

Clarke Mackey's  
**Taking Care**

**C**oroner'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**."

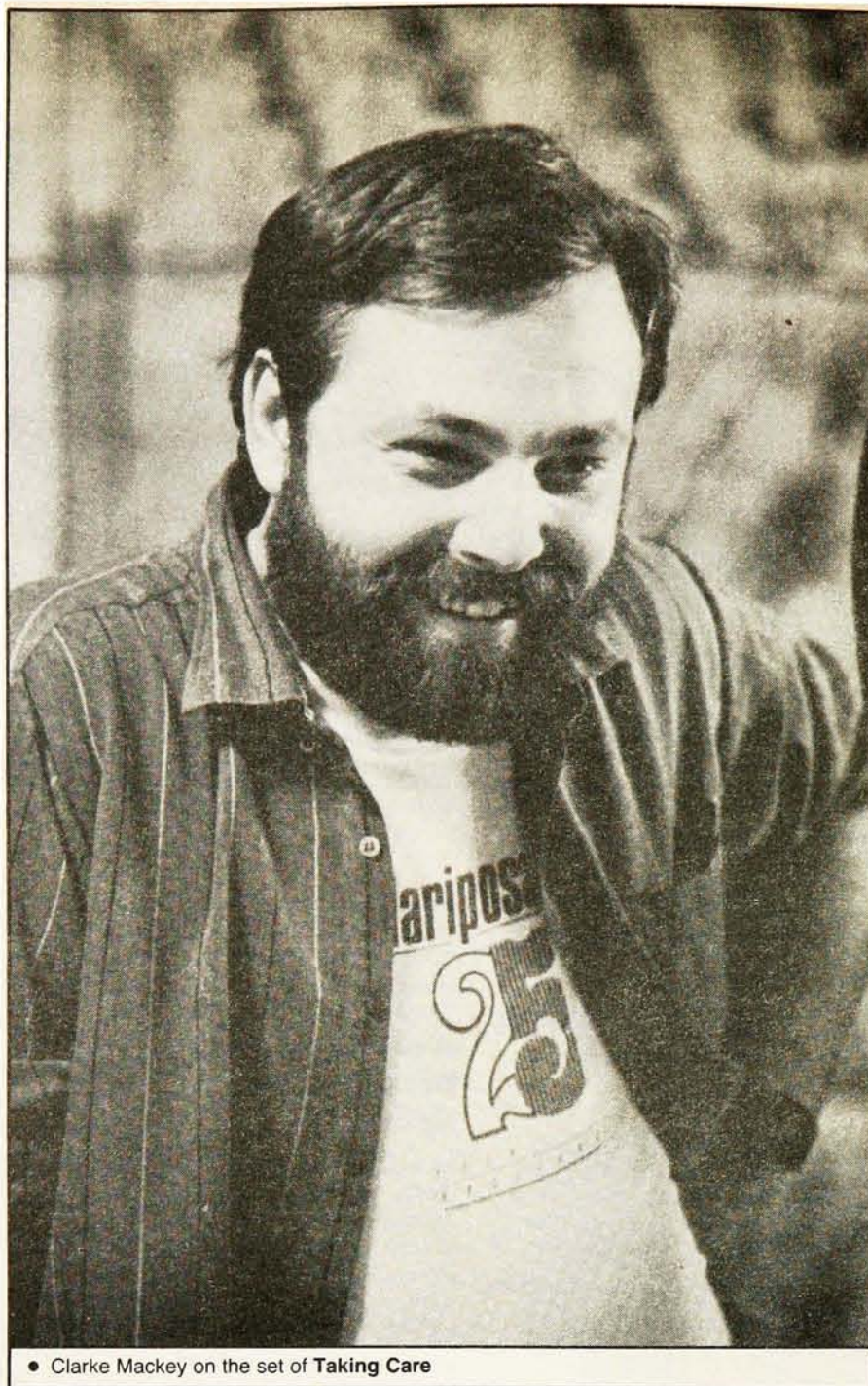
That film, marking Mackey's remarkable professional debut at age 20, is the story of adolescent upheaval, which won two Etrog Awards (now Genies) in 1971.

**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 •