

# "KILL THAT BABY"

All quiet on the northern set.  
Ivan Reitman's *Meatballs*

By Kay Armatage



This sporting life. Left to right: nymphet, nymphet, The Star, nerd.

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*Meatballs*, the follow-up to the enormously successful *Animal House*, which Ivan Reitman co-produced, was shot on location at a working summer camp last summer. Budgeted at under a million dollars, it's Reitman's first major directorial effort and stars Bill (*Saturday Night Live*) Murray and a cast of young, mostly Canadian actors.

My job on *Meatballs* was location coordinator—in other words the sole liaison between the camp and the movie. If we needed two basketballs or 400 camper extras for a scene, I had to arrange it. If we had to send 160 kids on a 2-day canoe trip so we could shoot in their cabins, I was the negotiator. I'd never worked on a feature before, but like many of the neo-

phytes in the cast and crew, I was keen and thought I was ready.

*Meatballs* is about the rivalry between a nice poor camp (our heroes) and a rich mean camp from across the lake. Every year the rich campers (all of them great athletes impeccably equipped) win the Olympiad. Every year the poor kids (lousy players all, with no uniforms, no nothing) are egged on by the gung-ho counselors to give their all and every year they lose. Badly. But this year head counselor Tripper (Bill Murray) comes up with a new pre-Olympic chant: "It just doesn't matter." Then he discovers that quiet, introspective, homesick Rudy (Chris Makepeace, a wonderful actor) can run the Marathon.

Reading the script was easy. I was still safe in Toronto at the time. At the first

production meeting I wrote efficiently in my notebook: Scene No. 23—2 basketballs; No. 48—400 camper extras; No. 109—150 camper extras; No. 103—check with camp director to see if we can shoot on the deck during free swim; No. 5—400 duffel bags and 5 buses. Easy.

Then we headed north to Haliburton, a wilderness of forests and lakes, and to Camp White Pines, the largest, richest, best equipped summer camp in Ontario.

There was a cast of about 30, including nine kids under 16 (three of those under ten) and a crew of about 80. There were the mothers of the littlest kids as well as Ivan's wife Geneviève Deloir with infant son Jason and toy poodle Charlie. There were 50-100 extras who played the parents of the campers in the visiting day scene and the 'villagers' in the movie

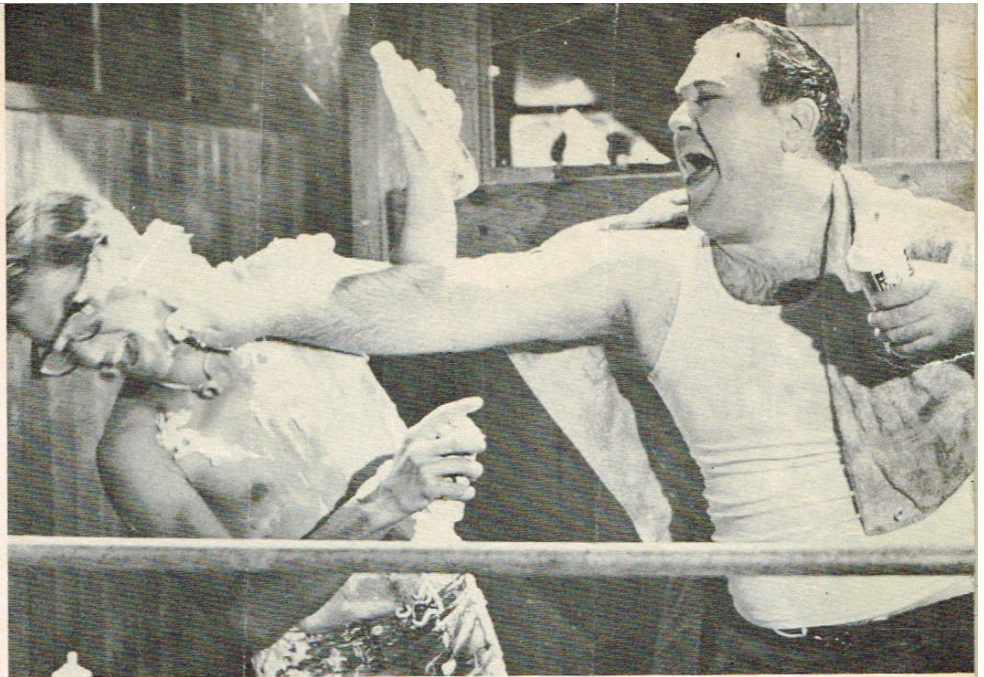
house scene. There were fifty or so extras from the nearest town with a shopping plaza (about 100 miles away) who played the rich snobby parents of the rival campers. And there were over 400 real White Pine campers and staff.

Except for the campers and local extras, we all stayed the seven weeks of location shooting at the Hunter's Horn Lodge on a lake about 15 miles from the camp itself. At seven every morning we piled into rented vehicles to drive the seemingly endless dirt road to the camp. This is the part of the shoot I remember most fondly: those lyrical cavalcades at dawn, the mists rising from the swamps and lakes as we passed, blue herons silhouetted against the reeds, the village of Hali-burton asleep as we roared along through the rosy sunrise. Leading the parade in the rented green Dodge was chipper Mary Guilfoyle, the Production Secretary. Following her a blue Econoline van filled with the young principles, always harmonizing (usually old Beatles songs—even right after breakfast). Then another Econoline bus, then twenty other assorted vehicles. As we neared the turn into the camp, we were joined by Ivan Reitman, The Director, and Bill Murray, The Star, arriving in different directions from their chalets on more exclusive lakes.

Every day the caravan drove along the beautiful mile-long entrance road to the camp and every day I cringed in fear. Would the campers hate us even more today than they had yesterday? Would the campus who had promised to get up early to stand around for four hours before they got to walk through a scene as "camp background" show up after all? Or would I have to run up and down that 1600 acres of camp another fifty times before I rounded up replacement extras who would then clamber after me, incessantly asking when they would get to show the movie cameras their special trick, or sing the song they'd practised so long or do their fancy widescreen dive.

They didn't get to sing their songs or do their photogenic dives. The smart ones figured out soon enough that they weren't getting any close-ups and that that was what really mattered. No close-ups, then no show as camp background. Then the kids started stealing production T-shirts or just not showing up for scenes they had promised to be in. By about the third day of shooting we were close to a state of seige.

They never gave the T-shirts back. Hundreds of Camp Mohawk and hundreds of Camp North Star T-shirts were silk-screened and they all disappeared. As shooting went on, retaliatory measures heightened. In the last weeks of camp we had to post guards at night to prevent out-and-out sabotage. The hydrogen-filled wheels were deflated more than once; grip equipment became featured decor in the cabins of the older



*If this photo were in your high school yearbook, the copy underneath would probably read, "A Close Shave." We'll go with that.*

kids. And I came close to quitting on the afternoon of the second day.

It was blazing hot, the peak of summer and about fifteen of the cutest little 8-year-old campers had sat all afternoon on the beach while one of the 8-year-old Toronto professional actors did a trick in the water over and over again. The "spectators" hadn't been allowed to move, not an inch, because everyone knew that they wouldn't find their proper places again and the scriptgirl had enough on her hands with the exploding beach-ball. So these cherubs sat in one spot for three hours on the promise that they would be featured in a potato sack race to be shot immediately after.

As soon as the beach scene was finished, I rushed the little girls to their cabins to change from their bathing suits, got them divided into rival teams and positioned them on the starting line ready for the cameras to roll. After they'd waited another hour and even missed their snack, Gord Robinson, the Assistant Director, came quietly over and drew me aside: "Ivan wants bigger kids." Mother

of millions already on my second day on the job, my heart broke for them. "No. These kids have been waiting all afternoon for their chance. You can't do this to them." Gord was insistent: "Ivan wants bigger kids." "You tell them," I said, and walked away. About half an hour later (the crew were still setting up) I came back again and Gord said again, "Ivan wants bigger kids." "Let him tell them," I said and walked away again (lucky I didn't get fired for this), this time taking a slightly bigger T-shirt from the wardrobe box. Finally everything was ready and Ivan stepped forward, clapping his hands like a Little League coach, and said cheerily, "Now where are my potato sack racers?" "Right here," I said, my arms around all fifteen of them at once, all of them about three feet high and jumping up and down in ecstatic anticipation. "They need to be bigger," Ivan said. "Here's a big one," I smiled, and firmly pushed forward one golden-haired 3 1/2 foot beauty. "OK," said Ivan, "Now here's what I want you kids to do." The day was won.

**'Cornball' Canadian movie**