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A subtle story of child heroes

Cancer. The word stops us cold. But it would be a shame if our terror stopped us from turning on CBC-TV Nov. 11.

Princes In Exile is the name of the film to be seen then and it is about a group of teenagers at summer camp. They call their "lodge" Princes In Exile and, on the whole, are as typical a bunch of kids as you'll get. Except they all have cancer. The camp is just for kids with cancer, one of many such camps across North America and one of the shocks of seeing the film is the shock of realizing there are so many young people with this awful disease.

Not a very cheery subject, you say, and, on the surface, you're right. Why should you use up your leisure time being depressed by some of the more terrible facts of life, you ask?

The only answer to that is you won't be. Depressed that is. These kids are heroes, as well as princes, and they make an impression that doesn't just fade away when *The National* comes on.

First there's Ryan (Zachary Ansley, *Journey Of Natty Gann*, *Cowboys Don't Cry*.) He is gloomy. He has a right. There is something nasty in his brain that ends in blastoma and he doesn't expect to make Christmas. He has two ambitions. To get the journal he's writing published and to lose his virginity—in reverse order, if possible. But the kids in the hut don't go for his gloom. They just won't stand a quitter. Especially not "The Stuntman," Robert (Nicholas Shields, *Lost In The Barrens*.) He has leukemia. It's in remission but he's not going to wait for death. He goes out and challenges it each day, much to the delight of an ador-

ing coterie of fans, who chant "Stuntman! Stuntman!" after each piece of derring-do.

Then there's Holly (Stacie Mistysyn, veteran of all the *Degrassi* series.) She has lost a leg to cancer and while she would love to help with the virginity problem, she just won't put up with self-absorbed gloom either.

The story comes from a book of the same name by Cincinnati native Mark Schreiber. The film is set in the United States and it was to The Hole In The Wall Gang Camp for kids with cancer, funded by actor Paul Newman, that director Giles Walker went to "get acclimatized."

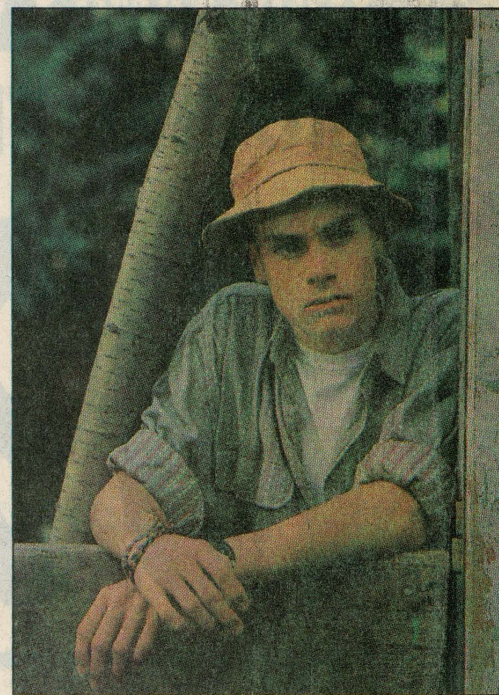
"But ironically, the film could only have been made in Canada for a number of reasons," says Walker. "Not only just physically made at all, but also the way in which it was made could have only happened here, I think."

For a start, it was financed almost wholly with government money. Cinepix put together a consortium of the National Film Board, the CBC and Telefilm Canada for the \$2.7-million required.

"If there is a justification for a government-supported film industry, you can find it in this film," says Walker and that's because, without massive profits to recoup for investors, a certain restraint and realism was possible.

"If it's subtle, it's because it's Canadian," he points out. "The Americans would have wanted to go overboard. Ryan and Holly would have had to make love in the waters of the lake and Ryan would have had to grab Robert the Stuntman's trail bike at the end and jump the gorge. I can see the poster now."

Though the film has received



Zachary Ansley as Ryan

rave reviews from Toronto's Festival of Festivals and wild standing ovations in Montreal, Walker is glad his film is going to TV's small screen.

"I think that is where it belongs, because people will watch it in droves in the safety of their living rooms, whereas we might have a very hard time getting them into a theatre to see it," he says.

But it hasn't been an ordeal for those who've seen it so far. Not even parents who have kids with cancer—a section of society that takes quite a knock from the kids in the film.

One such parent, after seeing the film, told Walker it was as if she'd had a window onto her son's life and it made her very happy because it showed he had a very normal life away from her. That's all parents want for their kids anyway, Walker points out.

And besides, the message of the film is universal—hope helps, despair doesn't—and that goes for whatever ails you.