

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

Q: Identify yourself

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JOE: Yes the name is Joseph Joe - Joe McGrath, born 1928 in Glasgow. Do I have to say anything else?

Q: No but I've got March 28th 1930

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JOE: Oh well that's wrong - it's March 28th 1928.

Q: Thank you

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JOE: There's a mistake right away my name is Joe McGrath - born in Glasgow, March 28th 1928.

Q: Now tell me about your family and ..

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JOE: My family yes - a - well my father was -a- a musical comedian, yes, he was a musical comedian and he - he er - got his first break during the First World War. He was in the First World War; he was badly injured in one of the battles of the Somme and er - I've got this photograph from which - black humour the photograph of him in the First World War with three other guys and he's written under it - 'Somme of the lad's', so he turned out to be a comedian

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And er - he was supposed to go back up to the front line but suddenly - they were asked "Anybody any experience of singing, dancing entertain the troops?" Which he'd never done in his life, but being the coward which he said he was, he said he'd do anything rather than go back up the front line. And so he sang and danced and he said to me "When people say to me Joe what did you do in the war daddy?" He said, "You can say my Father he sang the Germans to death" (interviewer laughs) "Sang them into submission - sang them in to defeat," (interviewer laughs) and when he saw Oh What A Lovely War years later - he said "That's what I did" (laughs)

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

Q: And your Mother was- was- was

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JOE: My mother, my mother - er - she had a marriage certificate that said spinster, but I never saw her spinning or anything (laughs) but er - she - I do know that she did - she did pick part - she was part of a woman's roller skating troop - difficult to say - a wo- a woman's roller staking troop, which is how she met my father, she was on the same variety bill and then - er - so when my father was on stage - er - working eventually she was in the box office - er - looking after the takings if any - exactly yeah

Q: And - um - did you have any brothers or sisters?

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JOE: No - I'm an only child- the only one - spoiled rotten, was always allowed to do whatever I wanted to do. And never any problem- you know when I came out the army after having been in the army - er - being in the Combined Services Entertainment Crowd in Malaya - which - which Peter Nichols wrote a play about later, as you know, well I met Stanley Baxter and Kenneth, Kenneth Williams - met them there, they were older than me. They came home earlier, and I was left there. So when I came back my father said "What are you going to do?" I said "I am going to go on the stage". And he said "OK, you go on the stage then" . And so - I spent all my young life at End of Pier Shows watching my father you know - travelling and in pantomime in - in winter - summer shows in summer

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So coming out of the army I did - er - do a summer season with him in Gourrock in Cragburn Pavilion in Gourrock - where I played straight man to my father - at the age of - I think I was twenty - yeah at the age of twenty - trying to do a middle age policeman and stuff like that. And at the end of the season I thought - no - I think I'll do something else, and my education had been interrupted by Conscription, and so I - being the, being the miser that I am, I rushed straight in - back into the army office and said "I want a grant! I want a grant I want to go to art school!" - and I got paid a grant to go to the Glasgow School of Art - so that - that then did four years Glasgow School of Art.

Q: Did you specialise or did you?

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

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JOE: Er - yeah graphic - in those days as you know - in those days it wasn't called graphic design - what you did was you did two years general course which was drawing, painting, printing - everything - book binding the lot. Very good - we don't do that now in art school in fact I don't think they even do life drawing - which is a shame. But -er - then I specialised in design - er - mainly advertising design and then I got - er - managed to get a place at the - er - Royal College of Art. I wangled that because I applied to get into the graphic design department there and they said it was full up. So I said "Well what about stained glass?" And they said "Right - we don't have anybody in the stained glass department".

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So I went in to the stained glass department - stayed there for six weeks and said "I want to change I want to go in to graphic design" - they said "OK" - went in to graphic design - finished at the Royal College of Art had a folio of work - commercial television was starting - wandered along and saw Michael Yates in which we know who were head of departments at Rediffusion and ATV I got a job with Richard Real (?) ATV -

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Very funny story about that because he said to me "Yes we can offer you a job here". He said "We can offer you a job here at - er - seven hundred and fifty pounds a year" - and I'd never worked and I thought "Seven hundred and fifty pounds a year how much is that?" - I was thinking "Seven hundred and fifty pounds divided by fifty two weeks in the year". "Oh" he said "Oh alright eight hundred and fifty". (laughs) And when I went out the secretary, Vinnie Bloomberg, was sitting there - she said "You must be good everybody else has got seven hundred and fifty" - and from there - I graduated downstairs to a Rediffusion in a couple of years

Q: Oh it was in the same building?

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JOE: In the same building - in Kingsway - I worked there there with Henry Federer and all the lads there

Q: Clement - John Clements?

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

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JOE: Yes - John Clements yep

Q: And Michael Yates?

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JOE: Michael Yates - who was head of department - Derek Cousins who had just come from the royal college as well - and Sydney King - anyway I was there and then I thought, I would like to direct - which is what everybody did - even in the labour exchanges people were saying what I really want to do is direct - in job centres - so er - I found out that ABC Teddington were looking for - er - trainee directors - and I went along there to one of their boards like Brian Tesler and - I can't remember the rest of the people at the board but anyway - I faced the board - went on holiday with my wife, we were away for three weeks - came back - couldn't get in because of mail against the door - pushed mail open - and there was three letters amongst every - all offering me a job - every week offering me a job at ABC as a trainee director and I hadn't replied!

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So I immediately phoned and got through to Brian Tesler and he said, "Well we thought you just didn't have any - when can you start?" I said "Anytime!" So I went along and started that day.

Q: And - and um - can you - er - describe the course as it then was (describe the?) the course as it then was or were you just attached to a director?

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JOE: Yes, -er- that's true, the -er- starting - it was quite good you know as a trainee director - er - I did advertising magazines - do you remember advertising magazines which were done live - where we would fry the sausages you couldn't hear the dialogue - you know - and - er - so I did them with Doris Hare I remember that yes - Doris Hare and lots of young actors and people who - later became famous. I moved from that - I moved from that (sigh) this was the turning point really - the turning point in my career

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BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

there was that - er - they took a program from America called 'Candid Camera' 00:08:43 and - er - this was as you'll probably know this was Jonathan Routh was going out and - er - involving people in japes and wheezes and - and - er - you filmed it from a hidden camera which was supplied to us by the Samuelson family - and David Samuelson CBE and people like that were all locked in cupboards together - filming and trying to direct - er - Jonathan while he was getting his unsuspecting - er - victims.

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Nobody at ABC no television directors wanted to do it - because they all felt that tape was the future, but I felt I wanted to learn about film - so I did Candid Camera for over a year and I must say during that year I learnt more about film than I would ever have learnt at any school, because you know we were working six days a week - filming two days - editing, two days - in the studio one day with Bob Monkhouse - playing back the stuff we had shot while Bob improvised a commentary and we had Sunday off - and then we started again

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And so - you know - sixteen mill film in fact sometimes it was thirty-five mill film - yeah - so it was very good for me because you were in a cutting room with an editor saying oh don't do that because I can tell you we don't have anything to cover this - and you know you learnt editing - very quickly. Oh and of course it won awards!
(Laughs)

Q: First of many I'm sure! - Um - so that led to what?

00:10:16

JOE: That led to my - er - let me think it's quite interesting - er - yes - this is interesting, I will have to think about it - it's - and then, because of my art school training - they did a programme called 'The Bookman' - which was about books and publishing and then they did another programme which Ken, Kenneth Tynan - who was then the er - working with -er- Observer as it's - er - theatre critic.

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He became editor of a program called 'Temple' - so - I was working for 'Bookman' and 'Temple' - which was really excellent education because you got to meet - everybody in the arts - you could sit there

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

and say who would we talk to this week? And they would come along and talk for - you know for twenty pounds or something like that - or the latest book - latest novel were only too happy to come - and we got all sorts of free books (laughs) Verity Lambert was my PA and - er - you can imagine Verity running - she ran - she ran the show.

Q: That was - er - ABC's version of BBC's 'Monitor' wasn't it?

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JOE: Well - that's a good - it's a good question it was the ABC's version of 'Monitor' and - er - Huw Wheldon saw - er - an interview one of the things I did - I did an interview with - er - I did an interview but we had an interview with Truman Capote - just when he'd brought out 'In Cold Blood' that novel - that very important novel which changed novels because it was complete reportage - so I put Truman into a greenhouse - near - er - Ealing and - er - I put bird sounds - bird sounds on it

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(Bird sound impressions) when we were interviewing him - and he said "Oh my darling you - you've put me in a hot house this is where I belong!" (laughs) He was wonderful - and then he said to me we were taking stills of him - he said "This still you're taking - we'll maybe use for publicity?" And the camera - Gary was using stills camera said yes - "Oh" he said "Well Joe I want twenty guineas" - we had to give him twenty guineas.

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So that was it Huw Wh... Huw Wheldon, saw the program - I got telephone - not many people know this and I went across to meet Huw at the BBC and he said "We want you to come and take over 'Monitor'". I said "God, yeah I mean yeah I'd love to". He said "No we're really serious - we'll have three or four different people like yourself and Humphrey who took over the music". He said "You'll do the arts and Humphrey do music" so - and I said "Yeah" - he said "We'll go down to the BBC club and have a drink", so I said yes.

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So we go down to the BBC club to have a drink and I meet this portly gentleman who showed me a photograph and said - "Who is this?" And I said "I have no idea" - and it was two young guys with their

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

arms round each other's waist with palm trees behind and I said "I've no idea who is it?" And this portly gent said "It's us you fool!" (laughs) and this portly gent was Duncan Woods - who later - 'Steptoe and Son' and all that stuff - and Duncan was a senior producer. So you can imagine a few drinks were taken there - and Bill Cotton Junior joined us - er - we had an evening - went home and I thought well I'm gonna work for 'Monitor'. Instead of which I got a phone call the next day saying come in again - went in again - back to the BBC bar - Bill Cotton was there with Huw - and they said "We've changed our mind we want you to join Light Entertainment"

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And I said "Oh really?" And he said "Yeah - we think - we think you'd do better in Light Entertainment" because we told stories and Duncan and I, and Duncan said "I think I'd like him in my Department". And I joined - so I did light entertainment - so I could have done 'Monitor'- could have been one of the, one of the honchos

Q: Were you on 'Monitor' had a narrow escape then?

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JOE: Yes I did - I think Jonathan Miller took over (laughs)

Q: Yes he did - so you've arrived in BBC Light entertainment and by then you'd be in television centre

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JOE: Yes - I'm in a television centre

Q: Nineteen - sixty was the first program out of there

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JOE: That's right - and I'm handed - 'It's a Square World' with Michael Bentine

Q: Which was already running

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JOE: Which was already running and John - oh - John Street - John Street was producer and I was handed it to direct and John would continue to produce - and I must say John Street was one of the

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

nicest men I've ever worked with because he had no animosity to me at all - he said "I'm so glad that I'll have a director working with me - I'll be able to concentrate on all the other work and you can just concentrate on direction" - marvellous - lovely atmosphere and as Bill Cotton said to me - "This is the BBC" he said "We have a benign despotism".

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A benign despotism here - (?) so I did the - the series of 'Square World' and it won the BAFTA - Mike - Michael Bentine got best entertainer and er - I got John Street best programme and I got best director - so that was lovely it was - it was you know and everybody was satisfied - and er - Michael Bentine said to me - under his breath as we were on stage getting the BAFTA - he said "You will succeed Joe, not only are you a good director - your also an ace crawler" (laughs) I like to tell stories against myself - you have to tell the truth (interviewer: absolutely yes)

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So then I - I was moved - I - yeah I think after than I did I wrote something with Bob Shust and John Bluthal called 'Just In Time' - which was a take-off of the James - James Bond and then that was done and that received good reviews

Q: But that - that was done in Light Entertainment or Drama department?

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JOE: It was done in the drama department - Sidney Newman - er - who was then head of drama asked me if I would write something for the Wednesday Play - so we wrote that - but it was really a comedy - and Sidney said "I want a comedy" - so you know although it was a drama it was a ...it was a dramatic comedy.

Q: Yes - yes I've got something called - er - 'The Big Noise' - with - er Bob Monkhouse

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JOE: 'The Big Noise' - 'The Big Noise' is interesting

Q: Was that around the same time?

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BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

JOE: Yes it was the same time, it was the BBC and it was the last program that Frank Muir and Denis Norden ever worked on together - wrote together - it was the last thing they did and Bob Monkhouse was the star - and he was playing a Disc Jockey - er - who was interviewing celebrities and stars so we get quite a few people who were well known and that time and - er - Frank Muir and Denis Norden wrote the - er - there were six half hours and - er - I got to know Bob once again because I had already worked with Bob on 'Candid Camera' so we were quite happy together

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It was very funny I thought it was a good show - er - I got to know Bob well and Bob was an interesting character cos' he used to say to me "Can you just stop me grinning?" - well I couldn't - he said "I have this awful grin which - I - when I see myself I wish I didn't do it" he said "Could you stop me?" So I used to say "Stop the grin!" And he - he had that insecurity where he had to grin - which you find lots of performers - top performers have this great insecurity - but in that time I also - er - I also did some shows with with er Spike - er - one I don't know if it's there I think it was much later but it was something called 'Oh In Colour'.

Q: Er that I've got - rather later quite some time later - now is it - was it at this time that you started doing commercials?

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JOE: Yes - at that time

Q: How did that happen?

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JOE: Well - er - at that time I used to I really used to laugh in those early days of television - you used to work with designers and half of the designers were doing commercials and then coming in to do television programmes and I suddenly got a - I'd worked with Richard Lester - who - er - was a director at that time and I suddenly got a phone call from - er - a guy called James Garrett who ran a company called James Garrett and Partners - but most of the designers in all the television companies were already working for him in their spare time - doing commercials

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BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

And I got a call saying Dick Lester isn't available and he suggests that you come along and direct a commercial we've got coming up - and I said "Why - why me?" He said well Dick said "He's already heard you are directing and he's fed up with you standing behind him when he's directing - muttering so you know that's not good enough". "We'll have to do that again Nick". But anyway Richard Lester - Richard as he always said when he dies he will be known as Richard 'The Knack' Lester (laughs) so that was it I did lots of commercials as well as working at the BBC.

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It was recognised at that time - of course I was - I wasn't BBC staff I was BBC contract - which was another thing that Frank Muir and Denis Norden advised me when I arrived - they said don't join the staff be freelance.

Q: So how exactly did that work? I know in my own experience it was a sort of rolling one year contract you know you got renewed or you didn't get renewed you know depending on how desirable you were.

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JOE: That's right - that's right well that's true and, and er I don't know if we should jump to this but actually what happened was that - er - I got offered - er - 'Casino Royale' the film - just as one of my rolling contracts was coming to an end - which is why I was able to leave the BBC and do it but I don't know if we're jumping a bit there.

Q: You - you are jumping because -um - what's coming up of course - er - after 'The Big Noise' and - um - the adds and things is 'Not Only but Also'

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JOE: Ah - of course yea - yeah and after 'The Big Noise' er - Bill Cotton Head of Light Entertainment at the BBC as I said - benign despot - in those days you - you had meetings where directors and producers sat around and suggested ideas and stuff - well my, my contract I think at the time was coming to an end - the first contract I had at the BBC - and Bill in those days - it seems ridiculous nowadays but Bill said - :Listen if you've got any idea for a comedy special - do it". And I said - "Well what do you mean?" - he said "No anything - if you've got any ideas on something just -uh- get it together and budget it and see - and we'll do it".

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

00:21:36

I said "OK" so I said "I can get Dudley Moore". And he said "Oh that-that's good". I said "So we'll Get Dudley Moore?" And he said "Yeah" he said "Dudley's dead keen to come and do a show". So I met up with Dudley - and it was going to be called the 'Dudley Moore Show' - but I met Dudley along with Peter Cook - and we said to Peter Cooke "What are you doing?" and he said "Nothing I'm running Private Eye - The Establishment" and he - he had just come back - this was the interesting thing - they had just come back from 'Beyond The Fringe' in the States and he said "I wish I" you know he said - pointing at Dudley "I wish I had been forced to learn an instrument as a child " (laughs)

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"Can always earn a living this little chap" - "I'll kill him" said Dudley - but -er - he didn't and the upshot was we went back to Bill Cotton and we said - "Got Peter Cook as well" and he said - "Yeah well" - and I said listen - "Together they are fantastic," I said "I've just had lunch with them" and I said "I've already seen them together I think Ned Sherrin did a show where they appeared together in an act - doing an act together and Bill said "Really?". I said "Yeah, I think, I'm sure that Ned did it". So I had a chat to Ned and Ned said "Yes they did appear together on one of the satire shows", that he did and so we got Cooke and Moore together and changed - er - it changed from, you know it was going to be the 'Dudley Moore Show' starring not only Dudley Moore - but also Peter Cook

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We did the pilot - Tom Sloane who was then Head of BBC Light Entertainment - actual head because Bill was Head of Variety or something at that time - Tom Sloane said - "If that's Light Entertainment" - he saw the Cook and Moore show; he said "If that's light entertainment - I'm in the wrong job". and Michael Peacock and Bill Cotton in the same room said - "Then you're in the wrong job! Tom!" (Laughs) "We'll take six of those" So we over-rode Tom. Tom Sloane, of course is the man who said about Peter Sellers "You'll never work for the BBC again!" (laughs) and Peter said " And I never did work for the BBC". (laughs)

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BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

Anyway these are all true stories but - but - er - we go on and we did Not Only But Also - the first guest star we had was John Lennon where Brian Epstein phoned me and he said "I see you went over my head and you've got John Lennon as a guest?" I said "Yeah well - you know?" He said "Right" He said "Now you're going to have to pay him something" - I said "Well how much?" He said "Five pounds." And that was it we got John Lennon for five pounds - it's lovely

Q: So in the first series there were six? Six programmes?

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JOE: Yes we did six and that's all I ever did I only did the first series and that again won a BAFTA, that won a BAFTA again. And that's the reason why I didn't do anymore because my contract was coming to an end and I was offered Casino Royale

Q: Now- how did that come about?

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JOE: Well - that - that - that came about through - simply through working and knowing Peter Sellers - it's as simple as that - I had - er - worked on - er - the Running, Jumping and Standing Still film

Q: Oh we've missed that out!

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JOE: Which was Richard Lester had - years before and I got to know Spike and I got to know Peter and in being at the BBC I had worked with Spike too on The Bookman - every time Spike brought out a book I had Spike on the Bookman programme at ABC and I got to know Peter as a friend - and - er - Harry - ah yes - it is marvellous it's total recall - and during my time at ABC television - we did a Goon Show - a television Goon show called Tales of Men's Shirts (laughs)

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Tales of Men's Shirts - which was a live Goon Show where they stood at mics and they just read the script - so in other words we filmed - we were going to do six of them - but Sellers being Sellers - let Spike down and Spike was very keen because Spike said - "These are old scripts this is wonderful - we could just do these old

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

scripts and film them!". Peter said yes - and of course being Peter as Spike phoned me he said "This swine Sellers - he's off to do another film!" So these other shows were never done - and that's how I got to know Peter Sellers - and was accepted by him - Spike and Harry as well as one of the family

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In fact during the - the shooting of the - er - The Goon Show the Tales of Men's Shirts - Peter and Spike, as was their want in those days, would sometimes have a little bit too much of the old brandy there - in-between takes and they were beginning to horse around and at one point I said "For god's sake you know - which mic are you on? Get back in to your correct positions" - you know - and they all came up to attention and saluted immediately - and Harry came over to me he tapped me on the forehead - said "Joe -it must be hell in there!" (Laughs)

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And that sums up Harry Secombe , he's a lovely man - lovely - so I knew the three of them and then when this Casino Royale and I, you know, my contract was coming to an end - I had done a thing called "Just in Time" which was a take-off of the James Bond - I'd done that for Sydney Newman in the Drama Department at the BBC - Sellers then signed to do Casino Royale - which was to be a comedy James Bond, spoof of James Bond. He then phoned me and got me along to meet Charles K Feldman - the producer and said - "I would like Joe to - er - direct me in the film - so Feldman said

Q: What was Feldman's background?

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JOE: Feldman was an agent - well he was the biggest agent in the world - he, oh yeah, he ran famous artists and they represented Arthur Miller, they represented Marilyn Monroe - er - Gary Cooper - Clark Gable. So he'd come - he was Hollywood, you know, aristocracy - but as he always kept saying to everybody - including Ursula Andress - "Don't ever forget we're all poor boys" (laughs) we all go "Yeah Charlie - yeah," He's a millionaire you know - but I so I went a long to meet him - and er - he said "Joe you fucked me up - you've really fucked me up - I had a director lined up for - we don't want to say who it was - who it was gonna be - now I'm gonna have

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

to - you and Peter have fucked me up. We're going to have to phone Hollywood and change a load of things. Where was I?"

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And Peter said you were saying that we'd fucked you up Charlie - he said "That's right you've fucked me up".

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Does that give you an idea of what this guy was like - he just rambled on and he'd get in to stories about Arthur Miller and so - and he was a very kind guy, but I learnt to my cost that - er - he was ruthless - I mean when Sellers messed up the film which we'll talk about - and I was asked to leave the film - he was completely ruthless he said, to my agent Dennis, Dennis Selinger - "What do we owe Joe? I mean what's the fee?" So Dennis told him, he said "Right just pay him it", so I got paid the whole fee, for six weeks work And Sellers got paid a million dollars for six weeks work - you know - and, and two and a half percent of the gross, can you imagine?
(laughs)

Q: But - but so you got in to preparation for the film with the sets and the every - casting blah -blah -blah and you started shooting at Shepperton?

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JOE: Yep - we started shooting at Shepperton and on the first day Sellers didn't turn up (laughs) and I thought this is it this is what this film is going to be.

Q: But this is your first big commercial movie as it were?

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JOE: This is the first, I mean it's the feature film ever done, and it was the biggest budget movie being shot in the world at that time - you know - and at that time there was no suspicion that it was going to be multi directors - at that time - I had a script that had been - first of all as Val Guest said in one of these interviews - it was written by Wolf Mankowitz and it was about three hundred - four hundred pages it was ludicrous - and -er - Charlie Feldman said "Bring in a couple of writers and lick this thing in to shape"

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BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

So I brought in John Law from the BBC with whom I'd worked on 'It's A Square World' - Michael Bentine and Terry Southern - because Sellers wanted Terry Southern having worked with him on Doctor Strangelove. So Terry Southern and John Law and I got this script down to about - er - it was down to about one hundred and fifty pages and there was loads of new stuff and stuff like that. Wolf Mankowitz - er - said "I'm pulling out - I've done as much as I can, there's no point in my staying here" - he said to me - "Good luck - keep in touch and keep a diary" - which I did - and Wolf walked off.

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So then we were left - with the script as it was - Feldman accepted it - Woody Allen then came across and was - er - read through the script and he said he - he would appear in the movie as well - went back to America - er - and we got things together and started at Shepperton. And on the very first day as I said - Sellers doesn't turn up and we get word from the guy called the Great Bert - who is , Bert was his driver, and philosopher and friend and he's known amongst the Goons as The Great Bert - Bert Mortimer - later turned up driving - er - Max -er - I'm a pink toothbrush I'm a blue tooth - Max Bygraves - when Peter died he turned up driving Max Bygraves - anyway that's by the way - but - but I have to mention Bert because anytime Sellers was - er - embarrassed or anything the great Bert arrived in the car and told you - "Peter can't make it today he's got a touch of the old (cough cough) you know".

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So that was what happened - Bert turned up - "Where's Peter?". "He's got a touch - oh he can't talk you know?" - so Peter turned up on the second day and I asked him - "How he was" and he said "I'm alright love" he said "I'm just letting Charlie Feldman know what he's dealing with" . Ah ha - we were already a day behind - you see? And off it went working OK - everything was fine, we get through four weeks - five weeks - Orson Wells has to turn up - Peter had asked for Orson Wells at that first meeting

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Charlie Feldman had said "Who do you think should play the villain opposite you?" And Peter had said, "Can we get Orson Wells?" Charlie had picked the phone up said - "I think Orson ought to be out of bed by now - what's the time in LA?" You know - sort of thing - my

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

- gets straight through - "Orson, hi" - and I can hear Orson's voice you know - "Yeah they're all here, the boys are all here - Peter here and the director Joe McGrath" - and I went - so I thought my god, Is Orson going to say "Joe who?" (laughs) but he doesn't so OK right yeah - so I'll take - all in all you'll fix - you'll be OK - "Right we'll tell you when your needed. Right". And so we've got Orson Wells fellas. - hangs up - Peter hugs me as a joke - "Joe we've got Orson Wells!" Charlie doesn't think this is funny - you know

00:33:24

Orson turns up - Peter says - er - "I don't want to appear in the same set up as him" - I said "What are you talking about? You have to appear in the same set up otherwise the audience I mean" He said "No you can shoot - shoot close ups" - I said "No - no - you've got to appear in the set up as Orson - the wide shot - you're at the table your gambling there's the two of you - we've gotta run - we've got the script run the master shot". He says "Well excuse me - hang on - I must make a phone call". And he goes off the set and disappears for three weeks (laughs) that's right!

Q: So - so what did you do you?

00:34:03

JOE: So I'm stuck with ha - I'm stuck with Orson Wells that's a good thing isn't it yeah! So Orson and I start improvising - I said - "Do some tricks", so he does card tricks (laughs) and he does levitation of one of the girls around the thing, and he's there's one point - there's one version of the movie where this girl is going up in the air and he looks off camera and says - "Can we get this show on the road Joe?" (laughs) Actually says it to camera - and I said - and I know for a fact there is a version that that is in there saying that - oh yeah - he's in there saying that.

00:34:36

So I', I shoot with Orson for about three weeks - er - meanwhile - Dennis Selinger who is Peter's agent and my agent - he doesn't know where is - however - it turns out that he's in Sweden - er - visiting Britt Ekland his then wife and her parents - obviously some family troubles and all that. But he's used the excuse and he never told anybody where he was. Anyway Charlie says unless he comes back - we're gonna sue him - you know - so he comes back and he says "Show me what Orson and you did - and then you and I can

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

improvise and do other funny things” - and I said “But we’ve already been through this - you’ve really got to stick - let’s go back to the original script - shoot the stuff that we said which is funny which you’ve passed which you agreed - with Terry and I and John Law”

00:35:31

And - and John Law is on the set incidentally he was on the - Peter wanted Law on the set so John was on the set - so we were having these arguments and - er - he says “No - no I’m not going to appear on the same set up”. And I said “Oh god - you’re behaving like an absolute spoilt child”. So he hits me - and I think oh my god - well - he sort of half hit me - he hit me but I managed to get it off - and I think if he gets away with it I said this is my - and I hit him. So, we start trading punches and there’s a stuntman who’s Gerry Crampton who was a stunt man on the film - is passing through this set that - we were in another - another - er - set having this quiet talk and a punch up and Gerry’s passing through and he comes across and he grabs us - and he holds us like two dolls you know -

00:36:25

And we’re going (growls) became the Goon show you know - and he said “I don’t know which one of you to hit - I love you both” (laughs) Let’s us go and Peter and I drop to the floor, start laughing see? So that was that. However - Peter, being Peter, says “I must change the stylus in my record player”, and disappears again! It’s comedy isn’t it - “I must change the stylus for my record player”

00:36:52

Q: That’s period joke - yeah

00:36:53

JOE: Yeah - and it’s comedy - so he’s off - so then I get word my agent, Seller’s agent Dennis Selinger says “Peter will not come back to the set if you’re on it - he’s embarrassed” - I said “What? He’s embarrassed?”

00:37:09

And he said - “You’re gonna have to leave - otherwise they are going to sue Sellers for - for - “ I think they were going to sue him for fifteen million dollars - “You’re gonna have to leave”, I said “What?” - he said “It’s very embarrassing, I’m your agent and I’m Peter’s agent” -

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

he said - "You gotta leave!" And I said "Wait" He said look at it this way "Feldman" - he said - Feldman who as you know - and was never able to make up his mind and even during the shooting we used to word from Feldman - go and shoot that scene again - and here's a re-write.

00:37:46

And Woody Allen who - by this time was around - said "Charlie always wants to cut the pay offs" so that you you can shoot a five minute sketch and there's no pay off - he said "Oh Where's the pay off? We don't need that" you know - so Charlie is re-writing and saying "Go back and shoot that scene again and that scene again" - and then he's complaining to me about being

Q: Over - over running

00:38:07

JOE: Over running! Anyway, Feldman suddenly says - "Paid you everything but - you gotta be there tomorrow", and I said "Why?" "Peter is coming on the set and he's bringing Princess Margaret" (laughs) this is - this is beyond - you know

00:38:24

So I'm back in the set the next day, playing with Orson, when Orson says "Where's our thin friend?" (laughs) Sellers turns up at just be - just after - just at lunch break- "Tah daaaaah we're here!" Princess Margaret - and of course she comes straight on - goes to Orson - gives him a big kiss and find out she and Orson had had dinner a couple of nights before . Now Peter is absolutely furious and he's lined up lunch there see? He's - he's got the chef from - from - er - I - er - I think it was the Dorchester or something I can't remember, to come down and cook lunch - so we - we go in to - er - to have lunch and the catering manager is there with a tray of drinks - and champagne and stuff and he comes across (phone rings) no don't - don't answer it it's a recording machine it's OK -

00:39:25

He comes across with this tray - I'll keep quiet if you like - no it doesn't matter - sorry yeah

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

00:39:32

He come across with this tray and his knees are knocking literally and the tinkle - tinkle - tinkling glasses you know and he offers this glass of drinks to Princess Margaret and she dismisses him and says "No - no Peter get me a gin and tonic" - a vodka and tonic - so Peter goes off and this guy is literally led off - you know - absolutely god almighty . We go and we have lunch - lunch goes on and at the end of lunch - er - Orson's having a cigar and there's brandies and stuff like this and -er - he says "Now let's - let's - get to the - cut to the chase here - this film is like fifteen days behind and it's all due to Mr. Sellers here".

00:40:19

He said "You know - I'd rather be watching Liberace than actually making this movie with this idiot!" And she says - Princess Margaret says - "What's been going on Peter?" And Peter says, "Well - no" - and she said, "In the casino which - which - where will you be sitting when you play the card game with Orson?" And Orson comes in - "That's anybody's guess" (laughs)

00:40:47

She says to Peter, "Naughty, naughty" - and Peter now is just under the table. Lunch finishes, he takes her back to town - so Orson and I left again - Orson says "Listen Joe, I've lost concentration" I said "I know." Ursula then says to me "What about doing a close up on me?" (laughs) and I say "Sure!"

00:41:09

So I say "Let's pretend that you're playing the card game and you're watching - Because you're gonna be over there" - she says "Right", so she goes over there and Jack Hilliard who is the camera man - the slowest camera man in the world - which is another reason - I said to him after this two of three days shooting at the beginning - "You're gonna have to speed up"

00:41:28

Every time we came to shoot on her, is taking hours - for a close up. And he says to me - "I might get an Oscar here", and I said "You might get fired here" - and Charlie said "We'll fire him next week". Two years later, I went down to Shepperton to do a commercial - they were still on the set that I had left, Nick Rogue was now camera

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

man doing inserts and pick up shots - I was still shooting Casino Royale and Nick Rogue said to me - "The last time I saw you, you said I'm going - nipping off for a cup of tea - that's the longest tea break in the history of movies". (interviewer: laughs - dear)

00:42:13

So I'm removed from the film - I'm removed from the film

Q: How did that actually happen - you get a phone call?

00:42:18

JOE: No - no - no - once again it was my agent, that was it, that was it - er - and - er - they bring Bob Parrish in to take over and he agrees to shoot singles with Peter and Orson - he agrees! He says "Yeah no problem you know - I'll do that you know". He's fired after five days - see - and Sellers walks off again, never to come back, and that was how it happened. So every time - every time you see Sellers and Welles in the movie it's me, except when you see close ups - mainly because well - Orson is mainly close ups and - and a bit - there's no - there's no two shots with Orson and Peter, it's incredible - in fact the establishing shot of Orson and Peter at the table I understand is - is er - er an optical - they- they got a couple of profile shots and did it - and in-laid them- in those days as you now.

00:43:19

Just to say - oh look they're at the same table (interviewer: yeah) terrifying.

Q: Now this - this - um - of course was - was - um - known about throughout the business

00:43:29

JOE: Yeah - I'd though that - I mean I thought at the end of it I would never work again.

Q: Yeah - that's what I was going to ask you know - what effect did it have on your work?

00:43:36

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

JOE: Well what happened was - what are friends for? I mean it's marvellous - er - well Peter Cook phoned up and said - Peter Cook phoned up and said "I hear you and Sellers had a punch up?" - and I said "Yeah" - he said - "Well" He said "That's incredible" he said - "I thought you were a fan of Sellers?" I said "I am I'm still a fan - I think he's a wonderful performer" - and Peter said "I think this is the first instance ever of the shit - the other way round of the fan hitting the shit" (laughs) lovely joke! (Interviewer: yes - yes - yes) That was Peter's answer (yeah)

00:44:13

So he said - "What are you doing?" I said "Well - I said er - I'm counting my money" (laughs) but "I don't think - I think this is going to be very difficult" . Dudley Moore came on the phone and said - "I've got an idea for a film and - er - I'm writing it along with John Wells - would you like to come along and have a look at it - and if you're interested - direct it?" Then I did a film with Dudley called "30 is a Dangerous Age Cynthia."

Q: Yes - sorry to interrupt but - you said - um - I was counting my money

00:44:48

JOE: Yeah

Q: So they paid you up full - full fee

00:44:50

JOE: Oh yeah - oh - oh yeah - yeah - yeah

Q: You need to say that sorry

00:44:56

JOE: I needn't?

Q: No you need to say that (laughs)

00:44:59

JOE: Oh yes sorry - so asked me the question again - what did I do after being fired off the film?

Q: Yes - yes

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

00:45:06

JOE: So after having been fired off the film - I - er - Peter Cook phoned up and said "What are you up to?" - I said "I'm counting my money" - because I had been paid off - in full - from the film. The interesting thing also is - to start with, I had done a year's preparation on this film - on Casino Royale - where that didn't count towards the fee for the film. I had been paid - I'll have to tell this because it's marvellous - I won't tell you what I was paid at the BBC, but when Dennis Selinger came back and did the deal and after Charlie Feldman had seen "Just in Time" and said - "OK he can direct the movie" - he said "We'll need maybe six or seven months preparation" - he said "Meanwhile we will pay him monthly wage". But it turned out to be a year - and they paid me per week what I was getting at the BBC per month

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Yeah - and that wasn't even the fee for the film - and I suddenly thought "Eh this is a whole different..." But - but, but honestly slap dash, compared to television I was working in at the time - shooting this movie - was a complete mess up - mess up - no - Woody Allen said to me after it - because he - he had appeared in it eventually - he said "How was it?" I said "Unh..." - he said "The unhappiest times of our life. Awful - no chance". As Raymond Chandler said - "Hollywood system - they hire you for your talent and they do everything they can to stop you showing your talent", and it's they just did everything - when you had a good idea, when everybody was a hundred percent ready to do something - Charlie would phone up and change the whole thing - terrifying.

Q: But - um - Thirty Is a Dangerous Age Cynthia was a happier experience

00:47:10

JOE: Thirty Is a Dangerous Age Cynthia was a happy experience - except for the British film critics who - by this time, as Dudley felt, that they had taken against him in a way - er - it opened here and didn't get good reviews at all - opened in America got marvellous reviews - marvellous reviews - I immediately got another film and Dudley became a Hollywood movie star through it - I mean it's incredible. You know - the write ups were this amazing talent Dudley Moore this amazing film this - this I mean - beautiful and I

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

was immediately offered a film with Shirley Maclaine she'd seen it and said "I'd really like to work with that guy".

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And the British, British critics no - and Dudley said and so Peter Sellers - Peter Sellers I mean - at the end of it all I mean - Peter Sellers and I became friend again - friends again - Peter said, "I think the last time I ever had a good review in Britain was - er - I'm Alright Jack". He said, "Something about it - why doesn't he just continue to - why must he play these multiple parts you know?" And Sellers said "I play multiple parts because the producers couldn't get a budget unless I agreed to play multiple parts" And Dudley felt insecure too he said - "Where is our lovely cuddly Dudley? That's the headlines, this is not the cuddly Dudley any more" It's interesting. We're not bitter! (laughs)

Q: So - um - you go in to the Bliss of Mrs. Blossom

00:48:43

JOE: Yes - that was a very - Bliss of Mrs. Blossom was a very happy experience - with Shirley Maclaine

Q: Uh - huh and - and um - was that set in London? I don't remember the story - I think its Dickey Attenborough

00:48:55

JOE: Yes it was Richard Attenborough - Dickey Attenborough and Shirley - and Jimmy Booth - do you remember James Booth yeah James Booth

Q: Was that Twickenham or Pinewood or?

00:49:05

JOE: It was Twickenham - was shot and Twickenham and - er - a very happy experience and I used one of my old friends - two of my old friends from television - Assheton Gorton and George Jerkovich were the two - er - art directors on the movie. And they - they came along - and so I surrounded - I learnt by this time to surround myself with people that I knew - because in Casino Royale I'd been forced to use cameramen and set and designers and stuff - in fact Assheton Gorton had been on Casino Royale and had been fired before we started shooting! And I had - er - you know threatened to leave too

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

00:49:46

And Assheton Gorton had talked me out of leaving and said - "No stay and do the movie it would be silly for you to leave it". But he had been fired before we had started shooting because Feldman said "I don't want somebody who's done a big major motion picture", you know he'd - he'd paid Assheton off as well, amazing, "It's my money I can do what I like" he said.

Q: What - um - give us a hint of Mrs Blossoms plot or er - what you tried to do with it

00:50:16

JOE: Yeah, Mrs. Blossom was written by James Clavell and it's really based on - it's the same story as an Alec Guinness movie called the Captain's Paradise - where he's a sea captain and he sails between Gibraltar and - er - tu - and Morocco in Tangier Gibraltar - so there's a wife if both ports, and he has to play them both together - well Clavell had this other idea that - er- Shirley Maclaine lives in London and - er - is married to Richard Attenborough - happily - but - er - one day - meets up with James Booth who's an odd job man and comes to the house and - er- they fall in love and she moves him up in to the attic so - he stays up in the attic and Attenborough and she are in the usual part of the house

00:51:09

So er - as Dennis Norden said with - "with hilarious consequences" we hope, I brought Dennis in - to do some re-writing of it, because it was written quite well but there weren't enough jokes and things and Dennis came in and said "I'd love to come in and be on the floor and watch it and contribute" So I had Dennis so I really surrounded myself with people I know, it were a great story about Dennis I'll tell you quickly - great story of Dennis Norden and Frank Muir told me was that - they had met Mel Brookes before Mel Brookes was famous and Mel Brookes said to them "What do you guys do?"

00:51:49

And he said "We're comedy consultants at the BBC" - and Mel Brookes said - "You mean you know?" So it's a great story isn't it?

Q: Yeah - just that I've got a note - um - pretty well all down the page about your - your as a writer you had contributed to (Joe: Oh all the time yes - yeah) most things yeah.

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

00:52:09

JOE: and of course I'd written just

Q: Which is something we haven't mentioned

00:52:11

JOE: I'd written 'Just in Time' - as well so I mean - and also the first - it's a very good point - the first series - this always happens in my life - backwards and forwards, the first series of "Not Only But Also" - I wrote along with Cook and Moore - so I mean everybody thinks Dudley and Peter wrote it - but they wrote every other series but the first series is by Cook and Moore and McGrath you know

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And so I was of course - as a freelance - god I was getting repeat fees for the writing as well - which is what Frank Muir and Dennis Norden said - "If you're gonna write - be freelance " you know - and I still get repeats to this day! Yeah.

Q: Wow, good for you but -um- so you contributed presumably to Mrs Blossom as well

00:52:54

JOE: Yes - I contributed with Dennis and that - but I didn't take any credit on it - because it er - I thought Dennis - er - I'd left Dennis completely alone to peruse the script and then to come and work with me for a week or two and tidy it up - so Dennis - when you see the movie it's from a book by James Clavell - script by Dennis Norden - yeah.

Q: Right.

00:53:16

JOE: But I learnt about that - you know when people say "Why do film - movie directors - was talking about film directors - why do they always end up with the same crews and sometimes cast the same people and that?" Its because you know that you're gonna get something back. I mean the thing about acting - John - Hou - Walter Houston and John Houston told me his father Walter Houston said "If you're gonna cast me - cast me against type" - it means I - I - otherwise I just do the same thing in every movie.

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

00:53:48

And I learnt that - that the get an actor or women in - actor - actress whatever you wanna call them - cast them against type, because them they will come up with something that is really interesting!

Q: Sure - sure I mean that's something I learnt from Ned actually (Joe: did you really- Ned?) yeah I mean he - he would employ people who were quite namey people almost - to do something, which they never ever did before then. You know - people who never played comedy would come and do a sketch - beg to come and do a sketch - you know.

00:54:11

JOE: That's right! And it's marvellous to watch them - to see their process - it's - it's great - yeah.

Q: Um - I've got something here - after bliss - youth wave

00:54:24

JOE: What?

Q: Youth wave?

00:54:26

JOE: Oh no - no - that - that was one of those things - er - those pop - er - programmes you know the - Tonight at Six Thirty and all that - no I just appeared in it I - I didn't nothing to do with directing I was just interviewed about making film yeah.

Q: Yeah - um - Magic Christian?

00:54:43

JOE: Ah well, now that (interviewer: also Twickenham) Yeah this is interesting the Magic Christian shot at Twickenham - this again you see was when Peter Sellers and I had fallen out for years - and I suddenly got a letter - from Peter Sellers apologising for his er - behaviour on Casino Royale - er - jumped very quickly because - marvellous again but I'll come back - when Peter Sellers was dying years later, I was with him in Dublin - which - we were shooting a commercial for Barclays Bank, when he had his penultimate heart attack and I had to take him in to Dublin in to the intensive care unit

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

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And as I was going - as he was going in to the intensive care unit he grabbed me by the hand and he said - "Joe do you remember when we had that punch up on Casino Royale?" - I said "Yeah" - he said "Well you know I wrote you a letter - saying I'm sorry?" - I said "Yes" - he said "Promise me you will never publish it?" and I said "Sure - and I promised him I would never publish it. But I never promised him that I wouldn't tell people about it - so I'm telling people about it! So he said that - he said "I'm so sorry but you know we had that punch up" - I said "That's OK" - he said "But you know - still - I'll never forget what you said to me that day" - and I said - "Well what did I say?" He said "Forget it I have", and they wheeled him off. (Laughs) Sellers!

Q: Going into intensive care

JOE: And I never saw him again.

00:56:20

But its not - its Sellers - forget it love, I have I thought I'll never forget it. Well anyway - we go back - Magic Christian - I got this letter from Sellers - letter of apology which I told about and - er - he said "Have you read the Magic Christian" - which I had - because - having worked with Terry Southern - Terry Southern then had written this book called the Magic Christian - and he sent it to me and he sent a copy to Sellers! So Sellers said - wouldn't it be a good idea to get back together again and do this film and I thought - well I don't really know - you know - against my better judgement you know - went along and had a terrible drunken lunch with Peter you know - bring on the Gewurtztramer there you know and Spike joined us and said yes you must do it - you know - and - er - in fact we did - and we used Spike in it in a wonderful scene where he played a traffic attendant - where Peter gets him to eat the ticket

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"Give you five hundred pounds to eat the - " "You'll give me five hundred - mmm" - eats the ticket - and he said, "You needn't eat the plastic" - "its alright Sir don't you worry" - eats the plastic and then Sellers drives off and he gives him five hundred pounds - Spike

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

shouted - "I'm here every Thursday! "(Laughs) Sellers shouted back - "Fridays are better for me!" Adlib, wonderful gold. The producer there was a wonderful guy called Dennis O'Dell and he had scheduled two days for this - and we were finished by lunchtime. And that's the difference - (yeah) you get Sellers, six months (yeah) or six hours (yeah) and you're finished, if he's in the mood and he loves it.

00:57:58

So Magic Christian Terry Southern came over again - met with Peter and I and Peter raised the finance - and er - we shot it once again we shot it at Twickenham - with Ashton Gorton - yes - and - er that went extremely well

Q: Quite a namely cast as well

00:58:16

JOE: Oh big cast Yul Brynner and - er - er - oh yeah we had guest stars - Dicky Attenborough - Attenborough appeared in it as well and - er - yeah God - it it it's a strange film because it's a sort of Don Quixote it's it's a periodic story it's it's instances of - this man who's so rich - er - that he sets out to prove that human beings will do anything for money. So you'll have a series of quick sketches of Milligan eating the parking ticket and things like that - er - Laurie Harvey stripping during Hamlet - to be or not to be you know - you know - to - er - Hey Big Spender (laughs) it's very funny it is - but its all Yul Brynner appearing in drag - and at the end taking the wig off and he's completely bald and this guy he's pulled says "Oh no" and Yul says "Oh yes". (laughs)

00:59:16

John Trevelyan - the - er - the censor at the time was seeing the movie and Yul Brynner - he doesn't know it's Yul Brynner he's in full drag and he's singing to Roman Polanski - "Mad about the boy" - and it's my voice (shout AH) - it's my voice it's on the movie, I know it's crazy but I'm mad about the boy - and he's singing and Trevelyan are watching it because the film has to get it censored you know - agent, whatever it is and census and Trevelyan says "Who is that woman? I know her". (indistinct) "I know her. Incredibly talented isn't she, very tall" (indistinct). Yes - yes (laughs) I said to Yul "You pulled the censor" (laughs) I remember when Yul was on the Michael Parkinson show - Parkinson asked him years later "What's the

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

funniest - the best thing you've ever done" - he didn't say - what's the enjoyable thing you've ever done on film - "Oh" he said "The Magic Christian when I was in drag - that was nice". (laughs)

Q: Um - and how was that received?

01:00:27

JOE: Again - very well received in America, (mm) made a lot of money - and in Britain - not too well received once again Peter said the curse of Sellers - you know - it - Peter went to see it - it did alright - went in to profit but - papers no - no - no you know (weird isn't it). They didn't like Peter - even - even - even he said even in the last movie he did "Being There" - he felt that the British press didn't quite give him the same as he got in Am - I mean America they just raved about it (yeah, yeah) - its interesting - see we're talking about Sellers - well I suppose because I did work with him that's a point yeah - one forgets that.

Q: Yeah um - next one in my list is "Oh - In Colour?"

01:01:12

JOE: Well - sorry that "Oh in colour", is a series with Milligan - with Spike and John Bluthal and stuff like that. Now - I've spoken to Norma Farnes - you know who was Spike's manager and is still still around and - indeed - is still publishing a lot of Spike's writings and stuff like that (right) and she and I suggested to the BBC you know that they might repeat it (mm) - the BBC said no they couldn't because - because it would be considered anti PC and racist nowadays - (oh- right) there's a lot of truth in it

Q: Well I'm pleased they kept it anyway

01:01:52

JOE: Oh they've still got it but they've never shown it

Q: So much it wiped you know

01:01:55

JOE: Well you know the Marvellous thing that years later in "Not only but Also" - the BBC wiped - they - a lot of the Dudley Moore Peter Cook stuff - and I said - Peter said - "What would be - why did they wipe it?" I said I understand they were using the tapes, they were

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

re-using the tapes for football - and Peter Cook said "Ah well as long as it's Tottenham Hotspur" (laughs) Always leave them laughing.

Q: Yeah sure - um - "Oh in Colour" was a series?

01:02:29

JOE: Yes six of them - and - er - you know as usual - once again well received by the, by the television you know press - oh yeah - because Spike by that time could do no wrong - oh yeah they loved him - and he used to get very annoyed with Norma he said "Why - why is it being shown on BBC two why isn't it being shown on one?" And she'd say "Shut up Spike - you know - the idea is to show it on two and it's a guaranteed repeat on one during the summer". Now if you put it on one now, it may never be shown again. (laughs) shut up Spike.

Q: Then er - we are now in to the seventies

01:03:09

JOE: Are we? I feel much better now (laughs)

Q: We're now to the seventies and um - you - go back in to the movies but a different kind of movies

01:03:22

JOE: Oh, was this during the - the bad years of British cinema?

Q: It could be - um - "Secrets of a Door to Door Salesman"

01:03:30

JOE: That's right

Q: Dar - oh "Digby" that' that's different

01:03:33

JOE: Digby's OK

Q: But also um - according to various things I've read, you wrote quite a few - um - movies that you know sort of B movies or whatever it was

01:03:45

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

JOE: Yeah soft porn movies, you know - when I look when I think of them now, nothing soft porn about them, but they were pretty much - er - at the time in the seventies - er - pretty much like - like - er - not personally but - like "Carry On" but broader - "Carry On" movies but broader. I didn't particularly like them but even in those days you could get good cast I mean Bill Kerr and people like that and Spike appeared in a couple you know - and they were quite willing to do it

01:04:19

But I mean it - it interests me now that here we are in two thousand and eleven and I was just watching the other night and there's you know major film stars intercourse and it's now on screen - you know in those days you couldn't you know you cut away. But nowadays they quite happily show intercourse and major stars - yeah.

Q: Oh sure - the - the - um - (?) I take it in to the seventies I mean you must have been asked to write (siren noticeable in b/g) by a producer or several producers or whatever I mean these - these "Door to Door Salesman" and various others

01:04:56

JOE: Yeah - these sort of things - er - they were done I mean - I - I'd reached the stage - we still haven't spoken about Digby but don't worry (siren lost) - I'd reached the stage where British film - at that time - the - the government closed an awful lot of tax incentives and the Americans who were all here, just went to Italy - or went back to the states, so the British film industry - of which I still say - there never - er - there still isn't a British film industry even although the studios are all full and everybody's working it's American - American money you know I mean it's a lot of rubbish

01:05:36

JOE: You make a film here and they say this is a very interesting British film and its gets shown in the Strand On the Green or or the Everyman and that's it - that's it - I mean every movie I've made got general release and went into profit - so I mean - I don't think there's any point in in working in an entertainment business - especially if it's comedy - unless you can entertain - I mean - and get a box office

01:06:04

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

So these things - these things came up - these they were quite cheap in a way and they were - and by that time of course cameras were much more mobile and you could shoot you know - very much quicker

Q: In real locations

01:06:19

JOE: Yeah - and all location stuff - no - no - studio - so these producers were around and they would come along - and say, you know, "We would like to do this and we can get it into the Eros cinema in Soho and it will run for a year - where it did - and things like that and you were on a percentage - which is a good thing - so they would say "We can't pay you too much - but like a theatre we will show you the box office every week" - now they can't hide it. That's the other thing is you know - I did - I did er - "Behind the Fridge" with Dudley and Peter Cook which was a theatre - at the Cambridge theatre - which was a review with - you know - and why was it called behind a fridge? And Dudley said "Well there's this Italian waiter who said - I so enjoyed that show you were in 'Behind the Fridge' - he thought it was me on the Fringe of course you see.

01:07:12

'Behind the fridge' was so funny, so they said let's call it "Behind the Fridge" - so we did it at the Cambridge theatre where it ran for a year - it toured Australia, ran for a year- it toured Britain - could have gone on at the Cambridge, then went to America - where it appeared as 'Good Evening' on Broadway - and I got money for that - so and then this, these films came along and - er - you would be paid a - a str - a flat fee to write it, it would be a few thousand pounds it wouldn't be you know - it wouldn't be like major motion picture - and you'd be paid to direct it - but you were on a box office cut so you were off the gross you weren't saying it would make a profit - so you can see it every week and you knew what you were getting

01:07:55

And some of these - those movies - I am now featured in this the French Cinematheque because I didn't put my name on them - although everybody found out - I called them -one of them I called

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

Croisette Meuble - furniture store on the Croisette and the other one Aleppo Pines - Pine tree from Aleppo - and at Cinematheque these films are there you know - they - Regie - Aleppo Penis - penis - what are you saying you naughty man - a little pines you fool

Q: So - so - so somewhere in all that - and I'm not sure of the sequence

01:08:32

JOE: yeah that's another one yeah - yeah set producer he's dead now thank god

Q: No it's Digby - er - biggest dog in the world

01:08:40

JOE: Yes Digby of course - 'Digby the Biggest Dog in the World' - for which it gets shown three or four times a year - marvellous - and at Christmas as well (on television?)on television and I get repeats on that too so it's lovely you know you get that.

Q: How did that come about?

01:08:55

JOE: That came about - because now this is - it came - I - 'Digby the Biggest Dog in the World' came about because years and years before that when Richard Lester was doing the Beatles films - 'Hard Day's Night' and 'Help' - the producer was Walter Shenson and all these years later - Walter Shenson, he got to know me because I actually wrote stuff during - for - which was used in 'Help' and 'Hard Days Night', for no credit - but money er - er - in 'Hard Days Night' I wrote a whole sequence where Ringo goes for a walk along the river bank and photographs rubbish - he photographs terrible broken jam jars and things you know

01:09:41

its I silent bit, it's really silent comedy where you're just having to put one of their tracks over it - so I know Walter Shenson then - and Walter turned up again years later - saying " I'm going to do this movie called 'Digby the Biggest Dog in the World' - would you like to direct it, now that you're a director?" And I said yes - of course - so er - that was a very happy experience again - he's a producer that,

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

he had his faults but his Carol Reed said to me - "Let me know if you ever meet a real producer". And years later he was passing me in - in - in the - in the Garrick Club I was at the Garrick club having lunch with somebody and Carol was passing me and he stopped and he said - "Have you ever met one yet?" and I said "No" and he said "Neither have I" - kept on walking (laughs)

01:10:30

Because directing a movie and a produce it's a different game as you know oh - it's not like television because in television everybody's friends - more or less - but these guys - anyway but Walter turned up and said once again - "Digby the Biggest Dog in the World" I said yeah and again I went through the script and didn't take credit but went through the script because I used Spike Milligan - Jim Dale and a whole load of people like that - so I got Spike in to look through the script and Spike contributed loads of gags and he said I want to play this - he said "I want to be Herr Ribbentrop". So we dressed him in a black leather coat - fedora and and a brief case, oh and he had his German accent you know - he was very good at it - it stopped him in a way - playing that character stopped him being Spike

01:11:22

you know just being Spike and going in to an area where you couldn't understand - because you know with Spike sometimes (impression) you think what is he saying? And because of this he had to speak like that - and it was good and er -

Q: Where did you make that was that on all location or...

01:11:40

JOE: That was - no - Elestree that was made Elestree and location - and - Jim Dale of course - and again through that film - was taken over to America - by Walt Disney and never came back - 'Pete and the Drago' and all those Disney films - Broadway - Broadway as well and I've got so many letters and cards from Jim saying - "I just wanted to say what a marvellous time 'Digby' was and it meant the whole change of my career - it meant me going to America getting divorced and being happy" (laughs) - this is absolutely true - (laughs) It's terrible isn't it - mind you as you know if you're actually

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

directing a movie - or you're do er - your liable to get divorced because like three - six months of your life go through and you've done nothing except that film and your being sued by the income tax - where's your wife - where is she she's left - it happened to me - oh yeah - yeah my first wife yes, it does happen.

Q: And how was 'Digby' received?

01:12:44

JOE: Well received - very well - that again went into profit because it - it's a children's film and they do rather well - if you make a good kids film - they're always shown - er - because we - we - we Jim Dale was wonderful to work with because he said to me "It's given me a chance to escape from 'Carry On' (yeah) - he said "I don't have to be a neurotic sex maniac or something you know or something like that - I'm able to play a straightforward comedian - comedic character" - which he did, and he was wonderful in it - yeah.

Q: Presumably the commercials are going on are they?

01:13:20

JOE: All the time - I was making commercials during all of this - yeah - with Peter Sellers - Barclays Bank as I said - so that was the last thing Peter did - but then I was doing commercials with Morecombe and Wise yeah.

Q: Do you remember in particular any - any campaigns any particular commercial that you - er - either for disastrous reasons or for happy reasons

01:13:41

JOE: No - no - no there were no your right - we got a gold at Cannes - one of the first prizes at Cannes for a thing I did called the Muncher - which was a huge - it's for Chewits - er - sweets and it's a huge dinosaur - eating New York and er - you can see it - it eats New York and all that and "He's eating everything in his path we gotta do something about it!" And the guy gets in the car and drives out and feeds it a packet of Munchers - and then it goes off in to the distance - and enjoying its Munchers and that won every prize that it could ever go so - I really have to thank the dinosaur (laughs)

Q: So what - what was that - was that anamatronic or cartoon or...

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

01:14:28

JOE: No - no it was the usual business of stop frame for the dinosaur and live action for the actors because we had a - well again I went to Twickenham this - they build a whole sort of like New York street scene - I mean they do it you know - wonderful with an elevated train at the back and it lifts up the train and eats it - you know like King Kong - huge thing - you know - thirty seconds (laughs) you know - and of course the Barclays Bank stuff that - er - Peter Sellers did, that won a load of stuff - er - they then wanted to do a whole other series of Barclays Bank based on the same character - and Peter Cook did it, and they asked me if I would like to do it, and for some reason or other I said no - I think I'll just leave it - because to go back with Peter Cook to do it when I had done it with Peter Sellers I just felt no I don't want to do it

01:15:24

And actually I was - I don't mean - nastily - but the commercials I think were ever shown - they just didn't work seemingly. But Cook isn't a good actor - he was never a good actor Peter Cook. Dudley - Dudley - wonderful actor - but Peter - alright being himself or - but he can't act he couldn't act - and indeed in all those 'Not Only But Also's' he was reading off teleprompt - Dudley remembered it all, Peter wouldn't make an attempt to remember it he read it all

Q: Well all those shows that I directed for Ned, you know the life - they were all on teleprompter because I mean they wrote their own material but - but - but I had to have two lots of cameras - because the one was actually taking the shot and other one was actually prompting it.

01:16:13

JOE: That's what we did - that's what we did. And of course when I did it - they eventually got these really good teleprompts where you can look in to the lens - mirror lit - that was wonderful - I mean Cook. But if you see the first series of Not only But Also - Peter Cook has lots of - his eyes suddenly glaze over and he's looking - to see - and he's looking for the lines! (laughs) Dudley's going (pause) and Dudley

Q: but er - going back to what I was doing the - the -the because the two people - John Bird - John Fortune - as ever um - were supposed to be looking at each other - I couldn't take the shot at the camera

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

when they were actually reading the - I had to take a shot with the other camera so that it looked as though they were looking at each other - but they weren't and they were looking autocue - yeah.

01:16:54

JOE: Yeah - I know - I know - well that - that - that does worry you that - that's the other thing you're right in 'Thirty is a Dangerous Age Cynthia' - I used John Bird - not as the detective - who is

Q: He's a very good actor

01:17:08

JOE: He's a wonderful actor and he became a great friend too - and John Fortune - who appeared in the Barclays Bank commercials when Peter died - er - he - he became a very good friend

Q: You mentioned John Wells also who was another one

01:17:20

JOE: John Wells was great (laughs) god - what a laugh he is - but I did the Morecombe and Wise stuff - the er - I did a film called 'Night Train to Murder' with Morecombe and Wise well yes - (?) I mean I laugh nowadays but you've got to you've gotta - years - I mean Eric died as you know which was terrible and I went to the funeral - memorial and everything - and about a year or two later I was in a theatre and I saw Ernie Wise and Ernie was in the same theatre and the lights went up in the interval and Ernie got up and was walking up the - the stalls and I was - I saw him - anyway I said "Ernie" he said "Hello Joe - don't offer me a job" (laughs) - its terrible isn't it what you laugh at ...

01:18:03

You see Peter Sellers - (laughs) - Eric Morecombe - you know - he went through them all - "Don't offer me work" he said "Don't offer me work!"

Q: We got um - I've got off the track rather -

01:18:15

JOE: No its me I - I

Q: Um - the 'Great McGonagall'

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

01:18:20

JOE: Ah - yeah that's a Peter Sellers again - " The Great McGonagall" - yes written by me and Spike Milligan, Spike and I wrote that together and had a marvellous time writing it - between Spike playing his trumpet and singing songs in his room - dum dum de dum de dum dum you know - but we wrote it because it had always been - er - McGonagall the Scots the worst Scots poet ever - real Scots poet ever - now this is where you jump you see - because when I talked earlier - working on a program called ' Temple' - with Ken Tynan who was an observer theatre critic I got Peter Sellers to come along and read McGonagall poems - dressed as McGonagall - so you have that in common -

01:19:06

He loved doing that because in the Goon show they used a poem a poet called 'Mcgoonigall ' based on McGonagall and this was Spike's idea - so years later - Spike said let's do a film on McGonagall I'll play McGonagall so I said fine - let's do it - so we wrote the script and we sent the script to Peter Sellers - er - and had lunch with him - asked him if he's play Queen Victoria - so he did - and he played Queen Victoria on a skateboard - so it was very funny because he's got the crinoline and he just moves across camera - you know he's moving (impression) and then when he dances with Milligan - he's on the skateboard and Spike is spinning him ha - you know

01:19:52

So we did that - and Sellers appeared - and turned up and did it - that was happy again because he was with Spike and he's you know - happy experience.

Q: So did you - where was that - was that on location?

01:20:03

JOE: That was shot at Wilton's Music hall

Q: Music Hall I was there the other week

01:20:07

JOE: There you are - Spike said er - when we wrote it - let's do them a favour - let's write it as a group of touring actors - and I said absolutely right that's brilliant - I said this is a group of touring actors

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

- who turn up at Wilton's and they tell the story of The Great McGonagall and he said that's what we'll do - and we can pay them the location fee so they were so pleased - and so we shot - and it's a wonderful place to shoot - great atmosphere - hasn't it marvellous atmosphere

Q: Yea - still I mean its amazing that it survived the Blitz the developers - and

01:20:38

JOE: And McGonagall

Q: And McGonagall (laughs)

01:20:41

JOE: But he loved it and Spike loved it you know - 'Oh beautiful bridge over the silvery Tay' - you know (laughs)

Q: Er - Zodiac

01:20:50

JOE: Oh can I do a quick poem - a quick McGonagall?

Q: Go on then

01:20:55

JOE: 'God' - is this is from Spike - a nod to Queen Victoria - who has survived er - an assassination attempt - 'God prosper long our noble queen - long may she reign - Mclaine tried to shoot her - but it was all in vain' - thank you (laughs)

Q: Thank you! 'Zodiac'?

01:21:21

JOE: 'Zodiac' - that's a sad story - now you're gonna get personal - 'Zodiac' was a series that they did with Anton Rodgers and -er - what's her name a can't remember the - er- woman have you got it there? No anyway - it's a series with Anton Rodgers - yeah - it'll come - er

Q: For Thames?

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

01:21:41

JOE: For Thames a detective sort of and wom... man and wife 'Thin Man' sort of thing - and I was asked to do it. The producer was Jackie Davis - Jacqueline Davis who's still with us and - er - it was - when we - we rehearsed it as in those days one did - we had like a couple of weeks rehearsal and I said - this is too long we've got to cut it and Jackie said no - no we don't want to cut it - let's wait until we get in to the studio and I said well I don't want to wait until we get in to the studio I'm frightened I think this is over length and there's too many sets - getting from one set to another takes all that time and there was this wheeling the cameras and the cabling - remember when we had to plug this in and plug that in

01:22:32

er - you know and she said no - no I don't want to cut it and I said I think we should - anyway we didn't cut it - er - and half way through the recording of it when we were doing it with the cast - and we had - er - Sinead Cusack - er - very good cast Gillian Raine - who was married to Leonard Rossiter - er - very good cast - Peter Jones - marvellous cast - er - half way through the recording of it - I got a phone call it was in the box that my mother was dying - was very ill and had taken suddenly ill and was in hospital and my father phoned and the doctor was on the other line - said if you can get up here you should because I think your mother is going to die in the next twenty-four hours or something

01:23:24

So - that was it - Piers Haggard interestingly enough - was rehearsing in the next studio and he came in - he said what's going on and I said what's going on and the P.A who was there was marvellous - I said I really don't know what to do - and she said I've already done it - and I said what have you done - she said I've got a car outside - you're going to the airport - just go to Glasgow. So Jackie was there - Jackie Davis was there and she was a bit- I can understand it all these years later - she was a bit "Oh my God what are we going to do" - you know I mean you know

01:24:04

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

Anyway there was quite a - quite a fracas in the box - the upshot was I left - and er - that was it - and I came back after - my mother did die - and I was away for a bit - two or three weeks - came back and Dennis Selinger who was my agent at that time - he got word saying that was being asked to go back to Thames to finish it - that they hadn't managed to finish it. Although Piers had sat in and said "I'll try and help" - they hadn't managed to finish it.

01:24:34

So I went back and they had one scene left to do and we shot that scene and Jackie didn't speak to me - you see and I was - so that was it that was how I left under a cloud then - well I mean Brain Tesler - not Brain Tesler but people who were in charge Lloyd Shirley and all that - they were quite OK with me they said we're so sorry that your mother died - but I think Jackie took it absolutely as a producer - she didn't get it finished and she had to go back to finish it and by that time I had lost interest - I said I'm sorry I'll finish it but you know - I said I don't want any money to finish it - but of course the actors all got paid

Q: Yeah but they were under contract anyway because they were doing a series

01:25:15

JOE: Yes, and they were so that was OK

Q: So they were there

01:25:16

JOE: They were OK

Q: She had studio time and everything

01:25:18

JOE: And through that I became best friends with Gillian and Leonard Rossiter - and got the film of 'Rising Damp' with Leonard Rossiter - through that - because he got to know me so well and my work - that he said - we're doing a film of 'Rising Damp' and I want you to do it - yeah - isn't that interesting how these things happen yeah

Q: Absolutely - absolutely when we

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

01:25:39

JOE: As one door closes another door closes!

Q: Yeah (laughs) um - when we've stopped I'll tell you my Leonard Rossiter story

01:25:46

JOE: Yep okay - and there's hundreds of them (laughs)

Q: Um - 'Girls come First' - 'I'm not feeling myself Tonight' - um - 'Sam and the River' what was that?

01:25:56

JOE: Ah - 'Sam and the River' - that was done for BBC children department and it's a detective thing for kids - but it was lovely - all on film - on - on London river - and within, you know I mean, writing the script and within you know six weeks shooting - I got to know more about London river - its so good actually in movies isn't it you learn - you learn so much you know - all about the you know - about the London river and the whole history of it and all that - and the river police and everything - so that was very enjoyable.

Q: Was that a six parter?

01:26:28

JOE: yeah it was a six parter six half hours - yeah and - er - it was good fun and Jack De Lane Lea produced it - he had a studio in London - a dubbing studio in London called De Lane Lea studios - now in Wardour Street - De Lane Lea Wardour - he produced that and put the money up - and the BBC - a joint

Q: Was it co-production?

01:26:49

JOE: Co-production

Q: Ah right - right - right - right - who was head Children's at that time do you remember was it Edward or was it um - er - wasn't Monica Simms -

01:26:59

JOE: Who?

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

Q: Head of - Head of Children's programmes - who would have hired you?

01:27:01

JOE: Yeah no - yeah who was the legendary lady that was there when Ned was there - the legendary woman BBC - three names dun - dun - dun -dun -dun - yeah that was it yeah - it will come to us - it wasn't Nyree Dawn Porter either (laughs)

Q: Um - I really can't remember it - there was Monica Simms who was Head of Children's programmes - um - and then Edward Barnes - um - um

01:27:30

JOE: I think it was Monica Simms

Q: Yeah probably she went on to be - Controller of Channel - um - Radio Four and all sorts

01:27:36

JOE: I think it - yeah I think it was her - she had written it more or less - and produced it as well

Q: Oh no - no she wouldn't have done that, it doesn't matter, doesn't matter, doesn't matter

01:27:48

JOE: The women had written it and she was a producer at the BBC but she wanted me to re-write it with some - some jokes and things in it yeah

Q: Um - um - We'll find out. 'Girls Come First'?

01:27:58

JOE: That's one of those - er those films those er soft porno type things

Q: Yes - Yes, it says Writer Director here

01:28:08

JOE: says Writer Director - yeah, yeah

Q: Is that one of your pseudonyms or did you own up?

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

01:28:12

JOE: I can't remember no I think I was just using Aleppo Pines or Criosette Meubles which ever I felt like at the time but you're right, some good titles there, 'I'm Not Feeling Myself Tonight' is a very funny title that this producer had come up with it's not a bad title

Q: MacGilvray or somebody

01:28:29

JOE: Yea, David McGilvray did work on one them, yes that's right David McGilvray but yeah, David Hamilton Grant was the name of the Producer of all those films and he died - well he was a very strange guy I think he'd been bankrupt three or four times you know these sort of guys and I said "Where did you get the money" he said "My wife" - so any time he went bankrupt seemingly his wife put up the money you know like quickly terrifying how people live - just "OK I'll go bankrupt you take the money" you know (laughs) then the wife divorced him (laughs)

Q: And that was the end yea. 'The Strange Case of the End of Civilisation As We Know It?'

01:29:19

JOE: Ah 'The Strange Case of the End of Civilis....The Strange Case of the End of Civilisation as I Know it As We Know It' is written by John Cleese and myself and Jack Hobbs who was Spike Milligan's Editor of all his books, all his books by Jack Hobbs, not the cricketer, Jack Hobbs was the Editor so the three of us sat down and wrote 'The Strange Case of the End of Civilisation as We Know It'. He played Sherlock Holmes, Cleese, Arthur Lowe Doctor Watson, there's a very funny bit in it when - eh - John wrote this he said - eh - "Well a man who eh - came in here earlier Watson that we didn't see", he said "He was five foot eleven he'd just bought a new suit ; his tie he tied in a Windsor knot (loud car horn in b/g) and a cream shirt and a fed.... and a curly brimmed fedora" - he said, "Goodness my goodness Holmes I mean.. stutter.. how on earth, why don't know these things?" - he says "Because you're a cunt Watson". (Typical Cleese) That was that was and it was in the movie but we had to go cos you're a 'beep' you know obviously but Cleese adlibbed it of course and just the whole studio did what you did everyone went. Shriek... (laugh) you know but isn't that

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

marvellous, he said "Well if Holmes was alive today that's what he would have said" of course he would have and of course Arthur was wonderful as Watson well with - "Goodness how did you know that Holmes - now look here Holmes..." you know.

01:31:01 Do you know that do you know that poor Arthur had narcolepsy, did you know that, well this again is a

Q: Yes - Yes I've got some Arthur Lowe stories as well when we finish

01:31:08

JOE: This is an incredible, this is incredible. We're filming on a bus which is full of immigrants in the film. They're all black and they've all got turbans or saris or something - bus is full of immigrants and what's his name, lovely guy, black guy, Griffiths, Derek Griffiths he's playing the bus conductor. John Cleese is Sherlock Holmes and - eh - Arthur, Arthur Lowe and they rehearsed this scene and it's going round, round Piccadilly Circus you know the traffic down and then round then back up again then down - an- an- an alright we're going to try a take now OK right mark it. It gets marked and Arthur's sitting there he says alright Joe?" and I said "Yes ready Arthur". He said "Yes ready right ready when you are" so and I said "Action" and he went (snore) he went to sleep and John Cleese and Derek Griffiths had to run upstairs - hysterical laughter you know I mean it's sad but the marvellous thing is how can you be so relaxed when you say 'Action' and he goes to sleep (laughs) I mean he was OK after that, I mean - he came to he said "How was that?" I said "Arthur..." , he said oh yes it happens sometimes you know he said, lovely man lovely man. Terrible isn't it

Q: Indeed. 'The Loser's' 'The Losers'?

01:32:35

JOE: 'The Losers' now - ah - that again that was - eh - Leonard Rossiter and Alfred Molina who has since become a huge star as you know and that was the first thing Alfred had ever done on television and - I was having auditions and he came in and he read some of the lines and I thought well you don't have to go any further this is - this the guy. And Leonard was in another room, in a rehearsal room, and I called Leonard in, I said "Listen to this", you know and Fred and Leonard said to me "Now - aye - aye - don't see anybody else let's get him". And we got Fred in and Fred - Fred has become a great friend.

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

I'm a member of the Saville Club and I've just proposed Fred Molina for the Saville Club and he's now a member of the Saville club

Q: He lives in America doesn't he?

01:33:22

JOE: Yes but he - any time he's here he'll live at the Saville Club and he's a lovely man and great actor. Well I mean to have both of them again you had Leonard Leonard Rossiter and you had Alfred and it was - Leonard played the part of a wrestling manager and Alfred was the young wrestler. It was written by Alan Coren. There's a good story there. Every time we rehearsed and you would know this Daryll because it was television, so every time we rehearsed we'd do a timing for two minutes on audience spread and all that - yeah - and we were always two or three minutes short so I would phone Alan Coren and I'd say "Alan we are two or three minutes short again" and he'd say, "Tell Leonard to slow down", I said "You tell Leonard to slow down" (laugh).

01:34:12

Anyway we did the series - success - do another series - yes - Alan refused to do it. He said "I don't want to do it it's too - it's too - too much - too frenzy" he said "I just prefer sitting in a room writing out get it printed that's it"> He said "This business of coming along and coming up with another two or three minutes, I just can't do it". And he said "I love it and I think it's marvellous and it was done very well - get another writer". And Leonard said "No - no I don't want to do it with another writer". So we didn't do any but the television company did. Yeah. No they wanted to do more but they didn't.

Q: Right - right - um then the Rising Damp film cropped up

01:34:56

JOE: That's right 'Rising Damp' film cropped up and that won the er won a BAFTA and it also won the British Standard you know the film award? The film

Q: Evening Standard you mean?

01:35:06

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

JOE: The Evening Standard Award it won that - er - as best, I mean it's amazing I mean I couldn't believe it 'Rising Damp', we shot it in a tenement in a building in Notting Hill Gate during - during the Notting Hill Gate riots and of course I said "Thank goodness Don Warrington is with us" (laugh) Don used to go out "Hello brothers", you know what I mean you know - very funny but a

Q: So that was all location

01:35:31

JOE: Yeah, and Denholm Elliott wonderful, he - well - this is - the Standard Film Awards it won best Comedy Film and that was even with the - eh - 'Life of Brian' up against it - it won best comedy film, Best Director for me; Leonard, Peter Sellers Award for Comedy. Denholm Elliot, Best Actor; and Francis de la Tour, Best Actress. And they couldn't believe it, Denholm Elliott said I've played in Shakespeare I've never, he said, he said I did one week in a comedy and I get Best Actor, lovely, but you couldn't fault it I mean when you have a group of people like that and they all know what they're doing.

Q: And it was written by the original television writers presumably, who was it Chezney, I can't remember

01:36:22

JOE: Yes Yes - eh - Eric Chappell who said "I don't want" - he was very funny he said "I don't want to come down to the awards because that film has got nothing to do with me. They've improvised the whole thing". He was joking but I said to Eric "The minute you say that, that goes into press cuttings for the rest of your life". And he's phoned recently and said "You're right", he said "I meant it as a joke", he said "I didn't even come to the shoot", he said "So, I mean as far as I'm concerned if it's a success I've got nothing to do with it, I did that as a joke".

Q: Were those awards voted for by the readership or by the critics?

01:37:01

JOE: No you're right, no you're right it was the audience, it was the audience and it was - It was eh - film audiences given cards and stuff like that and the Standard did it, that's absolutely right - yeah

Q: Um

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

01:37:16

JOE: You know that awful Billy Wilder story. Billy Wilder when he - there's eh - the - eh where they're both in Drag - what is it the - Jack - 'Some Like It Hot', he said "They showed it to an audience, you know, to get the audience reaction and with cards", Be careful of that because it's a bit shaky but you'll be OK but use it yeah. you know they had these cards to write on what they thought and it was 'Some Like it Hot'. And they said the audience reaction during it was fantastic, you know, but - he - Billy Wilder told me this story he said "One of the cards came", he said, "Mr Wilder your film was so funny I laughed so much I peed in my girlfriends hand" (laughter) - Billy Wilder - and as he said to me "I've always been accused of bad taste" (laughter)

Q: 'Good Night and God Bless'

01:38:14

JOE: That's - eh - 'Good Night and God Bless' written by myself and Donald Churchill.

Q: Did he appear in it?

01:38:23

JOE: He appeared in it much against both our wishes, yes -eh - it was about a really creep comedian, you know, a guy who's on stage as everybody's friend, love - Jerry Lewis type character and off stage is a real bastard. Is cheating on his wife; cheating on everybody ; won't pay his debts you know; ex wives and girlfriends; humping chorus girls and all that you know.

01:38:53

So I wanted Leslie Phillips to play it, he was of an age at that time. Leslie read it and said "Yes it is me but no thanks" (laugh) He wouldn't do it. He said "It would finish me, finish me". So I think Dave King who was still around who

Q: Was a very good actor,

01:39:13

JOE: Very good actor, that's why I wanted him as well. Sent it to Dave King and he said "Oh no - no - no - no", he said "I don't get a lot of work

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

these days, I'd get even less with this" And eventually the television people, it was Yorkshire, said "Donald you play it". And I said to Donald "Don't play it" and he said - you know- I said "Don't play it Donald because I'm - you know, speaking as Director or Producer I wouldn't cast you in this", I said "It's got to be a real smoothie".

01:39:47

And you know Donald suffered slightly from a stammer and indeed the fact he'd become an actor was he did it because his therapist told him to take up acting and he would lose the stammer, which he did but when he got slightly excited there was that e-e-e- slightly and I said "No, no", I said "You've got to deliver these one liners that you and I've written and" I said "it's gonna be - bom bom". Anyway it ended up of course once the money came around Donald said "Well I'm gonna do it." I said "Well OK do it you know".

01:40:19

So he did it and that was it he just did one series - eh - once again Phillip Purser who wrote for the Observer, Television Critic said "This is the best thing on British television at the moment, it will never get a second series, it's too true". And I, did offer it to a comedian who's just got a Knighthood and he turned it down.

Q: Who's that?

01:40:51

JOE: "Nice to see you" (laugh) Well he turned it down as well so they were right, three top comedians said no, they were right. All of them felt I'll never work again if I do it, you know.

Q: However, the next pair of comedians eh - were Morecambe and Wise. 'Night Train to Murder'.

01:41:16

JOE: 'That's Night Train to Murder' ABC Television, no Thames Television, sorry it had become Thames by then, Philip Jones was head then and -eh - they had been very - very disappointed in the movies that they had done at ABPC and as Eric said to me

Q: Pinewood

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

01:41:35

JOE: Exactly -as Eric said to me - he said - "They actually shot us in singles" and he said "The two of us - in a two shot like Laurel and Hardy" - he said "The timing worked out over the - the knowledge and timing of a lifetime - was put in to a cutting room - we're paying somebody two hundred and fifty a week and a sh - cut the time in singles" (interviewer: yeah - yeah - yeah - yeah) and he said "They actually in those days" he said "They had batons in the floor - so you came in and you found your batons and hit your marks" - he said "We were like a couple of dummies you know".

01:42:08

So when they went to Thames - they wanted to do a film - er - and they wanted to do it with me - so ph - Phillip Jones - that was part of their deal - so er - apart from the television stuff they were doing - so we shot the film - at er Twickenham again - we shot it and Twickenham - and - er - Eric by this time - wasn't well, that was it. And we had - we - we had - when we went for the insurance there was a problem with his insurance - on it - but they eventually managed to th - eh - Thames managed to work out a deal with the insurance people - because they were willing to let him do television - things but they - they wanted a six weeks and a movie - they were a bit worried and although it was ...

Q: Well they thought television was more stressful Than - than - relaxed

01:43:09

JOE: Of course it is but - you know - they said well we were - we said "Yeah we're on location for three weeks and we're back in the studio for three". They were a bit worried - oh you know - location and all this and - anyway - so eventually they did a deal - and he was insured and er - anyway he was insured - and we shot it - er - he re- he wouldn't do the film - he told me, he said "I won't do the film unless you edit it" - and I said "Yeah OK". He said "Because we just don't trust" - he said "It might be our fault - we don't trust editors". But by that time I had done loads of commercials with them and I had cut the commercials. Well that's easy thirty seconds - and er - they trusted me.

01:43:49

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

But they said - "We trust you because you know the timing - you know when to cut away and finish the gag - you know" he said "There's no egg in our faces - if you edit" And I said "Yeah"

01:43:58

So we shot it and - er - and I edited it - er - and then we - we -we -we they wanted - they were like Laurel and Hardy - Ernie was very happy to leave it to you - Eric wanted to be there in the edit room and with you the whole time and for the dubbing and for the music and for everything - and it - he used to go grey, with tiredness - you know? And he's like that (impression) at - the end of it I - I had finished the film and Thames had seen it and that was OK

01:44:38

Ernie wrote me a lovely letter saying - as far as he was concerned it was the best film that they had done - and I said "Well that's not saying much you know". But he actually said "I think it's the best film we've - we've ever done". Eric didn't talk to me - no - and I phoned up Ernie and I said - "Suddenly all gone quiet from Eric" - he said "Yeah - he said yeah he - he er - he does that after shows - he just has lost confidence in everything he does - even after a show".

01:45:12

I said "It's very like Peter Sellers" - he said "Yes" - he said "He's just lost" - he said "Now, if it goes out and gets reasonable reviews and things like that he'll come back up again". But the film went out - was shown once on television - I saw Eric after that a couple of times and he was - he wasn't over the moon he said "I'm quite happy with it yes - its alright not bad - not exactly one hundred percent as I thought it would be and I wanted it to be but very happy with it".

01:45:42

And of course then he died - and Joan his wife said to me - I really - Phillip Jones said "When can we repeat the show?" And Ernie wanted to repeat it - and Joan said "I'd rather not have it repeated because it reminds me of him being ill" - he's very ill - and I don't know the entire truth of that story but that's what Ernie told me - so it has never been repeated - and its lying there - you know. It's been shown, this is interesting, it's been shown at the BFI. And I was invited along for a showing,- in the big theatre and invited up to do an interview after it -

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

and they loved it- the audience absolutely cheered and laughed and loved it and question and answer afterwards.

01:46:34

So it - it helped me a lot that - because I had always felt - maybe Eric - you know maybe - um - um - um.

Q: When you saw it again on a big screen did he look tired id he look ill?

01:46:45

JOE: Yeah he did seem to me - yeah - and I think yeah

Q: That was affecting him his

01:46:51

JOE: I think it did - you know - I think it did - but you know - when you're working and; I mean Sellers was the same - I mean - when I worked with Peter Sellers there would be sometimes round about four o'clock or something in the afternoon he'd say "Joe love - you know - can I go home?". And you had to let him go home - er because you could see the colour changing and Eric was the same. Michael Bentine told me that once years ago - Michael Bentine said - Michael suffered from - er - mal - migraine and like Spike, he'd have to go away and lie in a dark room for two days. And you just have to stop shooting - and wait until he got better and came back

Q: Yeah - yeah because he died quite young didn't he Bentine

01:47:30

JOE: Yes - yeah mid-fifties - same as Leonard Rossiter - and he was the same - Leonard had a heart problem that nobody knew anything about, and it wasn't until he died and he had to have a post-mortem - because he died just off stage. They found out he had a heart defect that could have killed him when he was a child - he was - you know could have died or he could have lived to til he was ninety. But - but your right but - er - I felt that it was interesting to - Bentine was the one I said - Bentine was the one that said to me - "Comedy is energy.. Unless you've got energy you can't be funny" - yeah. A lot of truth

Q: Yeah - yeah absolutely yeah - um - I've got a note here - something called Christmas Conjuring Caper - Charles Dickens?

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

01:48:18

JOE: Oh - that's yes - that's - er - 'What the Dickens' - it's called - 'What the Dickens' - and that was done er - that was done - er - er - br - in Bristol - for - er - HTV - and er - (laughs) Jackie Stoller - Kenneth Haigh - er - Chris - er - Kenneth Cranham - Ben Cross - a wonderful cast - marvellous cast and er, it was based around the fact that Charles Dickens - was a professional conjurer - prestidigitator - great card tricks and stuff. So its based around the fact that he also founded the orphans home in London - er - it's based around the fact that he would put on a Christmas show in his own house for the orphans and the orphans would all get a day off - out of the orphan - come to his house where they met - er - personalities of the day and actors and stuff and they would be entertained and he would do card tricks.

01:49:23

It was a lovely Christmas evening thing - yeah I mean -er- and that-that - that -that was received very well - it didn't

Q: Was the - how - how - what was your contribution did you write and direct it or

01:49:35

JOE: No - no I - er - I directed it and produce - produced and directed - no Jackie Stoller was producer - and I directed it but the interesting thing was that - er - that BAFTA saw it - Jackie put it into BAFTA and BAFTA saw it - and said - "We don't have a category for this - and we absolutely love it" - it - it got rave notices and in Punch - I can't remember his name you know the guy that was married to Billy Whitelaw

Q: Yes - yes - him

01:50:11

JOE: German name -

Q: Muller

01:50:13

JOE: Anyway - Muller! Is it Muller?

Q: Yes - yes it was

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

01:50:16

JOE: He wrote - he said "This is one of the best things on television" and stuff like that you know - anyway - it went into BAFTA and they said "We don't have the category for this" -so - the marvellous thing is Jackie Stoller phoned me afterwards and she said - "They've now found a category for - er - light entertainment - comedy entertainment things - for next year", she said "Unfortunately we won't be there next year! So we've changed the BAFTA rules but we're not getting an award". Which is lovely - isn't it marvellous - but er - I - I love that

01:50:50

But I - I did enjoy doing it - once again as I was going to say - which might be on interest - I went down there to Bristol to do it and I - after - we'd had - we'd had two weeks rehearsal up here in London. And I planned it and said "Right we're shooting it on one camera". They nearly went mad down at Bristol because they'd four cameramen - you know - with know with four cameras - and I said "Ah - I want to shoot it in one camera" - and they said "You can't shoot it" and I said "Yeah - yeah I can shoot in it the time" - and I said - "Have the four cameramen around and let them take turns each of ca - you know".

01:51:24

Now the first couple of days - they hated it but eventually the cameraman came on our side and began at the end of the day to - to - suggest set ups and I said "That's the difference - that's the difference between four cameras" - I said "Four cameras your tromboning in and out I'm over here - I can - I can get a close up there and I can ki - you know - kidnap and shot here". I said "Here we can shoot exactly what we what - like a movie". And they all agreed - and we used to have discussions - I used to get there half an hour early in the morning and talk about the shots and they would draw and do shoot - and (stutter) we shot it - at the time no problem - and they loved it - and it looked great

Q: Yeah - well it's better for the lighting isn't it!

01:52:05

JOE: It's better yeah! Exactly because you can light each set up (laughs) lovely but yeah they loved it - (interviewer: um - I've got) oh at that time you'll love this - when I went there - the first day - we were talking about television - ad they said "That show that they're doing up

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

Liverpool" - that - er - what is it Hollyoaks or something - what was the first thing Phil Redman

Q: Brookside

01:52:26

JOE: Brookside - "That's the death of television". I said "No it's not", I said I gotta tell you as far as I - I "That's probably the future of television - we had these - no

Q: That was single camera of course

01:52:37

JOE: Yeah I know - I know I said I'm sorry that's probably

Q: It had to be because the houses were like this

01:52:41

JOE: Exactly - but they were against it you know - they said "That's the death of television" I said "No - no" I said "That's probably the future - yeah". I said "It's the difference between montage - where in a film - as - as Eisenstein says - you can have somebody in Moscow nod to somebody and somebody in Leningrad nods back" (laughs) that's the difference (laughs)

Q: I've got one more production - and that's the 'Mating Game'

01:53:10

JOE: Ah that was it - 'The Ma.. we talked about, sorry that was it - we talked - it's - er - that was for Yorkshire Television - that my friend Duncan Wood who we'd met in the Army with Humming Bates (?) he phoned me and said "We've got an American home box office thing to be done here - er - would you like to come up and do it it's a comedy?"- and I went up and did it. There was a guy in it called Joe Regalbuto - which you'll probably never - know his name but he later appeared in a few Tom Cruise movies and the woman in it was the star of the series 'Honey I Shrank the Kids' - where suddenly the kids became small and all of that

01:53:50

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

But that wasn't too happy because she - the woman was a little bit - er - thought she was in charge of the production and - er - used to say - "I demand to see the tapes shot back - played back to me on the floor" - and I said "No - I'm not gonna get in to that - you know " - because I did it a couple of times and she would then start to explain to me where the cameras should be, and that she wanted to do it again because she hadn't given enough. And everybody was standing around looking at their watches - Ian Lavender - who was in it - very good actor and Ian was in it and - er- - eventually one day she refused to - er - go on with the scene - and I said "OK" er - I went off floor and phoned Duncan Wood old friend from the Army years ago and I told him what was happening and he said

01:54:44

"Well OK I'll come down" - so Duncan came out of his office - he was then Head of Yorkshire - came out of his office and said to her - "Let's go and have a talk", and said to me "Can you get on?". I said "Yeah I'll get on with something else". Took her off - and - er - I'd found out later, had taken her up to the office phoned Hollywood, spoke to her agent and then put the phone down and said "OK well you finish today, unless you go down and behave yourself", and she came down - no problem - and that's what an executive producer should do- isn't it lovely but I think Humming Bates had nothing to do with it (laughs)

Q: Then - um what I've got

01:55:25

JOE: Do you mean I'm still working? (laughs)

Q: No, in a word I mean

01:55:29

JOE: I'm exhausted

Q: Your - your - um

01:55:31

JOE: I'm being interviewed

Q: Yes - er - yes doing - appearing in interview shows and retrospectives and whatever - whatever - I mean that is to a large extent enjoyable isn't it!

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

01:55:44

JOE: Yes - oh no - I - mean - I mean I have good recall - but my problem is as you've probably seen from this interview - whoever eventually sees it - I'm speaking from the grave - no - that - that - I - I jump a grass hopper, it's because you know - if you say something like Peter Sellers I immediately think "Oh, I first met Peter Sellers at the Odeon Cinema in Swiss cottage - ah - but then he and I fell out over Casino Royale but later did 'The Great McGonagall' and you

Q: All of that is flashing past

01:56:17

JOE: ... and that's flashing you know - because you can't say "Then I met Peter Sellers and then I didn't meet.." - it's part of, he's been part of my life - just like Leonard Rossiter - part of my life - you know - it - it - it's - these are the things that you remember.

Q: But - um - you contributed to all sorts of television programs about these people and - and - other - other luminaries um - anyone of those stand out in your memory as being spot on or not good or?

01:56:47

JOE: Well yeah - I did a - yes - I mean I did a thing for Home Box Office where they did a - can we talk about the history of Casino Royale - and - er - so they came over here with a crew and - er - they said we would like to shoot at Shepperton I said "I don't want to go back there" (laughs) So we didn't. They did, but I didn't but I said no I really don't want to go back there - not that I have bad memories I said "I just" - and they said no "That's OK we will find another location for your interview - but we'll go to Shepperton and shoot some empty stages" and I said - "And put echo over my voice" (laughs)

01:57:27

Because they said - "we gotta" they said - "We think - we think you're the only director that's left alive" - you know - (laughs) of a - because Val Guest had died as you know - and Robert Parrish had died you know - you know

Q: Was there somebody else - was there a

01:57:41

JOE: Oh yeah I - er - Ken - oh what's his name

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

Q: Hughes no - um -

01:57:49

JOE: Well yeah it would be John Houston - he died

Q: John Houston yes - yes - yes of course

01:57:52

JOE: And he died - yeah Ken Hughes

Q: Ken - Ken Hughes yeah

01:57:57

JOE: That's the five and me - but I mean John Houston was funny because I had met John Houston before he died in New York - years after it, and I was in a bar, my wife and I, we were in a bar off Broadway. And my wife had got tired and she said "I'm going upstairs". It was in a hotel bar - "I'm going upstairs to bed" I said "Oh, well" I said "I'll just have one more then I'll go"

01:58:20

And she went upstairs to bed and I'm sitting there and in comes John Houston and he sees me - and I'm sitting watching television in this bar and he se - "Mr. McGrath - Hello do you remember.." - I said "What do you mean do I remember you of course!" He said - "I'll have a Bourbon" (laughs) so he had a bourbon sat there and he and I spoke about Casino Royale

01:58:44

So they love that Home Box Office - the fact that he had been able to come back and tell his story - "Oh David Niven sends you his regards". Because David Niven and I had - had started off in Casino Royale and Niven - of course a lot of people don't know was born in Scotland - David Niven - and he said "We'll form a Sckosher Nostre (laughs) darling - we'll show Charlie Feldman what's what" that - that

Q: no - no - no - no - now the film I mean without you I mean - it went off to Pinewood Elestree

01:59:15

JOE: Everywhere! Well do you know the marvellous story - er - er - one art director met another director - Vincent Korda met Michael Stringer -

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

and Michael Stringer who was working with me - said "What are you working on?". And Vince Korda said "Casino Royale" - and he said "You can't be I'm working Casino..." - he said "So am I I'm at Pine" - we didn't know! Charlie Feldman had another - sorry I'm - Charlie Feldman had another crew working at Pinewood and hadn't told Niven - the actors - anybody else - I mean - unbel! And hoping it would all fit together and as Val Guest said later on he then was give the job of cutting or trying to make sense of it. Marvellous. Michael Stringer came to see me crying - he said oh I'm sorry

Q: I've worked with him too

02:00:07

JOE: He was in tears

Q: yeah um - um - well - er one thing I kept meaning to say and I'd forgotten - also very interesting are the ones that got away - I mean the ones you'd spent some preparation time on and they never got made or ideas that you talked about

02:00:28

JOE: Yes - well I mean - that would fill a book yeah, I mean it would fill a book, I mean I worked, I worked with Terry Southern on - the - the er - his first novel 'Flash and Filigree', which was his first novel - which was - was is still absolutely up to date- it- it - it was based on Los Angeles and the whole American Medicare business of that you insure yourself and that if you can't insure yourself you die! You know or you - if you get taken into a hospital the first thing they look for is your credit card - not - not - what's wrong with you. And he wrote this in the sixties - and its absolutely marvellous because what he brought in to it as well was something that is incredibly now - is this fact that - if you can afford it - organ transplant you'll live till your over one hundred, and where are they getting the organs? From the third world

02:01:31

And they're going - and they're getting people and they're saying "Would you like to..?" you know, people sleeping in the streets - they're waking them up and saying, "Lets have one of those and we'll give you three hundred dollars!" Then it gets flown back to a guy that's ordered it and is waiting for it. So Terry wrote that as a comedy - but there is a black - you see the guy that wrote 'Doctor Strangelove' you can see him writing this - and it's about this comedy doctor, you

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

know - yeah. And we had James Coburn as the doctor - yeah and Peter Sellers once again - as this idiot who was gonna sell his organs you know?

Q: And it never got made?

02:02:10

JOE: No - I got the screen play of it and all that oh and er - also I was - Anthony Burgess you know Anthony Burgess the great Anthony Burgess who wrote 'Clockwork Orange' ? I was supposed to - I was involved in 'Clockwork Orange' - before Stanley came in on it - in fact I've still got the book from Burgess which he gave me - and er - I was pencilled in - not - not told I would be directing in. But I was pencilled in to do it - with the Producer Si Litvinoff and a guy called Max Raabe - and I got offered another film - I can't remember which one it is- and er - 'Clockwork Orange' wasn't in any state to go. But I went and I did this other film and by the time I'd doing it and all that - Raabe and Litvinoff paid me off what they were and got Kubrick - and er, you know, I mean who can I - I mean it's a marvellous - he did a marvellous job on it - great job on it. But Raabe and Litvinoff hated working with him because Stanley - a perfectionist and they just couldn't take that

02:03:10

Seemingly he barred them from the set - and they had bought the rights to it. And when he'd got the job - barred them - yeah just you know you don't come on the set you leave me alone - you know they hated that.

02:03:24

Q: As I told you we went - I was on the Directors Guild Council for twenty years and every year we we'd give a lifetime achievement award you know - television - theatre - film - television theatre - film and we - we decided to do Stanley Kubrick - and we found it very hard to get people to say anything about him

02:03:44

JOE: I know - yeah I know - yeah

Q: You know

02:03:46

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

JOE: Peter Sellers - Sellers was good on Kubrick because Sellers said that he - that he was a complete perfectionist. Now the thing of working with Sellers is Sellers did not like to do a lot of takes, you know he would lose energy. He'd say "I'd think we've done enough" you know - or "can I just do one more? I've got an idea". And you'd let him, but he said working with Stanley - you would get to take thirty six and thirty seven and eventually Stanley would say print two and seven. And he'd say "What was I doing?" you know. And I'd say "Well pot calling the kettle black because you're a perfectionist in your own way". He said yeah - yeah

02:04:26

Because once Peter got it right he wouldn't care about the rest of the cast - that was it. "I've got it right - that's it can we move on?" - you know - but Stanley great director - marvellous director. Well what I was going to say is I then got Burgess - Anthony Burgess sent me his first novel 'Enderby' - 'Inside Mr. Enderby' and we got Richard Burton was going to play it, John Bryan, who produced 'The Man who Would Be King' with Michael and Shaun. And he was to produce and er - Burton unfortunately got ill, and couldn't do it and I've still got Burgess's screen play in there that he sent me and we worked on - I didn't do any writing I said "No - I'm not doing any writing on this - let's leave it to you John and send it to Richard first"

02:05:16

So we sent it the original - er - and of course the Welshness and Burgess wasn't actually Welsh but he - he - he could speak - I think he could speak ten languages. I mean he could speak ten languages - just switch from one to another - and he knew Welsh, he could speak Welsh, so he wrote a whole thing in Welsh to Burton and sent it - you know so that was another one which I'd one - and we got - er - oh god would have loved to have done it I mean it would have been marvellous you know.

02:05:46

Oh we had Anouk - Anouk Aimee as the girl - as the woman

Q: Was she married to Albert Finney at the time?

02:05:54

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

JOE: no it was before - before - yeah it was before that - otherwise we would have got Finney! (laughs)

Q: Two for the price of one

02:06:03

JOE: So there's lots of other things I could have - but you know - I mean I had something just now - something just now which is a short which is, its based on, it's a good way to finish this. It's based on a joke - a film joke - that everybody in Hollywood knows. And - it's - it's a short film but - it - it - it you know, it can be shot in about two or three days - just two or three days - but it's a guy who's in the Army in Vietnam - a ex-screenwriter and he comes out of the Army - comes back and he wants to get back in to the movie business. And he has an agent and the agent says you know - you know there's a couple of jobs that are coming up - maybe you can do some ghost writing

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So he says OK and he gets a couple of scripts and he does a bit of ghost writing - but he's lost it he's really got writer block - kind of. And his agent comes back and says they don't like what you've done. And he says "I know" he says - "it's terrible" he said - "maybe it's being away I just can't". He said "Well - unless you can do something I mean because" - he said "OK I don't know - " Agent goes away. He goes to bed that night, he wakes up in the middle of the night and he hears somebody in his room, a noise (impression) somebody's using his computer so he says "What the hell?" So he gets up and looks round the corner and there's this little leprechaun - typing at his computer

02:07:38

He says "What the hell?" and he has a gone you know. The leprechaun - "Put the gun down you know, are you pleased - are you pleased to see me? Shove that gun down". He says "What are you doing?" He says "Well I understand you're suffering you know - from the block - a writer's block - and its my job - I come around helping people. I helped Raymond Chandler, every - other big names" he says - he says yeah. He says what - what are you doing - he said "This thing you were asked to fill in you know - do a couple of pages on I've - I've done" he said, "Have a look at it." He says - "I'm sure you'll like it"

02:08:10

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

So he looks at it he says "Hey - this is not bad". And the leprechaun says "You leave me alone to finish it, go back to bed in the morning, call your agent." He says "Right". So he goes back to bed-

02:08:21

Gets up in the morning, presses the button up it comes on the screen - prints it out - calls the agent - agent comes round - "This is really good stuff! Take it to the studio" He said. This is the re-write - gets a phone call - they love it - they think it's wonderful. Now listen - they've got another idea that they want you to look it- this is a whole original screen play have a look at it. He says "Yeah OK ." Sends it round - he gets it, he goes to bed - sits up in bed drinking some whiskey waiting - the little guy arrives and says "Yeah!". He said "They loved it" - he said "I told you that what have you got to do now?"

02:08:58

He says "They want to do a synopsis of this idea they've got for film but they want some scenes written - dialogue and scenes written - you know ". He said "Oh let's have a look at it". So he says "OK - off you go to bed, and I'll take care of this". So he goes to bed - takes care of it, gets up in the morning - there's a scene there, calls the agent - gives it to the agent - the agent get - phone call - they love it - they want you to do the whole screen play - listen and you get - five hundred thousand dollars up front. He said "You've gotta take this". He said and - "God knows where this will lead to - your just back from a war" He says OK

02:09:39

Wakes up that night - doesn't appear - what the hell he hasn't appeared - what am I going to do? I can't get in touch with him - I better start some work with this stuff. So he starts working on it - it's no use its no use - poom! The little guy appears - he says "You've got the block again". He says "Look", he says "The thing is - you've gotta really beat the block - I've done a couple of jobs for you - get over the block - have a couple of glasses of whiskey - relax" He says "No wait a minute - wait a minute" he says "You do it" he said "Because I - I can't do it".

02:10:20

And the little guy says "No I'm sorry I've got another job" - he said "I've got another screenwriter I've got to go and help". He says "I'm off". He

BECTU ORAL HISTORY
JOE MCGRATH

says "Listen - I'll give you anything you want - just - just I've been offered five hundred grand" he said "for this - just do it - I'll give you two hundred and fifty thousand"

02:10:38

He said "No money means nothing to me" - he says "Are you married?" He says "Yes Norma the wife" "Wouldn't you like a holiday in Hawaii or something like that". "No - no - no I can't do that" he said - "er, you know, the jobs finished here and they're expecting me somewhere else, I'm off to do it "

02:10:55

He says wait a minute - "I'll give you all the money - just do it because then it will help me to get on with it" - he says "No - no sorry". He says "Is there anything? Is there anything you want that I can give you - that - that will make you do it?" He says "Yeah well there is one thing" - he says "What?" He says "Could I have joint screenplay?" He says "Get out of here you little shit!" Nothing worse than a Gnome on the way up. That's the short I'd like to do. (laughs)

Q: Well thank you Joe

02:11:32

JOE: No thank you for being so patient!

Q: Won - wonderful story and

02:11:35

JOE: No - thank you for being - you like the story? It's a good short story - it's a good joke, everybody knows that in Hollywood you know - they'll give you anything for the screenplay (laughs)

Q: OK

02:11:48

JOE: Are you happy? I was moving around quite

End