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Tape 1 Side A.

The copyright of this recording is vested in the ACTT History Project. Side One. So, Elaine Schreyeck, Continuity and Production Secretary, you have it.

Oh good.

Alright. Now, you've read the thing, so we start off with the, you know, conventional background sort of things, when you were born and school days.

When I was born? Yes the eighth, the year I was born?

Yes.

Oh.

If you don't mind?

I don't mind at all. I was born in 1924, at Tulse Hill in Streatham, and then I lived in Kennington with my grandmother. And, my father was a hotelier, so we lived wherever he was working, he was a hotelier at The Washington Hotel in Curzon Street, and then at the Howard in The Strand. And so of course, until my parents were divorced I was, always went with them and lived in these hotels. And then finally, at the age of four and a half, went to boarding school.

At four and a half?

Four and a half.

Where was it...

Until I was…, that was at Stony Stratford. I was there till I was seven, till my mother was able to take care of me again, and then we went to Ilford and we've been there ever since, so since 1931.

So your schooling is a bit spasmodic was it?

Well, no, I was at, I was at a convent when I was very tiny, when I was four, and then went to this boarding school, which was near some relatives of my mother's, which was fine. And then, once I got to Ilford I went to The Ursuline Convent, and stayed there. And left school during the war, I was evacuated at the beginning of the war, we were evacuated. And then I was supposed to go to France to perfect my French because my grandfather was of French origin, although British Nationalised. And of course, I never went to France to, to learn French properly, and ended up at Pitman's College in Southampton Row, which I never wanted, I never wanted to do shorthand

typing. But my mother always used to say to me ‘Well what are you going to do with your life, what are you going to be’? And I said ‘I'm going in the film business’.

Ah, that's what I was going to ask you, what, what prompted you to do that?

Well I always loved the theatre, I suppose like every young girl, wanted to be a film star and that sort of thing, I loved the theatre. And thought perhaps I'd like to be an actress. And then, I read in a woman’s magazine about a continuity girl when I was twelve and I decided that that's what I would like to do. I thought it would be much nicer to tell people what to do than be told what to do. [Laughter] So that was it. Well, as I say, I, my mother said ‘Well, look, alright you're going in the film business, but you'll learn shorthand and typing first’. And I said ‘Oh no’, she said, well mind you of course, it was essential. So when I finished school in June 1940, I was then evacuated, and we were evacuated first of all to Ipswich and then to Devizes in Wiltshire. Came back and of course, it was the time of the Battle of Britain and that sort of thing, and my mother was working at Bush House. And she said, ‘Well you'll go to’, you know, ‘to Pitman’s at Southampton Row, because we can meet each day at Holburn, we’ll go to Holburn together and you go in one way and I’ll go the other, go home together at night’. So I was there for a year, and during that period I wrote to every single film studio, and to Arthur Elton at The Ministry of Information seeing if I could train as a continuity girl. And of course, nobody trained continuity girls then as they don't now, so I mean it's no, nothing is different. So anyway came the end of the time and I had a few weeks to go and mother said ‘Well, what's happening’? So she, I said ‘I'm still going in the film business’. She said ‘Well you better find yourself a job’. So I went to an employment agency and said I only wanted film work, and they said ‘Fine’, and they found me a job at Paramount in Wardour Street. And David Rose was there at that time, and so was another lovely continuity, who had been a continuity girl, Diana McNab, I don't know if you remember her?

Oh Yes.

She was working...

She was at Ealing though wasn't she?

She worked for David Rose at that time. Anyway, I was a sort of little secretary to a couple of the legal department. And while I was there I met a very nice woman called Miss Fisher, who had worked with Michael Balcon at Gaumont, and she was a reader. And she knew what I wanted to do and she was very sympathetic and she said ‘Why don't you write to him and say that I’ve told you to write and that you want to train as a continuity girl’? So off I wrote to Ealing, Michael Balcon, got a very nice letter back from Stella Jonkia [ph 04:36] saying I'm very sorry we, we, you know, have no vacancy for a trainee continuity, but we have a vacancy in the Script Department, and if you’d care to come along and see us. So after six months at Paramount in Wardour Street I went to Ealing in February 1942 and that was it. So I worked in the Script Department , which I enjoyed very much with, you know, Angus MacPhail and Diana Morgan and all the people, to know how scripts were, were done.

[05:00]

Yes.

And then, when I was there, Basil, of course, Basil Dearden was there and he asked me if I would like to be his secretary, and so I said 'Yes'. So I, I was, and, of course, whenever, you know, he was making a film he either had Daphne Heathcote or one of the other continuity girls, and if any of them needed help or they were ill he'd make me go on the floor, because he knew I wanted, he was, he was most supportive and he was wonderful. So I never, again had any proper training like on a whole film, I used to help Daphne if she had crowds and she would, you know, give me the inside and I would type sheets out. And Olga Brook, at that time, was, was very pregnant with her son. And when we did *Bells Go Down* Basil used to say 'Well you better go down there and help her, she can't keep on getting up and down to type the sheets', so I typed the sheets. So that's how it started.

Well still there was no chance, there were various things, Daphne went into the cutting rooms, Olga left of course, to have her baby. And also during that time when we were doing *Bells Go Down*, Tommy Trinder was on the film and he wanted some secretarial work done and Basil said 'Oh Elaine will do it', so I did. And he was very nice and he said to me 'I need someone to do some fan mail, would you be interested in coming along to The Palladium some nights in the week and do it'? So I used to finish at Ealing and on the early nights and Saturday afternoons I would go along to The Palladium, and do his fan mail for him, which was marvellous experience.

And there was a difference in the money you got?

Oh yes, because, well my first, the first money I got was at Paramount was two pounds three and six a week.

Oh.

And I think it went up to two pounds five when I got to Ealing. And then, with Tommy, he gave me three pounds a week, which was lovely.

Which was more than Ealing were...

Which was more than Ealing. And I worked, as I say, Wednesday night and Friday night and Saturday afternoon, and very often Sundays if he was doing any broadcasting. But of course, in those days you see I mean the war was on, apart from going home from Ealing and, and, you know, and going home and having a meal and getting in the shelter that was the only thing to do. Or lying under the, the dining room table, going to sleep and going to work. Because I used to go from Ilford to Liverpool Street on the overhead railway, and then Liverpool Street to Ealing Broadway on the tube and then a number 65 bus to the studio, and that was travelling.

How did you estimate Tommy Trinder, do you…?

Oh he was a marvellous person, he was such a lovely person to work for. And, he really was, and even now I, I see him and he always remembers, he always remembers. And he said, I, I mean he, he never swore, he was a teetotaller anyway, he never drank or anything and he was most appreciative to anything you ever did. And

at that time, you know, Edmundo Ros was just starting, Kay and Kim Kendall were the two really lovely girls in the show, they, they'd just started. No, he, he, he was a very, very nice man. Well, time went on, I'd done this for about, oh, over a year, and he said 'Elaine I really would like for you to come to me full time'. So I said 'Well look there's a film coming up', and I said 'I don't think they've got a continuity girl for it, if they give me my chance I will do that film, and if not I'll come with you'. So, up came *For Those In Peril*, Hal Mason said to me 'Well, would you like to do it'? And I said 'Well you have never trained me properly, but I'll do my best'.

And sorry, what, what sort of film was that I 'For Those In Peril'?

Well, it was, it was an air sea rescue. We were down at Newhaven, we were out at sea every day on the off duty boats, on HSLs, MTBs, MLs. And whereas the, the WRENS and the, and the WAAF's weren't out to sea, I went out to sea every day on these boats. And then we went up to Blyth in Northumberland, on armed trawlers, we used to go out to sea about, oh, quite a long distance before we could fire our guns or anything like that. And during that time of course, I was called up. I was just nineteen when I did the first film you know, a few weeks after my nineteenth birthday. And, so I went to the, the place you had to go to, somewhere in Ealing off Eaton Rise and that, they said, you know, 'What do you want to do'? I said 'Well I'd like to go into the Naval Film Unit because I'm making films and everything else'. Well Ealing, at that time, they didn't have anybody, you know, so they applied for me to be reserved for a, for a period of time and I got, I got off because it was in the middle of a film and so forth. And then it came up again and I went again and said the same thing and they said well if she's doing the same sort of film, things that she would be doing, because I did other films, you know, Army films and things during the war at Ealing, and they said 'Well she's doing the same thing she would be do if she was in the Naval Film Unit, so you can keep her'. So that, that's how I stayed at Ealing.

[10:24]

Yes, so what did you do after 'For Those In Peril'?

Well I, *For Those In Peril*, I did *They Came To A City*.

Yes. I remember that.

Yes.

Because that was my first job as associate producer for Mick.

Yes. Oh yes, I did *They Came To A City*. I did *Bedelia*, in fact *Bedelia* was the last film I did do at Ealing.

Was it?

I did *Pink String And Sealing Wax,* and I had my twenty-first birthday on doing *Pink String And Sealing Wax*, with Bob Hamer. I did part of *Dead Of Night*.

Oh yes.

Yes.

Which, which, I'm trying to remember which section you did?

I did the, the one with Cavalcanti, with the, I did the one with Michael Redgrave.

Yes.

You know, with the dummy. I did the one with the little girl, the one with Sally Ann Howes, and then a bit of the, the joining up bits, you know, the beginning.

Very exciting that was.

Oh it was very, very exciting.

Yes.

Yes. *Dead Of Night*, I did that. And *Bedelia* was the last film I did at Ealing. Lance Comfort, of course, came in to do that. And, oh by this time I was getting, as continuity, about six pounds a week, and I asked for a rise, for a pound rise. And they didn't think they could possibly give me a pound rise so Lance Comfort had said to me 'Will you come with me to Riverside on my next picture'? So as I, they didn't think they could give me, I, we did some tests for *Nicholas Nickleby*, I remember that, with Cav. And then, by that time, Phil Crocker was coming out of the Army too and everything. So, I said, well 'I think you ', I'd been there well over four years, it was a marvellous training ground, Ealing Studios, I loved it dearly.

What do you think you mainly learned, just, how to do the job?

Well, how to do the job? I think we learned a, a discipline there, funnily enough. I think probably it was instigated by Micky Balcon himself. He was such a nice man and, and [Inaudible 12:06] and all the rest of it. And of course, people like Bob Hamer, who I, I was very fond of, I thought he was a marvellous person. You know I did *Johnny Frenchman* with Charles Frend too.

Yes.

While I was there. But, it, it wasn't, in those days one always sort of heard of Denham and all the places, those sort of places. And they seemed to be slightly different, but Ealing was a very good training ground. It wasn't, perhaps, the glamour of Denham, but it was, as I say, there was marvellous discipline there. Where, where it came from, from the head, probably, from, from Micky Balcon himself. But I always was, was very glad that I was trained at Ealing.

It was a friendly place I think wasn't it?

Yes, it was.

As I remember.

It was.

Yes.

It was a very friendly place. And I, I've always, you know, I, I wouldn't have left of course, if, as I say, I got my pound rise. But, anyway I went to Riverside and did the, a film with Lance Comfort and then, you know, it was freelance ever since that time, since 1945, '46. And freelanced ever since so all the business of freelancing these days, I mean there was never, I was never, or, yes, I did work for four years with Herbert Wilcox of course.

Oh what, what films did you do with him?

Oh I, the first one I did was *Maytime In Mayfair*. And I did *The Lady With the Lamp*. I did *The Beggar's Opera* of course, which, which was Peter Brook's first picture directing, that was all for, for, for Herbert. *Trent's Last Case*. But I mean, again, although I worked for them for four years, you know, it was like two weeks' notice on either side, you weren't permanently employed. And my first location was in 1948, when I did *The Glass Mountain*, with Henry Cass, which was lovely in Cortina and Venice. And then I went back again to Venice the following year, had Christmas '50, '49 in Venice, on another film called *Shadow Of The Eagle*, which we did, it was, we did, Italian actors and English actors, we swapped over, you know. Each time a scene we did them twice and those sort of things.

Was it bilingual?

Yes.

Yeah.

Er...

Do you speak Italian?

I speak pigeon everything. I say 'everything', a bit of Italian, a bit of Spanish, a bit of French. The thing is, is, you know, when I think I'm speaking Italian it comes out as Spanish and vice versa, because you get muddled, they're very similar. But I understand a lot, which is very helpful. And my French comes back when I, when I need it. I mean I can't write it or read but I, you know, I can make myself understood, which is very important I think.

You sound as if you really found that doing continuity lived up to your twelve year old expectations did it?

[15:00]

It certainly did at that yes, at that time. I used to sometimes think my goodness, what am I doing, you know. And I, certainly in later years thinking, I was sitting in the middle of a field, you know, knee deep in snow, typing, and why am I not in a nine to

five job in a nice warm office? But no, it has been a marvellous, it's been a marvellous life, you know, I've been all over the world, at the very best possible way.

You mean at, at somebody else's expense?

At somebody else's expense, of course, and then I think, oh well, thank God they paid me to go there and I didn't have to pay for it. But other places thinking well I must go back. And of course, now that I've, well more or less fading out I, I'm still travelling, which I enjoy, I enjoy doing very much.

When did you first join ACTT?

July 1942, Hal Britten joined me.

Ah, ha, yes.

Do you remember Hal Britten?

Yes, indeed.

Lovely Hal. Yes, July '42.

Yes.

So...

And you've been prominent haven't you done, done work for this, haven't you...?

Well, quite a lot of it, yes, we started a section that, you know, it was, you know, Peggy Singer, do you remember Peggy Singer?

Yes, yes, indeed.

And, and Doreen.

Yes.

Doreen North as she was then. We sort of started our particular section and, you know, went from, with the production secretaries as we had them at that time. And I felt, I mean obviously when I'm away I couldn't do anything, but when I'm not away and not on foreign locations and not terribly busy then I used to like, I thought well if you belong to a union you ought to know about it, and, and make it non-political and, and it's there for the benefit of the technicians, and I think that's terribly important. You're there to see that they get all the advantages that they should have.

And as far as continuity girls, in general, are concerned you think, you know, the union really helped conditions and money and things?

Well certainly in later years, I mean thank God, I mean because we never could get the, what we, what we should really have had because, you know, one has all these all

in deals and all these various things which was impossible because nobody would ever pay you for all the hours that we did, that was the trouble. And certainly in, in later years it improved. I don't say that it's not going back to the old days now, I think it certainly is as far as, from what I hear from people with the hours and everything, I'm afraid it's reverting to probably why the union started in the first place.

Perhaps that article that you read when you were twelve years old didn't mention how many hours after everybody else had finished you worked.

No, no.

You know.

No, that's it you see. And that, that, that was the thing. And I don't know that that's not perhaps, or has immediately put a lot of young people off doing the job, because people really don't realise what it is. I mean they think it's all glamorous and it's all lovely. Yes, you do have and there's a certain amount of glamour, yes you do go to all these places and, yes you do earn good money when you're working. But, as I say, you know, it's, it's been strange to many people in, in recent years that they're not permanently employed, you know, they used to go from one picture to another and everything else, but I mean I've always known freelancing, so it's, it's not new to me. And I suppose on that one had, had a discipline of what to do with your money and how, how, and how to sort of look after it because, you know, you might be on a marvellous run for two or three years of being continuously employed and then you, it gets an awful lot when there's suddenly there's nothing there.

Sure.

And you, and, and, and also you always sort of live at a, at a, a good standard of living when in the business, I mean it gives, it gives you that idea of having a good standard of living. And then, as I say, it comes as a nasty shock when suddenly nothing, nothing is there.

On those hours thing, what would you say, it's very difficult I suppose to establish a, a kind of standard thing, but for instance working in the studio in those days on an average sort of picture, feature picture, how many, how much work after the unit had actually finished shooting would you...?

Well it, you see the, I mean the lovely thing was when you did nine, eight thirty to five thirty, a forty hour week which you were supposed to do. Not the business like they do now, never ask you and they carry on to any hours and so forth. But say you, say you finished at five thirty, I mean if you've been able to keep up during the day, I mean it's, again, it depends on the director, I mean you might do seven or eight shots a day you might do twenty, and it depends how you have been able to keep up as to how many hours you do afterwards. It could be two, could be three, could be four. If it's an awful lot then, I mean if it's two or three shots you can sit and do it in the studio, you might be an hour, an hour and a half afterwards, but if you've got ten or fifteen shots to do you take it home.

Mm.

And of course I never lived anywhere near the studio, I always lived miles away. I mean in, in latter years if I was on a Bond or anything like that I used to try and live near Pinewood, I always used to try and get accommodation, or if I was working at Shepperton I would live near an aunt who lives near Shepperton.

[20:00]

Did you drive yourself to work?

Yes, to and from work. I never, well I remember it, when I worked for Wilcox I mean I used to drive from, from home to Shepperton every day, which was twenty-nine miles, you know, right through town and, and everything else. So you always left sort of half past six, seven in the morning or even before. In those days of course, there wasn't so much traffic but in latter years if you to go to Pinewood which is thirty-one and a half, not the M25 of course, the North Circular which was terrible. On, on a Monday, on a Monday I would leave at perhaps half past six, but I might be at the studio at quarter to, quarter to eight but I'd rather do that, if I left at seven I wouldn't be there till nine.

Were you ever late?

I don't think so, I can't remember, except, oh, once...

Yes.

When I got caught in a snowdrift on the way to A, ABBC. I was driving along, I was, I was in Totteridge Lane.

Yes.

I started off in Totteridge Lane, well you know what that's like, and suddenly I had to abandon the car. And I walked to the first house...

Yes.

Rang, asked them if they would ring the studio, the driver came out to find me and then got me to the studio. But I can't bear being late, I mean it, it just, because I like to be there and sort of sorting myself out beforehand, do you know, and, and getting in on top of things.

What else, the way was, I think again you see people don't appreciate that show business is all glamour and that, but in fact everybody who starts with actors in the theatre of course, you're always there.

Oh yes.

And that's true for…

And I think...

You know, everybody.

It's, it's the same with illness. I mean you, you wouldn't, you wouldn't, you wouldn't not be there unless you were absolutely dying. I mean, you know, there, there are people, like in the Civil Service, you know, people have, what is it? So many days sick leave a year or whatever it is. I mean I know I, I've been very lucky with my health, but unless you were absolutely dying you would be there. I mean I know nobody's indispensable, but on the other hand I mean sometimes I go and perhaps I can't talk, I've lost my voice through a bad cold and everybody's delighted that I can't say a word. But nevertheless, you know, you're there, even if you poke at somebody and, you know, make noises, and say sort of this is, this is not on.

Did you find any leading artists difficult from a continuity point of view at all or not?

Mm, in the main they're very, they were very good, yes, some, a few of them. Again, like yourself the, the good artists are very disciplined. The, these ones that sort of, you know, they do it by feeling and all this business this Strasberg thing and then, and...

Method Actors?

Method Actors, exactly, Method Actors. And they say 'Oh I can't possibly do that again'. And I'd say 'Well that's what you did last time, and I'm sorry this is, you know, what you have to do'. And, anyway they give you an argument after all it doesn't, it's no skin off your nose, if they don't do it right then we cut to somebody else so therefore they're not on screen. I don't care.

Did you make a note on your, on excerpts on your continuity?

Oh many.

Alright. Can you give an instance?

Oh well many, well many times I, you know, I've said that well, oh I well I mean obviously you, you can tell the director. And I know, you know, we were talking about Tilly, well Tilly is a great one, she used to write beautiful things on the, on the bottom of the thing. But I used to say, perhaps to, to any director say, 'Well look, I'm sorry but it's not right'. And he'd say 'Well alright, well if we can't do it again we'll forget it', you see. And, and say well so and so is not right to you, to the editor, I've spoken to the director and he's said it's okay so, you know, that's it.

Did you have any discussions about what used to be the famous thing, not so much now, a thing about crossing the line?

Oh yes. Oh yes, in fact I watched, did you watch the film the other night about the, the Welshman who was sort of start of the film business, did you watch it? It was called *A Penny For Your Dreams*.

No I didn't watch it, no.

Well there was a scene and I, I hadn't noticed that for a long time.

Haggar?

Haggar, that's right. I didn't know he'd got anything to do with the film business, that was news to me. But however, there was a scene in that, it was in a caravan and the woman was lying in bed and we continuously went on the wrong side of her, back and forth, I mean you can do it once and get away with it. And I thought golly what's happened here? And, and I, very often of course, on, on things if, if a film is really absolutely marvellous and you get carried away by something and you don't notice it so much. But this was really obvious, you know, it kept on jumping from one side to another.

They were looking, not looking at each other?

Well they were, they were over shoulders.

Yes.

If you'd jumped, he went on the wrong side.

Ah, so it's even worse.

Oh yes, oh even worse, of course.

Like a single it's, sometimes...

You, you might get away with a single, you think well there's nothing wrong there, but you don't know. Oh no, this was jumping either side of her while she was lying in bed.

Would you think, would you think that an audience, you know, an, an un-technical ordinary audience is affected by that?

No, I don't think they'd be affected so much about that, except they might wonder where somebody was in a room. But, other things, I mean, and they are very critical now about things. Maybe they're very critical because they're bored stiff with the, with the film. You know, I think that sometimes it, if, for example if a film is terribly boring then you notice things, if it is so good and holds you, you don't notice anything quite frankly, you're carried away. Even I, I'm, when I, I am very often, you know, carried away you don't think about it.

[25:27]

Sure.

But, but so many people say ‘Oh well it's, I noticed so and so, and what about this’ and things they are. I think oh my goodness they couldn't have been too interested in what they were seeing.

Well I think that's true what you've just said, that if the film is not very gripping as a story...

Yes.

Or entertainment.

Yes.

You then...

Then you start picking up, you see.

You can get, you can get some interest out of it by...

Quite.

And...

By looking and thinking 'Oh that was funny' and 'his hair looks wrong', or something, you know, like that. Yes.

What would you say in general the most interesting or exciting experiences you have had on, in films?

Well, there are many actually, I suppose. I worked, when I worked on *The Nun's Story*, it was marvellous, you know, being in The Congo and various in, indoctrinations of the nuns and that sort of thing, that we went to various places.

Is that Audrey Hepburn?

Yes, Audrey Hepburn, yes, and Peggy Ashcroft.

She was beautiful.

Oh yes.

Very nice lady.

Lovely. We got, well that was a marvellous experience. The greatest experience, from a travel point of view, was a film called *The Dove*, when I went right round the world.

Oh.

And, I know, I, when, when I finished that film I thought, if I die tomorrow I can have said I've had the greatest experience of my life. We started off in Fiji, we went from there to Australia, to Darwin, to Alice Springs, to Perth, out to sea each day with thirty foot waves and everything else, lashed to the side. And then to Mozambique, to Panama, to the San Blas Islands, to Ecuador, to Quito, to the Galapagos Islands, and back to Los Angeles, and home.

Marvellous. Who directed that?

Charles Jarrott. It was about the boy who'd sailed around the world single-handed, by himself.

Ah.

You know, all by himself. It was a marvellous experience. And then, you know, working with, well I've been so lucky I've worked with some marvellous people. In the main, American, I suppose, one of the, all the greatest of American directors.

Anyone, for instance, apart from Jarrott, did you ever work with Ford, for instance?

Yes, John Ford, I did *Gideon's Day* at MGM. John Ford, Joe Mankiewicz, Zinnemann, King Vidor, Rouben Mamoulian, Tony Mann, Billy Wilder.

Wow!

Oh I mean just, just...

Did you spend, I know you worked on a lot of American films in fact?

Oh yes, big American films.

Were you ever in Hollywood at all, much?

Not, not working, I went, when we did *Diamonds Are Forever*, and Guy was doing that picture. It was started in The States, and they had to have an all American crew, apart from Ted Moore and Ken Adam who did the thing. And they did the whole of the, the Las Vegas sequence. And then they were going to do a sequence out on an oil rig from ocean side and then all the rest was coming back to England. So he sent for me and said 'I want you to come out there, and you come, you've got to observe on the oil rig', because every time they go in to a room, in through a door we're in, in the studio, you know. So I went out there for three weeks on the oil rig, off, we used to go to the oil rig and we were at Palm Springs. And then I was sent, you know, into the studios, into the cutting rooms to make notes of various things that had happened and so forth working with the American editor. So that was, as I say, when we came back to England I came back with, I knew what was happening. And then of course, when we were in Los Angeles we did the, the boy coming in to Los Angeles Harbour at Marina del Rey. I was then working there then but, and I've worked in The States, I mean I've worked in *Hopscotch* with Ronnie Neame, you know, in Savannah, Georgia. I was on *Superman* of course, in New York. I've done every, well two or three, I've done *Superman* and a Bond in New York and in, in Canada. And then down at, again apart from makeup, hair and wardrobe and myself, we did another part of *Superman* in New Mexico, Gallup New Mexico. So I've worked in those as far as America is concerned.

Did you ever have any, no problem about labour permits or anything?

No, none at all, I mean yes, you had to write, I mean that's why I typed out a list like this of all the pictures, that's since 1955 not before. I mean for example when we went, as I say, in Los Angeles that was beside the point, there's nothing worried there, but when I went to work in Atlanta and Georgia we were under a different lot, we were under the sort of Chicago group, you see.

[30:26]

Oh that's always, they bring locals.

That's right, the locals there, and that was Chicago and Florida. Well they needed to know how many times I'd worked with a director before, and how many times I've worked with the same cameraman before, if I've worked with any of the other people before. All the films I'd done, and various things and with whom, so I sent them that list. I nearly said 'I'd like to know who you've worked with before and what you've done before'.

So it sounds sensible, in other words if you have worked with the important, or the correct director?

Absolutely, that's right.

Director.

That, that's it.

Yes.

The same thing of course, when we went in to, we were going on to Canada of course, for *Superman* but then there was a New York group. And then when I, again when we did some of the *Live And Let...*", no, was it *Live And Let Die?* I think so, yes in New York, there was like the first assistant cameraman, myself and art director. And again, because we had done thing, because we were then going on to, to New Orleans and then we were going on to Jamaica, just a group of us were allowed to go in. And then you said, I mean obviously you were carrying on and things. Because I had no, I mean apart from filling in all the forms and all the rest and, and, and, you know, I had 'H' Visas and 'B' Visas and all sort of things, I've never had any problem.

Great. Did you ever, you mentioned a little while ago going in to the cutting, the cutting room and working with the, an editor on the picture. Did you ever feel that you would like to become an editor yourself?

No, funnily enough, no. Not like Daphne, you know, Daphne wanted to. Because I did learn a great deal from them. I used to watch Michael Truman cutting a great deal and he taught me an awful lot. I'll tell you why, I felt very divorced from the actual creating of the thing. When you've got a piece of film in your hand, there it is, it's done, and you've got to make the best out of that. But I wanted to be involved in the creation of what was going on on the set. Now very often, I suppose again it's job satisfaction, you can, some directors you can talk to and some directors will ask, ask you what you think or you might be able to sort of put in a little something and say

‘Oh I’, you know, ‘I didn't like that’, or whatever. I mean people like Henry Hathaway of course, doesn't care what you think or anything else. I mean there are certain directors don't want to know, they're not interested in your idea at all, fair enough. John Ford, again was a, unto himself but yet he was a very nice, a different kind of character. But certain people just don't want to know, I mean it's their idea, which is fair enough, it's their story, it's their idea. But other people, and in the main I've been very lucky. Again you could talk about it, you could think about it, I mean if you, you, there's a scene and you feel so and, you know, you can't stand it, the way the actor’s doing something or you think he, he, nobody would behave in that way and that thing, and you could say to some directors ‘I'm terribly sorry, I must say this’, and they will say, perhaps oh well, yes you're right but this is how I see so and so. I mean they don't say ‘Shut up and go away’ or anything like that. So it, it was, you, you felt that you had at least contributed something. With being in the cutting room, yes of course, you make something out of, perhaps sometimes nothing because you haven’t got much to do things with. And if a director’s made a mess of anything, you've got to try and get it out and make a lovely story of it. I felt divorced. It's a piece of celluloid and it's there, and it's done, and there's nothing you can do about it really. But at least you’ve had the, the, the sort of personal, a personal contact with actors or with, you know, sometimes actors come up and say to you ‘How was that, what do you think’, you know, and you think oh well.

Yes, Thelma Connell was the supreme example of someone who went from continuity to editing.

That's right, yes. Yes.

A very good editor she was too.

Well Daphne did it for a little while didn't she? She, she assisted in the cutting rooms I know. But, yes some, some people would like, but I, and, funnily enough, in America a lot of top cutters were women weren’t they? You know.

Yes.

They were because I worked with Dorothy Spencer. But a lot of them were, I don't know whether they ever started as script supervisors.

She was an editor at MGM wasn't she?

No, Dorothy...

Right.

Thompson was, was it MGM? No it was another top one at MGM, I can't remember her name off hand.

But anyhow, anyhow.

Oh yes, she was at, she was either at, I think she was at Twentieth, Dorothy Spencer.

Ah, ha.

Yes.

But it is true that, certainly a lot of good editors, and top editors in Hollywood were...

Were women.

Even in the silent days.

That's right.

Yes.

Yes. But whether they ever perhaps started as script supervisors or continuity, because I don't know.

[35:02]

Well I think originally they started, the continuity started, had a, a, I think the first continuity girls really made contributions to the story, and way back in silent days I mean.

Well like, like Hitchcock's wife.

Yes.

Yes, she was, you know, she worked closely with him.

That's right.

Didn't she.

Alma Reville.

That's right.

Yes.

But, no I, I, I enjoyed the, the sort of personal contact with actors and things and, and directors on the floor. So, no I, I've always, always enjoyed ...

Do you remember an example of an actor or actress who really was difficult?

Oh well one, yes, one that I, I would never, ever, ever work with again, is Anthony Quinn.

Really?

Yes.

Ah.

Ever.

Why was that?

Just dreadful in any shape or form.

He was nasty was he?

Well no, it was, funnily enough, it was, it was a film of all men, and I thought oh how lovely, you know, it will be interesting because… I mean not that women are difficult they, in fact they're not, they are much easier in some, in some ways. But I thought oh this is going to be nice, it's a film with all men so it will be, you know, be able to get on and so forth. Well it was, it was impossible, they were all prima donnas, I've never seen anything like it.

Who were the others?

Oh well some were French, but I thought, well I thought that would be easy because being partly French I would be alright. But, no, I mean, oh they had their own hairdressers from somewhere and they had to have someone to cut their hair, and they were all playing French paratroopers so you can imagine they had short back and sides didn't they, that sort of thing. But I thought this is impossible. And the director was lovely, but I thought oh no, I can't.

Who was the director?

Mark Robson.

Ah.

And...

Was that 'The Last Count'?

No, it was called *The Lost Command* in the end, but it wasn't, it was called *The Centurions* originally.

Yes.

But, oh no, I mean, I thought, oh dear. No he was just, he, you know, he didn't learn his lines and he made it up as he went along and then, you know, because it depends on some directors, you know, like Billy Wilder, I mean, he won't have one, because he's fundamentally a writer...

A writer, yes.

First and first, first and foremost, he wouldn't have one word changed, he would say ‘Cut’, and you would think my God what's happened? And he'd look at you and said ‘Didn't he say a ‘the’ instead of an ‘and’? And you’d say ‘Yes’, and he said ‘Well, that’s no good’, you know. And so you had to know some directors who don't want one word changed or do, but when the whole sentences and whole things are changed. And I used to, and he used to say ‘What are the lines’? And I'd give him the proper lines ‘No, no, no, they're not the lines’. And I'd say ‘Well they’re the ones that are here so’, you know.

Have you ever worked with Hitchcock?

No, I haven’t.

No.

Of course Angela has.

Yes, that's right, I remember.

Yes.

Yes. Yes.

And Connie of course, Connie Willis. But, no I hadn’t worked with Hitchcock but I, I must say I have, I have worked with some lovely people in my time, I really have.

Have you worked, did you work with Huston at all?

No, Angela Allen was the work, the person who always did Huston.

Yes.

I mean I met him but I haven’t worked with him, I haven’t done a film with him. But, and of course, English directors, I mean Laurence Olivier was marvellous to work with.

What, which one, what film was that?

I did *Prince And The Show Girl,* the, the Marilyn Monroe picture.

That's the one with Monroe?

Yes.

How did you get on with Monroe?

Well, there again, you really didn't, that was amazing, you didn't really have much contact with her because as soon as she’d done something she went into her dressing room with the Strasberg lady, you know. And, but she, she was like a little girl, you know, you wanted to shepherd her along, you wanted to be helpful with her and

everything, she was marvellous. And, and she had a quality that came out on the screen which you would never have realised. I mean you perhaps saw her walking along the corridor at Pinewood and think oh well she's just a girl or something, but when she was in front of the camera, or when you saw rushes the next day there was a quality there that was quite exceptional.

There's a story that Olivier, himself said that sort of thing, that he, he couldn't believe it even when he, when he'd played a scene with her.

Played, yes.

It didn't, you know, it didn't have any...

It wasn't till you sat and saw the rushes.

Saw the rushes and that's it.

That's it.

It was, it was, something there?

Absolutely, it was absolutely true. And I mean, you know, we, he was marvellous with her, I mean absolutely wonderful. And we had rehearsals before, you know, weeks beforehand we were rehearsing with all the actors of course, who knew the parts because they'd done it in the theatre with him.

Mm.

You know, Dame Sybil Thorndike and Dickie Wattis and people like that, they were all wonderful. And we'd do, and we'd rehearse. But, you know, she'd say a word and she'd look at you and she'd say 'What does that mean'? I mean she didn't perhaps know what the word meant, and she does, she didn't mind asking you just told her. And you would say 'Well, you know, Marilyn you use, this is in this hand', and she'd say 'This is the hand'? And I'd say 'Yes', and there were things like that. But as I say, she was like a little girl.

[40:04]

Mm.

But on the screen there's this thing came out and it was just magic.

Is there anything you'd say that has changed very considerably from when you first came into the business to now which particularly struck you, either technically or in terms of your continuity job or anything?

Well, no, you see people keep on saying 'Oh well we can do different things', you can't change this job, nothing is going to change the job. Yes, you can be less particular, that's why perhaps I have never done television series because I couldn't be particular, I don't think. Not that they, they don't want me to be particular, but they

haven't the time. You know, you, everything is rushed and, and, and you've got to do so much per day and so forth so therefore I couldn't do that sort of thing, I don't think. I don't think literally that the job has changed one iota. Yes, people say 'Oh well we won't bother about sheets', and we won't have this and we don't… I think they say that because a lot of the people aren't used to getting them, and the people that do the job now don't know how to do them.

Yes.

Because they have not been trained either. A lot have come in from television, which is a great mistake, because it is not the same job as a PA, they're keeping, you know, PAs come in. The poor girls when they're doing PA, I mean they're, they're arranging accommodation for the, for the people going on location, they're doing part production secretary. I mean how can you do that and give your full attention to something on the floor? You can't, it's quite different.

What I've found today in working a lot in, in television that sometimes people have been surprised when I've said I, as producer, wanted a copy of the sheets.

Yes.

You know, which is...

Yes.

Essential.

Oh that's true.

But I was going to ask you a technical thing connected with that. Have you ever had experience of having a monitor on the floor?

Oh no.

You know, telling you what to do?

Oh yes, oh yes, I mean, when we've done...

Yes.

Musicals, like *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Yes.

And, mm...

You found it a help did you?

Sometimes to see the size of a shot, because, you know, again if you're in a hurry… I like to look through the camera, you know, in the old days you should, and you

should look and say what do you see or, or what, your cutter, you ask. A, a thing that has changed and did change at one time but is, I think it's reverted back again, was when the zoom lens started to come in, you know, because you never knew when anybody was zooming in and zooming out and you, you said ‘But you told me you saw that and now you've got all this in’. Of course I wasn't looking at those things.

Yes.

That, that would drive me mad. And of course, everybody went mad with the zoom lens at one time.

Yes.

Do you remember? They were in and out and all over the place.

Yes.

So that was a distraction at that time. And, as I say, they’ll say ‘Well this is the first set up and where, what did you see at the end’? Of course lots of marvellous operators that you worked with they will tell you, but then they don't always tell you if they've zoomed somewhere and you, and you've thought my God where are they, over there, what are they doing over there?

Yes.

That sort of thing. So that was, that was a great distraction at one time and I think that's sort of calmed down a bit now, people don't do quite so much of that.

It was the new toy.

It was the new toy, you see, this is it. Now the monitor thing, it was when we were doing two *Pink Panthers* at once, the last two, after Peter Sellers had died, when I worked with Blake Edwards. He has a monitor all the time, and it was useful to play it back sometimes because he'd perhaps do one take and then that's it and you were off, and you’d think oh golly how, I didn't see all that. In what, in, they, they are useful for that sort of thing. But I can't just watch a monitor because you can't see the details in it. And they're usually so bad, looking at them, you can't, apart from just about seeing, you know, the size of things.

Mm.

And sometimes playing something back, well that's it. But I certainly would never watch through a monitor if I can watch for real. I mean I don't even like wearing glasses, that's why I bought half glasses, because this I can do for reading but I think I miss something even through a pair of glasses unless I can see it actually, absolutely for real.

[End of Tape 1 Side A 44:20]

NB: The time codes given here are estimates based on readings from the original cassette recording.

Tape 1 Side B.

Elaine Schreyeck, Side Two.

Right. You were just, I was going to ask you Elaine about, you mentioned that during the war years you did work on some Army films and so on at Ealing, can you remember anything particular about them?

Well one particular one, I think it was, it was called, I'm just trying to think what, the name of it, *Watertight*. It was for the, well I think it was basically for the, for the Navy because it was to do with closing all of the hatches and things on the...

Submarines?

Submarines and things like that, yes. And, and, as I say, *For Those In Peril*, of course. We did quite, two or three of those sort of training things for, for the, for the Army at that time. I can't remember the other ones, but I remember *Watertight* very, very clearly. Because, I think that was a, that was a great time for the industry in general, you know, we made some marvellous films during the war. I, I saw *Ships With Wings* again the other day and looked at it and thought about it, and remember that at Ealing?

Yes.

Because there, there were some, there were some marvellous films made during the war. Then everything sort of changed and, until, as I say, about the '50s when, it was a great time in, in Rome so many big productions were being made there and all the...

The internationals?

The international things.

Right, I see.

Marvellous films like, you know, *Land Of The Pharaohs, Helen Of Troy, Quo Vadis*, and all the rest of it. And you'd be walking along and you'd bump into all the Technicolor technicians, all the boys, the three strip boys, you know, that were there.

And you're still using the three strips process then yes?

That's right, yes.

Could, Jack Cardiff, did you meet then?

Yes of course I met, I worked with, with Jack Cardiff. In fact I met him only the other day in Spain, he, he's now got a home in Spain. But, oh yes, Jack, because Jack did *Prince And The Showgirl*. But it, they were a marvellous set of technicians there, Peter Bolton and people like that. And a lot of the, the very good, I remember a marvellous assistant director, Italian, and he was, there was Gus Gusti [ph 02:06] of course, there and Piero Mousetta [ph 02:08] and they were both second assistants to Peter Bolton on *Quo Vadis*, and they always said even after that, you know, they would always work with him, he was such a marvellous teacher. So we, we were really it, it was a great time. And I thought well Rome will never be the same again, and yet I went back four years ago to do *Ladyhawke* with Richard Donner and went to Cinecittà and I thought, oh, the times, if you had a, a magic ring and, and went back thirty years what it was like, the, the good old days.

Did you work with any Italian directors, like Rossellini, or De Sica or any others?

No.

No.

None of the Italian, oh, apart from Zeffirelli.

Oh yes.

Franco Zeffirelli, that was a wonderful experience.

What, what film was that?

The Taming Of The Shrew, with Burton and Taylor.

Oh yes.

And...

How did you get on with the Burton/Taylor set up?

Oh marvellous, because I'd worked with both of them before and knew them very well. I did *Alexander The Great* of course, with, with Robert Rossen, with Richard Burton. And I, I loved them dearly, both of them. They were great people, great technicians, wonderful to be with. And that was a marvellous film to work on, Ossie was on it and...

Ossie Morris?

Ossie Morris. And, I mean Zeffirelli has so much talent, yet he was of the theatre and everything, and he had been an assistant of course, I think to Visconti at one time. But, I mean he was just a joy to work with. Of course you know, doing Shakespeare, he could act all the parts so, you know, he'd do all the Shakespearean parts for all the lovely, the English actors, you know, who had great, Michael Hordern and people like that, but he'd act everything. And he, he was, again it was a wonderful experience to

work with Zeffirelli, it really was. But, no it was all, I have had a lovely life, and it has given me a great life, the film business, you see, it's very true.

Yes, I was going to ask you looking back...

How...

Whether you'd wished to do anything other than what you'd done?

Oh, at times you often thought, oh, I'd like to, I should have been a hairdresser or I should have been a [Inaudible 04:12] instead of doing continuity. I know the hairdressers and makeup get up very early in a morning but, you know, and that sort of thing. And I thought, we were, many of us continuity girls had thought that we'd do that and then of course, you know, during the day you obviously see what they are doing, various other things, but not the, the… It's the hard grind of continuity which is, is the thing that you, you suddenly think well really is it worth it? Sometimes when you're, as I say, when you're abroad, and it can be very lonely at times too because at night, when everybody else is going out to eat something they, when, when you, the camera boys of course, they've packed up the camera and they've cleaned it and put it away that's it. But you go back and you have a quick bath or something because you're filthy whatever, and then you start again, and that's the hard part, you know. To recall everything that's happened during the day and be ready for the next day. Those are the things that are, that you think oh dear.

[05:00]

What, what do you think are the qualities for a good continuity girl?

Stamina I should think.

Oh well that's not...

Stamina.

That's not...

Well, you see it, it's a job, it's, it's a diplomatic corps par excellence, I can tell you that, because you have to be able to cope with people all day long, really get them to do what you want in the, in the best possible way without them knowing that you're getting them to do what you want, you know, that sort of thing. To get on with people, to, to be observant of course, and to, to have them, you know, set on your one course, this is the thing. But it, it is, as I say, you've got to, you've got to be nice with people, you've got to get on with a group of people. I mean you can be in the most awful conditions and in terrible times and whether it's night or day and hopefully make people feel at ease. Some actors are terribly, a lot of actors are very insecure and they feel very nervous and you sort of have to jolly them along. I mean I, I'm very fond of actors I like actors but some are, you know, more nervous than others.

Can you give an example of an, you know, what is probably now a well-known actor, being insecure in early days, when you were working on?

Well, well, you know, some of them would say to you ‘What do you think of that’? Or ‘What do you think that was’? A, a person I loved working with and was a marvellous actor was Peter Finch, who I thought was a great person. But he was a lovely person because he always used to ask your opinion, you know, he’d say afterwards, you know, ‘What did you think of that’, and, and ‘how was I’, and that sort of thing.

Did you work on a picture at Ealing with Peter at all?

No, I did...

No.

The first film I did with him was *The Black Prince*.

Right.

With Errol Flynn.

Yes.

With Henry Levin, another lovely man. And I saw, and I saw a film of his the other day *Don Juan* I thought, oh, how handsome, I was madly in love with him in those days. And then I did a thing, another film called *England Made Me* and of course, *Nun’s Story* with Peter Finch. Oh, very, very attractive man, wonderful person. But, you know, so, as I say, some actors will sort of say ‘Well what do you think’ , and… But most of, most people are lovely to work with really, they really are.

What's interesting a per pro what Alan asked you about, you know, what the qualities are. I, I was very interested in your earlier remarks about, you found doing continuity creatively satisfying because you felt that you were...

You can contribute.

Really, you were contributing?

Yes.

And that must be a quality that you need to have really to be a good continuity girl?

Well, yes, you see when you read a script I, you know, I, a script is sent to you and, you know, and I, I think by reading it I feel that usually having read it I can, I know how those characters should behave in certain circumstances. I mean my interpretation may be completely wrong for the director but I think I know. And, as I say, I like the theatre, I like plays, I like drama and all that sort of thing. So when you come to do a film and, and you, well even, a lovely thing that used to happen in the old days you worked with writers before you start, I suppose that was being in the script department. And the writer, obviously, is creating, the, the greatest thing about films is the script, I mean that's the first and foremost thing, if you've got a good script

it's absolutely marvellous. So he's obviously got his ideas about things. And I remember working on the *Battle of Britain* with Wilfred Greatorex and, and he was writing, we used to work together and then something about it, you need perhaps a, 'What about from a woman's point of view, what do you think about this'? And you, you feel that you're giving something. I had a marvellous experience working with Lawrence Darrell on one, some of the scripts of *Cleopatra*, I worked on so many scripts on *Cleopatra*, I was on it was for nine months, and that was marvellous. And again, I mean he's such a great writer but you, you do, as I say, you know, and he'd say 'What do you think'? And, and you, you'd talk things out. Therefore you feel you're creating from the very beginning, unfortunately these days it doesn't happen, you know.

No.

Because they haven't the time. It was the same with going on location, many years ago like on *Sundowners*, like on *Nun's Story*, like on *Nine Hours to Rama* in India, I would go out ahead with the director and the first assistant, usually, the cameraman and the art director and we'd go looking for locations. And I'd go, taking notes and saying well that, that, if we're going to do it that way that will be p.m. shooting and we do it that way it will be a.m. shooting and that sort of thing. Everything was marked, especially with Zinnemann who's very particular about things like that, which was lovely. And you felt you were there from the beginning, you knew exactly where you were going to shoot things, you knew how things were going to be. But again you see now there, there isn't the money, they don't do it that way. I mean you're lucky if you, if you get to see, you know, you, you're there half past eight in the morning this is it we shoot this way and that's that. All that wonderful time of the industry has gone. And I think that is why I have come to a time in my life when I, I am fading out, and, and, I mean I, I had a great experience a couple of years ago working with John Boorman.

[10:18]

What was that on, which film?

Hope And Glory.

Oh yes.

And I was thrilled to bits to work with him. I, I, you know, obviously thought I would like to work with him at some time, and I had been asked to work with him once before and wasn't able to so I thought oh well that's it I shall never have the opportunity again. And this came up and of course, it was my era, you know, and I was the same age as his sister at that time when the war began and, and it was lovely. And, again it's a long time since I've worked with a person in this manner that we, we, we sat down, we went through every scene in the script. We rehearsed with the actors on the sets when they were built in, going through every line beforehand around a table and actors would say to me 'Well does this usually happen'? And I said 'Well in the old days it very often did', I said 'but now I'm afraid it doesn't'. And they said 'Well this is marvellous because we get to know what characters we're playing, how they feel, he tells you these things'. I couldn't believe that these sort of things still

happened and it was a marvellous experience. And then he would say ‘Well, if you've got any remembrances of the war, if you, if you remember things, if you can think of something don't hesitate to tell me’. So, again you see you think, oh well I don't...

You get really involved?

You get really involved, that was the job satisfaction. And, in the main, I have been very fortunate in being able to do that. And of course, again, working with people like Mankiewicz, like Robert Rossen, like Billy Wilder, you used to work on scripts, who you've been able to work on scripts beforehand with people and gone through the scripts and done various drafts and things, that was a marvellous experience. And then again, you, you, you get the feeling of the film and, and things like that.

Did you ever feel you wanted to try your hand at directing?

Oh yes, very much so. I always wanted to be a director when I was younger, very much.

What stood in the way would you say?

Well perhaps in those days, somebody asked me this the other day, perhaps in those days it was a fact, we had great directors, marvellous directors, we haven’t got so many great directors now. I probably now one might even get a better opportunity. I think in those days all these people were still working full pelt, and it would, I mean it would be difficult to break into it. Now...

But was it because you were a woman?

Well maybe I, you see this, this Women’s Lib bit has never, I mean never gone down well with me at all because I've never had any problems. I suppose because, in the main if there was nobody, if you were the only woman on the floor… Anyway America it doesn't apply because there are male, male script supervisors. But, certainly as far as, you know, the women business, yes. But I mean nobody else does my job anyway, a man doesn't do it anyway so there was never any problem. Yes people had problems becoming, perhaps even production managers, you know, people like Teresa and things like that. It could have been that, that it, from a woman and that, you know, they've… It's difficult enough to get even a new young, male director a chance let alone a woman. But if you look at television now I mean I, I should think the male are worried about it because they're all women. I mean the, the credits are full of women, there's hardly a man to be seen and it's gone completely the reverse. Maybe I would have got a better chance if, if I was starting out now and, and wanted to be a woman director.

Particularly if you went into television I expect, as you were saying.

Yes, yes, oh yes probably. But, as I say, all that’s, that's finished now, so. But I, I really, I, most of my colleagues, and I don't know whether this has been the case with people that you have spoken to, say we had the best years, and as far as I'm concerned we had the best years and it was a marvellous experience.

Correct.

But I thought, well I probably *Hope And Glory* would be my, my last. People say, even say 'It's your latest', well I am now going to do John Boorman's next picture.

Great.

In September, he's asked me, and because I love working with him I'm going to do it.

Has it got a title yet?

No, I've, well really there's something but I'm not sure that it's the right one so… But I'm, he has written a script and we are going to make it. But he's, he's such a, a well ordered person, he's the type of person that I love working with and he's the type of person that you can always talk to and say things to. He may say 'Well no I, I don't see it that way' or 'this is the way I do it because I want so and so'. But at least you, again you've been able to contribute. And there are certain people that I might have thought of working with again if, if I was asked, people that I know very well like I did Ronnie Neame's picture before, you know, *Hope And Glory*, you know, I love working with Ronnie. But most of the people I suppose that I've worked with now don't make films anymore and that's it. But this I think has happened to a lot of people.

[15:24]

Well Charlie Crichton, for instance, has just made a film.

So I understand, yes, yes.

Could you give an idiot's guide to a continuity girl's job?

What do you do?

What do you do? As I say, you know, an idiot's guide.

Yes, but some people asking me to, they're always saying 'What do you do'?

Yes.

I, I'll do it from, from being on the floor, I mean once you've gone on the floor..

Right.

I mean obviously all sorts of things go on beforehand.

Yes.

I mean, you make a note of every single thing that's on the set, right? Plus anything anybody wears. When you're shooting you time every single shot. You make a note of, of where you start the scene, where you end the scene. The movements, the when

the camera moves, when the, that sort of thing. At the end of the, of the scene you have to know the prints, how many times, what the prints are, you, you get the, the lens, the distance, the filters and everything else from the camera department so that when you type your sheet all this information is on it. Or, if you're out on exteriors, what time of day you shoot, whether it's cloudy, whether it's sunny, whatever. The notes of the costumes, everything is written in your script. How many, whether you do a long shot, a medium shot, the size of the shot, you describe it, you type all the dialogue down. All the camera movements, the camera when it starts, when it stops. As I say, the, the, the timing of each shot, the length of each shot and what the prints are. And you type up a sheet of each one. And that mainly, you work mainly for the director and the editor and you are the liaison between the two people.

There's a peculiar thing about timing which needs explaining, the fact that master shots...

That's right, well master shots...

As against...

As opposed to the one you, as against the close ups, or if you do extra dialogue.

You mightn't allow any time for certain, any cut shots?

Yes.

Because it's already covered in the master.

That's right.

And that sort of thing.

I mean the master, if you, if you have a master shot of three minutes and then you go in and do, oh, twenty close ups or whatever it is you don't, I mean, yes you time them for your own benefit but, and then sometimes perhaps if you've added in another line, you might get another couple of seconds but you normally give the master shot timing. Timing's very, very important. Very often before a picture too you, I, when you do the script you time the script, for example I timed John Boorman's script for him the other day. You time the script.

In, in, how do you mean time it?

Well...

What is that?

When you time a script, you read aloud every single shot.

Yes.

With your stop watch and you time. But of course, I mean as you say if someone walks down the street and goes down, you don't know how long...

Yes.

The street is.

That's right.

I mean it can't run more than five seconds or three seconds or whatever. But that you learn, that's with experience.

Yes, yes.

In the old days one used to say 'Well a Warner of script if it was a page, a certain sized thing it was a minute a page or it was forty-five seconds a page or fifty seconds a page. In, in more recent years it's become one minute, twelve a page. And then you used to have three minutes titles at the beginning, one and a half at the end, well of course, that's all changed now, you know, with all these masses of titles that come on. And you time the script and also you break it down into periods of time, which is very important because then you go through this with a director and say, am I right, is it, this, three weeks later or two weeks later or whatever? Then you go through with the, with the wardrobe department so that somebody doesn't turn up on the set, you know, with the same dress on that they had three weeks previously or something like that, or three years previously. So all these things, it, as I say, it's a very combined operation. Then at the end of the day when you've timed all this and you've got all your sheets done you check all the prints with your, the camera department, with the sound department. Then you, you make out a rough progress report. In other words you, you say how many scenes you think you've done for the day, how many minutes you think they've done for the day. Whether a scene is completed or not. What actors you've used and any big hold-ups, you know, whether the, the camera broke down for half an hour or, you know, the roof fell in or something like that.

Could you explain, also for the benefit of the idiot's guide, the differences between scene numbers and slate numbers?

[20:00]

Oh yes. Well now this is a little, this is a great bone of contention. This was, it was actually funny because the American system is very different, well I say very different they use scene numbers as slate numbers. Now this was before, when the big studio system, you know, was in operation in America. You have a scene number and they put, they used to put, like scene fifty-one. And then if they did fifteen shots it was A, B, C, D, E, E in America. And then they have what they call a marked up script, which really the editor does for himself from your sheets, because he's really much better. But, in the old days if you had an American script like when I worked at MGM, I mean you couldn't change a word of dialogue without referring back to Hollywood, so that was fine, then you could mark up a script. But now I mean each line is changed so you've got to re-type the script anyway, which anyway you've got on your sheets. So you could never fit it all in.

So Mary only put on the other side the contin…, the script supervisor would write 'medium shot', just the lens, not the, the cameramen in America never told them the filters. I mean they keep all that to themselves, the Americans keep all their camera information to themselves, never tell you. We only do it for the benefit of the camera department, because they say 'Well, do you remember slate so and so, and so and so, what filter did we use'? And you look back and you tell them. But in America, no they keep it so alright. They put the lens and then they put the take and that sort of thing and that's, that's it. But in England, and this is I think very much a much better system, we have scene and slate numbers. Now a slate goes One, Two Three, Four, Five and, but on your continuity sheets you have the scene number as well as the slate number on there.

But the slate number, I know that, that refers to the, you start at slate One?

Slate One.

Yes.

And you carry through. And it's much easier. Say, for example, you've got another unit.

Yes.

And they're, they're not quite sure what they're what they're going out to shoot, they may be going out to a field somewhere but they might do fifteen shots which are all over the script. So you say 'Right, you start at 500, come back and tell me what you've done later'. But if they've got to sit in a field and work, try and work out which, where this is going to go, I mean it might be a car going by left to right we're not quite sure where we're going to fit it in. Then you can't tell it so therefore it's a muddle. But what used to happen in The States, they used to perhaps have two or three editors on one film. And what they would do is give, like Sid, they would give him scene 30 to 50 and give him all the shots like A, B, C, 30 to 50, so that's his little lot. They could have done it with slate numbers but they didn't do that, they would just do that by giving them the film. And they could never understand why we didn't do it that way at all. Because I said 'Well how'? Admittedly I think what happened, everything was very well worked out there, whereas we might have two or three units, you might even have two or three cameras on the other end of the field like in a battle with no idea where the shots are going to go, I mean you've got to sit and work them… I mean sometimes I don't mark up the scene numbers until the end of the day because the director doesn't know what he's going to do. He might say 'Oh I'll do a master shot now and have, will I do a close up or will I not'? You can't say 'Alright, that's going to be scene 30. We might do a bit that will be 30 A. If we do a bit down here it will be 30… It should be A, B, or C and we've got to go back'. You, you, you work out your A, Bs and Cs at the end of the day, I do to make it as clear as possible to the editor. But the slate number system is very much better than the scene number.

Oh I'm interested I, I agree with you actually on that.

Don't you, don't you agree? I mean you just, it's at night, I mean I might not have put one scene number down until the evening, and then I work out the As and Bs, so he

knows you see how they go to give him a clear guide. But it was funny because, again when, when I worked with John Balcon, the first time I met him and he wanted to do this American system and he saw my face you see and then he said 'Oh you don't, don't like that idea'? I said 'No, I don't'. He said 'Why not'? So I explained, so I said 'Well how about a compromise, how about we'll, we'll do it my way, we'll have the slates numbers but on, on the, the board we'll put the scene numbers as well so you've got it there as well'? Which of course is what we did. So it all worked out very well.

When did you pick up the idea from the...?

Do you know he might have, well he was in America...

Okay.

For a long, he did a lot of films in America, *Deliverance* and all those things you see. But I mean people, funnily enough, I mean Dorothy Spencer couldn't bear continuity sheets, she didn't want to know about continuity sheets, she wants it, wanted her script marked up.

Ah.

A lot of Americans did, but on the other hand many American editors loved, like Bill Hornbeck, people like that, I mean he, he couldn't believe all these sheets. And in fact when we were, worked on, I think he did *The Quiet American* which I did with Mankiewicz and we were out in Saigon, you know you never saw rushes from one day to another. And he would want to make notes for the editor and he would say 'Let me have your sheets'. And from the sheets you see we could work out, he could say how he wanted it cut, well we'll go from this shot and give him the other sheet and we'll put this one in. And I would send the notes back to America or to London or wherever or to Rome actually and, and send them to the editor. But you see if, if you've got these marked up scripts and odd pages of script being sent then, and then they've got to stay at the end of the film. I mean on the day you finish or certainly the next day you're all up to date. But there, excuse me, in The States it's probably a week or so to get all these things together to make it, the whole script up and, and, and give it to you.

[25:54]

Yes. I'm trying, thinking back, you know, to the days when I was an editor, the, the sheets were very useful indeed, but they weren't the absolutely primary thing.

No.

As far as I was concerned the primary thing were the rushes.

No.

You know, and then as you started to, to cut.

Yes.

Then, was there a, should be a close shot here, and then you'd have your sheets…

That's it, that's it.

So, you know, that was a co-operative sort of thing.

Yes, absolutely. And you see another thing that young camera assistants, and this again is more a thing to do with training because people are just not trained anymore, I, I, whether they haven't got time or whatever it is. But I remember recently I always used to ask for the footages for each tape, right? And, and always and obviously camera number and so forth, and they used to say 'Oh Elaine well we don't do this'. I said, I said 'Never mind what you do, that's what I want, and I'll explain to you why. Say something is going on, I've got a scene that's running three minutes and you give me thirty seconds or, or whatever it is or something', and I said 'well then just a minute, what's happened here? Something's gone wrong, the counter's not right or something else is not right, I want to know'. And they say 'Well, you know, we were, we were never told to, about this', you know, they, they block it all in one. They say 'Well, you know, the five tapes take, are a hundred feet'. I said 'That's no good to me. Well some may be shorter than others, you might have, something might have gone wrong with the camera'.

Yes, yes.

But nobody, nobody is taught you see, no, no… I said, they used to say 'Oh the, she's a fussy old thing' you see, and I said 'Well has anybody bothered to explain to you about these things'?

Well someone might want to know why apparently in the rushes this scene runs, this shot runs out.

That's right.

And, and, and isn't complete.

That, that's right. As the, the prints, and I say also not only that, if you've put like Take One is cut after such and such a word that sort of thing, they think oh God, it's gone wrong at the beginning, you know, there's fogging or something at the beginning, but we could print that one up, we've got it, does it run long enough for us to print it up. But if it's blocked in, in a hundred you won't even know whether it's on, it could have run ten feet just for the clapper board.

Yes, quite.

They never understand, nobody's ever bothered to tell them. And it's the same with, I said each, you know, each time you, you change a camera give me the camera number. We were out on, in Thailand on a Bond and we had four cameras going and suddenly got reports back that something was wrong with one of them, it was the heat, you see, we, you know, we kept them in refrigerated rooms, the camera stuff and everything else. Come with all your sheets, well which, which camera was it, where

was it that…? Now if you haven't got all this down, you know, it was that camera, at, at, even because perhaps you've used the same, the number, you know, A, B, C, camera all on 400 shall we say. Alright, well which one was it of the 400 that's gone wrong and where is it? And, and if you haven't got it all down you wouldn't know which camera had gone wrong.

You wouldn't know which camera, no.

And you wouldn't know how it was loaded or what happened or who loaded the camera and what or what's happened. But nobody, half, half the time these days these things are not explained to people. So that's, that's in a nutshell, there's an idiot's thing of what continuity girls do.

Well, I mean, yes, its' nice and clear.

Yes.

It's a bit clear.

Yes.

It's...

It's very useful.

It's very precise, it's...

It, it, it's really making copious notes about copious things. And of course, again the thing was, was the Polaroid from taking pictures of things, well certainly the Polaroid has helped a lot it's true. But Daphne used to draw everything, and she taught me to draw things. I mean I have memories...

Oh yes.

Of my very worst subject at school I could never draw anything. But I draw, I draw a setg because, alright you might take a Polaroid along 'Oh what are you bothering to do that for, why don't you take a Polaroid'? Well then alright fine, you take a Polaroid and the director says 'Oh I don't like that on there, move that out'. Fine, well if you've drawn it you can rub it out, can't you, and re-do it?

Sure.

But you can't keep on taking Polaroids, I mean the stock would go up and up and up.

Correct. And also I would have thought the fact that you've made your own notes...

[30:00]

It makes you remember.

I mean it makes you remember much more...

That's right, you think...

Than just looking at a record and having a record.

That's right.

Of it.

There was a lamp there, I've got a lamp there, where has it gone, you know, because the, you know, the cameraman's moved it and said 'I don't like the look of that growing out of somebody's head'. And you say to the props 'Why didn't you tell me, where's the lamp gone'?

Yes.

Which drives me mad.

Talking of Polaroids, did you ever work with Kubrick.

No, I have not. He's not a gentleman I should get out and work with.

Why, does he use a lot of Polaroid?

He Polaroids everything.

Ah.

Tells the cameramen where to put the lights and things

Yes. Oh no, no, no. No there are certain people I don't think that I would…

Yes.

Oh no, no, I said, I said don't bother to ask me, you know, one of those sort of things.

Is there anything you would, that hasn't been said that you would like to say.

One thing about the, the ACTT I would like to say, and this was and is my pet thing, was the pension scheme if I'm allowed to say this.

Sure.

In 1956 I came back from my first trip to Hollywood, I'd been in Mexico for seven months. And I was invited up to California to stay with a director I'd worked with before. And I, you know, he took me round to all the studios and I met lots of lovely people. And I was very interested in their marvellous pension scheme they have, as they have a pension scheme in Italy and in France and everywhere else. So I came back all enthusiastic, it was the time we had, you know, got our section and I thought,

and talking about messages to George Elvin about we must start a pension scheme. Well at that time of course, there were regular employers, employment at, at Rank and at ABBC and places like that. And they had pension schemes of course, but of course freelance people didn't, and I, we were all freelancing. Anyway we did even get The Sun Life of Canada to come down to talk to we group of ladies at that time about a scheme and saying ‘Well it would be difficult to, to operate but we could probably think about it’. Of course, nothing ever happened, and it's been my *bête noire* and I’ve gone on and on and on about pension schemes, because I think it's terrible. Yes, I mean, yes of course, in the end I made my own pension scheme. With this industry, alright you might get some perks of the trade when you're working, but not as all other industries. And I think it's awful that it has never happened, here am I well, well retired more or less and I will never benefit from anything that was happening. And how this could never have been devised before I just don't know.

What I'm trying to think, I can't remember really, I mean there were problems because of the freelance...

Quite.

Situation. But if you, you're quite right, it should have been possible, oh...

Well I mean the Italians did. I mean the Italians are, you know, they're great ones. But, like contributing to the, to the holiday credits and things, you could have been able to do that with a sort of scheme. And I waited as long as the new business of when you had to contribute to the Government one or not, because thinking we might get something off the ground but we never did. And it really was, it really was, it's been a great bone of contention as far as I'm concerned.

Mind you, I don't think, my memory is that the, I don't think the employers at the time were particularly co-operative.

No, no, I'm sure they weren’t.

I know they weren’t.

I don't think they were, but I think it could have been pushed on them, because I mean, you know, the Italians at one time, you know, they never used to pay their actors until later on and everything else, they were all sort of very difficult paying people. But they worked out, and I mean people that I knew in the ‘50s who worked in the business, they do, they have a pension and they get it from there, and they did this business because people contributed like, as I say, to the holiday credits thing, and like we did. And I think it should have been part of it. If they did it for their regular employees, why shouldn’t they do it for...?

For the...

For the…?

Freelance.

For the freelances? And it, it’s, that is one thing that I have always been very, very sorry about. And the thing is now with the, with the things that are happening within the union, I mean I was always, I don't know whether we should have taken the television people in with us, I don't know whether it helped particularly.

Well it's changed the union a great deal, of course.

Well that's it, I think it has. Because it's now really it's, it's all geared, it's like with the BAFTA awards and all those sort of things I get so upset about, it's all about television. I mean, film, it was the film...

Yes.

Awards, let's face it, we are the sort of secondary thing which drives me mad. And it's only, I mean the BAFTAs are only run for people who work in London, they're not run for anybody else.

And the only thing, I don't know if you have a view about this, is that with television, originally everything was going to be sort of, you know, television tape and from now on, and in point of fact what's happened is more and more stuff gets shot on film.

Yes.

For television.

There was, there's been all sorts of, there's all sorts of problems recently hasn’t there been about it.

Yes.

Because I, I mean I haven’t been involved. I, you know, I've been on various, I was Chairman for our section at one time, and then I've been Vice Chairman on the joint section with the camera, and I've been on the committees for a long time, but then a couple of years ago I said ‘Well I think I've done my stint’, so now I, I don't do any more. So I haven’t really heard all the, the problems that have been going on, but I mean one could see this was going to happen. And of course, also that so many more TV people would become freelance.

Yes.

That's another thing, you see, which of course, they'd always had the same jobs hadn’t they and, and good pension schemes and everything else, so I don't know what's happened on that score at all.

Well I think my, my, you know, my impression and my, I’m sure from my experience that TV people are much more neurotic for that reason about being freelance than film people, because film people have always been used to the, even in the days when there was a lot of regular...

Quite the uncertainty of it, yes.

As I say there was a lot of freelance.

Yes, quite.

You know.

Quite. Oh yes, I think that, that's it. I think they have been very worried.

I mean apart what, at Ealing and...

Since 1946 I've freelanced.

You've been freelance, and the same, the same thing with me again.

Yes.

You know. Ealing was the longest I was ever at one place.

Well you, it's the same with me. I was, what, four years at Ealing and then, yes I was four years with Wilcox, but I was, you know, and could leave with a fortnight's notice on either side.

Sure.

Yes, picture to picture.

Yes, I think, absolutely, picture to picture. So I mean it's never, you know, it's always been there.

So shall we call it a day?

Yes, if you're happy with everything I've said.

Yes, I think that's fine. I enjoyed it. Okay.

Thank you very much.

Thank you.

Good.

[End of Tape 1 Side B 36:20]

Transcript Queries – Elaine Schreyech

Page/Time	***Query***

Tape 1 Side A	
2 04:36	*Stella 'Jonkia'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Mike Balcon's secretary.*
5 12:26	*...and [Inaudible] and all the rest*
Tape 1 Side B	
24 02:06	*'Gus Gusti'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – 2nd Director on* Quo Vardis.
24 02:08	*'Piero Mousetta'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – 2nd Director on* Quo Vardis.
25 04:12	*...been a [Inaudible] instead of...*