

On a superficial level, at least, it's irresistible to compare **Princes in Exile** to "Meatballs," the teen-oriented, sentimental 1979 comedy-drama set at a summer camp. Although Bill Murray provided marquee value, the story focused on a 12-year-old misfit named Rudy (Chris Makepeace), whose lack of self-confidence always had him on the verge of running away.

"Princes in Exile" (CBC, Nov. 11)—set at a summer camp, too—was co-produced by the same team that served up "Meatballs." Moreover, its central character is a misfit named Ryan, a 17-year-old with such a bleak world view that he regularly clashes with his cabin mates. But that's where the two movies radically diverge.

The kids at Camp Hawkins, the bucolic setting for "Princes in Exile," have cancer. Ryan, played by Zachary Ansley of CBC's *9B*, has an incurable brain tumor. Nicholas Shields, soon to be seen in CBC's teen soap *Northwood*, plays Robert, the camper with whom Ryan clashes most; Robert has acute lymphocytic leukemia. Gabriel (Alexander Chapman; "Jesus of Montreal") has Hodgkin's disease. Stacie Mistysyn (*Degrassi High*) plays Holly, who has lost a leg to cancer.

The film is also a courageously radical departure for Giles Walker, a veteran National Film Board director best known for his "testosterone trilogy" of offbeat documentaries: "The Masculine Mystique" (1984), "90 Days" ('85) and "The Last Straw" ('87). Walker, who lost his first

wife to leukemia, was initially reluctant to tackle "Princes in Exile," a 1981 novel by Mark Schreiber; his turnaround came about as the result of a visit to the Hole in the Wall Gang Camp—a Connecticut retreat for terminally ill children funded by actor Paul Newman. (Incidentally, the Canadian Cancer Society says there are nine similar camps here.)



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Near the beginning of the film, the camp's director, Dr. Merritt (Chuck Shamatata) sets the tone: "This is a camp, not a cancer ward with trees." Thereafter, the kids do the usual coed camp things—sing around the campfire, get ready for skit night, fall in love with the infirmary nurse, and so on. Ryan has come with two hopes in mind: finishing his journal and losing his virginity. But hanging over everyone, of course, is the prospect of not living to see another summer.

Thanks to solid performances and a script by Joe Wiesenfeld (the award-winning writer of TV's "Anne of Green Gables"), "Princes in Exile" is a moving reinforcement of a universal truth: Hope helps, despair doesn't.

—by **John T. D. Keyes**

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