chissick explains that the company has entered into a joint-venture with RCA and Columbia for video releases, but wants a better break for theatrical distributors/exhibitors in the video market.

"Pictures are always released theatrically first. We spend a great deal of money on that release, and create an awareness of the picture for video. We're essentially doing the video operators' work for them. If the returns aren't going to be there, then the video people won't reap any of the benefits." Chissick regards government legislation for a video window as "inevitable. We've had discussions with the American companies, and they're reluctant to agree. So there's no other way to go."

As part of a vertically-integrated organization, Chissick has a strong sense of the overall domestic situation. Add to this his position as an AFC Commissioner, and he emerges with a unique perspective on the overall Australian film scene. The situation worries him.

"Look," he says, "without the tax incentives, we wouldn't be able to make pictures. But there are still far too many films being made, and I've great fears about where we'll be in a year's time."

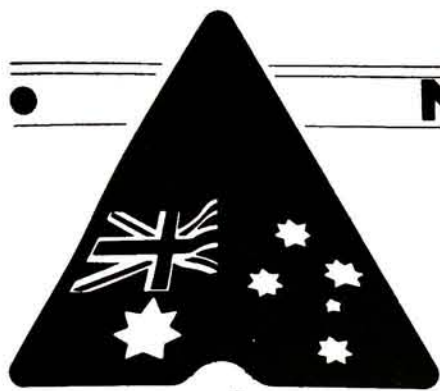
Tax incentives, production deals, mega-budget movies... forget it. Paul Cox wants to talk about passion.

He does so in very emotional terms. The Dutch-born director of *Lonely Hearts* has long been Australia's most vocal proponent of small-scale, 'personal' films, and as his international reputation grows, so does his insistence that big money and good moviemaking are diametrically opposed to one another. *Man of Flowers* - the followup feature to *Lonely Hearts* - cost \$250,000 to make, but Cox shakes off the idea that he's a 'low-budget' filmmaker; "I'm a responsible-budget filmmaker," he states. "Money doesn't make good movies. They consist of commitment, passion and the guts to explore human emotion. Money can't buy you any of those things, and all I've seen it do is corrupt people."

Since the critical acclaim for *Lonely Hearts*, Cox has received offers from around the world. He's refused them all. "It's amazing," he says. "They all ask me how much money I want, who I want in the picture. All that's irrelevant to me. I have a small group that I work with all the time, a group of people wholly committed to the projects. It accounts for how I got *Man of Flowers* done after waiting around for a year to make another film that never saw the light of day. Everyone - actors, crew, the whole bunch - agreed to work on *Man of Flowers* for nothing. They were ultimately paid, but it was that initial commitment that got the film done. And



● "Best gems in the world" - Thai sapphire buyer Mrs. Yen at work



Advance Australia

in three weeks at that."

This portrait of a quirky, middle-aged eccentric has already made waves at several festivals and is set for a North American release. Cox regards the movie as another look at the theme that concerns him most. "Non-heroes," he says. "People that really matter, rather than instant gods. The central character in *Man of Flowers* had to be an absolute lunatic, but a clever one. Someone who could outsmart the system. People like that are the ones I care about."

But his newest film moves him away from that realm for the first time. *My First Wife* details the disintegration of a marriage, and Cox says it's the best film he's ever done. "It's really a plea for people to hang in there. We always figure that if our marriage isn't working and we have an affair, it'll solve all our problems. That generally isn't true. I think it's all summed up in the last line: 'We must take more care about the way we say goodbye.' If you're obliged to part, at least leave with some respect for one another. After years together, human beings do owe each other that."

What *My First Wife* does share with his earlier work, he says, is its motivation: he wants to assume his full share of responsibility as a filmmaker in contemporary society. "There's a heavy social obligation to fulfill," he insists. "We live in dangerous times, and the more opportunities we create to make people think, weep and love, the better our chances of survival."

July 10: "What are we training all these talented people for?"

It's no short skip out to North Ryde, a 45-minute haul by cab from the city. But the trip is a must. This far-flung Sydney suburb is home to one of the Australian film boom's biggest and most controversial superstars, and in light of my visit to Melbourne, there's also the need to pick up the other side of a story.

Loved or hated, the Australian Film and Television School remains an integral part of the national film scene. The institution came into existence on the same tide of national feeling that created the AFC, starting experimentally in 1973 with a one-year course. The School's Act was officially proclaimed in 1975, but as Director Storry Walton explains, the AFTS is not part of Australia's academic community.

"Both the School and the AFC are part of Australian cultural policy," he says, "and we've always lived in the ministerial portfolios responsible for the arts. Our model came from Europe, that group of film schools modelled on the conservatory pattern that came into being after World War II."

Due in great part to a luminous first year (graduates of the 1973 program include Gillian Armstrong, Phil Noyce and Chris Noonan), the AFTS's reputation blossomed internationally. But domestic

criticism was fast to follow on the heels of that first flush of success; since the implementation of a full-time three-year program, and with ever-increasing budgetary demands, the School has found itself the target of some ill-feeling. Storry Walton thinks the reasons are multiple: "One of the problems in creating a full-time program in Australia is that we're a very pragmatic, impatient people who like to see results quickly, particularly from big investments. And this kind of program is a sleeper of sorts; it's trying to prepare people for positions of creative influence that they'll attain seven or eight years after they graduate. And that's been the case with film schools around the world. But it should be noted that most of our graduates have found good work in the industry almost as soon as they leave here - between 80 and 95% of them are always at work."

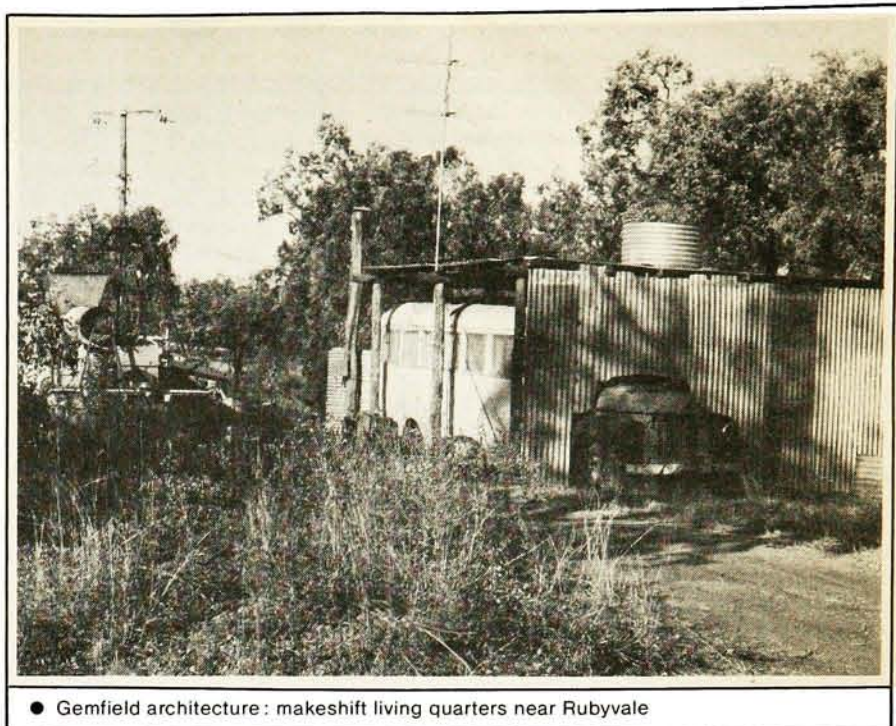
He's aware of the charge that the school is turning out graduates more concerned with technical prowess than with content, and denies this emphatically: "We feel you've got all your life to perfect your craft, and the full-time program aims to give people experience in the conceptual, artistic, creative and experimental aspects. You only have to look at the courses to see that the whole mode here is an expressive one, not a technical one."

This debate over focus has surfaced most often as part of the comparison game: the juxtaposition of Melbourne's Swinburne Institute of Technology with the AFTS. Walton thinks the faceoff is pointless.

"Swinburne and schools like it are complementary to the AFTS. We're not rivals. No country with as small an artistic community as Australia's can afford propaganda that sets students against students or faculty against faculty. A lot of people have chosen to promote Swinburne's cause - and with the level of their funding, the cause itself is certainly justifiable - by beating down the AFTS, arguing that the money we get is somehow linked to Swinburne's purse. We belong to entirely different systems. Swinburne is a department with a faculty within a College of Advanced Education. Our model is not academic; we're a professional training institute, an independent statutory authority, we're national, and our level of funding reflects a number of things. The actual cost of producing films and videos, first of all, and then the fact that we have three major programs: a full-time program, which trains and retrains people already working in the industry, as well as women, aboriginal groups, and other special concerns; and then an academic graduation program working in collaboration with thirty-five tertiary institutions throughout Australia. We have a research and survey department, we make resource material, and we have an international program. That's why we have a different budget to Swinburne, and why we're not comparable."

Conversely, the AFTS' eye on the industry has not been an uncritical one. Walton has watched the events of the last few years with some trepidation, and senses that the mandate of the school and the realities of the business may come into direct conflict.

"The ups and downs of 10BA (the tax-shelter) have reminded us just how erratic the fortunes of the industry can be. And that brings home the enormous



● Gemfield architecture: makeshift living quarters near Rubyvale

responsibility we have as a national institution: what are we training all these talented people for, and for what kind of future? It's the quality of the product that concerns us, because everything in this school is talking about excellence, about national identity. In the 1960s, when we first demonstrated for an industry, we had everything to gain. In 1984, it's different; we've everything to lose. Thousands of people have come into film and television in the last decade, encouraged by government policies like the establishment of the AFC, and all the state corporations, and the tax incentives. And the school has gone on the basis that there will always be a future in Australia for viable, independent production. I think that the next few years will be the second fight for the Australian industry, and it's already begun. Rather like a patient who doesn't realize he's entered the crisis."

Walton plans to have his students prepared for the battle. "I think both we and the students have to be politically astute. I tell them here that if they want to have an Australian industry, they'll probably have to spend 15 percent of their lives involved politically. They'll have to offer back fighting time for the right to make things that are socially and creatively important. I reckon that's a fight we've just begun."

In her own special way, she's a miniature legend of sorts: Rea Francis has been the public relations "frontman" for the Australian film industry since it got back on its legs in the early 1970s, and she's still out there spreading the word. When the film business started percolating, Francis was about ready to leave a government job in Canberra and throw herself into "a cultural industry, an art form that could benefit from my government and media experience. I went to the chairman of the AFC and told him: 'What you need is me.' He said 'I'll give you six months.' We ended up working together for six years."

Her mandate was clear: put Australian films on the map, both at home and around the world. And with the calibre of product in that era, the job was far from painful. "The films were excellent," she recalls. "*Devil's Playground*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, that kind of thing. And in those days, there was no

such thing as a private publicist, so I worked on behalf of the industry as an employee of the AFC. I did all the major campaigns like Cannes, took major restaurateurs, top wines, great beef, and created a whole national image. Correspondents from every country were reporting on the promotional backup that the government and industry bodies had given the films, and it set a trend. It wasn't just movies we were pushing."

She handled those campaigns from 1977 to 1981, and then set up her own business. "Now I work as a lobbyist, publicist, press agent. I'm also the AFC's media consultant. I suppose in the four years I've been involved in my own business, and the ten years I've been in show business, I've represented every major name in the industry... producer, director, actor, whatever. But I don't work for someone in whose product I don't believe. Perhaps I've been very lucky in being able to stick to that policy, but I feel that the moment I let it slide, I'll lose my standing in the community."

Francis' association with the industry has given her a particular perspective on recent events. She holds out great hope for the emerging second wave of talent, but expresses some fear about the prominence of large-scale organizations in the current production scene.

"The influx of money at the end of the '83-'84 year will give a lot of people work, but you have to keep in mind that a lot of it was gathered under corporate banners. And my view, as a small business person associated with independents, is that I don't think I could survive marketing independent pictures. There aren't enough of them being made to support that kind of thing." She counters this with an expression of faith in the AFC management: "The new AFC head has a lot of spark, and I give him my total support when it comes to remedying current problems. You can just hope that the combination of continued tax concessions and trustworthy people to oversee the whole thing will make the industry work. I think the remedy's in sight."

Next month: Inside Kennedy Miller

Erratum: Part I of *The Movies*, mate identified David Elfick as the producer of *Heatwave*. Elfick in fact produced Phil Noyce's first major feature *Newsfront*. We regret the mixup.