

JOHN KRISH

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Born 1923. Father a musician. Youngest of four children. Russian emigré. Unhappy childhood. Longed to be pianist. Brother Felix an actor. Killed in the war. Evacuated at 15. Returned to London. Before the war saw "Nightmail". Went to Crown at Denham, saw Dora Wright. Given job by Ian Dalrymple in art department with Teddy Carrick. Thence to cutting room. And on floor as 2nd assistant as well. On "Target for Tonight". Then with Jack Lee "The Pilot is Safe" and Skeets Kelly. (Now 17). Family atmosphere. Given huge responsibility. Then on "Ferry Pilot" with Pat Jackson. "Coastal Command" with Jack Holmes. Called up in Royal Artillery. Meningitis. Felix killed. Posted to Army Film Unit. Worked on "The True Glory". Discharged. Worked at Merton Park as editor with Julian Wintle. Worked with "Cecil B. de Musk" who used a megaphone. "Flying with Prudence". Then moved to Ronald Riley. First directing job. Ray Elton cameraman. Worked with Richard Massingham. Ministry trailers. "Health in our Time" for the Army. Remembers "Listen to Britain" with Humphrey Jennings. Had an inspiring enthusiasm. Chaos in the cutting room. Recalls him with affection and admiration. From Massingham moved to British Transport Films. Made "This Year London" with Jack Holmes. Roving reporter Colin Wills. Didn't deliver commentary so JK did it. Became a writer/director. Then "Away for the Day" about coach parties. Shot in Kodachrome. Disaster. Then made "The Elephant Will Never Forget" behind Edgar Anstey's back.

*End of Side 1.*

Story continues. Film shot in one week. Claude Hudson wonderful assistant. Musical Hall song on track. First recording a disaster. Second recording not so good. Great commercial success. Sacked. Went to World Wide. Exide Batteries film with Hindle Edgar, cut by Frances Cockburn "Under Your Bonnet". Biggest film there for the Army on how to resist interrogation. "Captured", a film on brain-washing. (Refers to editing "A Woman in the Hall".) Passport to features. Details on interrogation techniques. At FC's suggestion moved to Leon Clore. "I Want to go to School". A loyal producer. A film for World Refugee Year. Made a film about a refugee family, "Return to Life". Felt much in common. Rootless. Details planning and production. Then made a film about Apartheid. Raised budget by private subscription. Unit and actors worked for nothing. Tippett gave the music. Band of 50, choir of 50. Recording the most moving afternoon of his life. "Let My People Go".

*End of Side 2.*

A film on old age for Samaritan films (Anne Balfour-Fraser). A plea against indifference a common theme of his films. Story of John Ronson. Shot in his flat on a Sunday. Capacity to get on with people at a deep level. Emotionally wearing. Getting cemented to him. Needed five days to recover. Cut by Kevin Brownlow. Humphrey Jennings' influence was in it. "I Think They Call Him John". (Refers back to refugee film briefly, recalling the people who took part in it, and his later reactions to it.) Made TV series "Anatomy of the Film". Had been bruised by the industry. Recalls making feature "Unearthly Stranger" for Julian Wintle. The story behind the making of "The Last Hours of Sandra Lee". Frustration with successive producers: Jimmy Woolf, Dickie Attenborough etc. Then bought by Seven Arts and Ray Stark. His girl friend was Nancy Kwan, who was cast in the lead. A disaster. Felt devastated. Then "The Anatomy of the Film" came along that proved a therapy.

*End of Side 3.*

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After discharge from the Army in 1944 went to the U.S. Office of War information as editor on weekly newsreel for advancing armies. Run by Montague, who had an immense knowledge of editing. No prints. Cut on the negative. Good for quick decisions. Remembers the Belsen footage. How staff were devastated. Learned to be ruthless and detached in editing. Working with Leon Clore on films for NUT. "Drive Carefully Darling" for the Ministry of Transport, aimed at experienced drivers. Details of the film and the technique used. Thoughts in driver's head presented as dialogue. Road view presented on monitor. Recalls his attempts to break the mould of storytelling with each of his films. Applied this idea to "The Finishing Line" for British Transport and John Shepherd. A film to stop vandals on the railways. Couldn't show vandalism. Aimed at children between 8 and 11. Sounded out Mike Gilmour. Came up with bizarre idea of staging the film as a school sports day. Created an enormous row. Condemned on television. But a great success with its audiences. Then "They Took us to the Sea" with Leon Clore and the NSPCC. Chose to film an outing to Weston Super Mare for the day. The sights, smells and deprivation. Filmed the children as they came to life during the day. See their childhood for the first time. All deeply affected.

*End of Side 4.*

Recalls making "Man of Action" from material shot of Lord Leverhulme on his travels. Memories of film for H.M. Prisons. Visit to lifers' prison that almost runs itself. People totally adjusted to their incarceration. Spent an afternoon in a cell with a very intelligent and witty prisoner, only to find he had murdered a cell mate. Filming in prison for two weeks an amazing experience. On to features. Describes making "Decline & Fall" for producer Ivan Foxwell. Last film made at MGM. Designed by John Barry. Wonderful cast. Good relationship. Front office people less than straight. Had no right of director's cut. Relevant paragraph left out of contract. Learned a lot of the politics of feature film making. There followed "The Man Who had Power Over Women" for AVCO Embassy. Took over from director who had personal problems. Rod Taylor, Carol White and Jimmy Booth. A very difficult shoot.

*End of Side 5.*

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Further interview by Rodney Giesler on 19.10.2004

Transition from documentaries to features came at World Wide directing "The Salvage Gang", a children's film at World Wide. Parameters decreed by Mary Field at the CFF. Her eccentric observations. She had no real affection for children. Film a success, but didn't want to work with Mary Field any more. Returned to documentaries. Main transition to features through Julian Wintle. Called by Albert Fennell, his associate producer. Had a stage and a unit but no script. A science fiction film that became "Unearthly Stranger". Rewrote the script over the weekend. Started the shooting in a week. A glorious adventure. A marvellous assistant: Frank Hollands. Was Herbert Wilcox's assistant. Had a terrible camera operator. Cut by Tom Priestley. Now a cult film. Advised not to take a writer's credit. Denied residuals by Julian Wintle since he bankrupted the company. Betrayal endemic in features. Next film "The Wild Affair". Asked to do it by Romulus Films: the Woolf brothers. Scripted by William Sansom. Lead part to go to Sarah Miles. Started work with Jimmy Woolf. Woolf dropped out, and film went into limbo. Richard Attenborough came in. Destructively critical. Then he left. Film, changed companies. No working for Seven Arts, run by Ray Stark. Sarah Miles drops out. Lead given to Nancy Kwan. (Ray Stark her agent). Reluctantly accepted her. Protected her by surrounding her with comedians. An incredible struggle. Much of Kwan's part had to be post-synched. The producer now was Richard Patterson, whose job was a golden handshake. Always looked on a producer as a third eye. But they were all "children". Knew only the three producers he could trust: Ian Dalrymple, Albert Fennell, and Leon Clore. The film had a poor reception. Felt very bruised. Rescue came from the BBC. Did a series of ten programmes on how films were made: "The Anatomy of the Film". Series a success, and his zest restored. At the end of it, the accountants then wiped the tape! All this happened in the sixties. Commercials were now getting respectable. James Archibald at J. Walter Thompson brought in experienced directors, including Krish. An ideal job. Could afford to go back to documentaries, notably with Leon Clore. "Red Cross That's Us". The picture library that upset the sponsors, and Clores's offer to buy the film back to make his point. (46 minutes).

*End of Side 6.*

Next feature "The Man Who Had Power Over Women" for AVCO Embassy, Producer Judd Bernard. Asked to rescue the film. Bernard started to rewrite the script with Krish. The lead was Rod Taylor, the woman Carol White. Also James Booth. Rod Taylor an animal, a behaviourist. Carol White's late arrival, and Taylor's explosion. Nightmare shoot at Gatwick with Gerry Turpin. Atmosphere terrible. Taylor loved using his fists. He also had a drink problem. Problem with Gerry Turpin. Rod Taylor a very physical man. Arguments about the ending, and Judd Bernard's betrayal. The end of the film reshot to save faces. Things were repeated on "Decline and Fall" with Ivan Foxwell. Reference to the "Jew Boy's Tatler". Foxwell colluded with Krish's agent to deprive him of director's cut. And also stole the screenplay credit. Misrepresenting the schedule with Film Finances. Tried to get Krish off the

film in favour of Michael Anderson. Managed to finish the film. The fiddled optical at the end. Had a glorious feeling on the film. Actors and extras all wanted to see the rushes. Foxwell's jealousy. That was his last feature. Cameraman was Desmond Dickinson. Unsympathetic. Art Director was John Barry. The film a "Semi Failure". Went on to two children's films: "Friend or Foe" and "Out of the Darkness". Worked well with Bob Kellett. Trouble with Gordon Scott over Coca Colas with the Children's Film Foundation so as to preserve his bonus. (45 minutes).

*End of Side 7.*

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