



Wild Life

{ Presskit }
2011

A FILM BY **AMANDA FORBIS
& WENDY TILBY**



SYNOPSIS

Alberta, 1909. The wide open prairies of the wild west. Enter a well-tailored young Englishman, fresh from the old country. He's been sent to try his hand at ranching but his affection for badminton, bird watching and liquor leaves him little time for wrangling cattle. As the golden prairie summer turns to fall, it becomes clear that nothing in his refined upbringing has prepared him for the harsh conditions of the New World.

Borrowing playfully from the western, the nature documentary and eyewitness reportage, this short animated film offers a fresh, wry take on the Canadian frontier experience. By contrasting details as delicate as a teacup with the immensity of the prairie sky, the clash between civilization and wilderness is starkly rendered. **Wild Life** is about the beauty of the untamed prairie, the pang of being homesick and the folly of living dangerously out of context.

ABOUT THE REMITTANCE MEN

Wild Life tells the story of one of the thousands of well-to-do young remittance men who came to western Canada from England in the early years of the twentieth century. Some were looking for adventure, while others were sent away by exasperated parents who hoped the

rugged life would turn their wayward sons into men. They were known pejoratively as remittance men because they lived on generous allowances from home. In some cases, parents paid an unreliable son to stay away so as not to be an embarrassment to them.

In the New World, remittance men spent most of their time having fun. They entertained themselves by hunting and fishing, dancing and drinking, and playing cricket and polo. They worked only when

they'd run out of money from home, and then, only until the next installment of cash arrived. Compared to their more industrious neighbours they were colourful curiosities. The era of remittance men came to an end when World War I was declared.

(Sources: *The Canadian Encyclopedia*; and *Scoundrels, Dreamers, and Second Sons: British Remittance Men in the Canadian West* by Mark Zuehlke.)





AMANDA FORBIS

When the Day Breaks, 1999 (9 min 33 s)

Over 30 international awards including Grand Prize awards from Annecy, Zagreb, Hiroshima, Melbourne, Moscow, Houston and Los Angeles as well as an Oscar nomination and Genie award from the film academies of the US and Canada.

The Reluctant Deckhand, 1995 (46 minutes)

Directed by Jan Padgett, animated by Amanda Forbis.

WENDY TILBY

When the Day Breaks, 1999 (9 min 33 s)

Over 30 international awards including numerous Grand Prize awards as well as the Palme d'Or for Best Short Film at Cannes and Best Animation & Short Film Awards from Banff, Leipzig, Halifax, Gyor, Espinho, Austin, Chicago, Santa Barbara, New York and San Francisco.

Strings, 1991 (10 min 20 s)

Selected by 76 festivals around the world, and winner of 12 awards, its honours include a 1991 Academy Award nomination for Best Animated Short, a Genie Award in 1992 and awards from festivals such as the Ottawa International Animation Festival, Annecy International Animated Film Festival and the Hiroshima International Animation Festival.

Tables of Content, 1986 (7 min)

An acclaimed student film made at the Emily Carr College of Art. Its many awards include the Ottawa International Animation Festival First Prize in category (1988), Shanghai Animation Festival First Prize in category (1988), Annecy International Animation Festival Soroptimists of France Prize (1987), a Genie Award Nomination (1987), Espinho International Festival of Animation First Prize in category (1987) and the Montreal World Film Festival Grand Prix for best short film (1986).

BIOGRAPHY

Both originally from Alberta, Amanda Forbis and Wendy Tilby first met in Vancouver at the Emily Carr College of Art, where they studied film and animation. They each went on to create their own works with the National Film Board of Canada (***The Reluctant Deckhand*** and ***Strings***) before co-directing ***When the Day Breaks*** (1999). They have continued to collaborate on workshops, commercials and commissioned projects. Their commercial work includes a series of ads for United Airlines that showcases their fluid storytelling. In 2003, they relocated from Montreal to Calgary, where they made ***Wild Life***.

COMMISSIONED WORK

Ohio Health: Three TV ads (2011)

Alberta Ballet (The Seven Deadly Sins): Video projections (2010)

United Airlines: Website animation (2010)

General Motors: Six TV ads (2008)

Alberta Ballet (Mozart's Requiem): Video projections (2008)

Alberta Ingenuity: Promotional piece (2006)

Drew Carey: Animated logo (2004)

Acme Filmworks: Animated logo (2004)

United Airlines (The Meeting): TV ad (2005) – **Holland Animation Film Festival Grand Prize for Applied Animation**

United Airlines (Mr. Pants): TV ad (2005) – **Annie Award winner**

United Airlines (Interview): TV ad (2004) – **Annie Award winner & Art Directors Club Silver Medal**

Outloud: Website animation (2003)

Colorado Lottery: TV ad (2003) – **Annie Award nominee**

The National Film Board: Animated logo (2003)

Harvard Film Archive: Two animated trailers

Eukanuba: TV ad (2001)

Earthlink: TV ad (2000) – **Annie Award winner**

Janus Funds: TV ad (1995)





Q&A WITH THE FILMMAKERS

1. *Wild Life* is set in 1909, when a number of young Englishmen came to the western part of Canada. What is your personal, autobiographical connection to this moment in Canadian history?

Amanda: We both have grandparents who emigrated from England at the turn of the century, drawn to Canada by the promise of adventure. They weren't remittance men per se, but they did have high hopes of success in the New World. My grandfather and several of his brothers tried farming in Alberta. After a few short years, terrible weather and a desperately sick child (my aunt) drove my grandfather off the farm and back to England—just in time for World War II. As a result, both my mother's childhood and loyalties were divided between England and Canada.

Wendy: My grandfather arrived in Winnipeg in 1905. There he met and married my grandmother (also British) and together they travelled west. My grandfather, who had been a watchmaker in England, found work as an electrician installing power plants in small towns across the Prairies. When the Great Depression hit, they settled west of Edmonton and took up farming. With seven kids and dwindling resources, the conditions were extremely harsh.

2. What is it about the remittance man that captures your imagination? How much sympathy do you have for this character?

A&W: The remittance man is a bon vivant in an environment that doesn't tolerate such creatures. Though he is entirely without practical knowledge or survival skills, he is well-educated and curious. He is also a forgotten part of our short recorded history—a colourful figure in a bleak landscape. We think these high living, irresponsible British boys deserve to be remembered, particularly as they embodied Canada's version of the Wild West.

3. *Wild Life* is part western, part eye-witness documentary, part science film on comets. There is some faux-newsreel footage and a reference to Darwin. Why all these different elements?

A&W: Our idea was to construct an animated portrait of one remittance man in the style of a modern documentary—as though we were taking our cameras back to Alberta of 1910. To give the story historical context, we planned to refer to concurrent cultural and scientific events in the "civilized" world of 1910. We

combed timelines of history and saw that Halley's Comet made an appearance that year. We quickly became intrigued by the possibility of using the comet as a metaphor for the remittance man.

Astronomy, natural history and the writings of Darwin were popular subjects at the turn of the century, a time when many an English gentleman fancied himself an amateur naturalist. Mostly, though, the reference is there to underscore the hubris of a confident young fellow, sure of his fitness, and to foreshadow his own inability to adapt.

4. Your previous film *When the Day Breaks* dealt with isolation in an urban context. In *Wild Life*, the protagonist is facing loneliness on a different scale. Why is this a compelling theme for you?

A&W: We suspect it has something to do with the conflicted nature of animators—we need both solitude and community!

When the Day Breaks is about the irony of isolation in an urban context, and how it is our very proximity to others that compels us to disconnect. When the dangers of the city overwhelm Ruby the pig, she yearns for a bucolic ideal she has never known. In *Wild Life*, the remittance man's isolation is very real. He too is wistful—but in an inversion of Ruby's yearnings, he longs for the comfort and safety of the city.

Both stories are about characters coping with hostile environments. Ruby adapts, the remittance man does not. For us, *Wild Life* is really about adaptation—or lack thereof.

5. The technique is gouache on paper, digitally composited. How did you settle on this technique? How does the look of the film relate to the story?

A&W: After *When the Day Breaks*, we were determined to find a technique that did not involve hand-painting every frame. Also, we wanted to take advantage of the computer and its time-saving possibilities. After much trial and error with various media (including painting software), it became clear to us that the prairie landscape itself was a key element in the film, and to properly convey its subtlety we needed a richness and depth that only real paint can deliver. We chose gouache for its flexibility and aimed for a rough, folk art style. That said, we used the computer extensively as a tool for drawing, compositing and editing.

OUR CONNECTIONS TO THE WORLD

To date, Amanda Forbis and Wendy Tilby have completed only two short films, **When the Day Breaks** and **Wild Life**, although Tilby has also done solo work, the student film **Tables of Contents** (1986) and **Strings** (1991). This list of works may be short, but the films show a consistent trajectory and focus. Our relationship with others and the world, our empathy, our sense of observation and our attachment to place are all recurring themes. Through their powerful narrative and brilliant technical skills, Forbis and Tilby also evoke ideas and concepts that aren't easily expressed, and they do so with subtlety and sensitivity.

Tilby's first two films were painted on glass. A restrained character study of patrons of a restaurant, **Tables of Content** examines the fine line between loneliness and community living. **Strings** reveals the ties between two tenants living on different floors of an apartment building. This vivid story incorporates an elevator, bathroom plumbing, a water leak and sly references to the sinking of the *Titanic*. The film adopts a soft, warm palette in keeping with the humanistic nature of the narrative and relies on editing to underline the links between people.

Although the filmmakers use similar metaphors, they abandon a linear narrative in their masterpiece **When the Day Breaks**. In this film, a pig lady and a rooster man accidentally collide on the sidewalk. Soon after, the rooster is run over by a car, and the pig lady realizes she isn't alone in the world. This realization delivers an emotional impact in a film exploring our relationship with our community. Narrative fragments provide clues to the rooster's past life, and we come to understand that he had a story to tell and that a community is a group of individuals, each with their own rich stories.

When the Day Breaks has the distinction, rare in animation, of being set in a real location: the Mile End neighbourhood in Montreal. The film also embraces an almost documentary style (the realistic subway scene is particularly striking). Drawn on paper, the images make inventive and unorthodox use of rotoscoping, which gives the animal characters an astonishingly human look. The animated short enjoyed great international acclaim, earning the Palme d'Or for short films at Cannes and an Oscar nomination.

The years separating their films suggest that the two women opt for a very slow, deliberate process. It's no surprise that, for their next work, **Wild Life**, they avoided repeating themselves. The gouache drawings used in this second film result in cleaner lines and more distinct chromatic variations. Another difference: words are used for the first time. Forbis and Tilby adopt the rich lyricism of their previous film but with a more economical and restrained approach as they examine fragile social ties. They focus on a little-known chapter of Canadian history to delve even further into our relationship with our community, and, in doing so, they shed light on immigration today.

Wild Life tells of a young, wealthy Brit who settles in 1909 in rural Alberta, the filmmakers' native province. The man brings his upper-crust British traditions to the Prairies, much to the surprise of Albertans. However, reality eventually catches up with this fellow. The comet mentioned in the intertitles provides a great metaphor ("a comet is a mixture of ice and dust that, for some reason, has failed to become part of a planet"). This single comet can still shine in a sky brimming with stars. Western Canada's wide open spaces in the early twentieth century are rendered here with splendour and a very sure dramatic sense.

Forbis and Tilby have made international names for themselves in animation despite the small number of films under their belt. They are in the same league of animators and visual artists as Yuri Norstein, Caroline Leaf, Alexander Petrov and Michael Dudok de Wit, all of whom achieve subtle yet profound results using traditional techniques thanks to an expertise that commands respect. Their work brings to mind words like "transcendence" and "poetry" because they move beyond the anecdotal and create unique visual and emotional experiences.

Marco de Blois



MARCY PAGE



Marcy Page has pursued an interest in animation for well over thirty years. As an NFB producer of animated films, she has remained committed—throughout more than eighty projects on which she has collaborated—to seeking out eclectic and unusual productions that push the envelope of their medium. She's helped lead the way in marrying computer technology and artistry as NFB producer on Chris Landreth's Oscar-winning, 3D-generated "documentation" **Ryan** and on stereoscopic animation projects such as **Falling in**

Love Again and **June** (both released in 2003, and directed by Munro Ferguson) and **Moon Man** (2004, directed by Paul Morstad).

Marcy has worked with many other world-renowned animation directors, such as Paul Driessen, Janet Perlman, John Weldon, Chris Hinton, Gayle Thomas, Sheldon Cohen, Craig Welch, Lynn Smith, Carolyn Leaf, Wendy Tilby and Amanda Forbis, and collaborated on the first professional animated films of then-emerging talents Chris Lavis and Maciek Szczerbowski (creators of the Oscar-nominated **Madame Tuttil-Putil**) and the films of Torill Kove: the Oscar-nominated **My Grandmother Ironed the King's Shirts** and the Oscar-winning **The Danish Poet**. Marcy Page has helped shape dozens of acclaimed narrative and non-narrative films that have garnered over 250 international awards in total for the NFB and its celebrated animation program.

BONNIE THOMPSON



Working out of the NFB's North West Centre in Edmonton, producer Bonnie Thompson has created a wide range of projects with filmmakers across Canada. Bonnie first worked in marketing at the NFB, after which she moved into production.

She has more than fifty production credits—for documentaries, features, animation and interactive web projects. Film highlights include the Genie Award-winning documentary **Radiant City**, co-produced by Burns Films, and the Gemini Award-winning **Two Worlds Colliding** (CBC and APTN). Recent credits include **Wild Life**, the hybrid doc-drama feature **The Future Is Now!**, also co-produced by Burns Films, and the feature documentary **Wiebo's War**, co-produced by 52 Media, Inc. Her many current projects include the interactive **Bear 71**, with filmmaker Leanne Allison, and the feature animation **Wall**, with animator Cam Christianson.



A FILM BY **AMANDA FORBIS & WENDY TILBY**

CAST

Adam Blackwood
Luba Goy
Anthony Bekenn
Keith Dinicol
Colin Fox
Nonnie Griffin
Ben Carlson
Amy Rutherford

CASTING

Gail Carr

ORIGINAL MUSIC

Judith Gruber-Stitzer

**SOUND SUPERVISION
& EDITING**

Patrick Butler

SOUND EDITING

Brent Planiden

FOLEY

Andy Malcolm

ADDITIONAL PAINTING

Deborah Tilby
Corinne Dickson
Val Nelson

ADDITIONAL ANIMATION

Stephen McCallum
Olivier Masson

**DIGITAL IMAGING
& EFFECTS**

Brandon Jan Blommaert
Fred Casia

**DIGITAL IMAGING
CONSULTATION**

Randall Finnerty
Susan Gourley
Pierre Plouffe

SCANNING

Kelly Clarkson, *Chroma Surge
Print & Imaging*

ONLINE EDITING

Yannick Carrier

TITLES

Gaspard Gaudreau

**MUSIC RECORDING
& MIX**

Geoffrey Mitchell
Mathieu Leroux
Don Murnaghan, *Studio Frisson*

VOICE RECORDING

Ron Mellegers, *Footsteps Post-
Production Sound Inc.*
Thillaye Productions
Jonathan Cook, *Hobsons Studio UK*
Ryan Aktari, *Kitchen Sync
Digital Audio*

FOLEY RECORDING

David j Taylor, *Twisted Pair
Sound*

FINAL MIX

Jean Paul Vialard

ORIGINAL MUSIC

Judith Gruber-Stitzer

**Excerpts from *The Pirates
of Penzance & Cox and Box***

MUSIC

Sir Arthur Sullivan

ARRANGEMENT

Judith Gruber-Stitzer, David
Gossage, Lance Neveu

MUSICIANS

Lana Tomlin, Ellie Nimeroski,
Amanda Keesmaat, Josée
Marchand, Kevin Dean, Paul
Marcotte, Mohammed Abdul
Al-Khabyr

“Wahoo”

MUSIC & LYRICS

Cliff Friend
©Warner/Chappell Music
Canada - All rights reserved

ARRANGEMENT

Judith Gruber-Stitzer
David Gossage

VOCALS

Russell deCarle

MUSICIANS

Michael Jerome Browne,
Tommy Gauthier, Guy Donis

“Rainbow”

MUSIC

Percy Wenrich

LYRICS

Alfred Bryan

VOCALS

Ada Jones & Billy Murray

**“The Cowboy’s Last Ride”
(Edison Blue Ambersol, 1913)**

MUSIC

Judith Gruber-Stitzer

LYRICS

Amanda Forbis & Wendy Tilby

VOCALS

Russell deCarle

MUSICIANS

Michael Jerome Browne,
Tommy Gauthier

**ARCHIVAL RESEARCH/
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ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE

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REFERENCES

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Joy & Ted Tilby

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COORDINATION**

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Julie Laperrrière

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COORDINATION**

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Wild Life

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