

Appointment with Pohlman



Life As A Call-Boy

By Ralph Pohlman

Whenever I drive under a railroad overpass and see that CN logo I am reminded of my old summer jobs in high school. Melville was a small town of about 3,000, which was pretty big for southern Saskatchewan, but more than that, it was a divisional point on the CNR, where the train crews changed.

For a while I was a 'call-boy,' which is not at all like being a call girl. Let me explain.

Although there were regular crews that manned the scheduled trains, there were lots of non-scheduled runs, mostly freights, that were put together in the railroad yards. Crews were on 'call,' their names listed on a board in the yard office. It was the call-boy's job to find those guys who were on 'first call' and tell them they were going out at a certain time.

The requirements of the job were a bicycle and an intimate knowledge of the town. By that I mean you knew where guys lived, where they drank and where they—uh, shall we say—spent time when they weren't at home. Often it was the pool room, but then, boys being boys, they sometimes had a more secret favourite activity.

This knowledge was frequently worth a few bucks, especially if you were able to find Fred who didn't want to be found. If you found him in the beer parlour of the King George Hotel, where he had been all day, and where he wasn't supposed to be when he was on first call to drive a train, a little money often exchanged hands. You then reported, "Sorry, I couldn't find Fred."

"Did you try the beer parlour or Irma's house?" you'd be asked. When you answered yes, you'd be sent out to find the guy on second call.

My other job was in the express office at the station. Stuff was loaded on the express car of the passenger train in the order that it would be unloaded. The towns and villages on the CN line running across Saskatchewan are in alphabetical order (bet you didn't know that), and to this day I can still rhyme them off, starting with Atwater and Bangor at the Manitoba border and ending with Young and Zelma in mid province before they start over with Allan and Bradwell.

Now we come to the part about icing fish. Fish used to be packed in ice in wooden rectangular boxes and loaded on boxcars on the West Coast. By the time the train reached the prairie the ice was melting and you could see the cars roaring through the stations, water running from them like Niagara Falls.

My job, at the bottom of the food chain, was to get on the boxcar and, travelling with the train, re-ice the fish. There'd be a pile of ice blocks, a sledge hammer, a shovel, and a J-bar. The job description was simple. Smash up the ice with the sledge hammer, pry open the boxes with the J-bar, shovel some ice on the fish and nail the lids down again.

When I finished, I'd get off at the next stop and catch a passenger train back, riding in the coach. I'd be soaking wet and smelled like a fish store. There were soon a lot of empty seats around me.

Since I didn't want to make a career of smelling like a salmon, I decided to go to medical school.

Life In Whitchurch-Stouffville

At the town offices on Jan. 19, the Lemonville Group of Artists held an opening reception for *Life in Whitchurch-Stouffville*, an exhibition of paintings which will continue until March 29. Many of the artists were present, and harpist Gwyneth Reid provided beautiful musical accompaniment.



A visitor admires some of the beautiful artwork at the opening reception of *Life in Whitchurch-Stouffville*.



presents

On Feb. 8 at 7 p.m., Starlight Cinema presents Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris* at Nineteen on the Park.

Gil (Owen Wilson) and Inez (Rachel McAdams) travel to Paris as a tag-along vacation on her parents' business trip. Gil is a successful Hollywood writer but is struggling on his first novel. He falls in love with the city and thinks he and Inez should move there after they get married, but Inez does not share his romantic notions of the city or the idea that the 1920s was the golden age.

When she goes off dancing with her friends, Gil takes a walk at midnight and discovers what could be the ultimate source of inspiration for his writing. Gil's nightly walks take him closer to the heart of the city but further from the woman he's about to marry.

"Our hero has found his groove among the Lost Generation and, for us, there's some amusement to be had in sharing Gil's thrills—it's like stepping into a Classic Comics version of (Hemingway's) *A Moveable Feast*," observed Rick Groen of *The Globe and Mail*.

On Feb. 22, Starlight Cinema presents *Of Gods and Men*. Based on a true story of the kidnapping and murder of seven French monks in Algeria in 1996, the film is both a timely and intelligent rumination on key contemporary questions—fundamentalist terrorism and the relationship between Christianity and Islam—and a masterly piece of cinema.

Director Xavier Beauvois depicts the lives of eight brothers who live in a Cistercian monastery in the wild, parched, sun-drenched landscape of Algeria. There is a spiritual existence, but they also live and work in harmony with the locals, providing medical care while also taking part in local Muslim customs.

But outside their monastery more sinister forces are at work. When a group of Croatian workers are murdered, the local mayor urges the brothers to move away. This forces a crisis of conscience among the eight men, and when a fundamentalist militia group turns up one day, the choices they must make become very real and immediate.

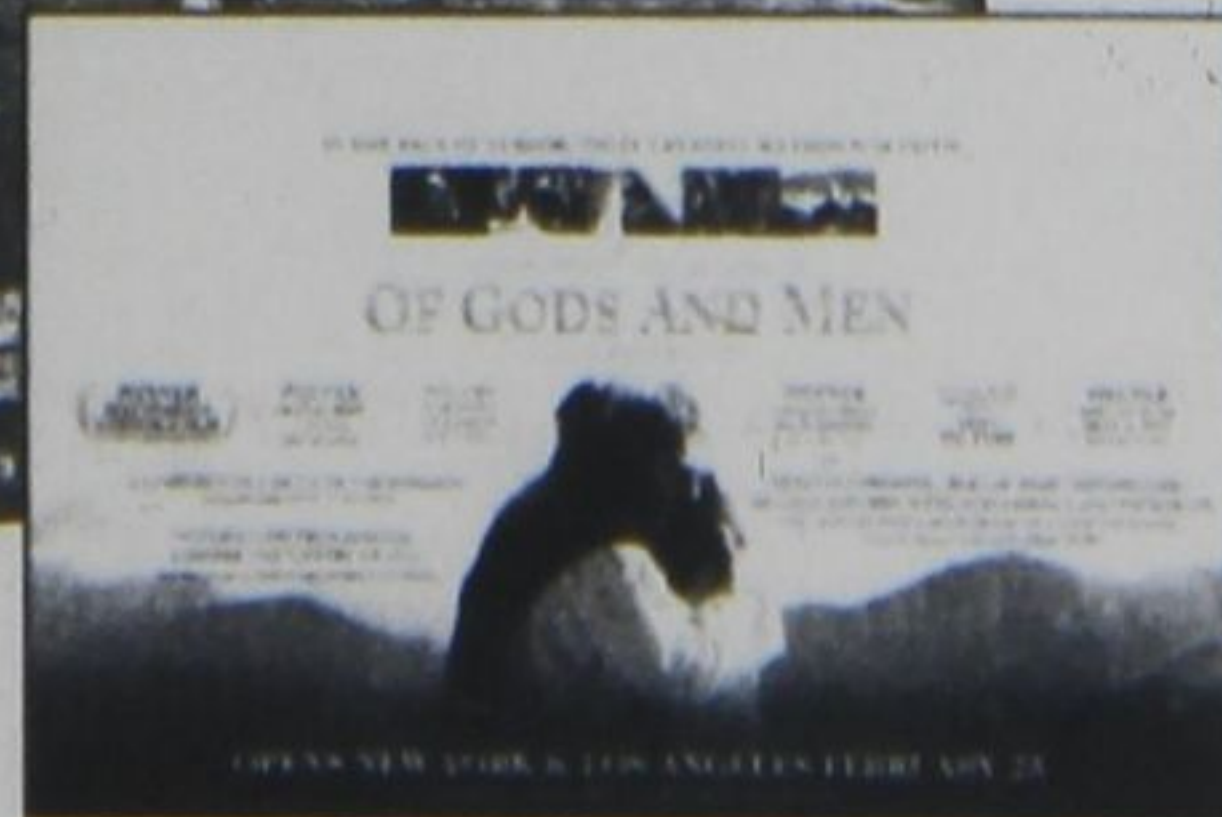
"Beauvois takes his time limning the daily rhythms of the monastery, lingering on its most lyrical and sensuous moments, so that when violence finally reaches its gates the effect is all the more chilling," noted Ann Hornaday of *The Washington Post*.

Friend of Starlight Cinema passes are available for \$100 and

include admission to all regular season presentations for one year and a free Starlight Cinema T-shirt (while supplies last). Annual memberships are \$12 and allow you to buy individual tickets for \$5 per screening. Single tickets are \$7.50 at the door on the night of the screening.

Starlight Cinema, which is part of the Toronto International Film Festival Film Circuit, is proudly sponsored by the *Stouffville Free Press*. For more information visit www.nineteenonthePark.com or call the box office at 905-640-2322.

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