



The Green Mile Journal
Written by: Doug Hutchison

7/20/98-7/24/98 TABLE READ:

Table read-through in Fairbanks Gym at Warner Bros. Hollywood. Present: Tom Hanks (Paul Edgecomb), David Morse (Brutal), Bonnie Hunt (Jan Edgecomb), Michael Clarke Duncan (John Coffey), James Cromwell (Warden Hal Moores), Harry Dean Stanton (Toots), Michael Jeter (Del), Sam Rockwell (Wild Bill), Barry Pepper (Dean Stanton), Frank Darabont (Director), David Valdes (Exec. Prod.), Mali Finn (Casting), various Castle Rock Reps, Assistants... and me (Percy Wetmore).

I have to keep running to the bathroom every hour or so to pinch myself and make sure I'm not dreaming.

7/20/98 – 7/24/98 WEEK ONE:

We shoot on the Green Mile – death row – so called because the floor leading from the inmates' cells to "Ol' Sparky" (the electric chair) is the color of faded limes. The set is amazing It's a virtual penitentiary. You can almost feel the real ghosts of 1930s prisoners and guards in the faux cells and corridors. The production designer is Terence Marsh who won Oscars for such films as *Dr. Zhivago* and *Oliver*.

We shoot the scene where John Coffey is brought to the Mile. Michael Clarke Duncan is HUGE (check him out in *Armageddon*). His arms are big as tree stumps. We all look like dwarves next to Coffey (especially little ol' 5'6" me!).

Tom Hanks seems like the nicest guy in the world – friendly, funny, and totally accessible. David Morse is a soft-spoken, gentle giant. Barry Pepper (who also played the young sniper in *Saving Private Ryan*) is a joy to be around. Jeffrey DeMunn (playing Harry Terwilliger) is charming as hell. Frank Darabont – our fearless Director – knows exactly what he wants. It's a thrill to watch him at work setting up shots and monitoring the action on the video screen. He's like an impish, cherubic boy. His eyes sparkle with excitement and he laughs easily when something strikes him funny. Frank sets the tone. The cast and crew seem to respect and work well with him.

The first day goes well. It's a monstrous scene with a bazillion different sequences and shots. We're scheduled to shoot this initial scene over the next four or five days and, at most, it'll equal about five minutes of actual screen time (ever wonder why it takes three or four *months* to shoot a two hour movie, folks??).

I fall asleep at night happily exhausted and dream of beating prisoners with my night stick (heh-heh). Get thee behind me, Percy...



7/27/98 – 7/31/98 WEEK TWO:

Conversation with David Morse about one of my favorite films, *The Crossing Guard* (Morse is brilliant in this movie. It's an awe-inspiring performance.): he tells me how cool it was to work with Jack Nicholson and how generous Jack was to cast and crew.

And speaking of generosity... Tom Hanks blows me away. He's the consummate professional. In the midst of massive publicity for *Saving Private Ryan*, he works long and hard with us and then takes off to do *The Tonight Show*, etc. But here's the kicker: he's invited to put his hand/footprints in the famous Grauman's Chinese Theatre starwalk on Hollywood Blvd. He works, like, five hours with us on *The Green Mile* and then – on his lunch break – runs over to Grauman's Chinese to do the print thing and comes *back* to work (with cement dust fresh on the soles of his shoes) to do off-camera lines for my on-camera scene. Rumors abound about various big-time Hollywood movie stars with dreadful symptoms of full-blown diva-disease and here's Tom-two-time-Oscar-winner-Hanks rushing back to the set, after one of the most prestigious honors in our profession, to dive back into work and read off-camera for me. The guy is an inspiration.

I screw up my back chasing that damn "Mr. Jingles" (the mouse) up and down the corridor about a million times. It's debilitating enough for four or five visits to the ol' chiropractor over the next few weeks.

Whacked back be damned. It's a thrill to be acting with the likes of Hanks, Morse, and this amazing cast and crew.

I fall asleep at night and dream of squishing mice under my boots (heh-heh).



8/3/98 – 8/7/98 WEEK THREE:

On Monday morning, the first thing I do when I see Hanks is fall to my knees and grovel at his feet (literally). He says, "What? *What??* What did I do?" I say, "I just saw *Saving Private Ryan* this weekend. You are God." I also heap accolades on Barry Pepper for his solid performance in *Saving Private Ryan* and Lois Burwell, our lovely Key Makeup Artist, who worked her magic on *Private Ryan* (and won an Oscar for *Braveheart*).

We move from the Mile into the execution chamber to film Bitterbuck's execution. Graham Greene (who starred with Kevin Costner in *Dances With Wolves*) plays "Arlen Bitterbuck".

Harry Dean Stanton joins us. He's quirky as hell and perfect for the role of "Toot-Toot". Harry's been in the business forever. I think he made his first film in 1946. He's a relic.

The actor playing "Jack Van Hay" turns out to be Bill McKinney who played the hillbilly in *Deliverance* who rapes Ned Beatty and makes him "squeal like a pig". So, the big joke on the set is imagining Jack Van Hay behind the execution room partition saying: "Percy, yew got a purdy mouth" and then hearing me squealing like the proverbial pig.

Bitterbuck is eventually executed. Graham Greene is wrapped. Cast and crew applaud him. He says (ever the jokester), "It's been fun. Next time, let's shoot up in Canada and call it *The Green Kilometer*." Everybody laughs.

At the end of the week, a sushi chef comes to the set and Tom Hanks treats the entire cast and crew to fresh sushi.

Whatta guy.

I fall asleep at night and dream of squishing spicy tuna and yellowtail sashimi under my boots (???)



8/10/98 – 8/14/98 WEEK FOUR:

David Valdes, the Executive Producer, has my undying respect. He's been Clint Eastwood's business partner, made a ton of films, and he's the sweetest guy in the world. David always has a smile for everyone and if he's ever stressed out, he never looks it. He appears as if he's doing exactly what God put him on earth to do and enjoying every minute of it. David runs a tight ship and yet this is the happiest, most stressless, most inviting film set I've ever been on. I was talking with one of the crew members who was lamenting a particular movie project of the past and defined it as "a total nightmare" where the cast and crew were "utterly miserable" and couldn't wait for the thing to be over. He said, "and as the saying goes, 'a fish rots from the head down'" (meaning of course, that the Executive Producer sets the tone on a movie set and that that particular Exec. Prod. was the head of a rotten fish...). – Well, if the saying holds true, then David Valdes is a rainbow trout, very much alive, and I'm grateful to be swimming in his creative waters. I have to resist the urge to give him a big fat hug every time I see him.

More of me chasing the mouse down the Mile. This time, I work with second unit (or "the mouse crew" as I like to call them...). They film me running and leaping down the corridor and then they film the mouse (Mr. Jingles) scurrying down the corridor and will eventually transpose the images and – oila! – seamless illusion: Percy attempts to stomp Mr. Jingles who appears to be a boot heel away from squashed-rodent-hell. The special mouse visual FX wizard is Charlie Gibson who supervised the mouse FX on *Mouse Hunt*.

There are actually a dozen or so mice playing "Mr. Jingles". Each mouse is trained to do a different "stunt" – scurry to the left, scurry to the right, stand still, etc. They're cute as hell and poop all over the place. Barry Pepper, Jeffrey DeMunn, and I start a volley of Mr. Jingles puns, "That Mr. Jingles is the cheesiest actor on the set... I heard Mr. Jingles has a micer trailer than the rest of us... Rumor has it, Mr. Jingles barely squeaked through his audition and got the part by a whisker..."

At the end of a very long week with just about everyone battling head colds and sore throats, etc., Hanks brings in a chef and treats the cast and crew to Dim Sum. He promises something special every Friday night. I say, "Hey, Tom, how 'bout strippers and booze next Friday?" (heh-heh). – Nearing midnight, it's down to me, Tom and Michael Jeter (and as sick as Tom is with the dregs of a lingering ear infection, he stays to do Jeter's off-camera lines...). Between takes, I keep Tom amused with my Michael-Clarke-Duncan-as-John-Coffey impersonation. The deep, booming, bassy voice coming out of my small frame cracks him up.

I had one of those surreal, dreamlike, goose-fleshy moments the other day. The Prop Master was setting up the cast chairs at one point and there was my chair, with my name inscribed on the chair-back, smack dab between Tom Hanks's and David Morse's chairs. It's as if time stopped for a moment. I blinked my eyes and thought: I've been dreaming this image for years and here it is right in front of me.

Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream,
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,
Life is but a dream.



8/17/98 – 8/21/98 WEEK FIVE:

Sam Rockwell joins the Mile for the scene where Billy goes crazy and attacks Dean. I ask Sam how he's been. He says he's been chomping at the bit to jump into *The Green Mile* and the skin of "Wild Bill". Sam is immediately likable. He's a solid actor, too (check out a quirky, magical, little movie called *Box of Moonlight*. Sam rocks in it...).

The fight scene involves several different shots, choreography and stunt doubles. Barry Pepper takes a hell of a beating. By the end of the second day, he's got an ice-pack on his neck, cuts and abrasions galore and an Excedrin headache from getting his head accidentally conked on a desk.

Tom Hanks plays getting kicked in the groin quite painfully believably. *OUCH!*

Sean Penn visits the set. He's friends with David Morse having directed David in two separate films. I want to tell Sean how *The Crossing Guard* rocked my world, but he comes and goes before I have the opportunity to meet him.

Rumor has it Stephen King may visit us in September.

I fall asleep at night and dream of pulling a chained Sean Penn down the Green Mile while yelling the line, "Dead man walking!" Frank Darabont yells, "CUT!" and says, "Wrong movie, Doug."



8/24/98 – 8/28/98 WEEK SIX:

We shoot the scene where the guards rehearse Delacroix's execution. It's Harry Dean Stanton's last day. He seems cranky. Not sure why (Probably from being under that hot, black, execution hood for a great deal of the time...). They request Harry in the make-up / hair trailer for a haircut. The 2nd A.D. returns to say that Harry doesn't think it's necessary for another haircut, as he's just gonna be under that "blasted hood" for the entire scene.

At one point, on my way to make-up, I stop at Harry Dean's trailer to ask him if he'd be kind enough to sign my script. He says "Sure. (Beat) Hmm... now I have to think of something witty to write." I laugh and say, "Okay, Harry. I gotta go to make-up. You think of something witty to write and I'll stop by after." I leave Harry staring off into space thinking of something witty. – Finished with make-up, I stop by Harry's trailer to pick up my script. I find Harry still staring off in space. "Think of something witty, Harry?", I ask. "No," he says (frustrated, apparently, by his temporary lack of wit), "I'm still thinking." I give him an easy out, "You can just sign it if you want, Har." (Truth be told, I would have been happy with just a signature as I was hoping to get everybody on the title page and, well, it's a huge cast...) Harry says, "Ah, fuck it. I can't think of anything. I'll just write..." and he proceeds to scribble:

For Doug:

Don't apply Percy's tactics to your career.

-Harry Dean Stanton

I think he's done and I reach for my script, but ... Harry *keeps* writing...

P.S. On second thought, it might be just right for Hollywood. (HA)

I retrieve my script and say, "Thanks, Harry." Harry Dean Stanton gives me an endearing impish smile, his eyes glinting with self-satisfaction and says, "Don't mention it."

Michael Clarke Duncan's sister visits the set. Much to Michael's chagrin, she shows me and Tom Hanks a photo of a six-year-old Michael posing in a party dress. We have a good laugh at Michael's expense (I'm dying to borrow the pic, make copies and distribute them to cast and crew! Heh-heh...).

On Friday, we rehearse the sequence where Billy attacks Percy. Tom has an *In-'N-Out Burger* truck drive onto the lot and treats the cast and crew to *In-'N-Out Burgers*. For those non-Californians out there, *In-'N-Out Burger* is a fast food franchise that, according to most California meat eaters, serves THEE BEST HAMBURGERS in the world! -- I tease Tom in the makeup trailer and say, "Hey, Hanks – *In-'N-Out* is fine for carnivores, but what about the vegetarians on the set?" He says, "Order a hamburger, hold the burger."

Wisecracker.

Purely by coincidence, Michael Jeter wears his *In-'N-Out Burger* T-shirt that evening. I fall asleep and dream of *In-'N-Out* burgers sizzling to well done perfection on the seat of Ol' Sparky...



8/31/98 -- 9/4/98 WEEK SEVEN:

So, Barry Pepper gets his ass kicked two weeks ago during the Wild Bill-attacks-Dean scene, Sam Rockwell gets *his* kicked last week during the Wild Bill-gets-thrown-in-the-restraint-room (again and again) scenes, and this week it's my turn.

It's another involved scene in which Billy grabs me through his cell bars, terrorizes me, eventually lets me go (at the prompting of the other guards and their drawn weapons), whereby I bolt to the other side of the Mile -- scared to death -- piss my pants (literally) and then, under the embarrassing scrutiny of my peers, taunting of Wild Bill, and derisive laughter of Del, threaten the guards with their jobs (if they talk about the incident to anyone), threaten that little "French fried faggot" Del, and storm off the Mile.

It's a challenging scene for me because I need to ride a roller coaster of emotions -- from joviality to surprise, terror, humiliation, embarrassment, and anger -- and attempt to drum them up organically take after take. There are a total of seven characters in the sequence and we need to capture the scene from a bazillion angles, groupings, establishings, close-ups, etc. All in all, it takes a good twelve hours to shoot. I try and pace myself as best I can, but still feel compelled to apologize to Sam when, at the tail end of the day, my well is practically dry and I'm virtually out of juice when it's time for his coverage. Sam's a good sport about it and commends me for accessing as much as I did during the course of a trying day.

Frank wraps the rest of the cast and I stick around for some "pee acting". I'm rigged with a catheter-type tube running down my pant leg and secured to my ankle with tape. The flow of "pee solution" is turned "on" and "off" by a technician standing just off-camera. It's an involved bit of business because the pee needs to stream in a specific direction and puddle on the floor perfectly. Also, the whole guacamole needs to be timed to coincide with a camera push-in. On top of that, my shoes and the floor need to be wiped-up and dried-off between each take and, of course, it takes several takes to get it right. At one point, an exasperated Frank says, "Jesus Christ, less pee, less, *less*. I need it to drip more. It's splashing down like he's a horse or something." I laugh and say, " Well, Frank, I am kinda *hung* like a horse." (heh-heh). As tired as we all are, pee jokes run rampant throughout the evening. Right before an umpteenth take I say, "Can we hold the roll? I have to pee." and, "Hey, I'm really starting to get pissed here." At one point, I manage to illicit laughter from even the most humorless and cranky crew members a booming Arnold Schwarzenegger - voice, "I AM THE URINATOR. HASTA LA PEE-STA, BABY."

By day's end, I'm an exhausted mess, hoarse from screaming, scratched to hell from Sam's Wild Bill-Freddy-Kruger-esque-razor-sharp-gnarly-nails, and soaked from faux pee.

The next day's shoot is a breeze in comparison. It's the scene where I am simply reading a book in Paul's office... and thank goodness I don't have any dialogue because my voice is shot. The name of the author printed on the binder of the book I'm reading is "R. Bachman" which is Frank's ingenious little touch and should prove to illicit chuckles from die hard Stephen King fans who watch the film (For those out of the Stephen King loop: "Richard Bachman" is the fictional author Mr. King wrote under for many of his earlier novels...)

I fall asleep at night and dream of pissing like the proverbial racehorse.



9/7/98 -- 9/11/98 WEEK EIGHT:

Mouse mashing time. We shoot the scene where I squash poor Mr. Jingles under my big, bad boot. All I can think about is my Grandma. After she saw *A Time To Kill*, Granny was convinced that I had taken up smoking no matter how many times I promised her that those were faux cigarettes and that my character, Pete Willard, was the smoker, not me. I'm anticipating a distressed phone call from Grandma after *The Green Mile* comes out saying, "Dougie, how *could* you step on that cute, little mouse??" -- Maureen Farley, our ever diligent Prop Master, places her coveted fake Mr. Jingles on the floor before each take and warns me not to squash it in the establishing coverage because she needs to keep it intact for future scenes. I keep Maureen properly irked and on her toes by pretending to actually squish the faux mouse before almost every take. By now, Maureen is somewhat immune to my devilish-Percy-antics, but I can still illicit a stern look or warning glance from her now and then (tee-hee).

The big joke of the week, however, is at my expense, but it demands that I fill in those of you unfamiliar with what I've come to dub my "*ConrightmAir* experience". In a nutshell: I spent six-and-a-half miserable weeks as nothing more than a glorified extra on the set of the movie *ConAir*, in the role of "one of the cons". Not only were my scenes with John Malkovich cut from the script, but I had to share a tiny, smelly honeywagon with another con named Mongo who is about as big as Michael Clarke Duncan (who, by the way, is the pivotal instigator of this story...). I have no lines. No material. Nothing. I'm basically background fodder -- just one of the dozen or so cons sitting chained and bound to my seat in that hot, claustrophobic, miserable airplane for twelve to thirteen hours a day. I could go on and on about my hellacious time on the set of *ConAir*, but you get the picture. Without a doubt, it was one of *thee* worst experiences of my career to date. Now, despite the misery (or should I say, *because* of it), I've always prided myself in successfully editing myself out of *ConAir* as sort of sweet retribution to the awful affair. In the few scenes where I *am* seen in the background for a fleeting second or two, I managed to avoid the camera at all costs and in imaginative ways; bending down to tie my shoe, turning around to look at another con so that my back is to the lens, hiding behind Malkovich, etc. In fact, you'd be hard pressed to find me in the dang film even if you *look* for me... or so I thought...

Fast forward to *The Green Mile*. Michael Clarke Duncan loves action flicks. He adores them. One of his favorite action flicks is *ConAir* (he even owns a copy, fer cryin' out loud...). Michael's trailer is situated directly across from mine. One particular day, I hear Michael's booming laughter coming from inside his trailer. Then I hear, "Doug! Doug! Come here, man!" (more booming laughter). I step into Michael's trailer. He's watching *ConAir* on his T.V. and doubled over in fits of laughter. He points to the screen. "Look at you, man! Ha! Ha! I found you!! Ha! Ha! Look at you trying to hide from the camera and shit! Ha! In *every* scene you're in! *Look* at you!! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!" Michael rewinds and fast forwards to every scene in which I happened to be caught. He found every one of my brief (two, maybe three-second) blink-and-you-miss-me sequences (Hell, he's probably seen the movie eighteen times so far...). So, apparently, I made Michael Clarke Duncan's day. Over the course of the week, he manages to tell the entire cast and crew about my *ConAir* debacle and how I tried to avoid the camera at all costs. At on point, his trailer is jammed with the likes of Hanks, Morse, Pepper, DeMunn, and Jeter for a "Doug-Hutchison-*ConAir*-Marathon". The entire trailer is rocked with laughter. I'm teased to death. "Hey, Doug, nice work in *ConAir*." "Hey, Doug, saw you in *ConAir*, man. Whatta performance." "Hey, Doug, Oscar-worthy stuff in *ConAir*, buddy." "The way you turned your back to the camera in that one scene... wow" ...and so on. Nina Paskowitz, our Key Hair Stylist, presents me with a giant, cardboard *ConAir* collage with the caption "I'm ready for my close-up, Mr. DeMille" printed in bold letters at the top. The collage is made up of several still frames pulled from the video.

They're all me avoiding the camera in one way or another.

Even as you read this, I contemplate my revenge on Michael Clarke Duncan.

We move into the execution chamber where Tom Hanks and David Morse slam me (literally) into Ol' Sparky, hold me down, and coerce me (via threats) to promise to leave the penitentiary for a different job, post Del's execution. If I thought I'd gotten my ass kicked two weeks ago during the Billy-attacks-Percy scene, I was sorely (pun intended) mistaken. After a bazillion takes of Hanks and Morse manhandling me in the arms of that rigid, hardwood, solid oak electric chair, I'm a sopping, scratched-to-hell, multi-bruised mess. David keeps apologizing for accidentally boxing me in the ear and banging my head on the back of Ol' Sparky. I tell him not to worry about it and I must be a masochist because, despite the pain, I attempt to provoke David before each take by shoving him as hard as I can. Truth be told, I want the scene to work and I don't want Morse or Hanks to pull their punches and treat me with kids' gloves for fear of hurting me. I *want* them to beat me up. So, the bruises I discover all over my body over the next couple days (despite the protective pads the stunt coordinator strapped beneath my uniform) are no one's fault but my own.

Tom treats cast and crew to pizza. I save my slices for after the Paul-and-Brutal-manhandle-Percy scene as not to barf all over Tom and David.

Before I leave the set, Lois Burwell places her amazing healing hands on my neck and shoulders.

That night I have a nightmare that I'm back on the set of *ConAir*. John Malkovich and Nicholas Cage are slamming me into an airplane seat and screaming, "Goddamn it, Percy, stop avoiding the camera, you little shit!!" while Ving Rhames (or was that Michael Clarke Duncan??) bellows with laughter in the background... Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!...



9/14/98 -- 9/18/98 WEEK NINE:

We remain in the death chamber for Del's execution. It takes the entire week to shoot and involves about forty extras (the witnesses), lightning flashes, rain, smoke, fire, a mechanical "Del dummy" and a team of puppeteers to work it. Frank controls the lightning box which sits next to him at the monitors. He looks like an excited, flushed Frankenstein commanding lightning at the flip of a switch.

James Cromwell joins the team. I'm happy to see him and tell him so. There was a rumor that we may have lost James due to schedule conflicts (as he's also shooting a film called *The General's Daughter* with John Travolta). James is a tall striking man with sharp handsome features and twinkling eyes (well, you know... you've seen *Babe*...). All the women in the hair and make-up trailer have a crush on him. He also has the patience of a saint. Over the course of his first five days on *The Green Mile*, James basically stands on the sidelines as Warden Hal Moores to witness Delacroix's execution. He'll have a lot more to chew on later, but this week is comprised of endless standing, observing, breathing smoke, and trying to avoid being trampled by an exodus of panicked witnesses.

At one point, Frank comes up to Hanks and says, "Hey, Tom, there's this guy here; says he knows you?" We all turn around to see a smiling Steven Spielberg standing near the monitors. Hanks and Pepper run over to greet him (having relationship with Spielberg via *Saving Private Ryan*, of course...). The rest of us hover around the periphery twittering with excitement and dazzled by the presence of THE KING OF HOLLYWOOD (I mean, this is Steven *Freakin'* Spielberg, folks!). Try as I might to remain cool, calm, and collected, my palms start sweating and my mouth is dry. No matter how many times I see my heroes in the flesh and remind myself that they're human beings who, like the rest of us, eat, sleep, shit, and watch *Oprah* (well, okay, some of us don't watch *Oprah*...), I still turn into a blubbering fool around them. I recall how nervous I was meeting and auditioning for Frank Darabont and how my heart raced when I met David Morse and Tom Hanks at our initial read-through two months ago. In retrospect, now that I've had the pleasure of getting to know these guys, my initial jitters in meeting them make me smile. Why in the *world* was I such a nervous wreck?? Nevertheless, when Tom introduces me to Steven Spielberg, I feel like a stammering idiot and suddenly the English language seems beyond comprehension. I blurt out something about how much *Saving Private Ryan* blew me away and welcome him to the set. We talk a bit about *The Green Mile* and what an awesome script it is. Spielberg is friendly and in no way as intimidating as the hubbub swirling around the mythos of his reputation as THE KING OF HOLLYWOOD. He hangs out on the set for a few hours. Later in the day, Frank puts Spielberg in the electric chair and affixes the steel electrode cap atop his head. Steven pops a cigar into his mouth and places his glasses askew on the bridge of his nose. We, the guards, gather around with Frank. The Set Photographer, Ralph Nelson, snaps a volley of pictures of us surrounding THE KING OF HOLLYWOOD -- crowned with the death cap and throned in the wooden arms of Ol' Sparky.

Okay, so here I've been racking my brain and heart for a way to express my deepest gratitude to Tom Hanks for being so dang generous and inspirational and fun during this *Green Mile* adventure thus far and for being... well... just for being Tom Hanks... when: I walk into my trailer and there's a package sitting on my desk. It's a note and gift from Tom. The note reads:

Doug,

Your confidence and enthusiasm is an inspiration to me during our long walk down the Green Mile.

To time well spent- Tom

The gift is a silver Swiss Aero pocketwatch. Inscribed on the front is:

*"Percy"
The Green Mile
E Block
Cold Mountain – 1998*

It's truly one of the most beautiful gifts I've ever received. Back on the set, I give Tom a big ol' hug and tell him how much the watch means to me. Apparently, Tom graced Jeffrey, David, and Barry with gifts as well, as I observe them thanking him too.

So much for trying to beat the Babe Ruth of generosity at his own game (actually, I still intend to give him a token of my appreciation... but what in the heck does one *give* Tom Hanks??).

A word about extras: Bless their enduring, patient, hardworking spirits. I have never been an extra (unless you count *CorrightmAir...*), but I'm here to tell you that it's mostly hard, tedious, unglamorous work. Extras are often treated like cattle on movie and TV sets. Even the term "extras" implies something additional to or not as important as the main players. Extras are instructed not to fraternize with or talk to the cast (rumor has it that on the set of *My Best Friend's Wedding*, Julia Roberts insisted the extras not even *look* at her between takes...). At lunch, extras have to wait until everyone else gets their food first before getting in line. They don't have the luxury of a trailer or honeywagon and are made to wait in a "holding area" (often a cafeteria or tent or parking lot...) until they are needed on set.

For the most part, the forty-plus extras playing witnesses on *The Green Mile* are treated like human beings and made to feel like part of the family. I attribute this primarily to Frank who directs them respectfully and thanks them repeatedly for their contribution. Still, the scene is demanding. The witnesses have to be wet from rain, thus they're sprayed with water before each take. Rain drips from holes in the execution chamber roof and onto witnesses unlucky enough to sit directly beneath them. After a dozen or so takes, these folks are fairly soaked to the bone (can you imagine what the extras endured on *Titanic*??). At the tail end of the scene, the witnesses are directed to run toward the doors in a mad, panicked rush to exit the chamber. The floor is extremely slippery from rain. The room is smoky as hell. The wooden fold-up chairs topple over during every exodus. Some of the witnesses are elderly -- in their sixties and seventies. I worry someone's going to trip and fall and twist an ankle or something, but, thankfully, the witnesses avoid injury and do a bang-up job take after take.

About midweek, I've delivered my "execution speech" a bazillion times:

Percy

Eduard Delacroix, you have been condemned to die by a jury of your peers, sentence imposed by a judge in good standing in this state. You have anything to say before sentence is carried out?

Del's lines and then:

Percy

Electricity shall now be passed through your body until you are dead, in accordance with state law. God have mercy on your soul.

In between setups, I ask the extras playing witnesses if they're as sick of hearing my lines as I am saying them. There's laughter and a collective "Yes!". When I ask if anyone can recite my speech, though, no one can do it. So I strike a proposal: anyone who can stand up and recite my Percy-execution-lines verbatim gets a crisp ten dollar bill. That night, I get no takers, so I tell everyone to study the lines and we'll have the contest on the following day. -- The next morning, we begin the competition. Unbeknownst to me, Hanks has had giant cue cards constructed with the execution speech printed on them in bold black magic marker. He holds them up behind me as I pick the first volunteer. The witnesses unwittingly expose Tom's prank by laughing out loud.

I turn around to catch Tom trying to discard the giant cue card. The gig is up. I scold Tom for cheating. Everyone laughs and applauds Tom's attempts. The contest ensues during the course of the day (with me keeping a wary eye on Hanks and his damnable cue cards...) and only two out of about a dozen contestants recite the speech verbatim and collect the prize. Each volunteer, however, win or not, is collectively applauded for their efforts by cast and crew.

Friday night is Tom Hanks's sushi night two. It's as delicious and appreciated as it was six Friday nights ago.

I fall asleep at night and dream of Steven Spielberg standing in the rain and reciting my execution speech over and over and over again as Tom Hanks holds up giant cue cards that read:

Life is like a box of chocolates.

You never know what you're gonna get.



9/21/98 -- 9/25/98 WEEK TEN:

Perhaps my character's name should be changed to Percy Bruisemore. I'm getting my ass whipped in this movie! Every week is a different chapter in Percy abuse. I walk onto the set and Frank says, "Ready for some more abuse, Pal?" I say, "It's what I live for, Frank. Let's do it." --In reading the script five months ago, I realized I was in for some grabbing, banging, hitting, slamming, slapping, punching, tying, gagging, pushing, and various forms of degradation and humiliation, but what I didn't consider was how many bazillion takes it would take to shoot each abuse-Percy-scene (ouch, a thousand times, ouch...)!

Remind me to do, like, *Enchanted April II* or something for my next project.

This week's brutality is a scene involving Hanks, Morse, and DeMunn ganging up on me, forcing me into a straight jacket, gagging me with a hanky, slapping a swatch of tape over my mouth, dragging me down the corridor, throwing me into the restraint room, and locking me inside. The entire sequence takes three days to shoot. Just another thirty-six hours on *The Mean Mile*, folks.

When Stephen King arrives it really is as if a king is among us. The fanfare is electric. The air crackles with excitement. The entire set is abuzz with anticipation of meeting THE KING and, hopefully, getting a book or script signed by him. --My first impression of King is: he's so tall. My second impression is: he's so *thin*. I had had an image in my head of Stephen King as he's appeared in the publicity shots used in many of his novels and, for some reason, he seemed heavier, *fuller*, in those photos. Maybe it was the Grizzly Adams-esque salt-and-pepper beard and mustache that he doesn't sport anymore, but THE KING appears more gaunt than bearish when I see him on the Mile in the throes of conversation with Michael Clarke Duncan (then again, *anyone* next to MCD would appear less than beefy...).

Ernie Malik, our PR Rep., introduces me to Stephen King. It's like meeting God. I mean, this guy *created* Percy Wetmore. In fact, the very world we're living, the very prison we're standing in, the very words our characters utter are sole products of Stephen King's fertile imagination. Before I can even thank him for conceiving me, though, THE KING is whisked away and swallowed up by a frenzy of more fevered fans, photo flashbulbs, and rolling TV cameras.

Frank has a birthday cake prepared for THE KING. The icing is green and the design is a cover replica of book four, "The Bad Death of Eduard Delacroix," in the six-part serial series of *The Green Mile*. We all sing "Happy Birthday" to Stephen as the lighted cake is wheeled on a cart down the Mile. After the song, King jokingly yells, "Gosh. You really *do* like me!" and Frank responds tongue-in-cheek, "Of course we do, Stephen. We all have *jobs* because of you!" -- Someone yells, "Make a wish!" Stephen King wishes that our movie is a huge success and sweeps the academy awards in 2000. He closes his eyes, draws a deep breath of air and -- call me superstitious, but I'm holding *my* breath hoping he blows all the candles out so his wish comes true -- blows out all the candles to thunderous applause. Frank hands THE KING a knife and asks him to do the honor of cutting the first piece. Stephen sinks the blade dramatically into Eduard Delacroix's "face" and says, "Die, Delacroix, die!" Everyone laughs and the caterer serves *Green Mile* cake all around.

My mama and her husband, Kone, fly down from Seattle for a short visit. I take them to the set. They're beside themselves with excitement; especially Mama who has lived vicariously through the ups and downs, highs and lows, successes and disappointments of my rollercoaster career. Mama prayed for and agonized with me, for example, during my audition process for *The Green Mile* and burst into tears when, after seven weeks of waiting to find out if the part was mine, I finally called her with the news. My mother has supported me through thick and thin and so it's a thrill to have the opportunity of sharing a slice of this dream with her. --On the ride to the studio,

Mama announces that she has a list of friends back in Seattle who want autographed pics of Tom Hanks. I tell her that we'll give the list to Tom's assistant, Amy McKenzie, because Tom is inundated with requests ad nauseum and doesn't need to be burdened on the set while he's working. Once in the make-up trailer, I introduce Mama and Kone all around. Mama beelines for Hanks and -- protocol be damned -- proceeds to list all her friends who are dying for his autographed pic including a particular friend's seven-year-old-boy named Vinnie who "absolutely adores" him. Puckish Tom doesn't miss a beat. He launches into a hilarious run-on monologue that goes something like, "Sure I'll just sign the picture 'Dear Vinnie, I'm happy you adore me because I *am* adorable blah blah blah and I appreciate that you buy all of my movies on VHS *and* DVD and, gee, keep up the awesome adoration of me blah blah blah, and, gosh, I *am* a famous movie star who makes lots of money for just goofing off and don't you think you should be worshipping teachers and doctors and firemen, instead, blah blah blah and..." --Tom continues firing off his what-I'll-write-on-my-picture-to-Vinnie monologue and has the entire make-up trailer in stitches. Afterwards, he says, "Or maybe I should just write, 'Dear Vinnie, obey your parents. Love, Tom.'" Then, on his way out, he turns to Mama and says, "Of course I'd be delighted to sign pictures for your friends. Get me the list and I'll have them for you by the end of the day."

If there was an Oscar for Making-Moms-Feel-Welcome, Tom Hanks would win one.

Barry Pepper and Michael Clarke Duncan would be nominated too. When Barry is introduced to Mama, he gives her a big hug and welcomes her to the Mile. Afterwards, Mama says, "He's so good looking. I *like* him." (Ah, Bar, you heart-throbber, you...). Michael Clarke Duncan picks up my tiny 4'11" mother and cradles her in his massive arms for a picture I must get a copy of for my scrapbook.

On the set, Mama sits in my chair next to Frank and watches as Hanks, Morse, and DeMunn bind me in the straightjacket and hustle me into the restraint room. In between a take I yell, "Help Mama! Do you *see* how they're abusing your son??" Mama announces, "I just wish I had had one of those (re: straightjacket) when you were a boy." Everyone laughs.

Very funny, Mama.

My mother and Kone are welcomed with open arms on *The Green Mile*. I am, once again, overwhelmed by the collective generosity of spirit on this set from cast and crew alike.

At the end of the week, Frank presents me with a gift. It's a framed black-and-white photo of him and *The Green Mile* guards in our circa-1930s uniforms standing around Steven Spielberg in the electric chair. I look at myself in the photograph (standing next to Tom Hanks, Frank Darabont behind me, my left hand on Spielberg's right arm, and David Morse, Jeffrey DeMunn and Barry Pepper smiling from the other side of Ol' Sparky...) and I see a little boy -- dressing up, playing make-believe, standing next to his heroes, imagining big things -- merging with the man, years later, today, holding the ghost of his childhood in grateful arms.

That same night, Tom treats cast and crew to rootbeer floats... provoking... delicious...

...sweet...

...dreams...

...ZZZZzzzzzz...



9/28/98 - 10/2/98 WEEK ELEVEN:

We move over to stage #4 to shoot the "access tunnel" scenes. This is where the executed bodies are taken, cleaned up, prepared, and then wheeled -- via tunnel -- outside the penitentiary where an ambulance awaits to transport them to the morgue. Once again, I marvel at Terence Marsh and crew's amazing set design and construction. Inside the tunnel it feels dank and murky. Our voices seem to bounce and echo off the faux brick walls. I can almost hear the subterranean drips and whispering scutters of rodents down here in the bowels of Cold Mountain.

Percy abuses of the week:

Brutal throws me a punch and Warden Hal Moores calls me a "Peckerwood" and "Little Asshole". I have the physical abuse thing down to a science by now. One here-we-go-again look to our Stunt Coordinator, Jeff Imada, and he's got the spine, elbow, knee, and shin pads at the ready for strapping onto respective body parts. --The verbal abuse from James Cromwell, however, is harder to prepare for and stomach. All I can think is: Christ, that's the lovable, charming Farmer Hoggett from *Babe* towering over me and calling me a "Little Asshole". It's surreal.

My brother, Erik, flies down from Seattle to visit. I take him to the set. He brings his camera and we take snaps of each other in the electric chair. Being the younger sibling who used to endure nonstop teasing and abuse from his older brother when we were kids (For example, one time I clothes-pinned all ten of his fingers to the backyard clothesline and left him out there bawling for Mama, heh-heh-heh...), Erik watches with unreserved glee, the scene where I get pummeled by David Morse. In fact, he actually cheers David on, encouraging him to pack his punches a little harder. Wise-ass. I gotta stop bringing family members to the Mile! Just kidding, of course... Erik, like Mama, has been a staunch supporter of me and the ol' career (despite taking crap from me as a kid) so it's sweet divination that he gets to watch his big brother Percy-cuted on the set. -- In fact, I'm curiously tempted to even let him clothespin me to Ol' Sparky if he wants.

Tom Hanks's lovely wife, Rita Wilson, visits the set. She's a welcome breath of fresh air down in the dirty, dark, dank depths (alliteration anyone?) of the access tunnel. Rita rushes straight for Tom. He lights up and one thing is crystal-clear: he's very much in love. They catch-up and then Tom introduces Rita around. I must have a big goofy grin plastered all over my Percy face, because I'm thrilled to meet the "Mrs.". She is delightful. As Rita converses with Frank, I lean over to Tom and say, "She's adorable." Tom replies, "Don't I know it. Yep, I scored big time." Rita eventually pulls up an apple box and sits in the tunnel just a foot or two from the action. We plunge back into the scene and for the first time ever, Tom botches his lines -- *twice!* I think: I'll be darned; even Tom Hanks can get nervous and flustered. The Oscars, the Emmy, *The Tonight Show*, the speeches, interviews and other big "star stuff" -- maybe they're all a piece of cake compared to a partner, the person who matters most, sitting on an apple box a mere foot away, watching you do your thing.

At one point, I ask James Cromwell to sign my *Green Mile* script and copy of *Babe*. On the script he writes:

Doug,

From one Peckerwood to another, all the best.

On *Babe*, he writes:

To Doug,

Hold on to the dream.

I am James. I certainly am.



10/2-10/9 WEEK TWELVE:

It's come to the point, dear readers, that I need to begin reluctantly editing my exploits so I don't unravel the story's end and spoil all the fun for those who haven't read the book. We've been, for the most part, shooting in sequence and this week's scenes are exploding with surprise twists and turns that reveal *The Green Mile's* shocking (pun intended) conclusion.

I will report this: Percy abuse (suprise, suprise) abounds. The way I figure, if this acting thing ever dries up, I can always do stunt work or make a fairly lucrative living in the Hollywood S&M scene at PERCY'S HOUSE OF PAIN -- In one particular sequence, Tom Hanks has to slap me hard enough to knock me over. Tom, bless his heart, is reluctant to hurt me any more than necessary. We consult prior to the scene and he asks, "So, how are we gonna do this slap thing?" I reply, "Tom, don't worry about it. Hit me as hard as ya need to. Make it look good. Just try not to box my ear." Cameras roll. Tom unwinds and unwittingly delivers a slap so hard, I see stars! He feels awful. Despite my efforts to slough it off, I guess Tom's hand-print on the left side of my face speaks for itself. He instinctively pulls his punches in the following takes and delivers slaps a mosquito would survive.

Jeffrey Demunn's good friend, Veronica Hamel, visits the set. She's even more beautiful in person than I remember her on *Hillstreet Blues*. I tell her so. Veronica seems flattered and asks, jokingly, if I'm married (at least I *think* it's a joke....).

A guest of Frank's, Quentin Tarantino, visits the Mile and hangs with us for hours. He's friendly, excitable, and loves a good cigar. Out by the trailers, Michael Clarke Duncan snags me to snap a few photos of him and Tarantino. Afterwards, the three of us talk *Pulp Fiction*. Tarantino shares a story about how Sam Jackson, at his final call-back for the film, was mistaken for Laurence Fishbourne by an embarrassed exec. I tell Tarantino about the time our 2nd. Camera Assistant, Chuck Katz, taped "Ving Rhames" up on Michael Clarke Duncan's trailer door as a practical joke and how I followed MCD around all day with a video cam addressing him as "Mr. Rhames". I think it's hilarious. Tarantino laughs. MCD bellows good-naturedly and then, when Tarantino's not looking, promptly punches me in the shoulder just for good measure. Ow.

At the end of a very long week, Hanks treats one and all to yet another array of sumptuous sushi and, after wrap, David Valdes has beer and champagne waiting for the cast and crew.

Next week, we leave the Mile behind temporarily and fly to Nashville, Tennessee, for location exteriors, etc. Everyone seems anxious for a change of pace. I'm sure Nashville will offer adventures, but I'm gonna miss that shiny, green, linoleum floor, those hollow cells, and Ol' Sparky. In a way, I feel like I'm leaving home.

I fall asleep at night and dream that I'm gagged and bound. Quentin Tarantino slaps me -- *hard!* -- across the face and Michael Clarke Duncan yells: "PERCY, I'M GONNA GET MEDIEVAL ON YO' ASS! (or was that Ving Rhames...??)



10/12/98 -- 10/16/98 WEEK THIRTEEN:

I've never had the luxury of flying in a private jet before, so when Tom Hanks invites me to travel to Nashville via *his*, well, I'm honored as hell and just about as excited as a child's first time to Disneyland. All aboard: Tom Hanks, Michael Clarke Duncan, Jeffrey DeMunn, Brent Briscoe (playing guard, "Bill Dodge"), Dan Striepeke (Tom's make-up artist), Barry Pepper, his wife, Cindy, and me. The best way I can describe the thing is: a limo ride in the sky. The aircraft is designed to carry about a dozen passengers comfortably. I sit near the back opposite MCD. Barry, Cindy and Brent share the center unit around a table. Jeffrey and Dan recline in seats up front and Tom relaxes on a couch near the front as well. Our flight attendant keeps the merlot, Heinekens, sodas, and mineral waters flowing. Before takeoff, she shows MCD the library of vids available for private viewing. I can't resist:

Me: Any porn?

Attendant: Um ... sorry, no.

MCD: You would ask that.

Me: Hey, when I have my private jet someday, it's gonna be stocked with porn, okay?

Jeffrey: Why doesn't that surprise me?

*Me: And how 'bout a Jacuzzi? Can you have a Jacuzzi on a private jet? And a masseuse?
And a sushi chef? And...?*

Hey, if you're gonna dream, dream BIG. Know what I'm sayin'?

The flight from Burbank to Nashville is approximately four hours. The ride is sans turbulence, sans noise, and smooth as silk. MCD kicks back with earphones and watches *Assassin* (the guy *loves* action, folks...) on the portable 6"x6" TV screen attached to his seat. Every now and again I glance over and catch him excitedly cheering on Sylvester Stallone. Barry, Cindy, and Brent share in conversation. Tom reads a magazine. The cover story is something like, "The 25 Top Influential Men in Hollywood". I have no doubt he's somewhere in those pages and on that list. I can't see Jeffrey and Dan from my vantage point, but Jeffrey's warmhearted laughter floats through the cabin every now and then.

I have a gift for Tom and decide to present it to him shortly after takeoff. It's a 2"x2" rubber monkey-face puppet that can be manipulated (via finger holes in the back of its head) into a menagerie of different expressions. Lemme explain: Back in 1987, I acted in my first film; a not-so-very-great movie called *Fresh Horses* starring Molly Ringwald and Andrew McCarthy. The film was pretty much critically panned (I recall one scathing review entitled: "Fresh Horses#t"... ouch...). As mediocre as *Fresh Horses* turned out, though, there are some redeeming factors. It sure looks great thanks to award-winning cinematographer, Fred Murphy, and actor Viggo Mortenson plays a small part in the role of "Green". Viggo is a helluva an actor and I'm pleased to see him climbing into the ranks of meatier, starring roles these days. Anyway, one day while on location in Kentucky, I witnessed Viggo on the set, sitting in a chair, playing with said 2"x2" rubber monkey-face puppet. He appeared to be conversing with the thing. When I asked what the heck he was doing, Viggo replied, "I'm working with my acting coach. This (re: monkey-face) is the consummate film actor. It's brilliant. Every subtle nuance, even just a mere raise of an eyebrow, evokes a completely different expression / emotion. Watch." Viggo manipulated Monkey-face into several varieties of hysterical expressions that had me floored. Admittedly, Monkey-face was the epitome of acting brilliance. It was a friggin' rubber simian Marlon Brando. I was so impressed, that Viggo was compelled to pass his coveted Monkey-face mentor on to me.

As Viggo handed Monkey-face over, he said solemnly, "Act well, my son." I, the awed student, felt like Luke Skywalker accepting some sacred talisman from Obi-Wan Kenobi. --Okay, fast forward eleven years to *The Green Mile*. A week ago, I was sharing the Monkey-face story with David Morse who acted with Viggo in *Indian Runner* (a Sean Penn directed flick). The following day, I brought the puppet onto the set to show David and the boys. Hanks got a particular charge out of Monkey-face and manipulated some priceless personas from the thing. Handing it back to me, he said, "My kids would love this. I could entertain them for hours. Where can I get one?" I didn't know. But I sure as hell scoured Hollywood to try and find one. No luck. Viggo Mortenson must have given me the last existing Monkey-face in the world. It seemed destined that it was now my turn to pass it on. -- I give Tom Monkey-face and a card (with monkeys on the front) wherein I wrote:

*Here's to hours of
monkeying around
with the kids.*

Tom's delighted.

As I sit in the plane sipping merlot and gazing out intermittently at Charmin-esque clouds in a baby-blue sky, I have a curiously morbid thought: what if this thing goes down and we all die in the crash (what would happen to the movie??)? On the heels of that speculation, I'm filled with a Jeff-Bridges-in-*Fearless*-like Zen calmness. If we crashed, Castle Rock and our loved ones would suffer the loss; but on a purely selfish note, if I was killed this very moment, I'd die a happy man in the midst of my dream. And what a way to go. Y'know?

Fortunately, the jet lands safely and we are all shuttled to our hotels in downtown Nashville. We shoot exteriors at The Old Tennessee State Prison. Built in 1898 from convict labor, the penitentiary became so overcrowded over the years that at one point, the claustrophobic 9'x6' cells (meant for two prisoners) were shared by three, sometimes *four* inmates. With no air-conditioning or decent cross-breeze, the prison became a virtual hothouse in the sweltering southern summers. The Pen was also home to one of the first electric chairs ever built. When a death row inmate was executed, all electricity was shut down and the prison plunged into a silent, ominous darkness. In a building adjacent to the penitentiary, a giant generator would eventually hum to life sending the necessary currents to juice up Ol' Sparky. --Around 1987, a full-scale prison riot ensued injuring several inmates and two guards. Shortly thereafter, the near century-old Pen became too difficult and expensive for the state to maintain. It was more cost effective to transfer prisoners to newer, contemporary facilities. By 1991, The Old Tennessee State Prison was completely evacuated and has stood empty ever since. It was used in the movie *Alcatraz* and, more recently, for Sharon Stone's film, *Last Dance*. The Old State Prison was also considered for *Shawshank Redemption*, but Frank and crew shot at a penitentiary in Ohio instead.

Approached from the winding access road, The Old Tennessee State Prison resembles more a Gothic castle or fortress than a penitentiary. It's actually, for lack of a better description, quite breathtaking. In fact, from a distance, with its cathedral-esque spires and giant arch windows, the prison seems less intimidating than compelling. It's a beautiful piece of architecture. Apparently, the original red brick exterior has been painted an ashen beige color to give the prison more of an institutional texture for *The Green Mile* (using 44,000 gallons of paint for the job!).

Out on the grounds, hundreds of extras are dressed in circa 1930s black-and-white zebra-striped chain gang uniforms. Ankles bound by heavy duty leg irons, they toil the fields with pickaxes and shovels. Mules pull plows and wagons of rocks and dirt. More extras, dressed in guard garb, tote rifles and ride on horses under the hot sun. Old Model-Ts sit in the parking lot. It's as if we've stepped through a time warp.

Frank is in his glory running around and shouting direction through a megaphone. The past three months on the Mile were directorially challenging, but it must be an extra rush to orchestrate such huge exterior shots with hundreds of extras and crane cameras swooping down into the action, etc. Moving from the intimacy of the studio to the great outdoors of a location, suddenly it feels like we're shooting a BIG HOLLYWOOD PRODUCTION (and I know Frank's just been

chomping at the bit to use his beloved megaphone!).

As for my part, the first day consists of riding back and forth and back and forth for several hours in the "Cold Mountain State Penitentiary" paddy wagon as we establish transporting John Coffey to "E" block. After shooting in a semblance of sequence over the past twelve weeks, it's quite an adjustment to crank back the wheels of time in my head and place myself at the very beginning of *The Green Mile*. It feels like a day and forever ago that I was leading a chained Michael Clarke Duncan down the "E" block corridor and yelling out my first lines of dialogue, "Dead man walking!" --I'm here to tell ya, though, that after months of the Percy abuse, it's damn refreshing to ride around in a paddy wagon all friggin' day... *damn* refreshing...

I fall asleep at night and dream that I'm traveling somewhere in my own private jet. Watching a porn flick on TV, I'm momentarily distracted by thousands of convicts outside my window and far down in the fields below. They're wearing black-and-white zebra-striped chain gang uniforms and swinging pickaxes. At one point, they all look up at me simultaneously and their heads are a sea of grinning 2"x2" rubber Monkey-faces(!).



10/19/98 -- 10/23/98 WEEK FOURTEEN:

Sam Rockwell and I explore The Old Tennessee State Prison's death row cellblock. There's the bad smell of an unkempt zoo inside -- dankness, urine and funk. We walk into one of the several tiny claustrophobic cells. Within, are two steel-frame twin bunks bolted to the floor and wall (one on top of the other) and an open, lidless, stainless steel toilet. That's it. No windows. No light. No view but for the crumbling stained limestone wall across the corridor. I swear, if I had to live in that place for more than a week, I'd forge a handmade shank and stab myself to death or pray that my execution came Godspeed. To heck with stays, delays, and life imprisonment. Step into one of those cells for but a brief moment and all you want is *out*. --Way down at the far end of the block, is the execution chamber. The chair is gone, but its foundation remains as does the ventilation shaft above and the stenciled wire-attachment instructions on the wall that spell out "head, left leg, back", etc. As I stand on the concrete foundation where the chair stood, I imagine the dark ghosts of the executed swirling around the room. The feeling in here is *heavy*. I have a pit in my stomach and a sour taste in the back of my throat. It's almost as if I can feel the remnant currents of fear and the lingering dregs of death in this place. It's creepy as hell.

Outside and under the sun, prison exterior shots continue. Poor Sam has to sit in the back of "The Cold Mountain Penitentiary" paddy wagon and breathe endless exhaust fumes as we speed down a dirt road take after ever lovin' take. The paddy's no limo, and Sam, butt planted on a splintery wooden bench in the back, endures some bone-rattling impact as we bounce over potholes, rocks, and gravel. To make matters worse, later in the day, I keep threatening to spike Sam's drool mixture (a concoction of raw egg and petroleum jelly) with a dash or two of Tabasco sauce (heh-heh). Each time Lois hands him the paper cup, Sam throws me a suspicious look and then carefully sniffs and inspects the drool before taking his obligatory gulpful.

As the day winds down, I witness a glorious, orangey sunset melting into the pink horizon just beyond the prison grounds and think: the inmates here couldn't've seen this. The walls are too high. To never enjoy a sunset again -- imagine *that*.

Leaving the set one evening, George, the local guard posted at the entrance of the prison, stops me and says, "Hey, are you who I think you are?" I reply, "I don't know. Who do you think I am?" George's eyes go sly and he says, "You're *Percy*, aren't you?" I smile and say, "Caught me." After formal introductions, George produces his paperback copy of *The Green Mile* for my autograph and then invites me to tour the Riverbend Maximum Security Prison. George offers to arrange it with the Warden if I'm interested. I am.

Riverbend Max-Sec Prison is hell on Earth. Just the sheer institutional cold order of the place is enough to send chills up the spine. The prison is true to title: it's maximum secured alright. Not one, but two 12'-high fences run the circumference of the Pen. Spirals of razor-wire are coiled around the tops. Just in case you're an attempted escapee who's superhumanly able to bound over a fence topped with razor blades, there are underground motion detectors between fences one and two that, when triggered, set off alarms. In the main security station, officers can zero in on your every move via an electronic "map" whereupon you are a flashing red light. If you have any brilliant notions of escaping in the back of a prison laundry truck (like you often see in the movies...), your chances are slim to none. An officer scans every vehicle exiting the Pen with a "heartbeat detector" that, I'm informed, is sensitive enough to pick up the minute heartbeat of a mouse. And how much does this high-tech security cost the good taxpayers of Tennessee State? Approximately \$36,000. a year *per* inmate. There are a total of 714 prisoners currently at Riverbend (you do the math). All of them are doing time for hard-core crimes and are considered "high-risk inmates". Ninety-six are on death row. The cons spend twenty-three hours a day locked inside their 9'x12' dorm-like cubicles. They're allowed one hour per day to spend outside

in a large cage.

Captain Dan Strickland and his fellow officers are my gracious tour guides. They seem genuinely excited to have a "celebrity" at their facility. Captain Dan, who is admittedly a huge *X-Files* fan, appears particularly pleased as punch to meet and walk "Tooms" through his workplace. The Captain is very un-Percy-like. In fact, he blows any Hollywood-tough-ass-screw-boss-stereotype right out of the water. Captain Dan seems a genuine, soft-spoken, compassionate and fair-minded family man. There's no swagger in his walk, no throwing his weight around and no apparent desire to glorify his position or rank. He works in a prison and deals with 714 hard-core convicts every day. That's what he does. It's his job. Period. I ask the Captain if it ever gets hairy in here with uncooperative, unruly prisoners. He replies matter-of-factly, "Oh yeah," and then relates a recent incident where a violent inmate, who had to be restrained, viscerously spat in Dan's face. When asked how an officer deals with convicts spitting in his face, the Captain shrugs and says, "You wipe it off, take a deep breath, and move on." Restraining violent cons, putting out inmate-instigated fires, searching cells for and confiscating makeshift weapons, enduring repeated verbal abuse, watching your back -- it's all in a day's work for the officers at Riverbend Max-Sec Prison. At forty-three, Captain Dan Strickland has been in the prison business for twenty-three years and, besides the spitting incident, has fortunately avoided any major physical harm and life-threatening situations to date. Knock on wood.

Despite the hostile atmosphere and possibility of violence, the correctional officers at Riverbend appear to enjoy their work. There's a good share of joking, teasing and laughter among them. If this jovial camaraderie seems a bit strange or unusual for such a serious place, I'm quickly reminded by one of the officers that "You gotta keep your sense of humor in here. Otherwise, it can get damn depressing." --I'm politely corrected by another officer that they are, indeed, "officers" when I mistakenly use the term "guard". Oops. I apologize and attempt a nice save by reminding them that I'm in *Green Mile* mode where, six decades ago, the term was "prison guard," y'know. The Riverbend officers graciously let my faux pas slide.

Touring the execution chamber, despite coaxing and chiding from George-The-Old-State-Pen guard, I can't consent to sit in the electric chair and get my picture taken. It seems, somehow, distasteful. I mean, *The Green Mile's fiction*, folks. This is the real McCoy. Call me a wimp, but I just can't park my butt in that chair and say "cheese". It gives me the willies. I sense, though, that my reluctance is somewhat disappointing to my hosts (and extremely un-Percy of me, I might add), so I agree to stand *next* to the chair and take pics with the others who seem to have no qualms at all about sitting and smiling in the arms of Ol' Sparky.

I fall asleep at night and dream that I'm strapped into the electric chair. George-the-guard stands before me and says, "Who the hell do you think you are??" I reply in a cold sweat, "I'm... I'm Percy. Percy Wetmore." George morphs into a slobbering, grinning, drooling, Sam-Rockwell-as-Wild-Bill who yells, "Whew! Sho' is gettin' hot in here!!" and proceeds to shake a bottle of Tabasco sauce all over me(!).



10/26/98 -- 10/30/98 WEEK FIFTEEN:

After two weeks in Nashville with a light work load and way too much time on my hands (I mean, you can only go to so many strip clubs with Michael Clarke Duncan, y'know?), I'm hankering to get back to Hollywood if even for a few brief days. Hanks satisfies my hankerin' (heh-heh) by offering me a seat on his private jet to fly back to L.A. with him, Bonnie Hunt and Dan Striepeke. I gratefully accept.

Bonnie Hunt should be a mom. Besides her incredible quick wit and sparkling sense of humor, Bonnie has an innate mothering instinct that both endears her and makes everyone around her feel, well, taken care of. She can walk into a room and one feels immediately embraced by her inclusive energy and disarmed by her charm. Bonnie's a cornucopia of funny stories and anecdotes about her adventures in showbiz. On the way to the airstrip, she entertains Dan and me with a story about how she once auditioned with Michael Keaton. All through the audition, as she was reading with Keaton, Bonnie had to stifle gags because, as she puts it, "Michael smelled like shit!". She couldn't wait for the meeting to end so she could get the hell out of the room and away from smelly Keaton. In her car on the way home, Bonnie claims Keaton smelled so bad that she was *still* catching whiffs of that pungent stink when she looked down to discover a smear of dog-doo on her shoe. Mortified, Bonnie realized it wasn't Keaton, but *her* who smelled like shit in the audition!

On the jet back to our hiatus in Hollywood, Tom keeps us amused with humorous tales from his adventures on *Turner & Hooch* and *Dragnet*. After dinner, I kick back for a nap and Bonnie -- in mega mom mode -- fluffs my pillow and tucks me in under a warm blanket (okay, she's too young to be my mom, but maybe I can adopt Bonnie as my surrogate overprotective sister...).

A few days back home in familiar surroundings and sleeping in my own bed, etc., is a slice of heaven. I pack my partner/sweetheart, Kathleen, in my return flight bag to Nashville. I'm delighted she can join me and, once again, thrilled for the opportunity to share *Green Mile* dreams with a loved one. Kathleen's been my right hand over the past three and a half months while I've been busy on the Mile. Her support and hard work have been invaluable (in fact, if not for Kathleen -- who types out and submits my journal to the website --, you wouldn't be reading this excerpt, right now...). --A virgin to private jets, Kathleen's as tickled pink about flying *HanksAir* for her first time as I was. We have a happy and safe flight back to Nashville with Tom, Bonnie and Dan. After a sumptuous Chinese buffet dinner, Bonnie puts on her maternal apron and helps the flight attendant clean up the dishes.

Continuing filming at The Old Tennessee State Prison, I meet Bailey and Evanne Drucker, the two adorable blonde-haired angels playing the "Detterick girls". Bailey and Evanne are sisters. The girls are six or seven-years-old and cute as buttons. When I introduce myself as the actor playing "Percy," Bailey scrunches up her nose and says, "Oh, you're the guy who steps on the mouse. You're *bad*.". I try to defend myself. "Hey, I just step on a measly mouse, 'fer cryin' out loud, Sam Rockwell's playing the *real* bad guy." Bailey throws a look at her sister. They're not buying it. Stepping on Mr. Jingles is, apparently, a hard-core crime amongst the kiddies. I guess it's a little like squashing Mickey Mouse or killing Kermit-The-Frog or bludgeoning Barney to death. I'm sure I can kiss a guest appearance on *Sesame Street* good-bye once *The Green Mile* comes out (maybe *Beavis & Butthead* will have me, though...).

Wrapping it up at the prison, I bid farewell to George-the-guard and ask how everyone's doing at ol' Riverbend. George informs me that Captain Dan Strickland is in the hospital after being assaulted by an inmate. I'm rocked by the news. I try to contact the Captain via phone. After a series of attempts, I finally hear from Captain Dan. He fills me in on what happened. Apparently, after ordering a strip-search on a particularly malevolent con who set fire to his bed, the good

Captain turned to exit the cell and the inmate rushed him and jumped on his back. Dan was sent smashing into the wall and onto the floor before the other officers could react and intervene. The Captain was rushed to the hospital and treated for back and neck injuries and eventually sent home where he's recovering on sick-leave. --We both marvel at how, just last week, Captain Dan informed me that in twenty-three years as a prison official he'd never been physically assaulted by an inmate. I express relief that the incident hadn't been worse and that the good Captain is blessedly alive to tell the tale. God forbid the con had had a shank.

Life is like a box of chocolates, indeed.



11/2/98 -- 11/6/98 WEEK SIXTEEN:

Gary Sinise plays a cameo in the role of "Burt Hammersmith", the prosecuting attorney at John Coffey's trial. He has one scene with Hanks wherein he extrapolates on the unpredictability of violent nature. It's an engaging speech and I can't think of anyone better than Sinise to chew it up. He's one of my favorite actors. --I met Sinise years ago when I auditioned for him for *Of Mice and Men*. I'm sure he wouldn't remember me. As it turned out, he *did*. In between camera setups on a breathtaking Tennessee farmland location, Tom Hanks introduces me to Sinise. We converse:

Sinise: I swear I know you from somewhere.
Me: I auditioned for *Of Mice and Men*.
Sinise: *That's* it. The role of "Curly," right?
Me: Yep.
Sinise: I remember. You were good.
Tom pipes in with a dash of Puck:
Hanks: So, Gar, why didn't ya cast him, huh?
[TOM!!!?]

Before day's end, I ask Sinise to sign my script. He writes:

*Doug,
Hopefully, someday, we'll
be in a scene together.
Good luck, Buddy!*

-Gary Sinise

As Gary hands back my script, Hanks gives me a basset hound look and says:

*Hanks: Don't you want me to sign your script, too?
Me: (tongue-in-cheek): Not really.
Hanks: (acting hurt) Well, why not?
Me: C'mon, Tom. You sign a bazillion autographs. Do you really need to do another one?
Hanks: Well, I'd like to...
Me: Oh, geez, alright, if it'll make you happy. Here.*

I hand my script to Tom. He scribbles something and gives it back. I read what he wrote. It's unbelievably touching:

*To Doug --
have learned from you.
Your great admirer,
-Tom Hanks*

Wow.

I mean: **WOW.**

Kathleen and I go to see a double feature of *Apt Pupil* and *What Dreams May Come* at the Nashville Regal 27 Cinemas (that's twenty-seven movie screens, folks...). After loading up on popcorn and sodas at the concession counter, we walk down the lengthy corridor toward our designated theater. On either side of us are posters for current and upcoming films. I'm tickled pink to pass movie ads for my fellow *Green Milers*... *The Negotiator* (hey, David Morse is in

that...), *The X-Files Movie* (hey, Jeffrey DeMunn's in that...), *Enemy of the State* (hey, Barry Pepper's in that...), *Soldier* (hey, David Tattersall-- our brilliant DP -- shot that...), *Babe 2* (hey, James Cromwell...), *You've Got Mail* (there's Tom). --Now, lemme reveal something for you out there who've never had the blessing/curse of climbing up that struggling-actor-ladder-of-hope. There have been countless times during my journey when I've walked into a movie theater, looked at poster ads, watched teasers for upcoming features and sat through various films *depressed as hell* for wanting (and not yet having) my name/face on said posters/previews/movies. It's not a grand thing to admit, but filmgoing was often a manic-depressive, schizophrenic, teeter-totter experience for me (I'm gonna be up on that screen someday...I'll never be up on that screen someday... I'm gonna be... I'll never be... I'm gonna... I'll... never... be...). Apparently, I've not been alone. Other strugglers, wannabes, and hopefuls have thrashed in those longing waters too. I read an interview, for example, where a pre-*Silence of the Lambs* Anthony Hopkins confessed that he used to drive down Sunset Blvd., look up at all those movie billboards not featuring him and inwardly scream, "WHEN IS IT MYTURN????! -- Well, after many years of persistence, perseverance, patience, phaith (the four "P"s of dream-chasing) and grappling with those damnable dragons of doubt, I can now, refreshingly, walk through movie theaters and relish the experience without reserve. Soon, posters for *The Green Mile* (hey, Doug Hutchison's in that...) will grace the walls and I can look at them with a tickle of pink and inwardly scream, "YES!"

But, for now, back to work (or play -- depending on your perspective...)

Our last location is The Middle Tennessee Mental Health Institute, an ancient, abandoned psychiatric hospital that sits on acres of beautiful, manicured land on the periphery of Nashville. Like The Old State Penitentiary, The Institute exudes a Gothic, ghostly atmosphere. Under a steel-gray sky, the empty, faded red-bricked, bar-windowed buildings appear haunting, hollow, and forgotten. The weather has turned a chilly November and adds to the *Shining*-esque ambiance of the place. You can see your breath. The oak tree leaves scattered among the institute's expansive lawns lie rusty, yellow and dead. The season of change is upon us. We're near the end.

The Middle Tennessee Health Institute serves as a *Green Mile* setting for "Briar Ridge Mental Hospital" where guards -- Dean, Harry and Percy --pick up a drooling Wild Bill Wharton to transfer him to "Cold Mountain Penitentiary". The day's shooting is accelerated and fierce since, if we can finish everything and wrap before sundown, we can all travel back to Hollywood a day earlier than planned (and, after a month on location, *everyone* is pining to go home...). --Sam Rockwell, as it turns out, suffers the brunt of discomfort, today. For a good chunk of the shoot, he stands naked-as-a-jaybird under a flimsy hospital gown opened and split up the back (and I'm here to tell ya: it's dang *cold* in that nut house, y'all...). Sam's a trooper, though, and doesn't even complain when he has to disrobe completely (nice derriere, Sambo...) so we can redress him in his sporty zebra-striped jailbird duds. --Despite the impending rush of the day, there's still allotted time for some clowning around when Sam drips stringy gobs of drool onto Barry Pepper as Barry stoops down in an attempt to dress said drooler. During his close-up, Barry's hat is splotched with puddles of goo much to the chagrin of hands-on Dresser, Lis Bothwell, who has to anti-drool Barry's uniform between takes. Lis is not amused, but Jeffrey, Sam, Barry and I are punch-drunk with giggles and every time our poor put-upon Dresser exclaims, "It's not funny, guys," we laugh that much harder.

By miracle of *The Green Mile* gods, we manage to meet our deadline and wrap out before sundown.

We'll return to Hollywood for our last leg of shooting on the Mile...

I fall asleep at night and dream I'm walking down *The Green Mile* corridor. On either side of me, behind the bars and in the cells, are various ads for movies past, present, and future. I pass one cell with a poster for *Silence of the Lambs*. Anthony Hopkins is in there, too. He beckons me to come "closer...closer..." and, as I walk toward him, Hopkins pulls Mr. Jingles out of his mouth (!). He hands the mouse to me and says:

"Mice dream, kid."



11/9/98 – 11/13/98 WEEK SEVENTEEN:

Back on the ol' Mile...

I'm not called in to shoot this week, so...

I dedicate this chapter to those *Green Milers* I've not mentioned enough (or at all) – Those behind the scenes who deserve their praises sung... who've kept our *Green Mile* machine well-oiled and fired-up with love, dedication, and hard work.

I reflect upon...

THE PRODUCTION STAFF

(Lemme say this: Assistant Directors work their *butts* off. When everyone else is getting a good twelve hours or more between shooting calls, A.D.s are lucky to cop four...)

...our 1st A.D., Alan Curtiss, who always has a welcome smile and firm handshake for his actors... 2nd A.D., David "Bernie" Bernstein, a huggable Smurfish kind of guy with adorable Dumbo-esque ears and a big, fat heart to boot (who was brave enough to don a white smock and play one of the "Briar Ridge" orderlies, taking unsolicited God-awful acting "tips" from Barry, Jeffrey, and me...) ...Basti Van Der Woude, the 2nd 2nd A.D., warm, friendly, and ever-present... Jodie Thomas, our DGA trainee, who probably has THEE most stressful position on the team as liaison between set, make-up / hair, and actors, and who manages to keep a smile on her sweet face while juggling a bazillion demands a day... Script Supervisor, Susan Watkins (Frank's right-hand woman) who maintains the meticulous task of continuity by scribbling endless notes and never missing a beat... Jessica Drake, Dialect Coach extraordinaire, who keeps our Northern Louisiana accents fine-tuned (and her angelic, little eighteen-month-old, Melina, who keeps us entertained with baby magic at lunch time...)... Visual FX wizard, Charlie Gibson, who's not only a genius at mouse-morphing, but a helluva sweet man, too... Ralph Nelson, our awesome Production Photographer, who slips onto the set like a cat, aiming, focusing, clicking, and snapping beautiful stills... Video Assistant, Scott Crabbe, who, bless his heart, probably hears the words "play back B cam" in his sleep at night... and loveable, chipmunk-cheeked Constantine Nasr, our documentalist, whose aim is always to please, never get in the way, and make the best damn "making of *The Green Mile*" ever...

THE CAMERA CREW

... David Tattersall, our kind and somewhat bashful Director of Photography, who's so extraordinary at (and yet charmingly humble about) his craft and has the undying loyalty and respect of a creative and dedicated team... David Emmerichs (in a sweat-soaked-army-green bandana tied around his head) who is an amazing Camera Operator with an eagle's eye... Camera Assistant, Heather Page (our "Foxy Focus Gal") who does the measuring / focusing / checking-the-gate dance with incredible finesse and whose sneeze (that sounds like a chihuahua's high-pitched yelp) sends cast and crew members into a traditional chorus of barking, yapping, and howling (that never fails to turn Heather a blush of pink and plaster, a big, bashful grin on her face)... pixie-faced Camera-Loader, Anna Castellini, who can tote and re-load film at the quick drop of a "Cold Mountain" guard's hat...

THE SOUND GUYS

... our Mixer, sweet Willie Burton (who always treats Kathleen like a queen whenever she visits the set)... and cherubic, Marvin Lewis, the Boom Man, who disarms me with his Cheshire-Cat smile and then tells me to please take off my "squeaky-ass Percy boots" (when they're not in the shot) to make his life easier...

THE PROP GALS

... Maureen Farley, one the *thee* best Prop-Masters in the Biz (as well as possessin' *thee* best shoulder-squeezin'-hands on the set...), and her ever-efficient team – Kim Larsen and Merdyce McClaren – tolerate my Percy shenanigans on a daily basis and still manage to do a killer job slappin' on Sam Browns, dressing every scene in picture-perfect detail and standing at the ready for Frank's last minute adjustments, tweaks, or replacements...

SPECIAL FX

... our Coordinator, Darrell Pritchett, keeps his technicians – Corey Pritchett and Jason Gustafson – busy juggling flashes, explosions, smoke, and various bodily fluids (Darrell was the one who kept the stream of piss flowing in the Percy-pees-his-pants sequence...)

HAIR AND MAKE-UP TEAM

... Lois Burwell, Key Make-up Artist, who has magic hands, a huge heart, and an endearing penchant for Teletubbies... Make-up Artist, Deborah Lamia Denaver, who's part-mom, part-punk, part-Goth and 100% beautiful / eclectic / artist... Nina Paskowitz, pixie-haired Key Hair Stylist, who cuts, clips, trims, slicks, and perfectly "Percy-fys" me every morning while her sweet-as-pumpkin-pie Associate, Janis Clark, works on the likes of Pepper, Morse and DeMunn... and Dan Striepeke, Tom Hanks's personal Make-up Man, who's been with Tom since their *Dragnet* days...

WARDROBE "POWER GIRLS"

... lovely and talented Costume Designer, Karyn Wagner, supervises Lis Bothwell and Heather Pain, Dressers extraordinaire (with "Girl Power" straps around their necks) who keep us immaculately pressed, clean and de-linted in our dark blue "E-Block" uniforms... (also: Juan Lopez, my and David Morse's original appointed dresser, who left the Mile mid-stride and is missed by one and all...)

THE OFFICE STAFF

... Carrie DuRose, Ellen Dunn, Lorraine Clarkson, David Johnson (Frank's affable, hard-working Assistant, who always goes that extra mile when I've requested 1930s-era music, vids and literature...), Rossie Grose (David Valdes's wonderful, warm-hearted Assistant), Brent Hill, Anna Garduna, cute-as-a-button Accounting Clerk, Jessica Klein (who always has a smile and hug for me) and her fellow Payrollers who put grins on the faces of even the most exhausted cast and crew members at the end of a long, grueling work week, and fresh-faced Amy McKenzie (Tom Hanks's stunning Personal Assistant) – all who keep things running smooth as silk in the *Warner Bros. / Castle Rock* camp.

TRANSPO TEAM

... Coordinator, Welch Lambeth, and Crew who are always friendly, courteous, safe drivers (and who went above and beyond the call of duty to accommodate me to and from locations in Tennessee on days when I wasn't officially working and just wanting to pop in on the set...)

CATERING CREW

... *Home On The Range* consistently prepares and presents an array of fine dining on the Mile – always tasty, always fresh, and always served with a smile...

I have the privilege of walking the Mile with this wonderful, dedicated and hard-working bunch of behind-the-scenes souls (I'm tellin' ya: not one bad egg in this basket...). My hat is off to them. They're my temporary work-a-day family.

They've etched themselves indelibly into my *Green Mile* heart.

I'll hold them in my dream.

Always.



11/16/98 – 11/20/98 WEEK EIGHTEEN:

The end of the Mile...

I'm scheduled to work at the crest of the week, but after make-up, hair, and wardrobing, as it turns out, I'm not needed in the shot afterall; since we don't have Tom, Frank asks me if I'll read his off-camera lines for David, Barry and Jeffrey. I say, "Absolutely, Frank. Now, let's see... since I'm Tom for a day, I'll need to be pro-rated at Tom's weekly salary, of course, soooo... one mil divided by five... that'll be \$200,000.00, please. Oh, what th' hell... I'm feelin' extra generous, so lemme just charge ya for one Hanks' hour, Frank, aaaand... that'll be... oh... let's round off... say 16K and call it a day, okay?" (Heh-heh) – Acknowledging my sarcasm with a good-natured chuckle, Frank instructs me to read Michael Clarke Duncan's off-camera lines as well. I do 'em free of charge (Hey, let's not get greedy, okay?) and resist the devilish urge to recite the dialogue in my low, bassy, MCD-as-John-Coffey-voice.

The week wanes...

MCD invites me into his trailer to watch a tape of his television debut (of four years ago). It's a guest-starring role as a convict named "Slash" in an episode of *The Bold and The Beautiful*. It's friggin' *hilarious!* Our laughter rocks the trailer and bounces off the studio walls. I'm thrilled MCD wants to share his ultra-cheesy-pseudo-drama-soap-operacting with me (especially when he had one up with the whole *ConAir* thing...). – I marvel at the spectacular unpredictability of our business. There's MCD doing "Slash" on a cornball soap only four years ago and I'll bank on his nomination for a "Best Supporting" Oscar for his portrayal of John Coffey in *The Green Mile* at the Academy Awards 2000.

My Manager, Sam Maydew, visits me on the set. It's so cool that he – who five and a half months back knocked on my door to impart the delicious news: "Doug, you got *The Green Mile* – is here on my last day as a sort of metaphorical bookend. This has been a wonderful experience, too, for Sambo who's believed in me from day one, gone to bat for me, and revels in the joy of our dream come true.

Sam and I lunch with James Cromwell and his lovely wife, Julie, who are both avid vegetarians. Thank goodness no one at the table's eating pork. It's a *Babe*-free feast.

Back on the Mile, we begin shooting my last sequence. As I sit on the green linoleum in my final repose of "Percy Abuse", Frank looks down at me at one point, laughs out loud, and says: "Man, you've been through the ringer, haven't you, pal? Percy is like the Wiley Coyote of *Green Mile* characters!"

Between a set-up, I lie down on my back and close my eyes. The hubbub of movie-making swirls around me. I hear Bernie giving background direction... David Emmerichs discussing the steady-cam shot with Frank... the padding of shoes shuffling by... the soft buzzing of an overhead light... Tom Hanks's cheerful laughter echoing down the corridor... the phish-phishing of a spray bottle "sweating up" an actor... David Morse murmuring something in his golden-soft tones... distant hammering... drilling... the jingling of keys... the rising and falling of conversations... "Quiet down, please!" (Bernie again...) ... a hush... a lull... I'm in that seductive place between consciousness and deep relaxation... that hypnotic Zen-like state... I think I dream...

I'm lying on my back in green grass looking up at the sky. I'm nine or ten. The puffy, white clouds above are moving and morphing into various shapes. I point out their ever-changing forms... (I've always liked to play this dream-game)... there's a castle... and there's a huge man nearly seven feet tall and 300 pounds... is he a king?... wait, it's not a castle... it's a prison... and look, there's a cute, little mouse with twitchy whiskers and oil-spot eyes and – Yikes!—There's a big, black boot hovering above the mouse... (it's gonna get squished if it doesn't move)... and

there's a chair... or maybe it's a throne... it's very straight and very tall and lightning bolts are coming out of it... and now there's a man in the chair... he looks sad... and then disappears in flames... no, wait, look... they're not flames... they're fireflies... lots of them... dancing around two people dancing... Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers... and I can hear Fred Astaire singing "Heaven, I'm in Heaven... and my heart beats so that I can hardly speak..."

... "on a bell"...

BRINNNNNNNNNG!

I wake up.

Camera. Rolling. Marker. Speed. And...

Action.

Cut.

Print.

Check the gate.

James Cromwell, Brent Briscoe and I are an official wrap. Round of applause. Claps on the backs. A few tears. Embraces. Farewells. Goodbye, Tom. Goodbye, David. Goodbye, Jeffrey, Barry, Frank... goodbye, crew...

Goodbye, Green Mile.

Outside on the lot, I catch Michael Clarke Duncan and have him sign my script. We wish each other well. He gives me a big bear hug, musses up my hair, and disappears behind the stage door.

Bye, MCD.

In my trailer, I peel off my guard uniform and hang it up for the last time. I put on my street clothes and grab my bag. Outside, a crew member walks by and asks, "So, what's next?" I shrug and say, "I don't know. We'll see what happens." He smiles and waves, "Good luck."

Walking to my car, I look up at the sky and see puffy, white clouds floating there...

... moving, morphing, changing...

(I've always liked to play this dream-game...)



12/1/98 – EPILOGUE:

I drive to Warner Bros. Hollywood to pay my last respects to the Mile...

Walking by Fairbanks gym, I recall our initial read-through in there five months ago. How nervous and excited I was sitting at THE ROUND TABLE with Tom Hanks, David Morse, James Cromwell, Harry Dean Stanton, Bonnie Hunt, and others I had – before then – only seen in the movies. We spoke our *Green Mile* dialogue together for the very first time. Afterward, I remember Frank looking around the table and saying "I feel like the luckiest man in Hollywood."

I walk across the parking lot (where our phantom trailers stand side by side) the door to stage #4 is open and I can see that our access tunnel set has been replaced by Doctor Evil's inner sanctum for *Austin Powers II*.

The sign on the stage #3 door still reads:

The Green Mile

Closed Set

(Do not enter when flashing red light is on.)

I enter.

The Mile is in the throes of deconstruction; a dead and dissected dinosaur. The prison cells are gutted, but the bare bone bars remain. The yellow, ribbed, tubular air-conditioning hoses lie coiled in a giant intestines-like entanglement.

I make my way down to the faded lime-green linoleum floor – scuffed, marred, and littered with debris; discarded nails, boards, sawdust, crumpled paper, rags, cans, and cigarette butts. I look up. Chunks of wall are missing (gaping holes in Dinosaur skin) and fingers of random wire stick out like severed veins.

I close my eyes for a moment and listen...

Except for the distant murmurings and occasional laughter from a few carpenters enjoying a break in a back room... the Mile is quiet as a mouse. I'm standing next to where John Coffey's cell stood (I'm told it's been transported to another stage for some possible future re-shoots...) and I can almost hear Michael Clarke Duncan's soft, low, bassy voice echoing in my ears: "Thass some mouse, Del. Look like a circus mouse or sumptin."

I walk down the Mile...

There's Delacroix's cell bars where I unintentionally broke two back-up batons in an overzealous effort to whack Del's knuckles and show him who's boss (and I can still hear Graham Greene chiding me: "Hey, Doug... this isn't real life, okay? It's, like, *acting*, bro'...") ... and there's the spot where I squished poor Mr. Jingles... there's Wild Bill's cell where I can still see Sam smiling behind the bars like the canary-eating cat... the place where I wet my pants (Frank yelling: "Less, less, *less* pee!)... where Paul Edgecomb fell post-groin-kick (and Tom squirming around on the floor yelling, "My penis! My penis... IS TOO BIG!" (and cracking us all up)... the mirror where I combed my Percy-slick hair (and drove poor Jeffrey DeMunn and Brent Briscoe up the proverbial wall listening to me whistling "The Mr. Jingles Death Dirge" tune over and over and over...)... the guard-desk where Barry Pepper bopped his head (and suffered a plethora of other injuries) in the Wild Bill struggle... Paul's office where I sat with my feet up on the desk perusing 1930s porn hidden between the pages of R. Bachman's *Caring For Mental Patients* and where Morse, Hanks and DeMunn slapped me with straight-jacket-Percy-abuse again and again...

I continue down the dark adjoining corridor to the execution chamber and...

It's gone.

Ol' Sparky. The walls. Partitions. Ceiling., Floor. Generator booth. Witness chairs. Ventilator. Tractors. Farm equipment. Storage shelves. Clock. *Everything*.

All gone.

But not really...

Come November, 1999, *The Green Mile* will be projected onto a bazillion movie screens in a bajillion theaters and seen by a gazillion people all over the planet. Resurrected. Collectively shared. Immortalized.

And when I sit in the back of a movie-house somewhere and watch... I can say to myself:

Wow. It's just like a dream I had.

I say one last goodbye to the Mile and walk out of the stage and onto the studio lot. Stars twinkle in the night sky above.

They remind me of John Coffey's fireflies.

I fall asleep at night and dream...

THE END.