

INSIDE AURORA: Ready for my Closeup? (Pt. 2)

By Scott Johnston

The car drove slowly through the Toronto cemetery, pulling to a stop in front of a beautiful flowering crabapple next to a weathered old stone building. Two people stepped out, and started slowly walking up a nearby path between the graves.

"You can't park there," yelled a man running towards them, waving his arms.

"We're filming a documentary."

"Oh, \$#@&*!?"

"Cut! We'll have to do it again."

Our first scene was not off to a great start.

If you missed my last column, I described that over the past several years I have been conducting research on the fate of my late uncle, who was killed in the Second World War, and whose body was never recovered or identified.

Although I don't have confirmed proof of this, I believe that he may be buried in an unmarked grave in a small cemetery on the island of Schiermonnikoog, off the coast of The Netherlands.

This had resulted in a German crew, who have been filming a documentary about the cemetery and its many fascinating stories, coming to Aurora to record our family's account.

After assuring the cemetery worker that my brother and I were only parking for a minute, we managed to successfully complete the shot the next time.

After some more scenes, the producer wanted to get some clips of us in a crowded area, to better emphasize the difference between the big bustling Canadian City of Toronto, and the small Dutch island of only 1,000 residents at the centre of the story.

We were downtown, so that would be easy.

Make that ? should have been easy.

It was Victoria Day Weekend and the city was deserted. Yonge and Bloor? Ghost town. Dundas Square? Eerily quiet.

In an attempt to make the streets look congested, we actually had to wait for and stalk the infrequent groups of people. I expect on screen we will look like two inept spies unsuccessfully trying to covertly tail someone.

The next day the crew came up to Aurora. They were most impressed with our town, including the cenotaph and "the castle" (Magna Headquarters).

Hopefully, a thorough house cleaning beforehand will result in no dust bunnies being visible in the final feature, despite the crew setting up in rooms in which we hadn't expected them to film, and much shuffling of furniture and contents.

There were some technical difficulties in a pivotal scene where we skyped with the man who manages the Schiermonnikoog cemetery. Although we'd been in touch for years by email, this was the first time we'd actually seen each other.

Unfortunately that's all we could do, as there was no sound, and none of us could lip-read. Eventually, after about half an hour, we got the sound to work, but the spontaneity of the moment had long passed.

The last day of filming was again back in the city, and consisted of them shooting us from different angles as we drove around town, in one case with both camera men and all their equipment wedged into the backseat of the compact car.

In the end, the crew seemed happy with all their shots, and I must admit a curiosity to see the finished cut next year, and how my uncle's story intermixes with the other ones they've already filmed.

More importantly, although we haven't conclusively identified our uncle's grave, through the documentary we have been able to share his story, which is a small first step towards providing a bit of the closure about his fate that my mother and grandmother never had.

My research continues.

Feel free to e-mail Scott at: machellscorners@gmail.com