



Filming the 'Wild': Movie crew stays busy in Montana's cold

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By *BETSY COHEN* of the *Missoulian*

LINCOLN - Christopher Lloyd sold his home in Darby years ago, but the Hollywood film star said he's happy to be back in Montana this month helping to bring to life a modern adaptation of Jack London's famed novel, "The Call of the Wild."

"It's just a wonderful script, and the role I was asked to play - the grandpa - I really like," Lloyd said while taking a short break during filming outside Lincoln on Sunday.

"He's kind of lonely, his wife recently died and he's excited to have his granddaughter come visit and have another voice in the house," Lloyd said.

As the story goes, the granddaughter, played by 10-year-old Ariel Gade, is not too happy to leave her big-city life and luxuries in Boston to spend time in the snowy mountains of Montana with her grandfather.

"She arrives with a lot of superficial pursuits and feelings - she's very much involved with status and keeping up with the Joneses," Lloyd said.

Gade's character, Ryann, has a change of heart when she finds an injured wolf dog, which she nurses back to health and fights to keep from a mean man played by Timothy Bottoms, who claims to be the dog's owner.

All the while, Lloyd's character, the grandfather, reads London's story to Ryann.

Both come to believe the injured wolf dog is a descendent of the story's famed "Buck" and give him the same name.

"She didn't want to come here, but she falls in love with the dog and Grandpa and when it comes time for her to leave and be with her parents, she has a more mature outlook on life," Lloyd said. "As for Grandpa - he's been in mourning for months and months and his granddaughter's visit pulls him out of it and he is ready to start a new life."

With a snowstorm on the horizon and a darkening sky overhead, there were few pauses in filming on Sunday afternoon.

Working with dogs and children is difficult, but throw in the whims of nature, and this kind of a production is quite a feat, said Nancy Draper, the film's producer.

Gade, the young star of the movie, was in every scene filmed on Sunday and all will be part of the movie's climactic moment - a dog-sled race intended to determine who will keep the wolf dog.

Despite the cold and snow, Gade and her co-stars, who include Kameron Knox, Devon Graye, Aimee Teegarden, Veronica Cartwright and Wes Studi, remained cheerful and on task.

To keep the momentum going, a staff of assistants kept hot chocolate and steaming cups of coffee close at hand. When needed, a warm van shuttled the actors from the snowy race scene to Maureen and Rollie Fisher's log home to thaw out and rest.

"We've invaded their home, and they've been so gracious about it," Draper said. Inside the lovely home, the kitchen has been transformed into a giant office, with laptops and fax machines lined up on one counter, and a banquet of food on another.

Dozens of people bustled around, bringing in supplies, running errands and problem-solving filming issues.

Production supervisor Larissa Michel said filming is going smoothly, but with any movie, there's always something that creates an unexpected mini-drama.

As if on cue, the film crew's radios squawked with the latest emergency: Lloyd's hat and gloves somehow got misplaced during a snack break, and the needed - and necessary - costume items had to be located pronto.

The delay didn't create an unintended break, however. Director Richard Gabai took the opportunity to reshoot a series of crowd shots.

Maureen Fisher said it's been fun to play host to the Hollywood crew and watch the movie magic unfold in Lincoln.

Lloyd, everyone agreed, is gracious and polite, a pleasure to be with and work around.

"He's a real gentleman," Fisher said. "And everyone is so nice.

"They're just the best, newest friends I could ever ask for."

Rollie Fisher agreed with his wife, but confessed the "magic" is a lot of hard work.

"It's busy," Rollie said. "It's been long days and short nights, but to tell you the truth, the whole thing has been fascinating."

Hanging out with the film's stars and watching the movie come together has been entertaining, he said. But the star of the show, as far as he's concerned, is the wolf dog, who goes by "Bubba" in real life and "Buck" in the movie.

"When Ariel - or Ryann as she's called in the movie - finds the dog and how that dog acted in those scenes is unbelievable," Rollie said. "He goes from nearly dead to being alive, and it's just amazing to watch it happen.

"That dog can act."

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