



A ROOM WITH NO VIEW

Kevin Bacon talks acting, solitude and *Murder in the First*

Kevin Bacon is remarkably calm, considering the soda he's just opened has exploded in his lap. I hand him napkins and tell him I was sure I'd be the one doing the spilling that afternoon. He looks puzzled. "I'm nervous. I mean, you're Kevin Bacon. Kevin *Footloose* Bacon." With a weak smile, he thanks me for reminding him of his identity. Apparently, he's tired of the farm-boy-with-happy-feet comparison.

Shifting in his chair, Bacon glances at the stuffed green duffel bag and guitar case sitting nearby, and tells me he's flying out that night to see his two kids and his wife, actress Kyra Sedgwick, on the South Carolina set where she's filming. But before he flies out, he has to endure a long day in Los Angeles, where he is making

press appearances for his new drama, *Murder in the First*.

Bacon plays Henri Young, a young man sentenced to Alcatraz in 1938 for stealing \$5 from a general store/post office to feed his orphaned sister. After a failed escape, he's confined to a filthy underground vault known as "the dungeon," with no light, no clothes and little food or human contact — except for daily beatings by a prison warden. Three years later, he emerges — a hermit, virtually crippled — and murders the man he believes is responsible for his imprisonment. James Stamphill (Christian Slater), the bumbling, fresh-out-of-school lawyer assigned to represent Young, turns what's considered a lost cause into the landmark case that eventually contributed to the closing of Alcatraz.

Director Marc Rocco (*Where the Day Takes You*) says that the true story the movie is based on — an embarrassment in the eyes of Alcatraz officials — was a tough one to dig up. "No one came up to us and said, 'Here's all the information on the Henri Young case.' Everywhere we went — the federal bureau archives, the Alcatraz prison archives — the doors

were slammed," he says. "We were told that the court transcript — any information — was shredded and, thanks, but don't call back again."

But Rocco didn't believe everything was gone; he interviewed former guards and inmates, and kept researching. It paid off. He found Stamphill's law partner, who found a box of old notes. There, Rocco dug up a lot about Henri Young's brutalization in a 6-by-9-foot solitary confinement cell. Part of his research included spending more than 60 hours in that underground Alcatraz cell.

Kevin Bacon: Marc was there for 60 hours? He's a nut. I was only [in the set's cell replica] overnight — there was absolutely no light. I don't know if it helped me get inside Henri's head, though.

U. Magazine: *What did get you inside his head, then?*

Bacon: There was the external, physical side of it — the voice, the makeup, the walk, the hair, the...

U: *The southern accent?*

Bacon: That just came to me — I heard Henri in that way. The body and movement, though, that was from the night in the cell and that feeling of wanting to get small. In his three years [in the cell], he wanted to make himself as small as he possibly could, and that's the attitude of being cramped and twisted — he's having a hard time straightening up.

Also, I thought about being with no human contact for that amount of time. I thought about how that would affect you — what you'd do instead of talking to people — and I figured you'd sort of start to hear voices in your head and talk to those voices. In the scenes, I tried to create an ongoing, running voice in my head to talk to.

U: *Was the voice hard to tune out once you finished filming?*

Bacon: No, no — I went to Hawaii.

U: *That'll work.*

Bacon: [laughs] More than anything I've ever done, this film had an effect on me. You can't shoot 14 or 16 hours of torment every day and then just turn it off like a faucet. I had a lot of feelings of dread and fear and anger, but [off the set] I really had to keep it together. I have two kids, and I would come home and they would need their noses wiped and their diapers changed — you can't say, "Oh, God, I'm too into this. I am Henri."

U: *Is this your hardest role ever?*

Bacon: Yeah, I'd say so — it's the kind of situation where you are so emotionally, physically exposed. But you have to have people around you who you can trust. I had that in Christian [Slater] and Gary [Oldman].

U: *What was it like working with Christian?*

Bacon: I'm crazy about him. He's very professional. I think that this is a great part for him because he's such a *man* in this film — well, he becomes one. In the beginning, you really see a lot of that charm, the bumbling thing he does so amazingly well. Then he transforms and does something we never really see him do: the straightforward, honest, intelligent lawyer. It's incredibly believable.

U: *James, Christian's character — what's*

his biggest impact on Henri?

Bacon: Courage.

U: *Courage to face...*

Bacon: ... the fear. Henri's just been afraid for so long. He's afraid of being alone, he's afraid of the dark, he's afraid of being beaten — I think he's afraid of almost anything but dying. God, I think he's even afraid of living.

[It's hard to picture this decidedly normal, kid-next-door type sitting next to me as the tortured, bloodied Henri Young. I tell him this. He laughs and, as proof, points to a small scar on his jaw.]

U: *Injured on the set?*

Bacon: Kind of. They didn't put the protective coating under the scar makeup — it burned me.

[So much for a war wound. But actually, it's appropriate for this man who describes himself as not very interesting. "I'm not feigning humility," he says, "(but) people are usually asleep by this point."]

U: *[Pointing to the guitar case] So is that yours?*

Bacon: [Embarrassed] Yeah.

U: *How long have you played?*

Bacon: A few years — too long to be as bad as I am.

U: *So you're not going to give up acting to become a rock star?*

Bacon: I don't think it would be very wise right now. Actually, if I had the time, [I might consider it.] A friend of mine is involved in rock and roll promoting down at the Theatre of Living Arts [in Philadelphia]. We play and write songs together. If I don't start another film, I'm going to play a concert down there.

U: *Will you play for me?*

Bacon: Play the guitar for you?

U: *Uh huh. Just one song.*

Bacon: Seriously?

U: *Yeah, I'm serious. It'll be a great lead for the story. C'mon.*

Bacon: [Almost dramatic pause; he's considering it.] No, I can't.

U: *I'm not a music critic.*

Bacon: I realize that. I just — I'm too tired.

[Darn. I was going to request that Kenny Loggins song, too.]



No man is an island, even on Alcatraz.

By Beth Mayall, Assistant Editor