

Timecode 06:14:18:10 to 06:41:16:08 THE END

OSSIE MORRIS OK well when I photograph my first film that was a struggle to survive you just try and illuminate the film you try and give it some little bit of style that you think you would like it like it to have but you don't you haven't got the experience to really do it properly. So that's a terrible sweat and in my case because I'm a bit of a slow developer I suppose the first four or five black and white films were an absolute sweat because everyone had a different set of problems different locations I mean the first one I was in Tunisia. You don't get your rushes back you have to go by what they say on the telephone that's awful. The next one was in Cairo. They say go to an Egyptian laboratory. I go to England. GYPTIAN laboratory and the man in charge only got one eye and that fills me full of apprehension. And it's all day for night material and that's very dicey to do with a strange laboratory because you're under exposing and then you go to laboratory and you ask look at your negativity gets hold of it and he kicks it around the floor with his foot. You know so that that's a bit of a sweat. Film number two film number three was in South Africa. Again you don't see a rushes they come all the way back to England. So it's a sweat all the time and they're all different sorts of problems. So the first four or five I was really struggling. And you know I'm trying to go out go a bit faster because you're not very fast when you start. Then there's this desire to break into Colour. Now that was very difficult to do because there were about four cameramen I had the monopoly of colour and they'd been working during the war. One was Jack Cardiff one was Bobby Cresco. One was Guy Green and one was you know Geoff was only an operator in those days there was one other I had coming in the name but they got the pretty well monopoly and any colour films they did. So I tried to break into colour. The only way I could do is try and do our day daily rates second unit were you know 10 pounds a day. Trying to learn colour so we're now up to about five six or seven and maybe I don't get a colour film say to about number seven and that happens to be. A little picture called Mask of Moloch made again in Tunisia. I do that and shortly after that I get this famous call to go and see Houston. And so number eight or nine is now Moulin Rouge and I've only done one colour film before that and I'm stuck with the mighty Houston. So that's a bit of a sweat you know. So I'm now up to about nine or 10 and then two or three more. Now I'm beginning to. Then I go back to black and white. And you know it's quite was quite hard to go back to black and white the key levels were so different. So that was a bit of a problem so up to 12 13 14 then we get to the middle group and you pretty well right there and you're you're getting into the run of the mill thing at least. And then after about 24 or 25 films you begin to feel well I must really try something different and you start to idly blossom out and try and be bold and venturesome and try things. So we're now up to the last 15 or 20 and I was I suppose the most interesting. I don't have a favourite not a real favourite. I mean I could I can have some of that I don't think I've done very well because I've got videos of them. But I mean you know in context when I did them I suppose. They're not bad but I'm not particularly proud of them now but the last 20 I'm pretty proud of and which QUESTION which film gave you the most headaches

OSSIE MORRIS well. Ships at sea. You're a monumental headaches Animal films give you tremendous headaches. What else temperamental actors give you headaches for instance difficult actors give you headaches. Well I mean you know Gallons? which is quite a problem with all that lot although I go out with them all very well. I mean A Farewell to Arms was a monumental problem with a difficult producer David Selznick is a leading lady in the film the memos piling up on the doormat. I mean their headaches they they they not you for six you know they go on pages on was all written on yellow paper. And so they're a problem. They're just temperamental actors can be difficult if you if you've got a film with good actors it runs quite smoothly and that's a fairly sane director you know a very rational director because they are a bit dull you've got to be a bit daft and a bit eccentric because that gives the film its sparkle and its magic.

QUESTION A technical question which I perhaps I should have asked earlier. How much reliance Did you have on a meter

OSSIE MORRIS as little as possible towards the end. I go I teach at the film school every year I give them two weeks in March and I try and teach them and part of the exercises I take their meters away from them. I try and teach them not to use the meter after they've got the initial key. When he felt when I first started I was a slave to a meter and in fact all the students at the Film School are now they there measure everything with a meter they go around and it's totally wrong because the amount of light that hits that that needs more light to give it the same response than that does it. So they put a meter there and then the meter only reads the same light doesn't tell you whether that's bright enough or that's too bright. So I try and teach them to use their eye more. But towards the end I just use the meter to set one light in the set and then the rest. I do by eye and it's marvellous that way you really are creating yourself you're doing it all yourself and the you haven't got to bother about the technicalities of the system. And I I don't bother about the camera side of it I am. Extraordinary. Dear old Harry the late Henry Waxman was a great technical Boffin. He knew everything about every camera every filter every lens that came out and he was a absolute hive of information and he used to ask me and made me look like an idiot because I didn't know it. Now I genuinely believe that the way I work. There's a camera there's going to photograph it. As long as I've got a spool of stock in that camera one I've got the lenses I want and the assistant puts on the diffusion and I don't have to look at that camera worry about it. I can concentrate on this and that's the way I work. Now Harry didn't Harry work quite differently and Harry did some marvellous work. So I mean it's all every body has their own style.

QUESTION Well on exteriors if you want about a meter on exteriors

OSSIE MORRIS on exteriors if it's overcast I use an incident light meter. If it's sunny I would use a reflective light meter. And even then towards the end I would use the reflected light less and less because if I get to know with the with the incident try to read into the shadows and and deal with that. And in snow scenes of course you can't use a reflected light meter you have to use an incident light meter cross. You did you hopelessly underexposed on snow.

Yes yes.

QUESTION did you have a favourite stop? Oh yes yes. Up a great stop  
OSSIE MORRIS Oh yes favourite stop in the studios key four five  
because we had to have a certain amount of depth of field for  
actors. Nowadays the fashion seems to be to shoot wide open and  
again at the film school I have this problem with these young lads.  
I mean they're given all the equipment in the world and I try and  
beg them to like to a T four 4 5 position and I give them half an  
hour to get the exercise ready and I can see they cut the lights  
down low and lower and lower and in the end I say no what's to stop  
and they say T 2 two three and it's become kind of a standing joke  
at home so I simply can't get up to 4 on 4 5. I don't seem to be  
able to do it. But that's that's a favourite stop most of the old ex  
school cameramen yhe Duggie Slocums? the Freddy France's the Freddy  
Youngs. That of that era all work at four five.

It's only the young ones the Chris Mengies? maybe David Watkin who  
work at wide open I don't know how they do it. I mean you can't  
photograph a musical at 2.2 know you've got to have a bit of depth  
exteriors whatever it can but I don't know if there is an  
appearance yesterday T four or five definitions you know which  
which which you know

QUESTION which of all the directors you work with perhaps is your  
favourite.

OSSIE MORRIS Well again the same thing applies I mean I like working  
with all of them but they're all most of them have got tremendous  
talent but it's I've tried to explain some of the talents I mean I  
love working with Houston I love working with Carol Reed. I only  
operated for David Lean but I love working for David Lean although I  
believe believe is pretty tough to work on now. I love working with  
Sidney Lumet Tony Richardson. I love working with Rene Clement? on  
the only one I didn't like was Stanley Kubrick. And there is another  
one as well. A man called Richard Sorafeni? when I got conned into  
doing a film with him and I that was I thought he was just had no  
talent at all. And I would never work with him again I don't know  
what's happened to him I think he's just disappeared out of an area.  
So really I like them all. Ronnie Neame I like I like working around  
the Ronnie Neame is a bit square as a director but he's very nice to  
work with.

QUESTION If you could if you could start again would you change  
course do you think

OSSIE MORRIS now. It depends if I started again with the industry as  
it is now I don't think somehow I would do what I did before I think  
it would be to some totally different because the industry has  
changed so much. Yes dear. Hello hello. You're already lovely how many  
drinks. OK yes dear we do commish out when it's really OK. No no no.  
What you got if you had to do it over again.

No but if I had to do it over again the conditions were as they  
were. Yes I would work again for two years for nothing as I did when  
I started I think we mentioned all this earlier if I would. I would  
work for two pounds a week have to spend it all on my fares because  
I absolutely love working in a film studio. I really do and I would  
do it all again but it's not. It isn't the same now you see I I mean  
I hate I hate the idea of the video and the immediate response now  
let me explain why I hate that it makes people lazy. You see when  
you when you're working on film you've got 24 hours of absolute

torment. Has to know whether it's come out let alone whether it's come out the way you want it. You simply don't know. So you've got to bust a gut when you do it to make sure that it is going to come out 24 hours later because it did not come out as something happened which you probably won't be there the next you will get somebody else in. So it made you pull all the extra stops out as far as I was concerned I had to concentrate. I couldn't afford to relax for a moment I mean people come on the set. My own wife would come on so I wouldn't know she's there. It's total involvement in shooting all the time just keeping going. Watching everything keeping everybody going but you have to keep the tempo going because you're really running the floor with the director and watching what he's going to do much of what actors are doing and so on and so forth. Now if you've got video and I've worked with video at Beaconsfield a bit to show them how to do things and video. It's not the same you know that if you put a light on and it looks as though it's come out that's about all right that'll do. And it wouldn't be any good for me. I wouldn't do such good work. I've got to have that nervous tension there and that nervous tension is 24 hours between filming and seeing. And I always cross my fingers when I go to see rushes. I always did. Nobody would ever stop me doing this. And I felt much better if I was doing that. Oh yes I do. And also can I say this. This is going to jar with the union people a bit. I believe that I was better as a freelance and I believe that all cinematographers a better freelance than under contract to a studio now you say well that's a pretty broad statement but let me explain why. It's this fear of not being asked to do another film on you only when you're freelance you're only as good as your last movie. And there's this fear that if you don't make a good job of that nobody's going to ask you to do another one. Now there's a you say well how do you know that the other way doesn't work all right the other way. I give you a classic example. The late Jeffrey Unsworth Jeffrey Unsworth was a freelance. For a long time and then he got into I had no financial problems domestic problems or something or other married sort of start to break up and he took a job under contract to Pinewood. Now he they worked him. I mean he had four weeks holiday a year day or two weeks holiday a year . They worked him on the floor for virtually the other 50 weeks. He would almost finish a film on a Friday a big film and then be two more days left to do Mobday & Tuesday. They wouldn't let him do those two days they'd say oh well you start on the other one on Monday and he'd have to start another one on the Monday need somebody else to finish those two days off. Now that drained him absolutely dry and his work deteriorated like mad finally. He was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. He broke away from it and he did the most wonderful work and he was within two or three years gained himself two Oscars because he was a freelance again if he was able to take a little bit of a break. So I do believe I do believe very strongly that creatively the it's better to be a freelance now. I hear that's beginning to go through in television. The feeling is that they're going to slowly. Put everything out a lot of it to out to independent production I know it's partly due to finances but I believe Thames are going more and more to freelance work and they seem to feel the quality gets a bit better that way. I mean that's all I can say. I'm sorry I have to

say that the ACT but I genuinely believe it.

Is there anything else

QUESTION now you teach you teach at the Film School. Yes yes. What do you really teach them.

OSSIE MORRIS Well you know I feel I've got a responsibility to the industry to foster young talent and I'm very happy to do this. I must add that I do it for nothing I don't get anything for it I'm very happy to do it all they do is pay my hotel accommodation. But I I care about the industry. It's you know I loved it and it's done me very proudly and I would like to help these young people. Now there are certain things that a film school can't teach which outsiders like us can teach them and that is there are relationships in films.

Yes dear. OK can I just stop you know I better come.

QUESTION as you were saying relationship about relationships.

OSSIE MORRIS Oh yes that's right. And the film school one thing they can't teach at the Film School is relationships and you must both understand that half of my talk is about relationships particularly with directors and actors and this is a very big failing on the part of all film schools throughout the world they're great at teaching them the techniques. But you know as I've explained technique is only barely 50 percent of it it's relationships and drive and understanding actors understanding directors that's very important. So when I go to the film's school apart from trying to teach them the basics of lighting and how to set a key light and fill light and so on and try to teach them to go fast because again the schools are very bad at doing that. I also try and emphasize to them the fact that the director. Is the captain of the ship. He runs the whole thing is ultimately responsible for the success or failure of the movie and that the cinematographer is only on the floor the number two. I mean they are the people like designers and production people but they're not actually on the floor on the floor. It's really the cinematographer and it's quite difficult to get this over to these young people. They seem to think that when they go out into the hard world of moviemaking their top they can take as long as they want. If they want to have an actor in with all sorts of lighting equipment and paraphernalia. And the actor can't move that's just too bad. I have to try and explain to them in the in the. World of realism that's not the case though. The actors have no climb up the wall no crash all through these bits and pieces they hem them in with and it's very hard for them to understand this but I very important that film schools understand this and I spend a lot of time trying to put this over to and I think it is a weakness on the part of the film schools and the only way I think they can overcome it is to ask people who actually have experience to go in from the day and talk to the students and make them realize that

QUESTION do you think. Do you think the National Film School year is turning out good people.

OSSIE MORRIS Well it's extraordinary when you when I go there and see them working I can't believe That you know that the end product is as good as it should be. But I have to say that the films school internationally has a tremendous reputation. I mean I you get students coming from Japan and get them from. I've had them from Japan to Poland Hungary Australia France Germany they all want to come to the National Film and Television School and they've got a

waiting list there as long as your arm. So and they do seem to win a lot of awards. How I do I don't know because at times I find it so chaotic down there and that they don't seem to get their priorities right. But it must be something about me that's wrong because of the way the school has a tremendous reputation I mean I'm very thrilled that it has but I'm amazed that it has really quite extraordinary QUESTION It is this Ossie of news that the people now are looking for and very often it is a method of self-expression whereas previously it was an entertainment industry was much more of a scene? the people working together to create the film rather than one single. I've noticed this myself in television where in documentaries it's useful or important for the producer to interpose himself between the audience and the subject here to present the subject.

OSSIE MORRIS Yeah well I know I think you're right I mean I think it is as far as the student films are concerned they are purely and simply self-expression and which is fine for a student film but it's no good when it comes to commercial movies there are a lot of other elements that come into it and maybe that's where the problem is that you know it's not necessarily. So. Right. But first if a student is brilliant at producing his effort at the film's school it's not necessarily right that he's going to be tremendously successful out in the commercial world because he has to amalgamate with other people. He's not his own boss any more and I mean I think that's partly what I've been trying to say and I think you're probably right. Some of them have done very well. I know they've written to me. One wrote to me doing tremendously well in Hong Kong. He's got his own commercial business and making a lot of money when that boy was at the film school he had to sweep offices out in the mornings before coming there to earn enough money to pay for his first year because they have to pay their own first year. And I used to tear him off like mad if he was late because I have one thing I know they have a. You know come to terms with the fact they've got to be on time and one thing the film school couldn't care less about is time and this boy was always late. I used to tear into him and say you know you never make it out in the world I said pardon but I think it's an insult to me because I'm here for two weeks and if you don't think it's worth coming at 10 o'clock I don't see why I should bother to come in and he said Me well I'm terribly sorry but I have to clean up offices to earn some money to pay for my stay here and I felt you know about four inches tall and that boy is now got a very successful commercial company in Hong Kong. I was another one came onto the set to me in New York when I was working there. So out of the blue he's out there now and he's doing very well making commercials so some of them do get on but I don't know whether they all do or do but IME if you ask me about the film school I'm very proud of the film school. I'm. Equally successful is it is I don't know whether Colin Young would like you know to hear me say that but I've told Colin many a time that there there are awful timekeepers and Colin replies Well so am I. So I mean where do you go from there.

QUESTION To to perhaps to finish finish off here. You know you gave us a lot of information about John Houston would you like to round it off at all. Really now Now he's no longer with us at all.

OSSIE MORRIS Well I don't think I've got I think I've covered him pretty exhaustively. I suppose I would sum him up by being the most laid back almost to the point of laziness. Talented director. I work with I think that just about sums it up. I mean it's an extraordinary it's almost a mixture of talent and laziness but it really I'm being a little bit unkind I suppose when I say lazy it's really what I would call a laid back is so detached from his work that he makes you feel he is lazy but has no shadow of doubt has tremendous talent. I mean all the top directors don't get me wrong. All the top directors I've worked with and I've mentioned above are all very talented. There is no substitute for getting to the top as far as I am so there's that as a for a director. They've got to have talent. And they've got to be able to communicate. If they can't communicate now Houston can't communicate but somehow they're so likeable and lovable. You find out what he wants to tell you or want to do. But most of the others have got to communicate and if they don't communicate a they really won't be any good as director I think.

QUESTION Do you think you know what made Houston tick they are because you just think it was very fragmented individuals so many facets.

OSSIE MORRIS Well yes yes fragmented I mean unbelievably so. Now I know what made him tick. You know I think. Through all those fragmentations there is this the near an incredible talent and I think that goes through everything his conversation his choice of art his works about his choice of reading. I suppose choice of. Sport doesn't I'm forced to go through his choice of wives. That's the exception that proves the rule. But but that apart Q it's just a talent and I think that it's not veneer really it's a stratum isn't it. Well as trite as probably you are in your opinion the wrong notes the stratum. You know you're right veneer is too thin though it's a strong matter. It's like all this is an on the top of it is this stratum of tremendous talent and I mean if it was in this room now we'd hold you spellbound with conversation. just extraordinary and yet his marriages were disastrous which he admits in his book extraordinary

Thank you I think but is there anything else much. Thank you. END OF INTERVIEW END OF INTERVIEW