

The Newborn Dead: The “Tell-Tale” Part

Written by Marla Newborn

Tuesday, 14 September 2010 14:26



Many little girls fantasize about being an actress—the glamour and high life of the stage and screen. I was one of those little girls. The first movie that captured my heart was *THE SOUND OF MUSIC*, and as a result I wanted to be Julie Andrews. Just watching her wasn't enough for me; I ran around my house singing all the songs, playing her part both before and after she fell in love with Captain Von Trapp. For me, the best part was when she was a nun: I put a towel on my head and paraded in and out of all the rooms of our home as if I too were the spirited Maria. So, who would have thought that all these years later, *VINDICATION* director Bart Mastronardi would make my dream come true and ask me to be an extra in his horror short *THE TELL-TALE HEART*?

Imagine the thrill when I got that e-mail! No, I didn't put a towel on my head and parade around what is now just an apartment. Nor did I walk around with a dagger imagining myself in the lead role, making the big kill. But I admit I did start to fantasize about going to drama school, changing careers, being discovered and... Just then, either the phone rang or my boss called me in, or something else happened to spoil my private moment of glory in the spotlight!



As the big day neared, my excitement turned to nervousness which turned to fear which was just masking shyness, which was all a cover for not being in control, of course. Luckily for me, the star of the short, the glamorous and renowned Debbie Rochon (*COLOUR FROM THE DARK*, *SLIME CITY MASSACRE*, etc.) was my houseguest and protector, so I felt just a bit better following her into the New York subway system from Manhattan to Queens on that hot August morning. Our destination was a vacant grade school—vacant because it was summer,

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and vacant because it was a Saturday. The school was to be an insane asylum. Having not asked any questions prior to that morning, I didn't know beforehand but soon found out I was to be one of the inmates. Did Julie Andrews start out this way?



We arrived at the school, and it appeared as if we were all present and accounted for. Everyone seemed to know everyone else. This only made me all the more shy. *Should have taken those acting lessons*, I cursed under my breath. I stayed close to Rochon's heels like a lost puppy, but soon enough people were saying hello. I made a mental note: remember names, remember names. Gee, I was so hard on myself. If I had only known that by the end, I would know everyone and it would be so much fun, I would not have given myself a near heart attack so early on.

OK, I did know some of the people there. THE BLOOD SHED's Alan Rowe Kelly was busy as a beaver, seemingly doing *everything*. We hugged and he said, “Here dear, go put this on—the sooner the better.” I saw he had handed me a pair of pajamas, the type one would have purchased at Woolworth's in the 1960s, with cute little bootie-type socks to go with them. Once again I followed Rochon, along with new friend Becca Dorstek, into the only “girls' room” I had ever seen filled with urinals. Apparently we were in an all-boys school. Becca and I changed into the same loony-bin PJs, but Rochon's were more the type you'd buy at K-Mart—way more upscale, but of course, she was the star. Let life inside the mental institution begin.



Once dressed, we all took turns having our hair and makeup done by Kelly, and when it was not our turn for that bit of glamour, we had to draw pictures to decorate the windows of our asylum—just like we would during playtime in a real 1960s asylum. And they had to be crazy loony sicko pictures drawn with Crayola crayons on construction paper. I drew lots of stick

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figures and houses and suns. Other people drew cats with their heads cut off, faces of the devil and words such as “I hate Mommy and I love Daddy”—cool stuff like that.

Right about then, some of us went outside for what would be the first of many cigarette breaks. People were laughing about some of the antics that had gone down during the previous shoot days. Suddenly, everyone stopped talking and began screaming toward the parking lot that “the heat” was coming, that “the heat” had arrived. I thought to myself, *Hey, it’s pretty hot out already, so what the hell are they talking about?*

when actor Jerry Murdock (a regular in Mastronardi and Kelly’s movies) arrived and gave us all a hug. I was hip enough to catch onto the “inside” line that Murdock brings “the heat” with him. Must be some sort of acting thing. See? If I had gone to drama school, maybe I would have brought “the heat”! Did Julie Andrews have “the heat” or is it something unique to Murdock?

It was my turn for hair and makeup. Kelly decided to give me an up-do, one of those real 1950s looks. David Marancik, who was playing a character named Fritz who was so loony he had to wear a straightjacket, cackled like a true madman as Kelly teased my hair vertical in preparation to create such beauty. Marancik’s laugh is infectious, so I began to laugh and finally feel at ease. Finally.

Now I was ready to meet the others. Little did I know I was in such amazing company. We were a small but meaty cast led by the aforementioned Rochon, who has more horror credits to her name than I can list; Lesleh Donaldson (HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME, FUNERAL HOME), Desiree Gould (DARK CHAMBER, SLEEPAWAY CAMP) and Murdock were also among the day’s big names. However, the extras were no slouches: Michael Buscemi, James Gitlin, Dorstek, Harry Dugan, Marancik and I played our certifiable lunatic roles with pride.



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The crew was a whole other story. As a writer, I have covered this very special group of underground filmmakers before. I hesitate at this juncture to use the word “underground” any longer, because their work just gets better and better with each new project. What makes these guys so special is that they wear so many hats—and all for one another. As I already mentioned, THE TELL TALE HEART was Mastronardi’s baby, and he was directing. The talented Dominick Savilli was director of photography, while filmmaker and Fango scribe Jeremiah Kipp served as assistant director. Actor/director Kelly did just about everything from acting to producing to wardrobe to hair and makeup to craft services and was the all-around wrangler for the shoot. Sound was handled by Steven Munoz, and the production assistant was Alex Gavin. The school cafeteria could not possibly have held any more talent, or it would literally have burst!



Finally, I was ready for my close-up. And it was quite a close-up. Mastronardi is a very kind, patient and talented director. He sat very close to me and told me exactly what I was to do. I was as comfortable as I was ever going to be, and feeling like Maria in THE SOUND OF MUSIC, I was ready. I did what I was told, something extra came out of me and everyone clapped. I burned with elation and shame—mostly elation.



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That was it for me, but at this point I could not bear to leave. I was having the time of my life. Plus, the principal characters were about to have their scenes shot. I got the chance to watch Rochon, Donaldson, Gould and Murdock in action. And all the while, I could not take my eyes off of Mastronardi and his solid, masterful sense of providing direction. I admit, I was in awe.

I did have to pull myself away eventually, and good thing too, since Rochon told me they shot until 3 a.m.! The experience reinforced the cliché we all know: Watching a movie is a whole lot easier than making a movie. But there would have been no convincing me of that at age 5 when I put that towel on my head, wanting to be Maria in THE SOUND OF MUSIC. Appropriately, Mastronardi rushed over to me as I was leaving and gifted me with a vintage music box, an official prop from a movie shoot. As I took the car service home, I opened the box and noticed it had a wind-up, and I was able to hear the sounds of music after all.

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