With eerie reality 'In Cold Blood' is filmed at scene of the murders

A NIGHTMARE LIVED AGAIN

Like ghosts returned to the Kansas wheatfields, two young men go through the events that gave the town of Garden City a macabre fame. The two look and behave eerily like the pair, Richard Hickock and Perry Smith, who on a November night in 1959 broke into the home of Herbert Clutter, in the village of Holcomb, 71/2 miles outside town, and murdered him and three members of his family. That crime was the subject of Truman Capote's international best-seller 'In Cold Blood,' which is now being made into a movie by Richard Brooks. Brooks shows a chilling insistence on re-creating reality. Not only do the actors who play the killers closely resemble their real-life counterparts but so do their victims. All play their roles in the places where the actual events occurred—in the same filling stations and pawnshops where Smith and Hickock stopped on their ride across Kansas to the Clutter farm, in the very rooms and basement of the house where Herbert, Bonnie, Nancy and Kenyon Clutter were killed. Levels of reality and illusion have piled up on the people of Garden City. First came the murders, then the trial of the killers, then the five-year wait for the hangings. A year after that it was all brought back by Capote's brilliant re-creation, first in a magazine, then in a hardcover book and a paperback. And now comes the making of the movie, like a nightmare revived, affecting both the people who lived through the events and the actors.
In a men's room across the street from the scene of the crime, actors Blake and Wilson play the scene in which Hickock and Smith discuss their plans to rob the Clutter home and leave "no witnesses." They expected a safe stuffed with cash but found no safe and only a few dollars. At right, the film re-creates the killing of Kenyon Clutter in the basement playroom of the Clutter house where the actual murder took place. And in the adjoining furnace room (opposite page) the film re-enacts the moment when Herbert Clutter was tied on a mattress box by Smith, who then cut his throat and, for good measure, shot him.

In the basement of the Clutter
me, the murders re-enacted
In the Christmas card portraits of the real Chutter family (above right) taken in 1953, Herbert Chutter stands next to his seated wife. Kenyon and Nancy are at left. Their older sisters, neither of whom was home the night of the murders, flank their parents. Above, like a double image of reality, is John McLiam, a veteran of movies and theater, who plays Herbert Chutter. At right are Paul Hough and Brenda Currie, senior drama majors at Kansas University, who portray Kenyon and Nancy.
Richard Brooks directs a crowd of extras in Kansas City bus station where Hitchcock and Smith meet in the film. Brooks amazed his cast. "He can tell you just by looking at you when you went to bed and if you had lunched," one actor said, "and gets things out of you you never knew were there."

Audrey Capote assumes a secretarial stance in front of the post office in the town of Holcomb, where Capote's presence on the set: "If he hadn't come along in the first place," one said, "we might be able to forget all this. Why'd he have to put us on the map this way?" "How else?" another resident asked. "For raising moly?"

The wife of the Clutters' minister, who has moved away because "staying in Garden City wasn't doing our nerves any good," says that reading headlines about the movie is "like having salt poured onto an open wound." Several people who came to watch the filming were pleased to act bit roles. But many scoffed at the proceedings. "Eight hours' work for three minutes of film," one said. "It's about as fascinating as watching peaches being canned."

When the company first came to town, a nice Methodist lady walked up to Robert Blake on the street and said, "Hello there, real nice to have you in town." She was rewarded with a scowl. The townspeople all soon found that Blake and Wilson were deliberately unapproachable. "It's for sure," Wilson said, "that Dick and Perry never knew the Clutters or anyone else here, so we don't figure..."
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Haunting spirit
of Perry Smith

CAPOTE CONTINUED

we should hang around with them either.”

Brenda Carrin, who plays Nancy Clutter, said, “There was a mutual embarrassment when we met Bobby and Scott. It was as if we were all apologizing to each other for being who we were.” She and Paul Hough, who plays Kenyon, are both 21 and both hoping to graduate on schedule next month from Kansas University. They have toured with a K.U. drama troupe in Eastern Europe and Greenland and would like to try their luck in New York theater. Their real concern now is to portray the Clutter family properly. “I have to remember,” says Paul, “not to focus my eyes when they drag me from my bed. Kenyon couldn’t see anything without his glasses.”

Brenda rode Nancy Clutter’s actual horse, Babe, a sway-backed 20-year-old, rented and returned to her old home for a couple of days. Brenda said, “The really spooky thing was that when I let her she’d automatically head right toward the same orchard where Nancy used to like to take her.” For Brenda a moment of revelation came during the filming of the scene when Blake, as Perry, came into her room for a chat and to extinguish her life. “I felt more sympathy for Perry than I ever had in the book,” she said. “It was a sudden, electric understanding.”

In some ways the parallels between the lives of Wilson and Blake and the killers they play are arresting. Like Hickock, Wilson used to be very good at basketball. “I got a basketball scholarship to Southern Tech,” he said, “but then I lost it when I got mononucleosis, so I hitchhiked from Atlanta to Hollywood and took lessons to get rid of my Southern accent.” Until his present role he spent as much time being a parking lot attendant and carhop as before cameras.

Blake, like Perry Smith, had an itinerant, insecure childhood. As a child actor he traveled between New Jersey and Los Angeles and all around the country, got a big part in Treasure of the Sierra Madre and for a while played a lead role in the television series Leave It to Beaver. He plays the guitar and harmonica, as Perry did, and is subject to fits of temper. “At box and lift weights,” he says, “to get the anger out of my system.” His motel room in Garden City, where he spent nearly all his free time, was extensively decorated. Taped to the walls were snapshots of his wife and children back in Los Angeles, and a big Magic-Marker picture captioned The Viper—the stiller he lies, the more deadly he bites. “I can’t tell you what that means,” he said, “but it has to do with my part.”

Thoughts about Perry Smith keep haunting Blake. “All the time,” he says, “I think how different Perry’s life might have been if whatever talent he may have had for painting and music had been channelled like mine—and how easily I could have turned out the way he did. But in his whole life, except when he was a tiny baby, there was never any sunshine.”

Perry Smith’s spirit was also being evoked in another motel room across town—Truman Capote’s. Decorated with such extravagant oddments as a pair of jewelled cufflinks originally made by Fabergé for one of the czars. The author was lying there remembering the five Kansas years he spent preparing his book. “It’s very strange,” he said, “but the first thing every morning when I wake up, and the last thing every night, I think of Perry. You know, just a few days before he died he sent me a 100-page letter that ended, ‘Life is the mother, death is the father; I’m going now to my father.’”

Not all Capote’s recollections of his curious friend, the murderer, are melancholy. Earlier that day, driving past crowds of townspeople watching the actors, he suddenly began to laugh. “It isn’t funny, really,” he said, “but I can’t help thinking how amused Perry would be if he were here now. You know how he used to like highfalutin language? How he’d correct anyone who said, ‘He don’t.’ Well, one day when I was visiting him in Death Row, reminiscing about the day he and Dick were brought back to the Garden City courthouse to be tried, I told him how big the crowds were outside waiting for him. You know what he wanted to know? He asked me, ‘Were any representatives of the cinema there?’”