

Clarke Mackey's
Taking Care

Coroner's Court in downtown Toronto usually exudes a sombre air which, this winter weekend, has been replaced with the cheerful buzz of the small, closely-knit and very tired film crew of Clarke Mackey's second feature drama in 15 years.

Taking Care is a thriller and social drama about three suspicious deaths in a Toronto hospital's maternity ward. Criminal charges are laid against a nurse, then suddenly dropped and replaced with a coroner's inquest.

Executive producer and director Clarke Mackey, and producer Pasia Schonberg say the idea for **Taking Care** came from a 1985 newspaper article by June Callwood. Callwood looked at how the Grange Commission hearings into baby deaths at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children reflected the attitudes of the justice system and the medical establishment (predominantly male) towards the nursing profession (predominantly female).

"I want to ask questions about sexism and power and about the way medicine is practised and how women fit into that. One reason I chose a labour/delivery ward was to look at the medicalization of childbirth," he explains. (Another may have been Mackey's own impending fatherhood. His first child was born in October just weeks before shooting began.)

"We also wanted to tell an exciting story which, without being a Pollyanna, would encourage people to act.

"I've always been interested in the depiction of everyday life and the relationship between the individual and the economic/political order of society, and this [latter] theme emerged only in a nascent form in **The Only Thing You Know**."

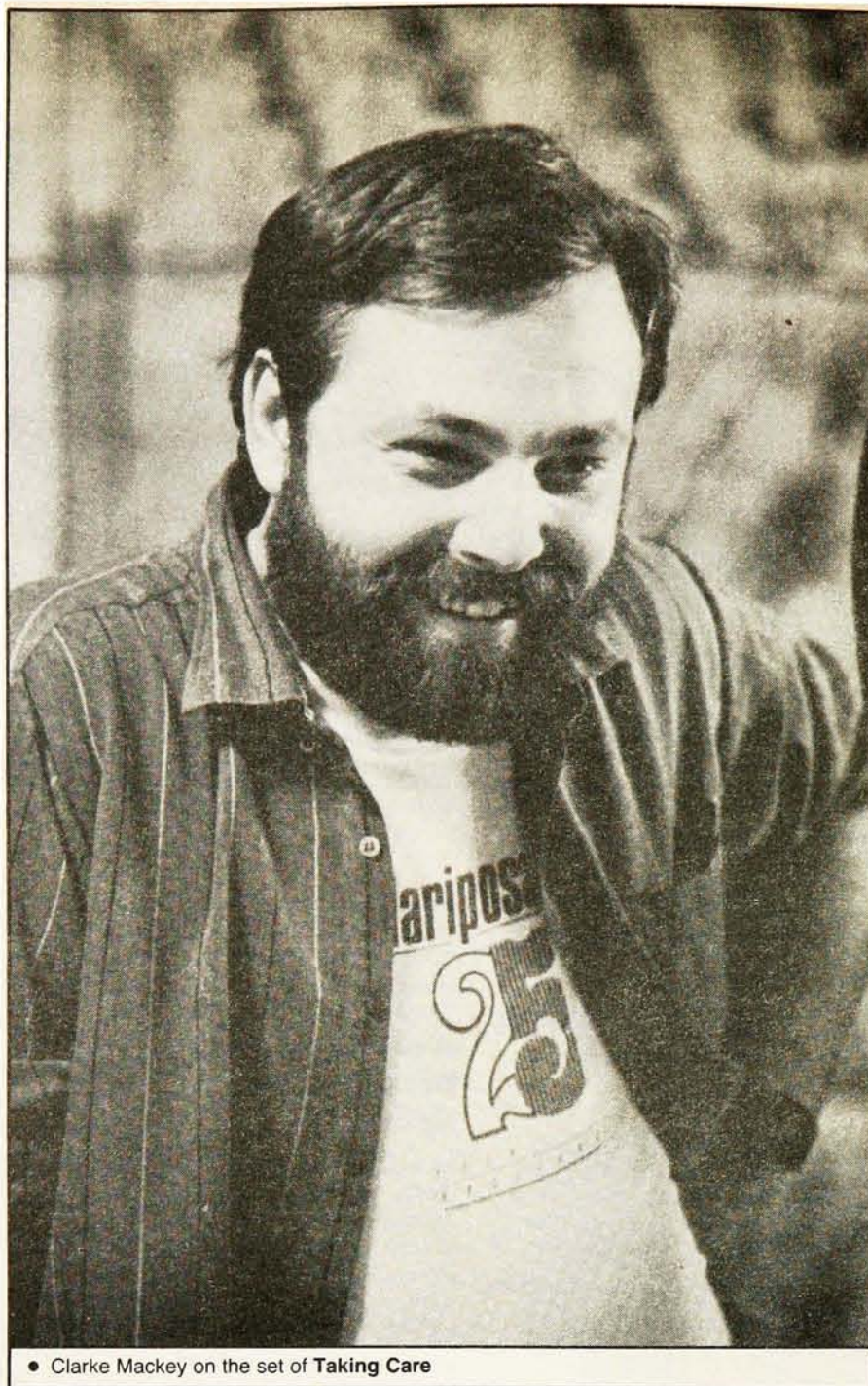
That film, marking Mackey's remarkable professional debut at age 20, is the story of adolescent upheaval, which won two Etrog Awards (now Genies) in 1971.

Taking Care is an independent production partially financed by TVOntario, a first investment of that kind for the network. It also represents Mackey's return to feature filmmaking: Mackey had continued his career in documentaries after critical acclaim yet disappointing commercial distribution for **The Only Thing You Know**.

Stan Fox, director of adult programming at TVO, says this venture is basically low-risk, but the main reason for committing TVO to **Taking Care** is Mackey's talent with people and with film. "We are so confident in Clarke, his writer, his subject matter and the cast. The story is an extremely fresh idea and we felt it was truly an educational film which deserves to be presented as widely as possible," Fox says. "Our interest is in having the first television broadcast."

Fox, visiting the set this Saturday, admits proudly that "this is an experiment for us."

Starring Kate Lynch, with Janet Amos,



• Clarke Mackey on the set of **Taking Care**

Allan Royal and Saul Rubinek, **Taking Care** is the story of Angie (Lynch), a young nurse who launches her own clandestine investigation when Marie (Amos), her co-worker at Downtown General Hospital, is suspected of the maternity ward deaths.

When Dr. Barton (Royal), the attending physician to the patient most recently deceased, uses his influence to have criminal charges against Marie dropped, an inquest is ordered.

Battling her superiors; her father (Bernard Behrens), one of the hospital's founding members; her husband (Rubinek); and her feelings as an expectant mother, Angie uncovers the tragic truth behind the deaths and learns her father approved of the hospital cover-up.

Today, the inquest into the death of Karen Jones is in progress. Dr. Barton is on the stand being questioned about the circumstances of his patient's death. A five-person jury is in place, listening attentively as he and the crown attorney converse in tongue-twisting medical terminology.

The modern architecture of the courthouse is a functional network of witnesses' lounges, coroners' offices, jury rooms and a central courtroom. There is a subtle elegance to the building which clashes with the wires, lights

and other trappings of a location shoot; they seem to violate the authority of the judiciary and the memory of the unfortunate deceased. However, once the courtroom is assembled for the movie's inquiry scene, the atmosphere settles into a state reminiscent of its day-to-day operations. A well-dressed, yet eclectic group fills the spectators' gallery. For this production, it's a big day for extras.

Described as a collaborative effort, **Taking Care** is being created, in the European ensemble tradition, by a group committed to the story and drawn to working with the director. That commitment is essential to Mackey, who deliberately assembled a small crew and a small budget (estimated at just below \$1 million) to support a cast of about 40 and to avoid the excesses which he feels produce poor results.

Mackey, an amiable, soft-spoken man, has definite ideas about creative collaborative filmmaking, acknowledging that there has to be a synthesis, a vision and a director who, ultimately, has the responsibility. "It's very important if you're going to do a collaborative approach to be clear about what the director wants to do," he says.

What makes this production particularly interesting are the intricate and not so coincidental links among the producers, players and crew.

It is tempting to chart the relationships, like some tribal kinship system taught in Anthropology 101; however, the following narrative will make it clear.

Friends, spouses, co-workers, students and teachers – "this interconnectedness," says producer Schonberg, "[combines] to make this project both possible and to give it the possibility of looking like a \$2-3 million film."

Many here have known Mackey since the days of **The Only Thing You Know**. Many are also working below scale, and some have made special arrangements to be here.

"I've known Janet Amos (**Silence of the North**) since the late '60s," Mackey says. "One of her early films, **Winter Kept us Warm** (1964) was very influential to me when I saw it as a teenager and I've always wanted a good part for her ever since." That part finally appeared in **Taking Care** and Amos arranged a leave of absence from her current position as Artistic Director of Theatre New Brunswick to do it.

Allan Royal (**Night Heat**), co-star of **The Only Thing You Know** and Amos' former husband, "really wanted to be in this film because of his past relationship with me," Mackey says. "He had to do a certain amount of finagling with his other schedules in order to do this."

Kate Lynch (**Meatballs**) starred in Mackey's most recent short drama **Pulling Flowers** (1984), and is both off-screen and on-screen spouse to co-star Saul Rubinek (**Ticket to Heaven**, CBC's **Benny Cooperman**).

Mackey and Stan Fox have known each other since the mid '70s when both were teaching film at York University. Fox joined TVO in 1981 and they were reacquainted two years later when Mackey began working with TVO producer Babs Church.

Church is now the consulting producer for the network on this production.

Mackey met Schonberg in 1978 when he interrupted his film career with a five-year stint in early child care. Schonberg, a vibrant woman whose youthfulness belies her age and experience, was reestablishing herself as an independent producer/director after 10 years in the field of child development. She was looking for a film editor for her project **Maybe Yes, Maybe No** (1979). "Film editor Roushell Goldstein was shifting careers and suggested Clarke," Schonberg remembers. Today, Goldstein is continuity person on **Taking Care**.

Mackey cut **Maybe Yes, Maybe No** and two other documentaries with Schonberg. That represented his only film work until his association, in 1983, with Babs Church, whom he credits with getting him thinking about making films again.

Oh, on a final note. Does **Taking Care** represent a comeback for Clarke Mackey?

"I don't think that it's a good idea to put it that way. I want to keep making fictional films. I feel the climate exists where I can do that now. In a sense that I want to keep working," he agrees, "yes, it is a comeback."

"But," he adds with a hearty laugh, "it wasn't like I went off on a five-year alcoholic binge!"

Leslie Goodson •

Paul Almond's Fate of a Hunter

From the sky, the brows of white hills roll out to endless limits, beautiful in their cold silence. In this part of the Laurentians, north by northwest of Montreal, somewhere between Morin Heights and Saint-Adolphe, the panorama is barren, snow-covered, and dotted by scrubby pines twisted in the agony of this December cold.

All except one particular hill where, nestled between ice-tipped poplars and broad-skirted evergreens, a village of wood huts seems to huddle against the north wind. These huts are odd, for they are strangely angled in some ancient, Asian-like style, and a '30s bicycle rests half buried in the snow against one of them. Drying in the sun, golden cobs of corn hang in neat rows on a wall of rough-cut boards.

There are people here. Some wear traditional Japanese dress: drab wool wraps, leg bindings, a conical hat, a fur waist-coat. It is, it seems, a northern Japanese village in a different time.

But it is an illusion. The other people who are there, those who seem so busy as they rush around the footpaths, wear different clothes altogether. They have the most modern and colorful of North-American parkas, Gortex knee-high boots, and heavy woolen tuques. Some carry walkie-talkies, and others operate strange and complicated looking equipment. They speak hurriedly in many different languages. There is French (accents are Hungarian-born, Parisian and Québécois), and English (recognizable as from Toronto, Montreal and Los Angeles) as well as snatches of Japanese from the 'peasants'.

The village is actually a front, nothing more than hollow shells of the real thing, specially designed to look authentic only from the outside. The pale smoke that rises from the chimneys is drawn from a convoluted crisscross of pipes channelling through the insides, and beside the smoke machine sits a young man, shivering. The houses, their back walls missing, open on to the windswept woods.

All of this is an exterior set for Paul Almond's latest film, *Fate of a Hunter*. Co-written by Pat Morita and its producer, John Kurri, and to be released by MGM sometime, the film stars a variety of actors from different nations. There is Morita (*Karate Kid*), Chris Makepeace (*My Bodyguard*), Michael Sarrazin (*Joshua Then and Now*), Japanese actress Mari Sato, as well as Seth Sakai and Denis Akiyama. It is described as a classic love story set amid the clash of two cultures during the Second World War.

The actual location is part of a Canadian armed-forces base, now abandoned and stripped of everything military, that has been taken over by the 60 or so people who form the entire crew of this particular film. The many squat, dull-looking buildings that crowd the

valley have been transformed for the occasion into a veritable little city dedicated to the making of this film — offices, a prop-making shop, wardrobe and make-up rooms, residences for the crew, interior sets, etc.

Now on the 22nd day of a 30-day shooting schedule, operations should be slowing down, but just slightly. Both Morita and Sarrazin have finished all of their scenes and have gone home. Yet the day is still almost as full and as long as ever for those who remain.

"Oh, it's been hard work," recalls one of the production assistants, Thom Richardson, "but we're feeling good. We're just happy it will be over soon." The outside shooting has been the most difficult part for the crew, since some periods of intense cold made their work difficult. During one episode, crew members had to stand on a frozen and windswept airport tarmac, in -40°C weather, while actors and camera crew were shooting on the inside of an authentic but narrow-bodied B-25 Bomber, circa 1940. The crew remained, uncomplaining, just in case they were called.

Today's work day began at 6:15 a.m. for the extras, who were brought in from Montreal's Japanese Cultural Center, and both they and the actors were in make-up before the sun had arisen. By sunrise, actors Makepeace and Akiyama were standing together by the coffee-machine, still trying out new inflections in the scene they were to do this morning. They laughed and enjoyed themselves as the morning seemed to dawn slowly.

In the early morning light, director Almond and the camera crew were already at the exterior set, in the bitter cold, shooting some establishing shots and other actorless scenes. It was still early when the remainder of the crew, extras and actors were bused up a steep hill, along a winding forest road, to the exterior set.

By the time everybody arrived, about 50 people occupied the little wooden village. Of these 50, one seemed to be controlling the ebb and flow of the day, and he accelerated the pace of the morning considerably.

From a distance, one might not distinguish Almond from the rest of such a large crew, as everyone is so thickly dressed: a sea of wool tuques, fur hats and heavy winter clothes. Yet there is one feature which would point him out in any crowd: the energy he radiates.

On the set, there is no one who moves more. When rehearsing a scene with the actors, he may grab a heavy prop, such as a door, and drag it around the space the scene requires, crisscrossing the space quickly as he leads the actors through his ideas, his mind searching aloud, leaping forward to a new concept. "Paul has a working style that is different from every director I've ever worked with," says assistant-director Doug Kruse. And his enthusiasm seems to be infectious. At one point during that morning, when some object was required from the equipment truck, the crew member who was sent did not rush at a brisk walk to get it — he ran. "He gets the job done," says Kruse.

This morning's shoot, in addition to several short connecting scenes that are quickly dealt with, involves a complicated choreography of movement, shot in wide angle, of some six different extras doing dissimilar things, and three actors acting a scene with several different actions.

Almond is painstaking in detail, conferring with each person involved, explaining exactly what he wants. Amazingly for someone who seems to be doing so much at one time, he seems to have the ability to focus totally on whatever task is at hand — blocking out all extraneous activity around him. At one point during the cold morning, some of the crew and some of the actors began to lob snowballs between each other

(and at visiting journalists) in a glad-handed effort to stay warm. Either Almond didn't notice or wasn't bothered by it, so intense was his focus on what he was doing.

As the actors finally begin the scene in run-throughs, he returns to each: commenting, requesting, adjusting, asking a question, even inserting a new movement and an extra line by an extra on the spur of the moment.

When every detail seems set, Almond calls for an actual take, and the hilltop resonates with assistant-director Kruse's voice calling for silence.

"Action," says Almond, just loud enough.

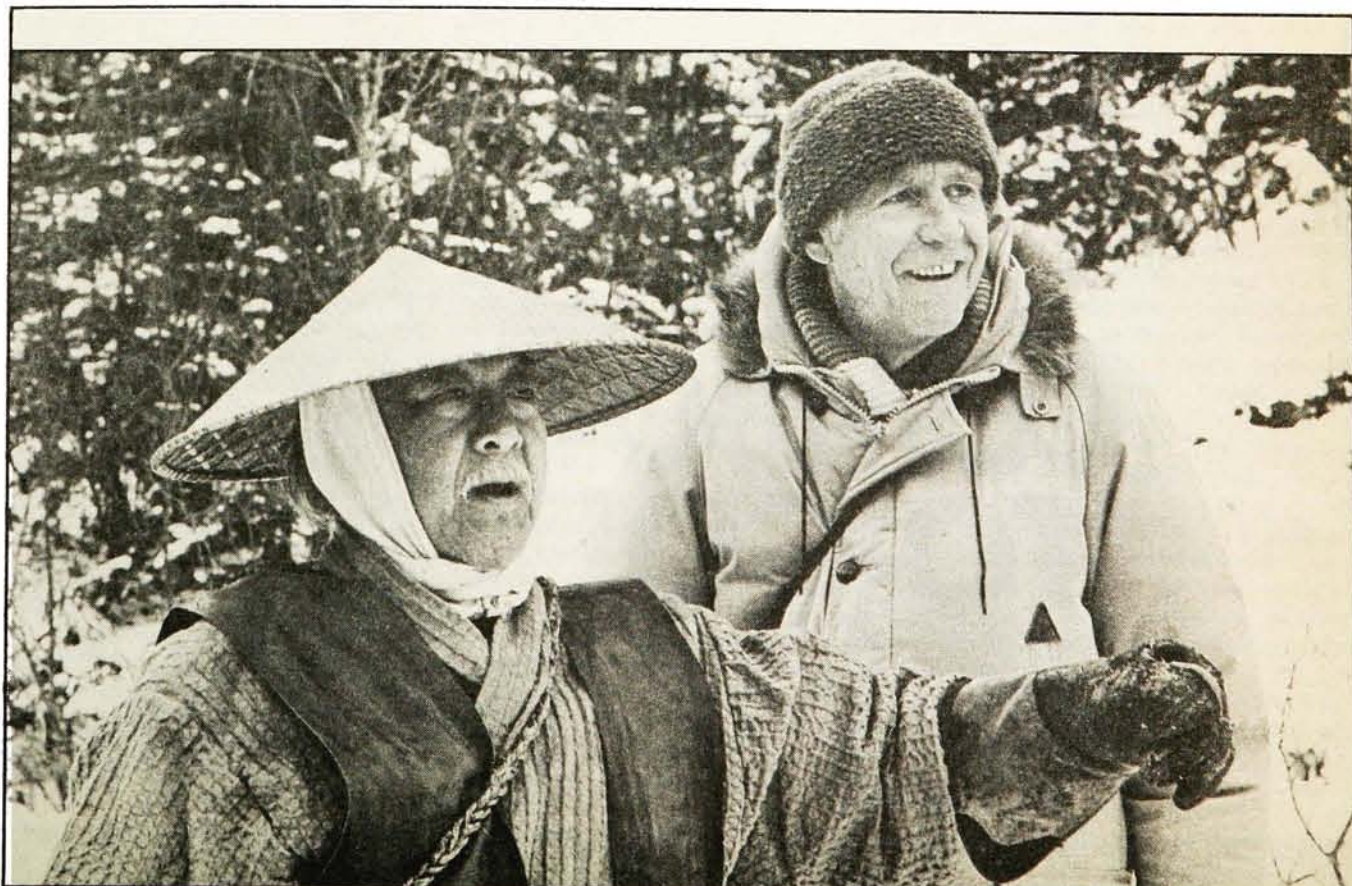
The extras go through their movements, criss-crossing the village in set patterns. As actors go through the scene, everyone on the hill is watching and listening intently.

When Akiyama, playing a benign village idiot, finally ends the scene, he accidentally drops a board. Almond does not yell "cut." Akiyama tries to pick it back up, but thereby knocks down the next board. The young actor looks befuddled in the exact same comic way anyone would. Except that this is totally natural, within character, and welcome comic relief at the same time.

When Almond finally calls out "Cut, and print!", he and the entire crew including the other actors break out into spontaneous applause, calling out to Akiyama their approval. Akiyama simply shrugs, smiling, as if to say "it was pure accident, I swear." But before the applause has even stopped echoing, Almond is already calling out instructions concerning the next scene. The crew bursts into a frenzy of activity.

Almond, pausing only long enough to watch the activity swirling around him, stops to pick up something from the ground. He sends a snowball sailing high over the treetops.

André Guy Arsenault •



• Pat Morita and Paul Almond turn Quebec into Japan for *Fate of a Hunter*

photo: J. Almond

John Blanchard's
Codco

They keep rolling out in Newfoundland like there's no tomorrow – that special brand of down-home, raucous, irreverent, sometimes raunchy humour that never lets anyone or anything off the hook. Like fish and brewis or seal flippers and cod's tongues it seems to be a special North Atlantic elixir that the people of the rock can't live without. Whether it's the wild antics of the Mummings, or Codco, or the outrageous social parody of **Faustus Bidgood** or **Dolly Cake** there seems to be no end in sight to the wellspring of Newfoundland wit.

Celebrating this peculiar form of east coast lunacy, Michael Donovan of Halifax-based Salter Street Films put together a package to bring some of the humour of the Codco company to the rest of Canada. I visited the set of this production, which has the working title of **Codco**, in November as it was shooting in the studios of CBC, Halifax. It began production on October 14 and wrapped on November 8 and is a co-production of CBC and Salter Street Films. Starring the lunatic crew of the Codco Company – Andy Jones, Kathy Jones, Greg Malone, Tommy Sexton and Mary Walsh – the production was an ambitious one. In over 20 shooting days they produced 55 set-ups which are ultimately destined for a television series of six half-hour shows. Each show will consist of some 10 separate sketches under a general variety format.

One of the most interesting aspects of this production is how it was put together and what it may represent in



• Andy Jones, Cathy Jones, Greg Malore, Tommy Sexton and Mary Walsh in **Codco**

photo: Jeannette Hanning

terms of future Maritime programming. According to Jack Kellum, the CBC producer attached to the shoot, in this region of Canada, as well as in most others, regional variety programming has died a quiet death. Gone are the heady days of **Don Messer's Jubilee** and the **Wonderful Grand Band Show**. These days the regional CBC stations count themselves lucky if they can maintain their news and current affairs programming at present levels. The budgets for variety programming are simply not there. Nor has there been, I suspect, the administrative will to undertake projects of this nature.

Onto this comparatively dormant scene stepped Salter Street which acted as a kind of broker to bring together CBC, Telefilm, and some private investment to make the project possible. From talking with CBC personnel it's safe to say that they are quite excited about the project, hoping that private initiative combined with some Telefilm funding will bring more projects of this kind rolling up to their doorstep. Salter Street, in fact, would like to see this

mini-series turn into a full-fledged series. It is scheduled for delivery to the CBC on March 31 and will be broadcast in the fall. If it is well received, Salter Street will press its case.

Given the current financial climate in Canada, producing variety programming in this fashion may be the only way in which regions will have an opportunity to develop their ideas. Certainly for the Atlantic area this production is an important step in this direction, both in terms of regional programming and in helping to support people and groups which would like to develop such material.

Despite the logistical difficulties of some 55 set-ups shot both in the studio and on location in various parts of the city – and despite the difficulties of coordinating a crew of over 30 which included both a CBC in-house crew of Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and National Association of Broadcast Employees & Technicians (NABET) members, as well as freelancers brought in for the production and the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Tele-

vision and Radio Artists (ACTRA) cast – everyone seemed to agree that the production had gone remarkably well. Production manager Andrea Shaw agreed that working on this production involved quite a mind-shift for many involved; both for the in-house members who worked with outsiders and vice versa. The greatest problems of the production seem to have been technical ones. According to producer Michael Donovan, much of the in-house equipment which was available at CBC studios in Halifax was 'State of the Ark' in vintage. This created certain difficulties and some equipment, such as all the broadcast Beta equipment, had to be rented in central Canada.

The producers did not eschew bringing in people from outside when the production values of the show dictated it. The director of the show was John Blanchard from Vancouver. His past experience with SCTV gave him the kind of comedy experience necessary to bring out the humour of the script which was jointly written by the Codco members. The art director was former Maritimer Bruce McKenna who took time off from various assignments in Toronto to come and work on the **Codco** show.

One evening, in a departure from the normal format, a studio audience was brought in to see, amongst other things, Andy Jones as a Johnny Carson style talk show host interviewing Debbie Christ (Kathy Jones) and Sheila O'Nazareth (Mary Walsh), two female authors who had just published their bestselling novel *We Were There* describing their experiences in the Holy Land during the time of Christ. Although the Catholic Church in Newfoundland may not be amused, the studio audience was doubled over in laughter at the description of the disciples as "they was party boys". Look forward to more of this madness when **Codco** takes to the airwaves next fall.

Christopher Majka •

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