

The Gateway

Incest victim's story

To a Safer Place
National Film Board of Canada
Wednesday, November 25th, 8:00 p.m.
Provincial Museum Theatre

review by Elaine Ostry

To a Safer Place took great courage to make. It is Shirley Turcotte's account of her childhood, when she was a victim of incest, and how it affected her. The film depicts Turcotte's journey back to her home, to the family members with whom she has lost touch.

It is a film that spares the viewer nothing. Turcotte's narration practically starts with: "I was five years old when I first tasted my father's semen..." But although the film is quite explicit, it is never sensationalistic. The very real pain of the family members never lets the view forget that the events were true experiences, not to be taken lightly.

...her dreams of a normal family have been shattered.

One of the first interviews of the film is between Turcotte and her old neighbours. They claim that they were unaware of the abuse of the children next door. The husband states that "whatever happens in the parent's house — that's their business." The wife tells Turcotte that, as a child, "you didn't have a spark to you at all."

Turcotte later replies to this statement in her narration: "We (the children) had no sparkle because no one loved us." Thus the film points out the need for outside help for the victims, and the importance of a loving family to a child's development.

To a Safer Place shows how the perversion of the father-child relationship stimulates the breakdown of the other relationships within the family. After all, the bond between parent and child is important to the harmony of the family as a whole; and the father's traditional role as the leader of the family unit magnifies the importance of this relationship.

Penguins intense, eerie

Penguins
Theatre Network
Run ends December 6

review by L. Robertson

Science is madness!

Anyone who has seen Michael D.C. McKinlay's *Penguins* could tell you that, the play, which opened Thursday night and runs through to December 6 at Edmonton's Theatre Network, offers some interesting observations on the scientific community.

A team of researchers, led by the madman/genius Dr. Melton, struggles with psychological and geographical isolation while performing experiments on penguins in Antarctica. As the study progresses, the crew (played by Larry Farley, Earl Klein, Vickie Papas, and Larry Yachimed) suffer from paranoia, frustration, and cabin fever. Isolation and claustrophobia are somehow combined in this eerie polar setting and the characters suffer accordingly.

It is this aspect of the play that is most strongly enforced upon the audience, due to the atmosphere of the theatre itself. After viewing the play, it becomes evident that *Penguins* was written with an intimate theatre in mind. In this case, the close dimensions and efficient use of space at Theatre Network combine with the plot to emphasize the characters' isolation and frustration with each other.

As the findings of the researchers become more and more bizarre, and the stress among team members mounts, the audience finds itself involved in the action. Suspense and

The film shows Shirley Turcotte talking to her brothers. They were also abused, although not sexually. They are both concerned about stopping themselves from continuing the cycle of violence. One result of their abuse is low self-esteem. One of her brothers describes the time when his enraged father threw the family dog against a wall, killing him. He stresses that he loved his father in spite of his violence, and that he would have wanted a father whom he could ask: "Dad, can I borrow your car keys?"

Shirley Turcotte also meets her sister Susan, who was likewise abused by their father. In fact, she gave birth to her father's baby, who was deformed and soon died. This scene is one of the most powerful and poignant of the film, as they share the painful experiences which once divided them. No actress could have depicted the horror Susan relates of the moment when the nurse put the deformed baby in her arms. When Susan winces, so does the audience.

The interview with the mother is the most painful of the film, because there is so little open communication between mother and daughter. This relationship is probably the one most affected by the incest of father and daughter. This is because of the tension of the daughter assuming (albeit against her will) the role of her mother in relation to her father. Also, the daughter feels great anger towards the mother for not protecting her.

Throughout the interview, the mother's answers to her daughter's forthright questions are painfully clipped and unsatisfactory. But Shirley Turcotte and the viewer realize that her mother is a victim too; her dreams of a normal family have been shattered.

Her mother reveals that Turcotte's father was very loving — before the children came. "He didn't like crying," she says.

The film does not show an interview between Turcotte and her father. In one scene, however, it shows the woman returning to her old bedroom, the scene of her childhood victimization. There Turcotte narrates how the incest not only divided the family members, but also forced her to detach her mind from her body.

"I would lie awake, wondering when his hand was going to reach for me... but there was a part of me that he could never reach." She would actually imagine this 'part' of her as retreating "into the wall."

This anecdote reveals the "survivor" ele-

tension is found throughout the plot, and are broken only by carefully placed moments of comic relief.

Strong performances were given by all five actors. They used the limited stage space very well. Especially notable were Andrew Akman as Dr. Melton's estranged son Dickey, and Dr. Melton himself, played by Earl Klein. Vickie Papas also deserves credit for a solid performance.

In general, the characters interact well with each other and deserve much praise for not stumbling over each other in the limited floor space.

Some mention must also be made of the set. Resident designer Daniel Van Heyst and his crew have created an elaborate and detailed representation of the research station which serves as the only backdrop for the entire play. A lot of effort and skill were obviously involved in constructing such a realistic set within the confines of the theatre (which, despite its size, holds 165 people).

Bearing all this in mind, *Penguins* is well worth seeing. McKinlay offers some unique insights on the scientific community and presents his material in a manner that allows the audience to relate with the characters and their problems. The acting is precise and excellent, and an intense mood is maintained throughout. The action flows smoothly despite being limited by the single-setting stage.

One warning, however: some of the language may be offensive. Parts of the play are also extremely intense. The second half of the play is anything but lighthearted. Also, dress lightly as the theatre is quite warm!



Shirley Turcotte's family — without father

ment in Turcotte's character. Indeed, the film is inspiring because it focuses on how Turcotte has dealt with her childhood abuse, and pursued her goals as a career-woman, wife and mother. She reveals her fears of marrying and of becoming a parent. She was horrified by the fact she had given birth to a boy ("I thought I had given birth to Dad..."), and was afraid of abusing her child.

However, although her past threatened to destroy her own relationship with her child, Turcotte is shown to be a loving mother.

The intent of the film is to show that it is possible to come to terms with one's childhood abuse, and that the problem does not exist in isolation. Turcotte is one of the founding members and a director of SEPSAC, (Support, Education and Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Children), and she leads

support groups of survivors. One of these support groups is filmed, demonstrating that Turcotte's experiences are not unique.

Jane Karstaedt of the Sexual Assault Centre attended the press screening, and assured the audience that Turcotte's case is typical of incest victims. She also informed the viewers that, according to the Faculty Commission on Child Sexual Abuse, one out of every two girls, and one out of every three boys experience some form of sexual abuse during their lifetime. Anyone requesting more information on incest or other forms of sexual abuse is urged to call the Sexual Assault Centre at 432-4102.

To a Safer Place will be shown on November 25th, at the Provincial Museum Theatre. It can also be rented in VHS video format, or in 16 mm, from the NFB library.

Sliding is sheer cute fun

Sliding for Home
Workshop West
Run ends November 29

review by Matt Hays

Sliding for Home is a really cute show. The acting is cute and fun. The design is cute and fun. The direction is cute and fun. And the writing epitomizes cute and funniness.

There's only one thing wrong with sheer cute funniness: nausea. It's all very well, but one can only take so much of it.

And *Sliding for Home* is full of it. Full of cute jokes, local references, hokey romances, audience participation, and cardboard characters. Why, vendors even sell popcorn and peanuts in the aisle in between innings. (Get it? Acts have now become innings!) All of this is intentional, but it doesn't make it any less bearable. Many older people might enjoy this show — much of the audience present on Friday night was, and did. The show is based loosely on John Ducey's struggle to get a baseball team started in Edmonton, and the locality of the plot allows for abundant references to city 'celebrities' (i.e. the Ghermians).

While I would not recommend this show, much of it is extremely well done. Morris Ertman's set is excellent, a very thoughtful piece of work. The billboards surrounding the set feature advertisements for well-known Edmonton companies both past and present.

The performances are strong. Mark Wilson, as Charles Dempsey, has a good voice of appeal, and a good voice. The supporting

cast is uniformly excellent and very capable of portraying a series of different characters.

The problems here lie with the script and direction. While John Ducey's story is an interesting one, this doesn't really translate into the production. Many of the scenes seem extraneous and the musical numbers are quite forgettable. The pseudo-political jokes are safe and soon get dull. Gerry Potter has directed a cute, and fun, but largely empty production.

...groups like Workshop West 'dare to be different' in their choice of new works.

Following Friday's performance, cast and audience enjoyed drinks together in the lobby. A cake was presented which read "Happy 10th Anniversary — Workshop West Theatre." Although *Sliding for Home* is not a great show, Workshop West Theatre takes real risks. Actually, it is groups like Workshop West that 'dare to be different' in their choice of new works which may not be commercially viable.

This show has about as much appeal as one of those calendars full of fluffy little kittens; but check out Workshop West's next production.

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