

Courtesy of Steve Pearson

Stuart O'Neil, Steve Pearson, Jon Vanderford, and Dale Vanderford as farmhands in the Hallmark Hall of Fame production of "O Pioneers!"

Stardom hails hard work, not all fortune and glory

Everybody wants to be a star — everybody, including me.

Now there are not many chances to make your grab for stardom in Lincoln, Nebraska; so when I heard last spring that a movie would be filmed in eastern Nebraska, I was determined to be a part of it.

Several weeks ago, I got my big break. I was cast as a farmhand in the movie, a Hallmark Hall of Fame production of "O Pioneers!" that will be aired on CBS next February.

The film, starring Jessica Lange, is based on a Willa Cather novel and was filmed entirely in Nebraska.

The first step in my campaign for fame was to get the thing every aspiring actor needs, besides talent — 8x10 black-and-white glossies.

Next, I developed a resume of my theatrical experience (community theater, high school musicals) and took that, along with a photo to Jackie Beavers, Lincoln's only talent agent. Then, I waited... and waited.

Months later, the call finally came.

Three of my closest friends and I were cast as farmhands and were to report to costuming the following day. (Technically, we were extras, but we prefer to be thought of as background performers.) The thought of it made me giddy with excitement — three of my friends and I in the same scene in a television movie.

Millions will watch the scene and see four farmhands, but when we and our friends watch the scene, we'll see the Fab Four — members of the Cornhusker Marching Band, aspiring Be-Bop quartet, and best friends.

One of the first things I learned is that the film business is an unpredictable one. We were originally told to report for filming the Monday after we went to costuming, but a schedule change delayed our shoot until Wednesday. We were called late Tuesday night and instructed to meet at the costuming warehouse at 6:00 a.m. From there, we were to be transported to the filming location.

Upon our arrival, we learned that we would be filming with the second unit (i.e., the one that, at least in this case, was not filming any of the major characters.) Alas, we did not get to

PEARSON
state

meet Jessica Lange.

We had reported to costuming the previous Friday, wandering through an immense unmarked warehouse filled with costumes and props. I was outfitted in pants and suspenders, while my three friends got overalls. We each got a pair of vintage shoes or boots and an old-fashioned farmer's hat, but the highlight of our wardrobe had to be the long johns — the kind that cover the whole body and have a little button on the backside in case of emergencies.

It was over 90 degrees the day we filmed. I had to wonder why in the world farmhands would wear long johns in the middle of the summer. The actors practically were having heatstroke just standing there; it's hard to imagine anyone actually working in these ridiculous get-ups.

We filmed our scene at about 11:00 a.m., in a beautiful green field in Saunders County, with a red barn and golden wheat field in the background. The director of the second unit, Andy Stone, took great care in placing each farmhand in a particular place in the field in order to make a visually pleasing configuration. He was assisted by his son, Chris, a sophomore at Dartmouth, who tried to impress us with stories about Mel Brooks and going to parties with Julia Roberts.

Each of us was given a hoe or a scythe to use in the field. Then, we were blotted with ice water on the chest, back, and armpits to simulate sweat (as if we needed to simulate it). The camera, which in the film will represent Jessica Lange's perspective, was mounted on a truck that drove slowly down the road. Each of the farmhands was assigned a number. As the camera approached, Andy would call a number, and the corresponding farmhand was to stop working, look-up, give a smile of recognition and wave or doff his hat.

We went through approximately 20 rehearsal takes, followed by two on film. The scene is about 35 seconds long — 35 glorious seconds of fame.

After filming our scene, we were treated to lunch at Hardee's — in full costume. While I was chomping my mushroom cheeseburger, an old-timer in the restaurant observed my costume and the tools in the back of the truck outside and asked if we were harvesting marijuana.

"No, just making a movie."

He didn't look as if he believed me.

After lunch, we spent three hours lying on a gravel road while the crew filmed a scene with a mule-drawn plow. After covering miles of territory we came back to Lincoln, returned our costumes and filled out the forms for our payment.

Andy gave a little speech about how he hoped we learned a little about the movie business and realized that it wasn't all glamour. He was right; it wasn't all glamour. It was a lot of hard work, and we only got \$50 for a 15-hour day... but we got something better — stardom!!

I just hope it doesn't end up on the cutting room floor.

Pearson is a senior political science and speech communications major and a Daily Nebraskan reporter and columnist.

Henry

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formance as Sarah is engrossing. Bening may also be a strong contender in the Oscar race this spring, perhaps as a Best Actress candidate.

In supporting roles, Bill Nunn and Allen turn in excellent performances. Nunn, also seen in "Do the Right Thing" and "School Daze," plays Henry's therapist, Bradley. Bradley treats Henry with respect and love, and the combination helps him to recover. Twelve-year-old Allen, taking on her first film role, proves that

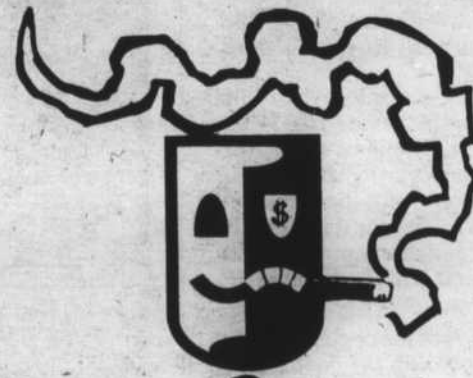
she has the talent to garner further film roles. She is charming and sensitive as Rachel.

Filmed in New York and Los Angeles, "Regarding Henry" was directed and produced by Academy Award-winner Mike ("Working Girl," "The Graduate") Nichols. Scott Rudin is co-producer. The original screenplay is by Jeffrey Abrams.

"Regarding Henry" is playing at the Lincoln Theatre, 12th and P streets.

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