

Vic Sarin and Anne Wheeler shooting *Bye Bye Blues*

boring. You'll have to spice it up a bit.' So, I spiced it up a bit."

Wheeler has said time and time again in interviews that stylistically, she likes to keep things as close to reality as possible. Coming from a background of documentaries, that would make sense. *Bye Bye Blues* presents a real challenge for Wheeler. "In *The War Story* I kept things as accurate as I possibly could, trying to recreate scenes from diaries. This is fiction - you want to get inside your character's head. I take a few liberties. I allow characters to have premonitions and memory flashes. Basically though, things will stay fairly realistic - I'm trying to present history as it was, not as we hope it was."

Bye Bye Blues is different from her previous filmmaking experience, largely because she is the sole author of the screenplay. "You have more freedom to change things while you're shooting. You don't have to worry about hurting anyone's ego. You just change it and make it your work. You can really exploit your actors and crew this way, merely by ironing out a scene until it works."

"I see myself as the watcher. That's my greatest role on set as a director. I try to watch everything and try to get back to everyone that's creating that image - the actors, cinematographer, whoever - and tell them if what I saw didn't feel real. I guess that's what changes when you've made a couple of films and they haven't been bad. People start to listen to you and trust you. You become a much more effective director because you don't have to argue every point."

Wheeler is aware of other expectations placed upon a director who has had a success like *Loyalties*. "I try to ignore these pressures. I treat my work as a series of challenges, and I try to do better each time. I've never initiated a project that I haven't completed. I've been a very cautious filmmaker. I work on each film like a painting, and continue to work until it's as good as I can make that particular painting."

So far, says Wheeler, this painting is turning out much to her liking. "We're very happy with the rushes. It's a very complicated shoot because there's a great deal of music involved. Then we had to set up the shoot in India, and there's a great deal of bureaucracy there. The fact that it's a period piece makes it tougher. It's an enormous film to be doing on the budget we're on. \$4.5 million may sound like a lot, but it's a tremendous challenge to every department involved with the film. So far everyone has met the challenge. The rushes look terrific."

And her next painting? "I'd like to do something for my children, quite frankly. I've written a script with Jim DeFelice (Genie Award winner for *Why Shoot the Teacher?* screenplay). It's sort of a Bugsy Malone detective story. I think I'm going to take next summer off actually. I enjoy writing, and if I could find someone to direct my stuff, I'd be happy. I feel like I'm a storyteller. And I've lots of stories to tell."

Funding for *Bye Bye Blues* has come from Allarcorn Limited, Telefilm Canada, and the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation (AMPDC). The film is scheduled for release in the spring of 1989.

Matt Hays •

Nova Scotia

The Bell Ringers

The illusion of the 19th century is almost complete. The village sits on the banks of a slow-flowing river. Along the dirt streets one can see only a couple of women in long dresses and white lace hats. A solitary man is splitting firewood with a double-bladed axe. A small flock of geese make their noisy, honking way across the lawns. The only anachronism is the constant crackle of walkie-talkies:

"Sheilagh, we're sending over some extras for scene four... Alice, could you come over to the production office?... I'll be there in a minute, I'm stuck on a tree... Ernie, are you on walkie?... " Then first A. D. John Houston's voice breaks in: "O.K. everybody, quiet on set... and rrrroll sound!" and once again everything falls back to the pre-technological silence of the 19th century.

We are in historic Sherbrooke Village, Nova Scotia, on location for the filming of Gamma Production's *The Bell Ringers*, one of 15 episodes in the CBC *Family Pictures Anthology* series. Based on an incident in the life of B. C. writer Sam Roddan, *The Bell Ringers* has been adapted for television by Nova Scotian Tony Foster and by casting coincidence both Roddan and Foster have roles in the production. For Roddan, a jovial man in his late '70s, being on location is a moving experience. *The Bell Ringers* is the first of his many stories to ever reach the screen and brings back many memories of the Port Arthur of the 1920s where the events which inspired the film took place. Twelve-year-old Ian Reid of Sherbrooke has been cast as the young Sammy Roddan while veteran Halifax actor John Dunsworth plays the Rev. Roddan, his father. Meanwhile the real Sam Roddan is playing McGruffy, the local milkman.

"And cut," comes Houston's voice, "Thank you very much everyone. That was excellent. We'll now be moving over to the Perelli's Store

for the next scene." Art director Ernie Tomlinson and assistant Denise LeBlanc scramble to adjust and put into place the various props and articles which must convincingly transport 1890s Sherbrooke to the 1920s. Costume designer Sheilagh Hunt and assistant Pat Walton flip through Polaroids and continuity notes before running to change socks and bowties on various actors.

The production sails smoothly along. Although weather, some technical problems and the necessity of working slowly with the two 12-year-old leads who have no prior acting experience slow down the filming somewhat and cause the six-day shoot to spill over into seven, the production sails along on a remarkably steady tack. It was not always so. Early on in the development a three-way quarrel broke out between original screenwriter Kent Stetson, producer Luciano Lisi and the CBC who wanted changes in the script that Stetson found unacceptable. An impasse ensued and finally Stetson stepped out to be replaced by Tony Foster. Sam Roddan is philosophical about the changes to the story which he now feels has more of a hopeful tone and a sense of resurrection - "Almost like Easter!" he says with a chuckle and a gleam of his ever-sparkling eye.

This is director Herménégilde Chiasson's first English-language drama. He is well known to Atlantic audiences for his films *Toutes les Photos Finissent par se Ressembler*, *Cap Lumière* and *Le Grand Jack*. Last month, the *Atlantic Festival Atlantique* showcased his most recent film *Madame Latour*, a dramatic feature about one woman's struggle to regain political control of the new colony of L'Acadie. Crew members who worked with him on that shoot say that he is gradually finding his directorial voice and exerting his vision more effectively on *The Bell Ringers*.

Toronto actress Janice Nutter, fresh from a successful season at P. E. I.'s King's Theatre, arrives one morning at 4:30 am, works fiendishly all day and departs at 11:00 pm to catch a morning plane for T. O. Amazingly she looks bright and untired throughout the entire experience.

Snapshots of activity: Joyce Nicholson

Director Herménégilde Chiasson rehearses a boxing sequence with Melvin Sangster (referee), Daryl 'Pee Wee' Flint (Crusher Carstairs) and Ed MacLeod

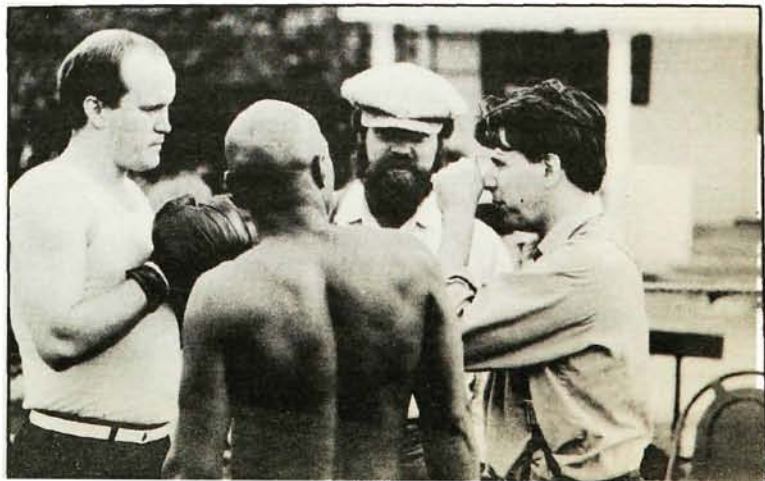


PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER MAJKA

(production assistant – Craft) is an unsung heroine who rises each day at 5:30 am to prepare the tea, coffee, and diverse munchies that keep cast and crew going on the long days (in addition to becoming a 1920s floozie when some further extras were needed for the boxing match). Location manager Alice Albiston carries on stoically trying to summon scores of extras on a shooting schedule which changes daily because of weather. Production manager Peter d'Entremont and assistant Robin Sarafinchan deal with the thousand problems stemming from shooting in a functioning museum while crowds of curious visitors are flocking through the sets.

The Bell Ringers has now wrapped and the dailies look quite promising. Post-production kicks into gear almost immediately since, according to CBC series producer Brian O'Leary, the series is scheduled to be telecast between January and March of 1989. The town of Sherbrooke slowly returns to normal, and self-professed beachcomber Sam Roddan returns to B. C. to comb some more beaches. Who knows what he'll find next?

Christopher Reardon •

Toronto Looking For Miracles

Woodland Park on the outskirts of Toronto. The sun is blazing, the heat is intense. Unhappy policemen in full uniform are guarding the entrance to the park. It's not a crowd that they're trying to beat off, but the grinding heat wave. Driving down the gravel road leading toward the wooded interior, Lucie Hall, director of public relations and creative affairs at Sullivan Films, meanders her way toward one of the sites of Kevin Sullivan's latest made-for-television feature film, *Looking For Miracles*. We arrive at a shady spot in the woods, the humidity in the air is rich with the scent of pine. Scurrying about are young boys in full summer garb, except that the fashion of the day is circa 1935: sailor caps, undershirts, heavy woolen shorts, designed by Martha Mann. The crew, camped in the woods, concentrates on the scene unfolding in a canvas tent, under the guidance of producer/director/writer Kevin Sullivan. He is steering a dramatic confrontation between the Head Counsellor of Camp Hochelega, Ryan Delaney (Greg Spottiswood) and the streetwise punk Ratface (Noah Godfrey).

The direction is gentle but firm, the crew's attention focused but relaxed. Only some off-camera tension is expressed by the parents who are concerned about their children's

welfare. Soon lunch is served and, as in camp, the morning activities are set aside in order to indulge in the ravenous and restless appetites of the community.

Looking For Miracles is the third major dramatic production for the award-winning Sullivan Films, internationally acclaimed for its mini-series *Anne of Green Gables* and *Anne of Green Gables – The Sequel*. The story is based on the memoirs of playwright, journalist, author and president of Paul Newman's food business, A. E. Hotchner. Set in the summer of 1935, at the height of the Depression, the comedy drama is about two estranged brothers who develop a lasting bond in the midst of adversity. Ryan Delaney 16, intent on entering law school, is saddled with the responsibility of taking care of his younger brother Sullivan (Zachary Bennett) who had been farmed out to relatives. Ryan grudgingly allows Sullivan to join him at Camp Hochelega, where he has talked his way into becoming Head Counsellor, despite his lack of experience and phobic fear of water. He threatens his helpless younger brother lest he disclose his insecurities. In the course of the summer travails, the two brothers have obstacles to overcome; Ryan must earn credibility and Sullivan must achieve a sense of belonging. Ultimately, despite the terrorizing antics of Ratface, the falling-out with the camp's benefactress, the loss of Ryan's scholarship and other dilemmas, the brothers recognize their need for one another.

A simple story, another *Meatballs* with a bunch of funny gags strung together? Not so, according to Kevin Sullivan. "Camps started in the '20s and '30s, based on stuff like Grey Owl that was popular at the time. They were focused on recreational education and opening up the kids' minds to the wilderness, in a very romantic background to the story." In one scene shot at night, a flaming arrow shoots through the air to light a bonfire. Obviously a source of inspiration for the story is childhood enchantment.

Given only five weeks in which to shoot the film, Brian Thomson, the director of photography, accustomed to the methodical and careful mapping of shots on commercials, is coming to terms with the speed and spontaneous nature of the shoot. This is his first feature and as a father he is delighted to be involved with quality children's programming. He is intrigued by the unpredictable and surprising performance of the children, a challenge to any crew.

Encouraging, coaxing, and coaching the children off-camera is Janet Green. A graduate of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts and a veteran at training child actors, Ms. Green attempts to evoke from the young performers motivations for difficult emotional scenes, eliciting from them spontaneous performances. Often the children must harken on their own memories of painful moments and longing desires, to suggest a mood for a scene. "Children do not have the training of a seasoned



Director Kevin Sullivan and crew on the set of *Looking For Miracles*

actor," she claims. Adult actors may trigger themselves into a reaction through tried techniques, whereas children lack the methodological discipline for creating and evoking the dramatic effect required by a scene. At daily rehearsals with Jan Green, Zachary Bennett and Noah Godfrey are gently encouraged to discover their characters and reserve their restless energies for the scenes at hand. Through feeling rather than by rote, the children prepare themselves for the direction of Kevin Sullivan. The crew have unanimously acknowledged the fine performances of the young actors.

For Greg Spottiswood, 23, who has been more accustomed to the rigours of the stage than those of the camera, co-starring with Zachary Bennett, 8, has been particularly rewarding. "Zach immediately brings things down to a one-on-one level, so that you forget that there are people all around you watching your every move," he praises his co-star. Though Spottiswood plays a role seven years younger than himself, he is not concerned about the age difference. He attributes this attitude to Ryan having first-time experiences at Camp Hochelega, which in effect, permit his character to be played with the incredulity of the uninitiated. Spottiswood looks at his role in *Looking For Miracles*, his feature film debut, as a milestone in his career. One senses that he hopes that this role will do for him what *Anne Of Green Gables* did for Meagan Follows.

Looking For Miracles is a co-production and CBC and Disney Films. Kevin Sullivan and his co-executive producer Trudy Grant, hope to establish an ongoing association with Disney, which will oversee the production of a continuous series of feature-length films. Sullivan, at first, saw his involvement with this production merely as its producer, but the more he became involved with plotting the story, the more he realized he wanted to direct it as well. To give the script its final polish and dramatic pulse Sullivan turned to writer Stuart McLean.

Initially, consideration was given to placing the story in a contemporary setting but it was dropped since it would have given the drama a harder edge than was necessary. The choice of retaining the setting at the height of the Great Depression was to lend it a storybook feel, and credibility to the hardships endured by the Delaney family and lend it the aura of a fable.

Inbuing the sets and costumes with '30s realism are the accomplishments of Art Director Carmi Gallo and Costume Designer Martha Mann. Gallo meticulously researched the rustic setting of Camp Hochelega – cabins, canvas tents, Indian bonfires – and in Toronto, she searched for streets with working-class tenements to replicate a '30s environment. According to Sullivan, such period street scenery is quickly disappearing from the city's landscape. Martha Mann combed department store catalogues from the era in order to accurately reproduce the fashions of the day. Unlike the fairly uniform casual summer fashions of today, which serve to mask class distinction, Mann's endeavours made her particularly attentive to divisions of social caste. She had few samples of original clothing from the era since poor members of society had few clothes and wore them until they had to be thrown away. Mann worked in close collaboration with Sullivan as he plotted the arc of his characters, so that she could convey through her designs the subtle changes and transformations required by the script.

The infectious optimism of Kevin Sullivan carries the cast and crew through the drudging heat. There's an intimacy on this shoot, a feeling that a visit by a reporter is something akin to Visiting Day at camp. The proceedings are temporarily interrupted but the life of the summer community must go on. After all, it's all for the sake of having memorable experiences under the rubric of organized mischief.

Looking For Miracles is expected to air this month on CBC.

Candida Paltiel •