

# John Krish (writer, director, editor)

4/12/1923 - ?

by [admin](#) — last modified Jul 27, 2008 02:21 PM

**BIOGRAPHY:** John Krish was born in London in 1923. His father, a Russian émigré, was the founder of the New Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra. Krish was inspired to enter documentary film-making after having seen *Night Mail* (1936). He was accepted as a trainee by Ian Dalrymple at the Crown Film Unit. He worked as assistant on *Target for Tonight* (1941) and as a runner on *The Pilot is Safe* (1941). As an editor he worked on *Ferry Pilot* (1942) and *Coastal Command* (1942), and with Humphrey Jennings on films such as *Listen to Britain* (1942) and *Fires Were Started* (1943). Towards the end of the war, Krish worked as an editor at Merton Park with Cecil Musk and later with Richard Massingham on various documentary shorts and Ministry of Information trailers, including the 'Food Flashes'. Titles discussed include *Flying with Prudence* (1946), *This is China* (1946), *Health in Our Time* (1948). After the war, Krish joined British Transport Films as a director, making films such as *A Works Outing*, *Away for the Day*, and most famously, *The Elephant Will Never Forget* (1953) about the end of the tram service in South London. Over this film, he fell out with Edgar Anstey and left British Transport Films. His first feature-length documentary *Captured* (1959), was made at World Wide for the British Army as a training film on how to withstand interrogation under torture. The film was subject to security classification and as a result was only seen within the Army. Krish went on to work for Leon Clore on films such as *I Want to Go To School* (1959) for the National Union of Teachers, and *Return to Life* (1960) about refugees for the World Refugee Year. Other documentary films discussed in detail in this interview include *I Think They Call Him John* (1964), about old age, *Let My People Go* (1961) about apartheid, *Drive Carefully, Darling* (1975), about road safety, and *The Finishing Line* (1977) a controversial film made for British Transport to discourage children from trespassing on railway lines. **SUMMARY:** In this interview, John Krish talks to Rodney Giesler about his career in the film industry. He is an extremely engaging interviewee and he gives very detailed recollections of the film units and personalities he worked with, including Humphrey Jennings, Cecil Musk, Edgar Anstey, Harry Watt, Leon Clore, Julian Wintle. He is particularly interesting on his philosophy of documentary film-making and the often difficult ethical implications of making good documentaries. Krish began making feature films with *Unearthly Stranger* (1963), and throughout the 1960s and 70s his documentaries were made alongside a string of feature films, as well as celebrated television series such as *The Avengers* (1961) and *The Saint* (1962). The feature films discussed at length here include *The Wild Affair* (1963) and *Decline and Fall* (1968). Krish found feature film-making more stressful than documentary film-making, and particularly did not relish the working relationship with various producers. However, the interview concentrates mainly on his documentary work. NB The interview stops half way through, but arrangements have been made with Geisler and Krish to complete it.

**BECTU History Project - Interview No. 326**

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Transcription Date: 2003-12-02

Interview Date: 1994-03-22

Interviewers: Rodney Giesler

Interviewee: John Krish

Tape 1, Side 1

This is an interview with John Krish, recorded by Rodney Giesler in London on 22nd March 1994.

**Rodney Giesler:** When were you born?

**John Krisch:** 1923.

**Rodney Giesler:** And can you tell me a bit about your background, family background?

**John Krisch:** Yes. My father was a musician and he created a symphony orchestra of unemployed musicians - unemployed because of the coming of sound, strangely enough, people who played in the pits in cinema - and that was called 'The New Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra'. And I was one of four, the youngest of four. There was a big gap between me and the other three, something like seven, eight years. They were very close together and then there was this long gap and then came me. And I was born a musician. I was born with the gift of a very good ear and a sense of rhythm and a very good memory. But my father didn't want me to be a musician, he had suffered a great deal. He'd gone away from Russia to be one himself and that was his justification. I think that his reasons were much deeper than that and er... So my childhood on looking back, which I've had to do through prolonged therapy, was extremely unhappy. Because I longed to be a pianist and I wasn't even taught music, literally it was denied me, and so that set up an enormous amount of problems. The brother I was closest to who was called Felix, was an actor and so I thought I'd want to go into the theatre, and I hero-worshipped him, he was the middle of the elder three. And he was killed in the war, in the Lancasters, and that was - that is a pain that I have not yet got over. But relating to that, when I was fifteen I was evacuated because the war had just started, and school was a total mess. And so I left in time to be home for the Blitz. I wanted to go into the theatre, into the theatre - which was The Oxford Playhouse. We're now talking - I can't work out the dates, anyway I was fifteen. And they hadn't got any vacancies, I wanted to be an assistant stage manager. Earlier in my life, before the war, the school had gone to the Science Museum and I'd seen Night Mail in the cinema and never forgotten it. And because I couldn't get into the theatre I decided to try the people who'd made Night Mail. And I found out where the GPO Film Unit were, they were in Soho Square. So I went there and I was told they'd moved to Denham. And I got the name of the woman who was responsible for employing people, who I was told was called a Production Manager. And being very cheeky, I went to Denham, and found myself confronted by police at the gate, very high security then - this would have been 1940 I suppose, '41, '40. So I said that I'd come from the GPO in London to see Dora Wright, and they let me through. And Dora Wright was so amazed that I'd got through the police that she - she was immediately very taken with me, and got me to

see Ian Dalrymple who was head of the unit. The Crown Film Unit I think it was then called, it had been changed from The GPO Film Unit. And he was also very taken with my initiative and gave me a job there and then, as a trainee. He asked me what my hobbies were and I'd said 'music' although it wasn't really a hobby since I couldn't read, but I could play very well. But then I was interested in things like model theatres, so he put me in the art department with Teddy Carrick. He thought that would be the place to start someone, with Teddy Carrick who was at Blackheath, which was still operating as a studio for the GPO Film Unit/Crown. And in talking with him it became quite clear that I wasn't a draftsman and I wasn't a model-maker and I wasn't really suited to that at all. So then it was thought that I would go as Ken Cameron's assistant in the sound department, but that didn't interest me particularly and I found Ken very cold and difficult. And so they made the best decision, which was to put me in the cutting room, which is the best possible start. And not only that but they were so keen on making the best use of me and me getting the best out of it that I was put on the floor as a second assistant to the director and then put into the cutting room on the same film. And so I learnt an enormous amount. The very first film I worked on as an assistant was to Joe Mendoza strangely enough, whom we were talking about a moment ago, on Target for Tonight. They were shooting in the studio, the Rock Studios in Elstree, I don't know what they're called now or if they've gone. The crew room stuff and the briefing in Target for Tonight. And that was my first experience of filmmaking.

**Rodney Giesler:** And R.Q. McNaughton was the editor wasn't he?

**John Krisch:** Yes I think he was - it was either him or McAllister I'm not sure which. I in fact did not go into the cutting room because they had signed me to something else after that. But I was on the floor for a fortnight, getting the tea and getting the fags and being bullied by Harry Watt, who was a bully. Nevertheless it was a wonderful experience. And I remember I couldn't understand, they were shooting night interiors, [chuckles] as I learned to call them, but with so much light coming from the lamps. And it was only when I saw rushes that I could see that it was looking like night, but certainly to my eye it looked nothing like night of course. There were no actors in Target, these were all the real people, I think most of who died or were killed.

After that, because I appeared to be a very willing, running-type assistant, they put me with Jack Lee on his first film, which was to be shot in Dover and on the channel during the Battle of Britain. It was called The Pilot is Safe, it was a five-minuter, and it was about the air-sea rescue boats. And I went with, as his assistant and as assistant to Skeets Kelly, the cameraman, in those days there were just three of us. And I also looked after the budget - I was now sixteen, sixteen and-a-half, seventeen. So I was carrying the gear, pulling the focus, doing the budget, getting the food, booking the hotels, and going out into the Channel in the middle of a raid and waiting for pilots to drop into the water. At night, Dover was absolutely ringing to the sound of the guns which were bombarding France, it was the most [chuckling] un-restful occasion I've ever been on in my life.

It was the first one also where I learnt to smoke a pipe. Jack Lee smoked a pipe and I thought that was the thing to do. So I got a pipe and made the mistake of lighting up for the first time in the middle of the Channel of course and I turned as green as the water. It was er - it was an extraordinary experience. They were very good to me, both of them, both Skeets and Jack. And Jack in fact became a very close friend and kind of looked after me, they all did there at the

Crown Film Unit, they were my real family, for me, because they cared for me in an extraordinary way.

Dora Wright, the production manager mothered me, in many ways much more than my own mother. She fed me - I was getting a pound a week and I was living in Herne Hill with my parents and so the fares were eating up almost my entire salary - wage. And so she organised for me to sleep in a dressing room to save the fares, then she would feed me to save me spending money in the canteen. Dal, Ian Dalrymple realised that I was under-educated and was concerned and very caring about that, I went to stay with him too. Pat Jackson was also very fond of me and looked after me. There was an extraordinary feeling - they really were my family, and of course the one I loved most was Jack Holmes, who was called Mr Holmes in those days. And they all gave me an immense amount of responsibility. I went back into the cutting rooms on *The Pilot is Safe*, then I worked on *Ferry Pilot* in the cutting rooms, which Pat Jackson made. I think that was cut by Gordon Hales who was also incredibly kind.

And then the big responsibility came when Jack started *Coastal Command*, and he - I went straight into the cutting room on that. And that, I think, was cut by McNaughton - I'm not sure. But Jack insisted that I was given all the post-synch, to supervise and to put back, which was a massive job because it was all optical film in those days of course. There was no rock-and-roll, you couldn't do it again, you just had to do it over and over and over and over again. And we were doing post-synch of course with non-actors, with a crew, and so there was an enormous amount of footage. And it was my job to fit it all. And shortly after that - oh there's one very nice story about Jack and myself. In those days if you weren't doing very much you could sneak off up to Town with a trade show ticket, which you could generally get from the production office cause they were always sent there. And the editor I was working with decided that there was not enough to do for the moment, so we went up to see Anthony Asquith's film, I think it was *Freedom Radio*, it was showing at The Plaza or something like that, at eleven o'clock in the morning. And when the lights went up, who should I see sitting in front of me but Jack Holmes who was the senior director. And I thought, "Oh my God this is it," you know, [chuckles] it's like being found out for truancy, I mean it really was bad news! And as he was getting on his coat he looked round and saw me. And absolutely typical Jack he said, "If you don't say anything, I won't!" [Laughs] And from that moment we became very close friends and that continued until his death.

After the Crown Film Unit, I went into the army. I think *Coastal Command* was probably the last film I worked on there. I was called up and I went into the artillery and was sent to a War Office selection board to be an officer and then I contracted meningitis. In the meantime, just before that, the brother I hero-worshipped, Felix, was killed. And so I was er - laid very low and obviously open to anything that was going and it happened to be meningitis. So I was in hospital for nine months and should have been discharged, but because the invasion had started now they wanted anybody who could stand and who was slightly warm-blooded. And so I was posted to the Army Film Unit where I worked on *The True Glory* as an editor, with a whole bunch of other editors. But I was very ill still and eventually was discharged - I had a nervous breakdown. I know that's a phrase which is used lightly, but it was exactly that, I had to go back to hospital.

And um - I was then discharged and took a long time to recoup. When I went back to work I worked for Richard Massingham as a - no that's a lie, I went to Merton Park first as an editor. Julian Wintle was the supervising editor there. And Merton Park in those days was made up of a number of different companies under the umbrella of The Film Producer's Guild. And it was thought that I would go to Green Park which was the arty end of it, which Ralph Keene was the producer. But they already had an editor and so I was put with another company with the expectation that they would take me when the other editor left. And I cut a number of films there, an air-force instructional film for a director called Cecil Musk, who was a very dear man, he used to put boot polish on his hair. And he saw himself as an old-time movie director, and so was known affectionately as 'Cecil B. DeMusk'! [Laughs] And he actually used to come to Merton Park Studios in riding gear, like his namesake, and used a megaphone. I mean to use a megaphone on the stage at Merton Park is like using a megaphone in a telephone box. I mean you just don't do it, but he did! [Chuckling] He was a very, very sweet man, not a very good director unfortunately.

And um - I also cut 'The History of China' [chuckles] which was a five-minuter, called This is China in five minutes. [Chuckles] Oh my God! What else did I cut there? Well there was a huge change in my career on the film that 'Cecil B. DeMusk' directed, it was called Flying with Prudence. It was for the RAF and about safety and flying, and Prudence was personified as a girl who was a kind of friendly ghost girl who sat in the cockpit with them. Nobody else saw her but the person she was watching over. She was played by Pam Cutts, who was Graham Cutts's daughter. And for authenticity, Cecil insisted that the fuselage of a plane be brought onto the stage, rather than have it built. And of course it was disaster for the sound department. There was absolutely nowhere for them to put the mike without it being in shot. There weren't any such thing as these kind of mikes that I'm wearing. And so the entire film had to be post-synched. And I was absolutely in the middle of it.

I'd been asked by the supervising editor, Julian Wintle how long it would take and I said that it would take at least four weeks before we could dub - I mean it was massive, every cough and spit there was nothing but guide-tracks. And so he said, "That's fine", but two weeks later the phone rang and it was the producer, a very aggressive man called Frank Hoare. He said, "I'm in the theatre, waiting, where is it?" "Where's what?" I said. He said, "We're dubbing." I said, "We're not dubbing, we're not dubbing for two weeks, I told Julian this." "Don't rat on your colleagues," he said. So it was obvious that Julian had said one thing to me, had agreed one thing with me and had said something quite different to Frank. And so I left. I finished the film and said that I was not going to stay. And one of the other producers within the company heard that I was going, a man called Ronald Riley, one of the coldest men I've ever met. He said, "I'm going to make a film about steel and I'd like you to direct it." It was to be shot in Ebbw Vale. And that was the first film I directed. Ray Elton shot it. We were there I think six or eight weeks. And I learnt an enormous amount. I was quite pushy.

I would have been - something like twenty-two or twenty-three, I was the youngest in the unit. And I couldn't understand why it took so long to light something [laughs]. I mean it was massive this steelworks, but I was very impatient. I wanted it all to look like - like an early Russian film. I wanted it to look as if it was Eisenstein shooting it. And it didn't, ultimately, but I mean the flowing steel, the sweaty heads, the smoke coming out of the stacks, I mean I really - I'd seen

these films and I thought I was going to make it look like October. But all the time I was very impatient to keep going, to keep going, and of course moving around the steelworks was - I mean an incredible problem for the crew, for Ray Elton and his sparks. And so it was fairly tense but gradually I learnt to curb my patience and the film was perfectly okay. I mean its derivative nature didn't seem to upset anybody, but it upset me because I could see that it was a very poor attempt to copy and I didn't attempt that after that, I learnt my lesson.

I directed - I don't think I directed any more for Merton Park. It was not a very happy place. The standards were very low on the whole, apart from Ralph Keene's lot. But they were still - he directed most of the things. And so there was nothing really that I wanted to do there so I went to work with Richard Massingham as a director/editor - writer/director, editor - no, director/editor then. And that was a very curious relationship. His wife knew my wife, which is how I got to know him. When my wife and I split I was persona non grata there. I made some trailers with him - does the name Massingham mean anything to you?

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes...

**John Krisch:** Oh yes, oh right. These um - the Ministry trailers, five minutes, Five Inches in the Bath, those kind of things, although I don't think it was that particular one. But I used his comic face as much as I could. I made a film for the army there, called Health in our Time which was about - really about hygiene. It sounds terribly dull, it was not dull at all - about the problems of living as a community. But it was about health, about world health really. And the last five minutes was a reconstruction, it ran about forty minutes and the last five or ten minutes was a reconstruction of the war in Burma, where the British won simply because they had better anti-malarial precautions than the Japanese. Um - now what did I do after that? I think I must have gone to Worldwide.

**Rodney Giesler:** This is about 1946 is it, straight after the war?

**John Krisch:** [Pause] I suppose it must have - yes, can we stop a moment? I just want to get this straight... [Break in recording] I think one of the most important films to me that I worked on in the Crown Film Unit, which for some reason I forgot to talk about, was Listen to Britain of course. Working with Humphrey was an amazing experience because he was quite unlike anybody else there. Watt was a kind of weak bully, Holmes was a gent, a mixture of - as I think I said in that screening - a mixture of Barry Fitzgerald and Jack Buchanan. And Jennings was way out on his own, he was so in love with making movies, with pictures, he was so excited by rushes that he couldn't sit and watch them, he would walk up and down. And that was immensely inspiring, that kind of enthusiasm was so contagious. But he was an absolute bastard to work with, because he was so single-minded. I was seventeen now, and the cutting room - I didn't work on the shooting of it, I worked in the cutting room. And because I was a junior I was not allowed to work at night, which is when they like to work. They like to start at four and go on until three or four in the morning - they would work for twelve hours. So that when I got into the cutting room the place was in total chaos. Humphrey shot an enormous amount of film every day. It was un-scripted, in spite of what his widow says, he just went out and shot. And I had the job every morning of re-filing the entire film. Because all the lids would be off the cans, all the

centres would be out of the rolls and they always wanted everything immediately, because it was made in the cutting room.

**Rodney Giesler:** Nothing logged I suppose?

**John Krisch:** I suppose it was logged, it must have been, it must have been. I must have done that as well, as well as numbering it of course - no it must have been logged, I'm sure it would have been. So that chaos had to be cleaned up, because they always wanted another four frames of something. But it was incredibly inspirational in spite of the misery. And it was misery because it was like the Aegean stables every morning - [chuckles] just hopeless. And the bins were stacked with film, all of which would have to be put away. I remember I had to go to the labs for something and on the way back decided to go into the canteen for a quick cup of something. And I'm sitting there and it's full of extras, this is Denham we're talking about. And suddenly Humphrey is standing at the door, shouting at me, "What the hell do you think you're doing there?" So I crept out feeling like something out of an H.M. Bateman drawing [laughs] - oh God Almighty! And I went back. But that was Humphrey, I mean he had absolutely no idea of how to deal with people, certainly with juniors. There's a very well known story, I mean he could really get up everybody's nose. When we were shooting *Fires Were Started*, they were on the roof at night, reconstructing a raid, fire, and he'd been absolutely impossible to the entire unit, especially to the continuity girl. And on the way down to the ground, via a fire escape, an iron fire escape, the continuity girl went ahead of him and as Humphrey was coming down she put her foot out to trip him, she was so beside herself with rage. That's what he could do to people. He saw it and stepped over it, otherwise he might have had an even earlier death. I thought he was amazing. I thought he was - the energy and the extraordinary single-mindedness, and his ability to make things, to photograph things and make them very evocative, deeply influenced me, unknowingly then, but later on I was aware that something of his spirit had stayed with me. A lot of people thought he was a phoney, I had absolutely no - I think he went nowhere in that direction at all. I think he was almost inarticulate with a kind of artistic rage, because he was a painter and a poet and a filmmaker, and he loved music, and it was all bursting out of him, which was splendid, infuriating but splendid. And a phoney he certainly wasn't. He loved this country, he loved - he was an immense patriot, and his films absolutely readily prove this love of the English and the British and their quiriness, and their spirit, which is all rapidly fading as we all know. God when you think what he would be thinking today, what he would have thought of Thatcher! I think he was lucky to die early, although his death upset me deeply, I think he was already repeating himself. I think *Diary for Timothy* is a repeat of *Listen to Britain*, and that's sad. And I think had he gone into Group 3 and started to try and make features, I think he would have been so unhappy that he would have gone back to painting or poetry, but wanting to make films all the time because he loved them so. But his wonderful enthusiasm and his simplicity, and Jack's humanity are the two greatest influences on me. Jack's capacity to get on with anybody without 'brown-nosing' anybody. I mean just his wonderful warmth with the unit or with non-actors is something I've relished and always tried to follow. And the dedication that Humphrey had, his incapacity to even think, to even say anything like, "Oh that will do." I mean it would be absolutely impossible for that sentence to come out of his mouth. "Oh we'll get away with that." I mean all these kind of film phrases that one hears, especially from people in television - "We'll get away with that" I absolutely can't stand, and it's because of him. And so it's made me quite prickly to work with, for some people, because I've been very demanding. I

was very lucky, you see, not to have started in the feature end at Denham, but to have started in the Crown Film Unit, with people who were being paid incredibly badly, who were incapable of clock watching, who were absolutely un-cynical. Who loved being there, loved working all hours, loved what they were doing, and spread it. And I was fortunate enough to catch it and it stuck with me forever. I've been called a perfectionist as a term of abuse. I don't regard it as such. I think it's a wonderful thing to have inherited from those people. Now where were we? We were at the end of Massingham...

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes.

**John Krisch:** ...and wondering what was coming next and whether it was - it must have been British Transport, it must have been. Which had just started - Edgar Anstey. We were in a couple of offices in Petit France in um - London Transport's head office. And Jack was there, Edgar Anstey, [Stuart] McAllister, Ian Ferguson was the production manager and er - one other man, I can't remember his name. And the first film - oh hang on - yes the first film that I did there I think was A Work's Outing which Jack and I directed - Jack Holmes. It was to be the works outing of a shoe factory from Derby, to London. We shot it with six cameramen and it was shot in a day. We went up the day before to have a look at the shoe factory and to find four people who we would feature, so that it wasn't just a monotonous bunch of people wandering about. And we shot a little stuff in the factory of them at work and then started out at seven the next day and shot on the train. Shot - we had cameraman, a cameraman at St Pancras who shot them coming off the train, then we got into the coaches, then went for a trip round London, then had lunch near The Central Hall, and then went on a boat up to Hampton Court, where they had tea. Then they went window-shopping and then they went back on the train. And we shot everything, except the return journey, we said goodbye to them on the platform of St Pancras. And at the centre of it was a roving reporter who was a man called Colin Wills, who was Australian. And he was to me the figure who would take us from one couple to another and just be a sort of continuity. And we photographed him and of course with everybody else. And he was due - I not only directed it with Jack but I had to cut it as well - and he was due to come up with the commentary, his personal diary of the day. And he just didn't turn up with it - he just didn't bother to do it. And we were coming up to the dubbing date and Edgar said, "Well you better write it, you were there." So that's how I wrote my very first commentary. And the film is warm, sentimental and I think is a very good record of the day. And from that moment I became a writer, director, thanks to Colin Wills not doing it....[Pause] My mind is going blank about what I did after that. Oh yes, I did a film called Away for the Day which was to be about the kind of parties that go on coach trips for the day in different parts of the country. And the idea was that we would shoot it over a month and then put it all together so that it looked as if it was all happening on the same day. And I had a unit of four - um, Reg Hughes, his assistant was Bob Paynter - who eventually worked on a lot of Michael Winner films - and my own assistant. And we went all round the country. We were shooting on 16mm in Kodachrome, which was the first time it had been attempted commercially, and it was so new that we couldn't see any rushes because they would have to process it all in one batch. So we were shooting and not knowing what we were getting. But worse than that, it had taken such a long time to set up that by the time we were actually ready to go, most of the coach trips had gone. And so instead of being able to make a sensible itinerary of starting in the South and going up the West Coast, North, across, down the East Coast and back, we were going from Blackpool to Dartmoor, from Dartmoor to

Worcester, I mean it was absolutely crazy! And we would travel overnight because we had to be there first thing in the morning. And there was no time ever to get to know anybody the night before cause we were never there in time. We arrived there just in time to go to the hotel and sleep. And so I would get to the assembly point for each of these groups, introduce myself and the unit, try and get from the driver an idea of where the beauty spots were. We would shoot the party getting into the coach, we would get into the coach and shoot some stuff. We would stop the coach, my assistant would have the camera car behind. We would all rush into the camera car, drive on at great speed to this beauty spot, set up and get a shot of the coach going by, pack it all up in the camera car, race on, stop the coach and get some more stuff of the inside! And all without trying to spoil their day, because they had a very tight schedule. They were due for lunch, they were due for tea, they were due for a tour, and...

**Rodney Giesler:** They were having fun!

**John Krisch:** They were having fun, it was their one day out, it was their summer holiday! These were, on the whole, very poor people - from a Welsh Valley for instance, a Miner's Association or whatever. And yes, having fun, that's the point. And we were, in our hysterical way, I mean fortunately they were a wonderful unit, except my assistant was a bit of a pain but he was all right. But worse than that, because we were shooting with this shitty Kodachrome which had absolutely no stops in it, it was - probably it was rated at 25. We would shoot and then the weather would come down, and we would have kind of a quarter of a trip and know that there was absolutely no point in going on. Well if we did go on it was unlikely that we were going to get anything. And so we shot a whole lot of bits with shitty weather. Nevertheless we finished. And I then um - saw the rushes and then saw the assembly, which was done by an editor, so-called. And I was absolutely appalled when I saw that, it was so awful! I told him that a third assistant could have done better. So I cut that myself. I think we went through, the labs produced something like thirty copies before they could produce the right colour of a London bus, which was absolutely crucial of course to London Transport who'd sponsored the damn thing! They didn't want pink buses! [Laughs] Or buses that looked like tomato soup! And um - oh it was awful, absolutely awful! The next film I did after that was the one that caused my exit. The trams were about to be taken off and Edgar asked me to go and shoot the last night at the New Cross depot. He gave me four hundred feet of stock - well, the production manager said, "Here's four hundred feet of stock, that's all you need, we only need this as a record." And I said, "But there's a film here!" "Oh no there isn't!" And I was so sure that there was a film that I went to John Shearman who was the assistant producer, and said, "We've got to make this because if we don't they'll have gone and there'll be absolutely nothing. Four hundred feet is not going to get me anywhere." And he agreed that we were going to have to do this in a very subversive way. So I stole the stock from the stock cupboard and he organised the equipment. And the production manager was kind of in on it but not quite. It was very hard to explain just how it happened. But I was given an assistant as a cameraman and the assistant was Bob Paynter who I knew very well. And the most wonderful assistant for me called Claude Hudson who was a total loony. He was the kind of dream assistant that when things were getting worse his humour would get greater. He was incapable of panic. And so there were just - Bob had an assistant for some of the time, there were just the three of us for most of it. And um - we were not allowed the unit car so we took our gear on a bus, Newman Sinclair and tripod, and I made up the film as we went along. And by the time I'd shot it, Edgar of course was by now aware of it, and quite angry. But

an editor was put on it, a man called Jack Ellitt, who I'd not worked with before, and he found me prickly because I was like Humphrey, I just stood over everything. You going to stop? Are you running out? [Break in recording]

**Rodney Giesler:** The tram depot - saga.

**John Krisch:** The tram film yes, yes. Um - so by the time John Shearman and I had put this conspiracy together and I'd stolen the stock from the stock cupboard, there was only one week of the trams left. And so the film was in fact shot in the last week of the trams and without a script. I just went out rather like Humphrey did I suppose. And having lived in South London I had, although I hated it, I had a feeling for it, I knew where to go and what it was going to be of, what I hoped would be of value in the film. I can't be that arrogant because no one knows in advance. And it was just wonderful.

It was a wonderfully spontaneous piece of filmmaking with a wonderful unit - a rare experience for us all. We were devoted to each other and they were absolutely tireless, all of them. And I remember Claude Hudson, this wonderful loony assistant who went on to be production manager on a lot of the Bond films - he unfortunately died very young. There's a shot in the film of the trams in the rain in South London, something in the commentary says "The trams and the rain and South London all seem to go together. Not that now the trams have gone the weather will be any brighter, it's just that they belong together." And I wanted a shot of the trams going past the camera, throwing up some spray. And no sooner had I said this than Claude was off, knocking at every house within sight, asking for a brush. And there he was in the middle of the New Cross Road somewhere, busy sweeping the water into the line for me. I mean mad - wonderful - instant. And it was like that every day.

And there's a wonderful story, I think it's a wonderful story. We were doing some night shooting of um - I wanted a shot for the end of the film of the tram going away into the distance over a London bridge. And in those days the film stock was not fast enough for the tram to travel at normal speed for it to look as if it was travelling at normal speed. It had to creep, cause we were shooting at probably ten frames or something, or sixteen maybe. And so it was essential that the traffic be stopped. I only wanted the lone tram anyway cause it was going to be the last tram. But all traffic had to stop and it had to be stopped both sides of the bridge. And the far side of the bridge was the City of London and my side was the Met.

And we set up there, and suddenly I saw... Oh and yes, before the shot, Claude was busy briefing the two policemen we'd got working with us that there was to be a signal on a torch. That Claude would flash the torch three times and the City policeman on the other side would flash it three times, knowing that it was the moment to stop the traffic. We didn't need to have any signalling with the policeman who was by our side because we could just tell him to stop the traffic, but we didn't want to keep running backwards and forwards across the bridge, which presumably was Blackfriars I suppose - must have been. And there was this - "When I flash the torch once it means we're ready, when I flash it twice I want you to stop the traffic and when you see me flash it three times and you flash three back I know the traffic's been stopped so that we can turn over. Have you got it?"

"Yes."

"Any problems?"

"Well," said the City cop. "There's only one - I haven't got a torch!" [Laughs] So of course hysteria there was for the moment. But there was another, even more delightful moment before we were shooting, just as we were about to shoot. I saw a man on the bridge - this is about eleven o'clock at night of course. And he was coming towards us, looking rather sort of - sheepish I suppose, and kind of looking behind him and all that, I mean it looked very strange. And I said after the shot to the City police cop, "What was all that about?" He said, "Well I'll tell you. He wanted to urinate, and I said, you will not urinate on the City side. If you're going to urinate you will urinate on the Met side, thank you very much!" [Chuckling] And so he pushed him over to our side! Anyway we got the shot and it is the last shot of the film.

I wanted - in the army, not in the Army Film Unit, before I went to the [Army Film Unit, I was in charge of entertainments in my artillery regiment and one of the shows I did there was an old music hall, rather like the player's theatre. And one of the tunes in my collection was called 'Riding on Top of the Car' which was about a couple, a Cockney couple who decide to take their honeymoon riding on top of the trams. And it is the most wonderful old music hall tune ever, and I wanted to use it. And I contacted Edward Williams with whom I'd worked before and whom I loved dearly, and he did an arrangement of it. I said that I wanted it sounding as if it was being sung in a music hall and that I would go to a Derby and Joan Club to record it. But I wanted him to arrange it for what would be the equivalent of a pit band. We would take them the Derby and Joan Club and do a singsong and that I'd have song sheets printed and do a whole lot of songs and then we'd do this one when they were warmed up - which is what we did. And by this time of course, within the unit, I mean the film was well established because I'd cut it and there was no more hiding it. But there was not a very good feeling between Edgar and myself. It would be difficult to define it. It was just a distance I suppose, a distancing.

Anyway - it wasn't being taken very seriously still. And I wanted Ken Cameron to record it as, in spite of the fact that he - Ken and I had never had a warm relationship - I knew that he was very good at recording music and there was probably no one better. "Oh no, we can't afford Ken Cameron, you must take this company." A man and a boy, I can't remember who it was. So we went to a - I found a Derby and Joan Club in Lewisham, which was on the tram route anyway, so they knew all about trams. And Edward got his band together and we had this glorious afternoon. And the recording was total shit, absolute shit! Unusable! And the difference between Ken Cameron and this man was probably five pounds an hour. So I had to do it all over again, with a proper recording unit. We didn't get Ken, we might have done or it might have been Scriven [?], I can't remember. Anyway they weren't going to chance it the second time.

But these people, these oldies - [laughing] of which I'm now one! - I mean were so enthused by this. It was such a glorious afternoon for them, to sing, not just to some old dear playing the piano, but to a band and all the feeling of being recorded and going into a film and so on, and we all had a very good time. And I had to get them all out again, and by this time it was snowing. I'd made the film in July and by the time they'd stopped bugging about and we'd got to this second recording it was now January or December. And we had to get the same lot of people to make it sound like a full music hall, and of course half of them were afraid of coming out in the snow cause they were going to fall and break hips and things. And we did a second recording of it, which was okay but I - and it's fine for the film, but that first one was immeasurably better in my

- you know, my memory. Maybe there is no difference technically, I mean not to the recording but to the effort they put into it, but to the quality of the afternoon is what I'm really talking about. So I used it and the film was the first commercial success of that unit. It went into the cinemas, they'd not had anything in the cinemas before. It was er - it went to Edinburgh. It became an absolute resounding success. And of course my position became more and more untenable in Edgar's' eyes.

And one day, shortly after it had won at Edinburgh or wherever, I got a letter. The briefest of letters, which said, "Dear John, thank you for your efforts on The Elephant Will Never Forget but I think it's time that the unit had some new blood."

**Rodney Giesler:** A real 'Dear John' letter.

**John Krisch:** Absolutely. I was thirty and he was talking about new blood. I was very angry, very, very angry. I was pleased about the title. I walked for days trying to think of the right title, and it just happened, and it was a wonderful feeling. It is always a wonderful feeling if you come up with something that you know is the right title because it's a difficult process. And The Elephant Will Never Forget is er - it works a treat, I think.

**Rodney Giesler:** Did Josh Elland[?] have to fight your corner a bit on this picture?

**John Krisch:** Yes he didn't um - he didn't fight my dismissal. And the er, the story doesn't really end there. Because Edgar always felt guilty and he became very much warmer to me in later years. He always let me know whenever we met or passed each other, we never met officially but if we were at the same place at a screening or something, he would always immediately bring the conversation to The Elephant Will Never Forget. He'd say, "I just thought you'd like to know that a copy of it's being held in Moscow as a prime example of British documentary - I thought you'd like to know that," you know, and all this was going on. And um - he um - I never worked there again. We came across each other when I started to make films for the newly formed Children's Film Foundation. He was on the board and he was very much in my corner then, absolutely. But we're jumping on a bit. What I've missed out so far is my time at World Wide. The first film I made there was for - with Hindle Edgar as producer. It was a film shot in Manchester for 'X I Batteries'. And Francis cut it, Francis Cockburn cut it and Kevin Brownlow was the assistant. And it's, you know, it's kind of one of those from field to table, the story of the loaf, only this time it was the story of the battery and it was called Under Your Bonnet. And then I made um - after that - I think I did, I'm probably missing something out but the biggest film I made there was for the army. I'd always refused to make films for the army which involved things like training for battle or anything to do with fighting with tank recognition, I never did those films. The only film I'd made for the army so far had been with Massingham, which was about health. And this one I was asked to do was for military intelligence and was to do with resisting - er, no with interrogating. It was to be a feature documentary, around seventy or eighty minutes. I did a lot of research and went on exercises where interrogation was being used. Where paratroopers would be dropped and had to get from A to Z and would be intervened - there would be soldiers stopping them getting there and then they'd be brought to this interrogation centre where they would go through an interrogation as if they were interrogated by the Russians. And I sat in on this - they would be weekends. And what was so surprising was that

even though these - er the captives knew that they were going home on the Monday morning or the Sunday night - they were Territorials, or going back to their regiment if they weren't - they still collapsed under the kind of interrogation that they would have had, had they fallen to the hands of the Russians. So I learnt all this, all these techniques and wrote a film, and it was a very tight, thrilling script about a group of paratroopers who were dropped and picked up one by one. And how the knowledge gleaned from one is used against the other and so on until they get - until our people know the entire story of what their target was. So I present that to the War Office and it's fine. And then I get a message saying "We've briefed you wrongly. We didn't want a film about how to interrogate, we wanted a film about how to resist interrogation. So you're going to have to start again." So that was dropped and then I started to research what had happened in Korea, because that seemed the best possible example. And so I wrote a film about brainwashing, which was called Captured. And which I saw - which I was pleased to do in spite of having to start again, because I saw it as my calling card into the feature film industry. I had already edited a feature...

**Rodney Giesler:** What was that?

**John Krisch:** It was called The Woman in the Hall and it was the Wessex Film Unit which Ian Dalrymple, who had been my boss in the Crown Film Unit, started and he asked me to be the editor. And that was the first film they made which Jack Lee directed. Now that must have been in the early fifties or the late forties, and I'd forgotten that, forgotten to mention it. And I was to stay as their editor and as a potential director. And the second film that they did was Esther Waters which was going to be a disaster. Dal, Ian Dalrymple was a very literary man, he loved English literature. In fact The Woman in the Hall is based on a not very good novel by a woman whose name I now can't remember. That was always his source of material and Esther Waters was going to be a very expensive disaster and I was to be the editor on it. And I said that I couldn't work on it. There were going to be two directors. Dal was the most loyal man I've ever, ever worked for. When he produced The Woman in the Hall which was Jack Lee's first film, he took us all from the Crown Film Unit. Two cameramen, Chick Fowle and Pennington Richards, he didn't know which to have so he had both and they did alternate scenes. That's typical of Dal, he didn't want to disappoint either so he used both. When it came to Esther Waters he wanted to direct the actors but he wanted the art director to do the set-ups, and again two cameramen. And it just is not a particularly good story in my opinion.

**Rodney Giesler:** Genteel begging, wasn't it?

**John Krisch:** Yes exactly, [chuckles] exactly. It ran a week somewhere and the worst moment I had was when I was at the preview and I knew Dal was there and I just scuttled off because I couldn't bear - I mean it was a total disaster. It looked quite nice but it was just absolutely an unsittable through bore. Anyway - why did I get onto that?

**Rodney Giesler:** You got onto that because you were looking for a passport into features weren't you?

**John Krisch:** Oh that's right, thank you, yes. So I decided not to be cynical and edit something in which I had no faith, even though I knew I was kind of dishing my hopes of early directing in

features. I also thought that at that age I wasn't old enough to direct grown-ups in features, I didn't know enough. But having done a lot of documentaries by this time I reckoned that Captured was going to do it for me. It was very exciting, very unpleasant. The final scene was the water torture. It's about a group of men who slowly turn on each other because that's the way the Chinese and the North Koreans operated, and it was a revelation. And the first thing they did when I delivered it was to plonk a secrecy stamp all over it. I was never allowed to show it to anybody - until the eighties [chuckles]. Twenty odd years later, when somebody wanted me to do a Gulag film, which I didn't particularly want to do. But the only thing I had to show which was similar was Captured. So I wasn't allowed to talk about it, I wasn't allowed to show the script, I wasn't er - it was lost to me. After World Wide...

**Rodney Giesler:** Was that film finally made or not?

**John Krisch:** Oh yes it was, oh yes, and shown but only shown under strictest security conditions. I mean you almost had to sign your way in and out of whatever military theatre or Navy or - I mean it was shown to all military personnel because it was thought to be so valuable. Because nobody had any idea what could happen if you were captured by the Russians. And of course the Korean War was the first time we'd actually fought the Russians - although they were called North Koreans, but they were all trained. And the kind of interrogation and torture that the North Koreans got up to, especially against The Gloucester Regiment, which is what I based this on. In fact I had the adjutant of the Gloucester Regiment as my military advisor during the shooting and he lasted a fortnight because the reconstruction was so accurate that he had a fit and went off. And um - it was terrible to see, he was a very sweet man - he had an early death. Um - General Farah-Hockley who is always on television these days, who is part of the Chief of Staff, he was a major in the Gloucesters and had been severely tortured and I learnt a great deal from him which I used in the film. It's a very effective film, with real Chinese playing Chinese - I mean all of them are waiters because there were no Chinese actors in this - so it was quite hard to find. There's a very nice story of that too...

There's a scene in it - um - the whole point about being a prisoner of the Koreans was they never had barbed wire round the place, they never had conventional prison camps like the Germans. They would take over a village and put ten people in a hut, ten soldiers in a hut, take out potential leaders and put them in another hut. But there was no need for any barbed wire because nobody could escape because nobody could look like a Korean. You couldn't go through the country looking like a Korean. Nobody ever escaped in the Korean War. And their system of interrogation, of getting into people was very simple. There would be these ten men in this hut which would be ten by twelve and which is where they would live and sleep and shit and everything - well they would shit outside but there was no proper sanitation or anything. But you could never lie down without touching somebody, you could never stand up because the Koreans are very small and if you were six foot you'd be touching the top of the hut and so on and so on. So it was very claustrophobic and it got on people's nerves very quickly, and so they became very tense and brittle. And what the interrogators would do, they would appear at the door, point to somebody, take him out, take him to the office and just sit him there and two hours later take him back. They wouldn't ask him any questions, just sit him there. And when he got back everybody would say, "Well what happened?" And he'd say, "Nothing, I just sat there." And the next day he would be called for again and he'd be taken to the place and he'd sit there, not asked

any questions. He'd go back and his roommates would say, "What happened?" He'd say, "Nothing."

And by this time they would start to disbelieve him and he would feel their distance growing. So the third time they'd come for him they'd start asking questions cause they'd know that there was now a great deal of tension in that hut. And because he had been turned against by his mates there, he would need a friend, he would need somebody to talk to, and his interrogator could be a very gentle, well-spoken, well educated Chinese. And this scene, which took me a long time to shoot, involved this moment in this young man's - young, weak man's life when he'd been called up for a third time and was now with the interrogator who's beginning to ask questions. And of course the food that they were served was absolute shit, it was rice and nothing else. But on the table in front of this British soldier, the interrogator had put an apple, which became his focus. And the interrogation went on and it was the interrogator who ate the apple. And every time - and I did it in very long takes because the tension of the long take, the silence between the questions was absolutely vital to the scene. That the man sitting there didn't know what part of the room he was going to be - whether the interrogator was going to be behind him or in front of him, where he was coming from. It was like having a snake in the room on two legs. And all the time he would just take a chew at this apple and stare at the soldier and then walk around again and ask a question and then take another chew. So for each take I needed another apple. And this was not a Chinese actor, this was a Chinese waiter. Because I didn't want people made up, looking like they were in *The Mikado*, I wanted the real thing you see.

So I'm now going through, like, my fourteenth apple and the prop man turns to me and I'm getting quite tense though not showing it. And I said, "Another apple Ted please." And he says, "Another apple, Guv? They don't grow on fucking trees you know!" [Laughs] Which did me a great deal of good, it did us all a great deal of good. He was a wonderful, wonderful assistant called Ted Lewis, who is dead too I'm sorry to say - also died young. But he was absolutely divine, another of these people who when it really got awful just got funnier and funnier and were capable of warming up a unit even though we were all falling apart with anger and tension and watching the clock. So that was that film, and I think that was the last film I made at World Wide. And I didn't have -

**Rodney Giesler:** Who was your cameraman on that, do you remember?

**John Krisch:** Michael Reed, he did it superbly well.

**Rodney Giesler:** And this was when, in the sixties?

**John Krisch:** Yes - um in the - yes it must have been, it must have been in the sixties cause one of the children was born by then. Um - and thanks to Frances Cockburn, who didn't edit it but had just left and with whom - I had been her assistant in the Crown Film Unit by the way -

**Rodney Giesler:** Really? Hmm.

**John Krisch:** And so I had known her for years and years and years. And thanks to her I then went to Leon Clore after World Wide. And the first film I did there was for the National Union

of Teachers and it was called I Want to go to School. And that was really my best time because Leon was the most loyal producer who always stood up for his directors. Unlike the producers at World Wide who were always anxious about the next film and were going to brown-nose the sponsor and were going to say, "oh no, no, no, they're not going to like that, do it this way otherwise we won't get the next film." It was always the next film that worried Jimmy and Hindle. But not Leon.

I remember an absolute classic example at World Wide of how not to make a sponsor's film. It was the first film I produced. They wanted a film for the Metropolitan Water Board. They'd already made one called, if you can believe it, Every Drop to Drink [laughs]. And they wanted an update on it, and somebody had gone out and shot the new pumping stations and other stuff, and I supervised the putting of it together and made a whole film out of it. And it consisted of an historical sequence - there were three basic sequences, the historical sequence, how things are today, how things will be in the future. And I thought that in a way the most interesting part of it was the historical sequence. So I said that it must go in the middle - how things are today, how things were, how things will be. And it made an attractive package. So everybody was pleased with that and we had a sponsor show and the place was filled with water board people. Hindle Edgar was the producer, and everybody said how much they liked it. And then he got up and said, "Well is the film in the right order for you? I mean would you like to have the historical bit at the beginning?" Nobody had raised this. And they were absolutely flummoxed about having to make a decision. And so the head of the water board said, "Well this is very unusual. Perhaps the fairest way is to take a vote."

So Hindle, of course thought, "Oh well here's another film coming..." "Yes that's a good idea, let's take a vote." So the head of the water board, the chief, had his secretary and her notebook, and went down to the front, "Those who want the historical bit at the front, put your hand up." And because the chairman did, everybody else did, and so it was changed. And the film is shit, absolute shit. I mean it dies from the moment it starts. You know if the best bit's at the front, if you play your ace at the front you're done for, and that's what - So the film was hardly ever asked for out of the catalogue and that was a dreadful lesson of how not to deal with sponsors. And of course when I went to Leon exactly the opposite happened. I have been with him at meetings in the Foreign Office, anywhere, and they start trying to push their point of view, and he says, "You look after the country and we'll make the films!" I mean he's said it! And so all the films I made there, I Want to go to School? - Our School? - I want to go to School was the first look inside a primary school and the reason for that is that parents would ask their children when they came back from school, "What kind of a day did you have?" And they'd say, "The usual." [Chuckles] And you never learnt what it was like.

And in the sixties it was very important, parents were very involved in education and new methods of course and the relationship between teachers and children and the fact that there weren't any desks, there were tables. And it was all changing and all wonderful and primary schools were absolutely the best in the world in our country. And I made this film in a school in Watford and it was a great success. And I shot sound - synch, and I took six weeks to shoot it. And then they wanted the same thing in a secondary school. And then at about this time, which I suppose is 1961 now, came World Refugee Year, and the Foreign Office wanted a film about Britain's role in the treatment of refugees, that was the brief. And they wanted an historical

survey, and I said to Leon, "This is not the subject for a film, this is a subject for a pamphlet. The only way you can make a film" - I was quite arrogant - "in my opinion" (I probably didn't say "in my opinion") "for a general audience, is for them to feel what it's like to be a refugee. So you've got to make it about a family who come here and who suffer the privations." And being sort of the son of a refugee, it was very close to my heart of course because in a way I have no roots. I was born here, my father wasn't. My mother was just born here, her parents are also from Russia. And so I've never felt English or British, I feel rootless, and so I had a lot in common.

This was the time of the Hungarian uprising. And we went to this meeting at the Foreign Office and Leon absolutely stood by me. And so I was commissioned to write this film about a family, which I then had to find. So I went to the Refugee Organisation which was in Grosvenor Crescent and started digging around amongst the refugees who had come here from Hungary and from Yugoslavia. And I knew I wouldn't - well I suspected I wouldn't find a family as such who I could then plonk in the film, but that I would have to find a mother, a father, a baby, a child, a grandmother - I wanted both generations. And eventually I did find them. I wanted a man who an audience would dislike the look of. I didn't want somebody looking like Yehudi Menuhin [chuckles] and I wanted to win over an audience. And I found a man who was a Serb, who'd been imprisoned by the Russians and kept in the dark, in solitary, for about eighteen months. And there's all the pain of every refugee and he's a very unattractive looking man. I found his wife and a proper child, a proper son, and I borrowed a baby. The woman was Croat and I had no idea what that was going to mean. I found a woman to play the son's mother. She'd been in Auschwitz and lived in Brighton in a room on her own, she was a dressmaker. She was not Jewish, she'd been sent to Auschwitz as force labour. And I had this script in Serbo-Croat and an interpreter. And it's a reconstruction of their first weeks in this country. It starts with them arriving on a train, er - very, very difficult to shoot. It's one of the best, I think it's one of the best films I've made, certainly in terms of directing, because these were the real thing and they are forced to play very emotional scenes with each other and difficult feelings and reactions and so on. And the point of the film is that the boy becomes more and more integrated. He goes to an English school. Eventually they are given a flat of their own - they begin in a hostel then they move to a flat. And the boy goes to an English school. And of course the parents are too old to grow roots in this country and the film ends with the feeling and the knowledge that the family is going to split because the boy is going to become more and more English. And so the film raises more questions than it answers in a way. Yeah I think it is a very good film and there's a lot of all the good things I think from the Crown Film Unit.

Shortly after that Sharpeville happened and I was asked to make a film about apartheid by the South African boycott committee. Are we at the end of the tape? [Break in recording] And the boycott, there was a South African boycott committee set up and they wanted a film to show to the general public so that they would not buy South African goods. And it was no use telling them not to, they needed to be told and shown what was happening in South Africa. And of course the committee had no money whatsoever. So it was decided, we decided to put an appeal, to write a letter to the major papers saying that this film was to be made but that we needed money and that if people sent no more than a pound it would mean that we could start. So the letters went out and the money started to come in, enough for us to start. And I got together a unit of people who were willing to work for nothing. Walter Lassally photographed it, Timothy Burrill was my assistant. And we put notices in stage doors and in 'The Stage' itself saying that

we needed actors for this. And I started to write the script. And it's a mixture of a reconstruction and library material, dramatised sequences. And we got enough money to start shooting then ran out of money, showed what we'd got in cinemas in Wardour Street to influential audiences, and then passed the hat round. And they either gave cheques or actual cash and we got enough to keep going. Leon Clore gave us the equipment of course and the cutting room. Kodak gave us film. The union were quite happy about us working for nothing and - we eventually got the film together. I got James Cameron in to look at it and together we wrote the commentary. And then I wanted the music and wanted Michael Tippett's 'Child of Our Time', the 'Go Down Moses'. And we had no money to pay an orchestra, no money to pay a choir, no money to pay the bass, who sings the lead, the leading role. And so we appealed to the musician's union and we got a band of fifty. We got a choir of fifty. Marcus Dodds conducted it. Michael Tibbett gave us the music for nothing. And the only person who charged I must tell you was the sound recordist, and he charged his taxi for getting the gear. We paid the timpanist his taxi, we paid the harpist her taxi, but everybody else did it for nothing. And it was the most - I know it sounds kind of gushy, but it's not gushy. It was the most moving afternoon of my life in films I must tell you. They played their hearts out! We weren't running the picture, it was not done to the screen and I thanked them with tears in my eyes after. I mean the bass player, one of the bass players was on tour with Lena Horn and had heard about it and turned up. And the principle bass was from Covent Garden, and so on and so on. Er -

**Rodney Giesler:** And of course that's where the title came from -

**John Krisch:** Yes, Let my People Go. And it was an extraordinary afternoon. Then I was to make a film for the NSPCC, after that.

**Rodney Giesler:** Shall we cut, because [Break in recording]

**John Krisch:** As yes so um -

**Rodney Giesler:** The end of Let My People Go and onto the next project.

**John Krisch:** Yes. Let My People Go won a lot of prizes for me. I'd won some before of course, everything I'd done for Leon had won prizes. And Let My People Go won the British Film Academy Award, it also won a prize in the East - in East Germany, I think in Leipzig. It was the first film I did for nothing. There was to be another, which I made for Samaritan Films some time after that I was kind of - I took myself off to make this for Anne Balfour-Frazer[?]. I wanted to make a film about old age, what it feels like to be old and to live alone. I wanted to make a film to make people feel guilty. I seem to have been doing that a lot actually. There is one thing that is common to all my films which I've recently discovered, and that is they are all made with a plea against indifference, the one sin I think of which is unforgivable. Not that anything should be unforgivable but I find indifference the most difficult of human weaknesses to tolerate and to forgive. Indifference with the people with whom I am working, but the indifference of the world at large to the problems that are continually in front of us. And as you, Rodney, and I were saying, as we grow older so our anger against all these kinds of things grows. But it's always been the motivating force for me and this may sound like paperback psychology, and I've only come to this in my - I'm now seventy and I've only now come to it. But that I was as a child

treated with indifference, nobody really saw what was within me. I was thought to be dull, I was thought to be impractical, and not very bright, which is the same as dull I suppose. And I've fought my way out of that but those labels stick. And because I was never seen for what I was and never allowed to be a musician or whatever, there's always been a driving force behind my films as I say, which I've only been able to identify recently. And so this film that I was asked to make, but that I also wanted to make, about old age is also part of that same cannon. And I went to Anne Balfour-Frazer - I can't think how I got to her - but she had her own production company and was a very wealthy woman in her own right and was connected with a major whiskey firm in Scotland. And...

**Rodney Giesler:** And descended from Arthur Balfour...

**John Krisch:** Yes, exactly. And a very cultured woman who knew nothing about films but had a big heart and an awareness that she should be doing good things with films. And so when I went to her and said that I wanted to do this she said that she could raise the money through the family. I said that I would do it for nothing. And so I had an idea about making it in one day about an old man, and to make it on a Sunday, which is always seen by all of us lucky enough to have families as a family day. And I chose to make it on a Sunday when he would be on his own. And I needed to find somebody who was on his own, who, if he had sons, didn't bother - or daughters didn't bother. And through an organisation which looked after the welfare of the old - I can't remember what it was called, it was a newly formed thing - I had a list of people to call on. And in a huge block of council flats in St John's Wood of all places, I found a man called John Robson. Who was from Northumberland, who had been widowed for nine years, who had no children, who'd been in the First World War, who was an ex-miner, had tremendous discipline and was not at all phased by me and the idea of making a film about him. And I decided that the film would be shot entirely in his flat on a Sunday. With him getting up, shaving, dusting, maybe writing a letter, making a meal for himself, reading the paper, doing the ironing and going to bed - watching the television while he was doing the ironing and going to bed. And that was all. Well what I hadn't reckoned on was just how emotionally wearing it was going to be, how his dependence on me as one of the few people he'd ever had any hours with... The only people who called would be the neighbours, occasionally to give him - if you can believe it, this is true - the scraps of their Sunday meal. I didn't use that in the film because I just, I mean it was intolerable, but that's what they would do - the scraps off their plates.

**Rodney Giesler:** In St John's Wood of all places!

**John Krisch:** In St John's Wood. Well it was a huge council estate. That's the irony of it too of course - I mean all that money around. But anyway, he absolutely clung to me like a leech. Because of Jack Holmes I had the capacity to get on with people very quickly and at an instantly deep level. And not superficially deep, I mean very involved, one has to be in order to be able to use them, which is what one is doing, let's not pretend. And so I got very close to him but of course what I didn't realise was just how close he was getting to me. I was getting close to him because I wanted to use him. He was getting close to me because he needed me as a companion. And it got to the point where he really thought I'd been in the trenches with him - he was not demented, but this - I was getting cemented to him. I was not a casual acquaintance, he was sure that we'd been together. The First World War, like everybody who had gone through it and lived,

was the most important and the most incredible emotional experience that they'd ever had. And some wanted it repeated, or those who had suffered couldn't get it out of their minds, and he certainly couldn't. And so the demands that he was making on me made it impossible to shoot it in one day, even in one weekend, and I shot it over two weekends. And at the end of each shooting day it was as if I'd shot for fifteen weeks, that's how it felt. And so I needed a week to recover, I couldn't shoot on the Monday and then follow it on the Tuesday - I needed five days between. And so I shot it over two weekends - silent - because I had to treat him as a puppet. There's a sequence in it, where having had lunch, which was two cold sausages and some boiled potatoes, which is all he had, I didn't go out and buy his food - what he had that Sunday was what I shot. And afterwards I wanted him sitting down, opening the paper and then just falling asleep. And so I had to be a puppet-master and say, "Start to let your head go, now I want a little jerk, now let your eyes close slowly" - and it was all like that, as if I was hypnotising him. But of course I couldn't shoot sound, but I wanted sound. So I shot it silent and talked him through absolutely everything. The irony of that [chuckling] is that at one of the screenings when it was finished and successful and another prize-winner, a woman turned to me and said, "Oh weren't you lucky to be there when he fell asleep." And I thought, "You stupid bitch! If you'd known - if you'd known what that cost me in effort!" Anyway!

I gave Kevin, who I've known since he was fourteen, Kevin Brownlow, I wanted him to cut it. He had been a fan of mine for years. I first came across him when he was serving in a shop in Hampstead, which is where I lived then. And he had this collection of silent films of course, and my wife, Anne and I really mothered and fathered him, and fed him and all kinds of things, and he became part of the family. So I wanted him to cut this film. And I saw the first cut and it was very fast indeed [chuckles] - which was exactly what it should not be. What I wanted, I wanted it to be the most agonising experience for an audience, for them to actually feel what it's like to be old and to live alone. And - oh, just before the editing stage, it's quite interesting this, it would interest you. David Muir photographed it, an Australian cameraman who happened to be over here, a very sweet man, who also did it for nothing. And when I took him to the flat he said, "Well we're going to have to shoot this with a 35 or a 50 or a..." I said, "No, no, no, no, we're going to shoot this all on a 28. I want to see three walls in every shot, otherwise we won't get the feeling of claustrophobia. And if we don't see the third wall in the shot, we've got to see it in a mirror or something. We've got to see, except for the close-ups, every shot has got to be on a wide-angle." He said, "Well it's going to make the flat look twice as large." I said, "I don't give a damn! He's got to be on his own and he can only be on his own if you can see that he's on his own." And he said, "Well you know I think really it's going to make the flat look artificial." And I said, "Well it's going to be my decision and it's going to be on the 28 or even a 25 if we can get it, if we can hire it. He's got to be isolated in very long-shot, even every mid-shot." And of course if we started on the Saturday we had to do two day's shooting before seeing the rushes on the Tuesday, or the Monday - I don't know if there was a Sunday bath, I can't remember. And there would be no chance of going back. If I was wrong, I was going to have to live with it cause no way could we afford any more stock, nor would I be able to repeat any of the stuff that I'd got with John Robson, who was in his seventies. And the rushes were lovely - black and white. And you never felt that he was living in a palace, you just felt that this was a man on his own, which was right. And that's a film where Humphrey's influence is, I think, very striking - in retrospect - I did not shoot it with being aware of that. But my use of John Robson's um - of the things which

were close to him, his ornaments, photographs, which I cut to from time to time have, for me and for other people, a resonance, which Humphrey was able to bring.

**Rodney Giesler:** He had an influence on your filmmaking instinct rather than on your rational...?

**John Krisch:** Yes exactly, exactly.

**Rodney Giesler:** Hmm.

**John Krisch:** One of the school films I did with Leon, Our School, the end -

**Rodney Giesler:** What was the one about the old man?

**John Krisch:** The old man is called, I Think They Call Him John, which I thought was another good title because he was totally anonymous. I mean he was surrounded by people and nobody ever visited him, except this organisation for the old, and us. I kept up with him, I took him - we took him as a family - we took him hampers every Christmas. Not from Fortnum's but I mean just some food for the holiday. And we organised a phone for him. Instead of paying him we bought him a television set and the Samaritan Films kept in touch with him when I couldn't or didn't. And that's one of the things of course that you must have found when making documentaries, that you often find yourself bang in the middle of peoples' lives and you either continue seeing them or they never leave you in one form or another. I mean the refugee film was absolutely the case in point - I didn't finish the story of that. When I'd finished shooting the time came - oh I'd said to you that the man I found to play the husband was Serb, the woman I found to play his wife was Croat. There were scenes where I needed them to hold hands and they could barely look at each other, let alone touch each other. And I had to communicate with them, through an interpreter, of what I wanted, or show them what I wanted. I mean I eventually achieved it but it was always agony because of this unknown force and anger between them, this hostility, which I had no idea about in those days.

**Rodney Giesler:** But didn't the hostility come out in their marital relationship?

**John Krisch:** They weren't married, they were not married to each other. I made them married for the film.

**Rodney Giesler:** That's what I mean - could they present a married couple on the screen?

**John Krisch:** Yes they did.

**Rodney Giesler:** Given this -

**John Krisch:** They did, I mean through sheer force of what I wanted. Her real husband...

**Rodney Giesler:** You were a real puppet master then?

**John Krisch:** A real puppet master, without any question - and I'll come back to that when I've finished the story of that film. But one of the ironies about our business and me and my films, and they are my films because of this immense intensity that's gone into the making of them, which was unknown to me, or un-revealed to me. Being Jewish, I never thought I'd find myself making a sympathetic film about refugees who are fucking fascists! And she was! She and her real husband were members of The Ustahas, which is the Yugoslav fascist unit - movement. And she was proud - her husband was proud that he'd smuggled the fascist flag into this country. But they were refugees and I had to treat them as such - but it stuck in the throat a bit. Nevertheless, we now go to the time when that film was on its last day and they have to say goodbye to each other. He's going back to his home in Brighton or wherever it was, and she's going back to her husband and her family. And she spat at him. When it came to saying goodbye she spat straight in his face. But there's an even worse story. The woman who played the grandma, this dressmaker who lived in this tiny room in Brighton - I finished shooting with her before the film was finally shot. She was very, very difficult, she believed that nobody loved her. And talking about being involved with people, I brought her home to the family one weekend and um - just to make her part of something because she had no friends. And my wife asked her to make some clothes for the children and she was pleased to be asked. And we were shooting one day, and I'd finished shooting with her in the morning, and I said, "I don't need you any more, you can have the afternoon off." And the next thing I hear is this hysteria and a terrible commotion. She's locked herself in one of the rooms in the hostel in which I was shooting, saying, "I'm never going to come out," and, "Nobody loves me!" - all in, this was in Croat - or was it Russian? - I can't remember. Anyway, she was not going to move, she was going to throw herself out of the window and God knows what else! So I had to go in and explain to her that when I said I didn't need her any more, all I meant was that I would see her tomorrow but that she had the afternoon off and should make the most of it. Because she was old - I didn't say that, but because I wanted her to have as much rest as possible, because she is the pivot of the film - she's very much the pivot. Anyway so that episode has gone over. So I'm now finished with her and she's okay. She knows that even though she's not going to be in the film that I still want to keep up with her and that she'll come and visit the family again and make the clothes, continue to make the clothes and so on. The next thing I hear is that she has committed suicide. She was found in this tiny room. She'd gone out and bought three feet of rubber tubing and fitted it to the gas ring - which was all she had to cook on - and put the other end in her mouth, and had died standing up at the table on which was her sewing machine, and was found leaning over it. And there were three of us at the funeral - the priest, the woman who ran the hostel and me. And she went to her death believing nobody loved her - and that was terrible.

**Rodney Giesler:** Did she realise that she was being made an important person when she was being filmed?

**John Krisch:** No, no -

**Rodney Giesler:** Did she see rushes for instance?

**John Krisch:** No, and she never saw the final film. No it was impossible to show rushes where we were - and I didn't really want them to see it cause it was so strange, the whole atmosphere was so strange - close and remote all at the same time, it was really bizarre. But it was a terrible

postscript to the film. And when I later made a television series about how films are made which was called Anatomy of a Film it was divided into ten half-hour episodes and one dealt with documentary. And I was running this refugee film which I called Return to Life to the man who was producing the series, Victor Poole[?] of the BBC, and when it was over I was crying. I've never, ever cried at my own films, but I was - I had to get out of the theatre. This was at the Centre, Television Centre - at Shepherd's Bush, Lime Grove. I just couldn't stand what I'd done. I realised how I'd used these people, how I'd manipulated them, how I'd been the puppet-master and how this woman had killed herself and how the woman playing the wife and the man playing the husband hated each other beyond belief. And I don't know what it was, it was so painful I couldn't bear to be with anybody else. And um - I'm not somebody who's tearful, I don't live at such an emotional level that I'm liable to breakdown - not at all, not at all, I've got huge defences - but something absolutely broke through them at that moment. The reason I took on Anatomy of the Film was because I had been very badly bruised by the industry. I think - yes - at some earlier point I had made my first feature film, which was a science fiction film, called Unearthly Stranger. I'd also made - or did that come after? I'd also made The Avengers - I think they must have come after. Oh yes, I know how I got out of them - how I got to make my first feature - at Beaconsfield was a company called Independent Producers and the producers were Julian Wintle and Leslie - Park, Parks? Leslie...

**Rodney Giesler:** Something like that... [NB. Leslie Parkyn]

**John Krisch:** Yes. But Julian of course had been the supervising editor at Merton Park and so knew me, had double-crossed me with that post-synch episode, but had faith in me as a director. And it was an extraordinary experience really. His assistant, who was the active producer on the film, was a very sweet man called Albert Fennell and Albert I'd met at Beaconsfield. And he rang up and said, "We're in terrible trouble. We're due to start shooting a feature on Monday week and the distributor has just turned down the script and the director has walked off. We've got a unit and we've got the stages. I'm going to send you a script, see if you like it and if you do, you can direct it on Monday week. I'm sending it in a car" - this was on Friday! So the script arrives an hour later and it's total crap! So I ring him back and say, "I've read it but it's crap and I want to re-write it." He said, "But there's no time." I said, "Well I will re-write it." So I spent the weekend re-writing it, and delivered it on the Monday - I mean a total re-write. It had monsters in it, which we couldn't possibly construct within the time. It was about um - I've forgotten the word, but the idea that you can think yourself, the power of concentration is such that you can think yourself onto another planet - the word will come back to me, I just can't think, I'm getting tired now. But the idea was that we were trying to find the formula for this force within ourselves which could do without space travel, we could just be there by concentrating. But the story was that they were already here, as monsters. Well I knew that we couldn't possibly make convincing monsters in a week, and so I had the bright idea of making the monsters disguised as human beings! [Chuckles] But they had to have a defect - that the power of concentration, of looking normal was such that there had to be something, some clue which would at one point give the game away. And what I dreamt up was that they didn't blink their eyes, that they couldn't just do the finishing touch to that amount of reality. Anyway, so I wrote all that in, and of course they were all very pleased. Now we had to cast it, do the sets, budget it, find the locations - and we did all that in the week. And I got John Neville, who I knew, to play the lead, and rallied round some other mates, and we started on the Monday and by the Monday evening I'd shot five

minutes of it. And it was extraordinary, it was like going on the road with a show. And the film became a cult sci-fi picture and is always showing at sci-fi festivals - *Unearthly Stranger*. It always shows up with Don Sigel's um - God I am getting tired...

**Rodney Giesler:** Do you want to stop?

**John Krisch:** Er no, no, no - I can't - but I mean it was a famous sci-fi film which had been made twice, about pods sticking themselves in the back of your neck -

**Rodney Giesler:** *The Day of the Triffids*?

**John Krisch:** No not that, no - it'll come back eventually. [NB. He probably means *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*] But the second feature I made was - now I can't remember if this is the right order -

**Rodney Giesler:** There was one you did, was it from a war novel?

**John Krisch:** Yes that was later, that was *Decline and Fall*. But before that I made *The Wild Affair* which was from a William Sanson novel called 'The Last Hours of Sandra Lee' - which is not about her death but about her forthcoming marriage. I was asked by Romulus, by Jimmy Woolf, to adapt the book. Everybody said it would be impossible - Bryan Forbes had turned it down saying it wasn't possible. It was about a girl, nice middle-class girl, who was about to get married. She works in an office in a place - like a Helena Rubenstein place in Bond Street. And it's the last day of work and it's also the day of the Christmas party. And she's marrying a nice, middle-of-the-road young man, and it's all going to be very nice. And she suddenly realises - of course, this is the early sixties I must tell you - she suddenly realises that she'll have nothing to look back on when she's doing the ironing, no 'experience' in inverted commas. So she decides to use the Christmas party, her last hours at the office, to try and get some experience, something to look back on when she's doing the ironing. And it's um - the book is conceived as her good self and her bad self, or her tempting self. Her real name is Marjorie, but she has this fantasy figure of seeing herself that much more beautiful, that much more chic, that much better dressed, and she calls herself Sandra - she is the person she sees in the mirror.

**Rodney Giesler:** Who played her?

**John Krisch:** Well I wanted Sarah Miles, who was under - had just made *Term of Trial* for Romulus, and they wanted Sarah Miles. And she would have been perfect, she was the perfect age and the perfect look and the perfect kind of cheeky, sexual quality. And Jimmy Woolf was to be the producer. I did the adaptation and everybody raved about it - it took me quite a long time, about three months, but it was good. It was a very good script - it was the first script for a woman - leading role that there was around. It was all being written for John Mills and co at that time and Eric Portman and so on. There was not one part for a woman, not a leading part. And so it was very sought after, this. And Sarah Miles was going to do it and - then she was told by Romulus that she could only do it if she signed a seven-year contract - and she refused. Jimmy Woolf at this time was busy having an affair with Laurence Harvey, who was busy shooting the second version of *Of Human Bondage* in Ireland. And he rang up, and I was there when they had

this conversation, in Jimmy's flat, saying, "Jimmy you must come over, they're making my life hell! You must support me on this because they don't know what they're doing" - and this, that and the other. So anyway Jimmy came off my picture because of his affair with Laurence Harvey. And so I had no producer, but a script which everybody wanted to do. So they then told me, "Well Richard Attenborough is going to produce it." So he and I - he and I knew each other because when I was in the Army Film Unit he was around Pinewood making a film for the RAF Film Unit - he was in the RAF as a...

### **Rodney Giesler:** Journey Together

**John Krisch:** Yes exactly. So - in fact we had been part of the Dramatic Society at Pinewood. I played his father in 'While Parents Sleep!' [Laughs] Anyway - that was disaster. Richard Attenborough as a producer is absolutely a disaster! First of all he wanted the best part for himself and anybody else I wanted he said was either gay - no he didn't use the 'gay' word - was queer, was not reliable, was a drinker, was this - everybody I wanted, I put up, he would knock down. The question of the girl could not be solved. We were floating around, trying to find it. Then, as happens in the feature business, it changed hands. Without my knowing why or when it was suddenly bought by Seven Arts. Romulus, with Jimmy Woolf out of the way didn't want to make it any more. Richard Attenborough only had a limited amount of time because he was about to do something with Forbes. So we'd got nowhere in six weeks. Every actor I wanted he turned down. He didn't attempt to fiddle with the script but it just made it impossible. And he was only there part-time because he was already really involved - it was a stupid decision to try and put him with me because he really hadn't got the commitment. And so it changed hands, Romulus sold it to Seven Arts with my script and with me. And then I was taken out to lunch - [Noise of aeroplane in background - Break in recording] The Wild Affair, 'The Last Hours of Sandra Lee', the William Sanson book had now changed hands from Romulus to Seven Arts which was headed by Ray Stark. And Ray Stark at that moment in his life was both a producer, both head of Seven Arts and still an agent. And his principle woman actress was Nancy Kwan, who'd just played The World of Suzie Wong, her first film. She had replaced France Nuyen. Nancy Kwan was the daughter of an architect in Hong Kong and had trained for the ballet and was not an actress, but nevertheless she played this tart with a heart and was big potential box office to Ray Stark.

I was taken out to lunch by Kenneth Hyman who was the head of Seven Arts over here and a publicist called Richard Patterson who was busy moving from publicity into production, working with Seven Arts. And various names came up and they said, "Well how about Nancy Kwan"? And we all thought it was a huge joke, but of course the decision had already been made that Nancy Kwan, this Chinese girl, half Chinese, was to play this English, middle-class girl. I was with Christopher Mann, the agent, at that time, and when I heard this I said, "This is impossible!" He said, "Well let's get Ray Stark on the phone." So I speak to Ray Stark and Ray Stark says to me from Los Angeles, "You either have Nancy Kwan or I tear up the script." I said, "But she's half Chinese!" He says, "Her mother is English, an English rose." I said, "But her mother isn't playing the part!" "Well you either do it or I tear up the script. You either have her or there is no film!" And he puts the phone down. And Chris Mann says, "What are you going to do?" Well I knew enough about pictures to know that you couldn't make a film with a bad script and a good actress but you might make a reasonable film with a good script and not such a good actress.

And as I believed in the film, and it was good, everybody said the script was good. One of my friends at that point was an American who wrote *Funny Girl* and I showed it to him and he thought it was an absolute delight, and I knew that I'd got something good. Jenia Reissar, who was a casting director for *Romulus*, kept a copy of it in her desk she told me, because she thought it was the best script she had ever read. Comedy - English comedy for a woman. So Nancy Kwan was shipped over, and the film went down the pan. I mean she was totally, totally wrong. In fact I did two weeks rehearsal with her just to try and get her to speak English, she speaks Mandarin naturally and all her cadences are wrong. I had to post-synch every line of her eventually but I had to try and get her to speak what sounded like kind of English for the shooting. And during this period she turned to me and said, "You didn't want me in this film did you?" So I said, "Well no I mean I hadn't thought that you were going to play it, but now that we are going to do it together we must do it as best as possible." But she was hopeless. She tried, she tried her best, but her best was so limited. And so I surrounded her with very good actors, mostly comic actors - surprising - I just wanted it filled with comedians. Terry Thomas, Bud Flanagan, Gladys Morgan, Jimmy Logan, Betty Marsden. But the film died, it just died. It has a very good party sequence on it, which is the one the critics picked up on. But if you can imagine it, I mean I had to try and find a father and a mother who are seen at the beginning of the film, to make it look as if they could possibly produce a half Chinese. I chose Bessie Love and er - oh I can't remember the man -

**Rodney Giesler:** Bert Kwouk?

**John Krisch:** What?

**Rodney Giesler:** Bert Kwouk?

**John Krisch:** [Chuckles] No, Bert Kwouk - no I didn't go that far! [RG laughs] I turned him down for the brainwashing one. He'd just done *Inn of the Sixth Happiness* and wanted a million pounds a week, because he thought he was famous, having [chuckles] - having walked along the same corridor as Ingrid Bergman! Anyway, so after that I really hated films, when I'd seen such a good script go down so badly. And I remember - and this will finish it (afternoon session or morning session). It was showing at The Metropole, which no longer exists - whether I closed it or not I'm not prepared to say! And so I rang the manager and said that I'd made this film and could I look in on the evening show cause I wanted to see what the reaction was. And I went and turned up and I said, "Are there any seats?" And he said, "Well come in." And there were kind of five of us in the cinema, four of whom were usherettes! I walked the streets that night - I was with a girlfriend, an actress girlfriend - and I walked the streets, I could not bear what I'd experienced. All that effort! They had coupled it with a monster movie. They'd called it *The Wild Affair* and er - So I wanted nothing to do with pictures and then out of the blue some weeks later, Victor Poole from the BBC rang me and said, "I've got this series, *The Anatomy of the Film* and I'd like you to do it, to write it and present it." Well we met - he didn't say that over the phone cause he hadn't met me. But I went and had lunch with him and he said, "I want you to do it. It's going to take a year. It's going to be five hours of television and I want it to cover everything from the birth of the cinema to the present day." And so in the process of researching that, all the original love I had for the cinema came back into my system, to be bruised later again with *Decline and Fall*, but that's another story, we'll leave that for next time, hey?

[Break in Recording]

**John Krisch:** One thing I forgot to talk about was, in the last year of the war I was discharged from the army, in '44, discharged from the Army Film Unit, where I'd gone, having had meningitis - we've been all through that. And having been downgraded to 'C' and 'barely warm' as we used to call it. But the invasion was on so they wanted everybody. So I was a film editor there on The True Glory, which we've said. But then I got ill again, the repercussions of not having had a chance to recover properly from meningitis came back and I had a breakdown, and then went to a military hospital, where I was discharged. And when I was well enough to work I went as an editor to the Office of War Information, which was the American equivalent of the MOI. And what they were doing was turning out a newsreel every week for the advancing troops to take into the liberated towns. So we were getting stuff from the American frontline photographers, cameramen. And there were about five editors, mostly American, I think I was the only European. And the place was in Mount Street and run by a man called Montague whose first name I've forgotten - he was a very, very lovely, modest, kind American - not too many of those. He was so diffident, so easily embarrassed in spite of his great knowledge. He was the make-up editor at Paramount News in America before he was seconded to the OWI. When I first went to meet him it was like walking into a cliché. He was sitting at his desk in this huge room in Mount Street, with his feet on the table, a fag in his mouth, his hat on the back of his head. And because he was so shy he didn't know what to do first. He didn't know whether to take the fag out, get his feet off the desk, take his hat off - and he somehow managed to do all three [chuckles] and stand up and shake my hand! And he had an immense knowledge of cutting. He taught me - in the - I suppose, what was I there - six months, probably more. I mean the place closed when the war in Europe was over, so I suppose that was about six months. But I learnt more there about cutting than I'd learnt anywhere. I also learnt to handle film with immense care. Because what we were doing was needed instantly, we never had time to make prints, so it was all cutting negative. So you learned to make a lot of decisions quickly and it does enormously - it does your judgement enormously good things.

**Rodney Giesler:** So you had to run the negative?

**John Krisch:** Yes, yes - not too many times as you can imagine. And projected of course - and that's what we saw as rushes. And what happened was that each of us was assigned a story, we would all sit in the theatre in the morning and see the day's rushes. And he had this extraordinary knack of looking and saying, "Well that story's worth a hundred and fifty seven - you take that, John. And this one's worth a hundred and thirty-eight feet, you take that, Stan" or whatever. And that's what we had to do, we had to cut our stories exactly to the foot that he had reckoned it was worth. One of the editors there was the editor of The Blue Angel - an American called - I think he was called Sam Winston. We were using 'flamm' film [Nitrate] then, and there was an American there who used to smoke at the movieola, which absolutely scared us all shitless. There was a music library there, run by an American from Brooklyn, who I never understood, his accent was so strong. Very sweet - he looked like an American taxi driver. But the most extraordinary thing about that period was that one morning we were sitting and looking at rushes, and we got dope sheets, always, so that we knew where we - what part of Europe we were looking at. And then one morning we were sitting there with a dope sheet with Belsen on it. And this was the first footage of the liberation of the camp, and none of us knew what we were in for.

There had been absolutely no publicity, and I reckon that the five of us sitting in the theatre - I don't know there must have been three, four, five, something like that - were the first people to see this material in negative. And we sat there all morning there was so much of it. And the other day when I saw Schindler's List and found that I wasn't as moved as I wanted to be, I realised that I could never be by anything that anybody could make because I'd seen it, absolutely unwarned. And I've never got over it of course. Well my not getting over it of course is of no consequence when one thinks of the people there. But it was an extraordinary moment to have experienced and shared with just a handful of people, and none of us could talk to each other. I fortunately wasn't given the job of editing any of it, because by this time I was [sighs] - I was doing longer things. We were making a longer documentary newsreel on invasion of the Philippines, which had happened, so I was given that job. But er - it was, in my career in film, something absolutely devastating. Anyway the war in Europe ended and the OWI was disbanded over here and there was a great piss-up! I'm a non-drinker and the only drink available was rye whiskey, and I was carried out of the place, I mean literally. I think I received alcoholic poisoning for a lifetime! It was amazing! But I learnt, as I say, to be ruthless, to go for the essentials, to have a shot on the screen just for as long as it was needed. And that penetrated all my thinking, whether I was writing or directing or cutting. I've always managed to be quite detached, even though when I've directed a film, a shot, and it's been absolute hell to get and whatever, and there's always a tendency to think, "Oh God we went through all that, why throw it away?" But I've always been able to detach myself from my own work in the cutting room and not get emotionally involved with it and think, "Well is it - do we need it, don't we need it?" And if we don't, we don't, and that's it and it gets thrown out. And I think it's all that directness of thinking and the capacity to be ruthless was as a direct result from what I learnt from Montague, the newsreel man. So that was a very important part of my life. I would have been twenty-two or twenty-three then, so I was the youngest there. Um - now where did we go from there? Oh then I went to Merton Park...

**Rodney Giesler:** Were you demobbed at that time? Were you, or where you sent with your army rank?

**John Krisch:** Oh no I was out of the army - yes I'd had my cardboard hat and my cardboard suit and er - no I was out. And then I think I went to Merton Park, which I've talked about. And then - I think we may have to stop a moment while I look at this crib. [Break in recording]

**John Krisch:** So after Merton Park, where did I go? Transport or World Wide?

**Rodney Giesler:** World Wide.

**John Krisch:** World Wide, yes - yes. Have we talked about - yes - the film - you were asking me, the film, the first film I made at Transport was called This Year London, which was the work's outing film, which I made with Jack Holmes. I think that um...

**Rodney Giesler:** You went into a lot of detail on Captured, which was -

**John Krisch:** That was at World Wide, yes

**Rodney Giesler:** Then you worked with Leon Clore...

**John Krisch:** Yes.

**Rodney Giesler:** Let My People Go

**John Krisch:** Yes. The films I made with Leon - I made three - two films for the National Union of Teachers - we haven't talked about those, have we?

**Rodney Giesler:** We have, yes.

**John Krisch:** Oh we have?

**Rodney Giesler:** I Want to go to School.

**John Krisch:** Oh yes, oh you've got it, yes.

**Rodney Giesler:** We're on side two at the moment.

**John Krisch:** Oh right - I Want to go to School, that's right - Return to Life. Did we talk about The Finishing Line?

**Rodney Giesler:** No - it's a title I don't remember.

**John Krisch:** No - um - can we go onto pause for a moment, because this is going to be so messy for you. [Break in recording] I think every film I made with Leon got me a prize somewhere. The one that got me the John Grierson Award for the Best Documentary of the Year was called Drive Carefully, Darling. I was asked to make a film by the Ministry of Transport for experienced drivers. And we all know that experienced drivers won't be told because they believe that they are the best. So I had to devise a way of reaching them which they couldn't resist. And so the first decision I made was never to see the driver. Because if you showed a man in his forties they would say, "Oh well he's obviously too old" or "too young." I mean there would be some resistance from an audience, there would be some way of not identifying with this man who was driving, who would be considered an idiot whatever he did, because we all consider ourselves perfect. If he had a tie on we'd say, "Well there you are you see, he's obviously a civil servant, he wears ties!" If he didn't have a tie on, "Well he's obviously a layabout!" If he had red hair, "He's obviously got a temper!" If he wore glasses, "He's blind!" You know [chuckles] there was no way that you could show a character that somebody wouldn't say, "That's not me!" So I decided to shoot it as if from the driver's viewpoint. And then I went further than that and decided to make it a sort of fantasy but not a total fantasy. So that - I wrote it with a man called Mike Gilmore who was somebody I'd worked with in commercials. He was very bright and we always managed to stimulate each other's brains. We were both quite quick with ideas. And what we decided to do was to go inside the man's brain to reconstruct the inside of the brain and have three characters in front of a whole lot of computers and press buttons and things. One - the man in the centre - they were in a control room, which was the brain - the man in the centre was called 'Brain'. Each of them wore a white coat. The man on his left was um -

'Ego' and the man on his right was 'Memory'. And the film is a drive from leaving his wife and child in the morning and not arriving - he shoots the lights. But the hazards, the normal hazards, on the way are seen as if from the driver's point of view but also seen on the monitors within the brain.

We flash between the actual car journey and inside the head and there's dialogue between the three of them about the risks that have been taken, the um - the things that haven't been remembered. I mean 'Memory' reminds him of things that he hasn't remembered and so on. And it's um - it's quite funny in places and the comments from 'Ego' are very recognisable - you know, "Go on, overtake, you can do it, put your foot down!" All that kind of thing is going on, it's um - it's a series of temptations between each of them. 'Brain' pretending to be very sort of in control but allowing himself to be persuaded and then feeling chided by 'Memory' and so on. And eventually it's just a simple overshooting of the lights and we see the brain die. And as it dies, his wife comes back with the shopping and closes the front door and that's the end of the film. And the effect of it is absolutely extraordinary. I've been in many audiences with it, including police, senior people from the driving side of the Ministry and so on, and they all sit there absolutely silent at the end. So in that way it's worked, that nobody's ever managed to slide out of it and say, "Well that's not me." It is incredibly upsetting because it's so simple. And that as he dies, as the brain is dying he's getting images of the way he said goodbye to his wife and child as he climbed into his car, repeating and repeating and eventually they disappear as he does. And there's no way anybody's managed to say, "No, no, that wouldn't happen to me" - they all feel it could because it's so - it's so unexpected, him crossing the - you know going over a yellow light, not even a red light! He goes over a yellow and somebody else is doing the same thing of course, which is what we all have to be careful of. And that won the Grierson Award.

And I think what is important about that is not the prize, but it's been um - it's not been a deliberate policy but it's something which I seem to have chosen to do subconsciously. And that is - and this is going to sound very pompous and it's not meant to be - but I've always wanted to push [sighs] - this is pompous - the documentary barriers apart. I've never, ever wanted to stay within the confines of the Ralph Keenes or the - the masters of - well even Humphrey - those kind of documentaries have their place and I carry what is best of them with me and use what I've taken from them in some form or another. But the actual shape of a documentary, the way it appeals to an audience, I have always attempted to shift the mould, to break the mould, not to create a new one. Because everything I do is different - I don't think anybody can say, "Oh yes, that's one of his films" - except, maybe, if they feel a bit moved at the end they may say, "Oh I expect he did that." But the um - I've never - I have never developed a style as such or wanted to because every subject has demanded, in my opinion, to be treated quite separately. And what moves me in a certain direction is the need of the film. That is, the audience for whom it's intended.

It's always the first question I ask - who is it for? Once I know that then I can start to feel a way of solving the problem. And I was surprised to win for Drive Carefully Darling, because the purist documentary maker would say, "This isn't a documentary, this is something for which there is no real description because it's got actors, it's dramatised, it's got fantasy, it's got reality. It couldn't be considered a documentary except for its length." [Chuckles] But it is a documentary and it won the John Grierson Award, and I was very pleased. I did it again when I

was asked to go back to Transport to do a film, again with the same problem. To be made for an audience who was ready, not to accept what was coming off the screen because they thought it wouldn't apply to them, and that was - I'd left Transport a long time ago, it was John Shepherd who was in charge then. And it was the most impossible um - I can't think of the word - I don't mean premise - proposition? No - um - what is it when you're asked to do a film?

**Rodney Giesler:** [Indecipherable]

**John Krisch:** Well nearly - it's not quite that. Oh dear - brief!

**Rodney Giesler:** Brief, yeah.

**John Krisch:** Sorry - I did warn you Rodney, this is not my best morning! The brief was impossible. He said, "We want a film to stop vandalism..." We haven't talked about this, have we?

**Rodney Giesler:** No.

**John Krisch:** No. "...on the railways, to stop children putting things on the line, throwing bricks at trains, I mean at drivers. Playing on the railway, breaking down the fences, using the railways as a shortcut" And I went into this with some - I mean real interest of course because it was a film which was needed which is always very pleasing to do - but impossible because the first thing they said was, "You mustn't show any vandalism because that'll only tempt those that haven't". And it was for an audience of - I talked to the psychologist at British Transport and between us we reckoned that the film would have to be for children between the ages of eight and eleven, because after that it was probably too late. Thirteen - ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen - maybe up to ten, maybe eleven, but anything after that if they were at it they were at it and probably about to stop it anyway - it would lose its novelty. So there I was, faced with having to make a film about vandalism without showing vandalism. So I got onto Mike Gilmore again, who was this wonderful sounding board. And it was exactly the same problem as Drive Carefully Darling - to make a film for people who won't listen. And we walked round Regent's Park endlessly. I think we talked for about a month before we came up with anything. And we were probably seeing each other every day. I mean he had a job and I was probably on other things, so we weren't closeted for eight hours a day for a month, but if we weren't together we were certainly thinking about it and then getting each other on the phone and talking. But then we would go for long walks and try and sort this whole bleeding thing out, and it was impossible! And then we came up with the most bizarre idea I have ever had and he has ever had. And we both thought, "They're obviously not going to take this at all and we'll be off the hook." Because there didn't seem to be any solution whatsoever to making a film about vandalism without showing it. So we had this idea of having a grotesque sports day on the railway line. Where the um - [sighs] where the events would be 'Last to Cross', 'Stone Throwing', 'The Great Tunnel Walk' - and that we would stage it on a railway line, with a brass band, with parents sitting in chairs, with refreshments and with the St John's Ambulance there and stretchers. And they fell for it! They went for it! And they gave me a bit of line around Hertfordshire, after half-past nine until half-past three. And I took a hundred and seventy-five children from the local school - I wrote a script called The Finishing Line. We had bunting and prizes there on the table and

everybody was in shorts and singlets and different coloured bands, divided into teams. And we did the entire thing as a sport's day. And it is grotesque. It finishes up with 'The Great Tunnel Walk' where a hundred and seventy-five children walk straight into a tunnel and when they...

**Rodney Giesler:** Is there a train?

**John Krisch:** Yes. And when they're well inside, a train goes in from the other end. And those who get through, the one who gets through is congratulated by the man who is in charge of the sports, as coming first and of course the child looks as if he's been through the Somme! And parents go into the tunnel and drag out the bodies and lay them all down in a line on the railway line and - it created an enormous row! Before it was made there was a huge article in The Daily Express, which said, "This film must never be seen!" They'd got hold of a psychologist who said, "It will do untold damage to children." Now this man had not seen one foot of the film - nobody had. Because I was cutting it and nobody had seen it. But he'd heard about it and made a story out of it. The BBC, when it was finished, devoted the whole of - was it called, Tonight, the seven o'clock programme?

**Rodney Giesler:** I saw it, yeah.

**John Krisch:** They got RoSPA [Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents] in, a man from RoSPA. They wanted me to go and defend it and I said, "I have nothing to defend. If you want some contention on television, if you want to see an argument, I am not going to be put in the position of having to defend something which doesn't need defending simply because you want a bit of argument on the telly for four minutes." And I refused to go. But they ran the whole film with parents sitting there and then the RoSPA man, who was against the film because - I don't know if you've ever made films for them but I mean they are so mealy-mouthed about their role. He was trying desperately to get parents to condemn it, and none of them did. It was an amazing success on television. But the best story of all about this film is that I sat in again with a lot of children seeing it and generally, out of say a couple of classes of sixty there would always be three who would go out in the middle of it, feeling sick, the nose-bleeders of this world. And a headmaster told me that when the film was shown at a school, he had a very angry phone call from the mother of a child the following morning who said, "How dare you show this film? My daughter had nightmares the entire night and I was having to be up with her - it's an absolute disgrace!" So the headmaster said, "Well we're showing the film for the parents tomorrow, please come, and if you still feel strongly about it then we'll see what can be done." So she came and she said, "Well" - she was grateful because she realised that now this child had had nightmares she would never, ever play on the railway, which was exactly what I had intended. So that was a success, it saved some lives. I think people were afraid of it and that it needed courageous head teachers to show it. And some didn't because they were afraid of angry parents. But I think it was a very enlightened piece of sponsorship.

**Rodney Giesler:** And you had no problems within British Transport?

**John Krisch:** None whatsoever, absolutely not. When we ran it for the approval show to the whole of British Transport, including the psychiatrist and the Unions and so on, they were absolutely for it. I wanted to hammer it home by making the end titles a growing mosaic of heads

the size of postage stamps, filling the screen one by one, of all the drivers or people in the railway who had been injured, hurt or killed. And the legal side said that I really couldn't do that because there were so many cases still being investigated. But they were all for it being tough, and it was tough, so that was a success.

**Rodney Giesler:** And the film was called?

**John Krisch:** That film was called The Finishing Line.

**Rodney Giesler:** The Finishing Line.

**John Krisch:** Yes. I didn't - I had terrible problems with the production department and British Transport, they had absolutely no experience. This again you see had pushed apart, pushed aside, split the mould of documentary. They had never, ever had anything remotely like this. With dialogue, with kids, a hundred and seventy-five kids, with brass bands, with parents - you know extras - I mean they wouldn't know an extra from a - well they thought extras were things you had at cricket! And um - oh God almighty, they totally mishandled it, we had a terrific struggle. I only had ten days in which to make it, but that was okay, we did it. So that was good, um...

**Rodney Giesler:** Pause for a minute?

**John Krisch:** Yes, what a good idea. [Break in recording] Yes we talked about breaking the mould. We've talked about They Took Us to the Sea have we, the film for the NSPCC?

**Rodney Giesler:** No.

**John Krisch:** Ah. This was made at Leon Clore's. Another of these difficult briefs - that is, I don't know whether you know it but the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children has a junior section called, if you can believe it, The League of Pity, which is about as Victorian as you can get! And they wanted a film about cruelty to children to be shown to children - I mean better-off children in boarding schools and so on and other schools, where they might be persuaded to give some of their pocket money. But on no account was I to show any cruelty. So I thought and thought and thought and thought, and I couldn't find the answer to this. Money was not going to be terribly plentiful, but there would have been enough for a 'sort of documentary', whatever that means. And then I had a bright idea. I asked them, "What do you use the money for?" And they said, "We take the children out for a day." And I said, "That's what we'll make the film about." Having made This Year London and that it had worked, that you could make a film, with planning, with planning, with committed cameramen and assistants, you could do it in a day. And so I decided that this is what would be very good. I went to the NSPCC headquarters and talked about this and they all thought it was a good idea. And then I looked out for various timetables of the various parts of the country and discovered that in Birmingham a group of inspectors was going to take a bunch of children to Weston-Super-Mare for the day. So I went up to Birmingham, got to know the inspectors, went on their morning tours to the deprived families and children. I couldn't believe what I saw, what I smelt - it was like going back three centuries, I mean it was just appalling - the neglect. Anyway - [sighs] - it was obviously going to be the best way of dealing with the subject. So I got together a bunch of

cameramen, a couple of assistants, went to Weston-Super-Mare, and had a look round to see whether they were likely to go on the pier and so on, and the walk from the station to the sea. Because I discovered before I started shooting that a lot of the children had never seen the sea. So it was obvious that the first sight of the sea was going to be an important moment. So it was all mapped out very carefully. It was made in co-operation with J Walter-Thompson], with James Archibald who was running the film side then. I was under contract to Thompson's for commercials. And we shot it in exactly the same way as I'd shot This Year London all those years before. And the children start out at seven o'clock in the morning, I mean looking like old men and women. And their inadequate parents, some of them, were there to wave them off. And we photographed all the way in the train, and there was a cameraman waiting at the other end to get them coming off the train, and then we leap-frogged each other all the time. None of us ate for the entire day. And the film finishes with them getting on the train at Weston-Super-Mare to go home to Birmingham and waving us goodbye. You start to see smiles on their faces at about four o'clock in the afternoon, when they ride the donkeys. Then you start to see their childhood for the first time, or the better part of their childhood rather. [Sighs] And we - we were all very deeply affected. I was - the unit on the train back to London were - needing a drink and some food and just to sit down really. And I couldn't sit down. I was green, because I knew what they were going to return to. I knew that they had had a lovely day but I knew that within - that it was not even a fragment in their lives that would heal anything, it was a diversion. Some of them - I don't know whether they - I mean some of them maybe have not even survived now. But anyway I stood all the way back from Weston-Super-Mare, at the end of the carriage, with the window open and with the air just bashing my face. I could not - I couldn't sit down, I couldn't eat, I couldn't - I couldn't get it out of my head what I'd smelt and seen before I'd started filming, what I knew, what their homes were like. But the film worked. Um - it has a special music soundtrack, and we did record some sound, they do some singing in the train, but there's hardly any dialogue. There's a commentary I wrote, spoken as it were by one of the children. There's about twelve lines of commentary in the film. When he sees the sea he says, "It's got a funny smell to it." It's full of comments like that, unexpected thoughts. It's not a commentary that takes you through, it's just very spasmodic and just to heighten a moment.

**Rodney Giesler:** And this was a fundraising film was it?

**John Krisch:** Yes.

**Rodney Giesler:** In that sense?

**John Krisch:** Yes, to be shown to children. But there's a wonderful, wonderful epilogue to this. It won some prizes. It was shown in Poland and the word came back that they thought it the most anti-Catholic film they had ever seen in their lives and they were appalled at me as being such an open anti-Catholic. And I didn't know what the hell they were talking about. You know, there's no religion in it anywhere. So I went to find out what they were talking about and [chuckles] it's this. When the day is over, the people who ran the pier, on which the children spent a lot of time on rides and eating their lunch and so on, gave each of them a stick of rock. And as they walked back to the train they were kind of waving these sticks around and just - they walked back with a bounce and they looked like real children really for the first time - that's what was so ironic, they were on their way back. And of course the Poles had never seen a stick of rock and they thought

they were candles! [Chuckles] So it is er - you can't win sometimes with these - with audiences. But the film was a success and it obviously raised some money and achieved - it showed children who are deprived without showing how they were deprived. And it is a very, very sad film, a very upsetting film. It contains a lot of me, like all those films do. And er - I saw it the other day again and realised just how much of me there is in it. That is - the me, that is, that in his own way was deprived as a child. Not bashed or mentally tortured like those children were, but not recognised, not - the measure of me was never really understood at home. And so whenever there's deprivation I find [sighs] that I've been drawn to expressing it. But it's only now that I'm seventy that I realise that there's so much of my own suffering in these films that it is a way of alleviating it and using it all at the same time. The - true. And cannot be said of the features that I've made, which we'll get onto after some coffee, hey? [Break in recording]

**Rodney Giesler:** This is John Krish, Reel Three, Side Five.

**John Krish:** Now I've remembered one thing, we were talking about the past. I was rung up one day and somebody said, "We've been making a lot of films for Lever Brothers, and in the boiler room they'd just discovered a whole stack of cans of silent film and we want you to come and look at them." And what it turned out to be was that as a young man, Lever always took a cameraman with him when he went to visit his plantations to see how the palms were doing for his Palmolive Soap, and coconuts and so on. And there was all this material of his voyages and Africa at that time. And they wanted a film, so I put it all together and made a film and I think it was called Man of Action. And that was a nice thing to do because that was really creative editing at its absolute best, there was no script, just the material. And to make something out of it was most enjoyable. So now we're going to go on - there were other things [consulting filmography] - no that needn't go on - to the minutiae. Have we talked about HMP, the film about prison?

**Rodney Giesler:** No.

**John Krish:** Well just briefly about that. It was a film I was asked to make by the Home Office to show what it's like to be a prison officer. What they really wanted was a recruiting film of all the different prisons. And I felt that it was going to be impossible, that really that is the job of a pamphlet not of a film. And that it was best to make a film in one prison to show how relationships are built up or not. And they agreed, and I went around a lot of prisons to find a suitable one, and decided to make it in Maidstone in the end, which has got a complete collection of prisoners. They have a 'lifer's wing' and um - they don't have juveniles but they are attached to the original borstal which is at Rochester. And I um - [chuckles] the film opens with the gates of the prison opening and three men coming out with suitcases, and they're in a hurry. And you hear the man on the gate saying, "See you! You'll be back!" And you think they're released prisoners - they turn out to be prison officers who are running to catch the train. And as they stand on the station at Maidstone, waiting for the train which they had just missed, you understand that they, in fact, are prison officers under training, who have just spent six weeks there. And as they begin to reminisce about - it sounds very corny - but you get to see their first six weeks in the prison service. And you get to understand the prison mentality as they come into contact with different types of prison officers, and the chaplain and the top governor and so on. They are not in uniform - they're in civvies with a badge. And the film runs about seventy minutes and poses more

questions than it answers, which is what I think this film should do. It makes it quite clear what kind of a person you've got to be if you're going to succeed, which is really what it's about. It has to be about relationships not about wielding sticks. So that was an experience. The quietest place I ever went to was the prison in um - off Portsmouth, which is only 'lifers' which seems to run itself, it is quite extraordinary.

**Rodney Giesler:** The institutional system has really taken control?

**John Krisch:** Well it seems - that's one of the worrying things about it actually, that it seems to happen so fast. Like when you and I were in the army, I mean we can adjust to it really quite rapidly, surprisingly, unless we're misfits, in which case we'll never do. But um - prison life seems to be something that people can adjust to. It was an extraordinary thing - I spent a long time in Maidstone before taking the unit there. I didn't have a script, I just knew what was wanted and the Home Office was okay about that. I had a [indecipherable] which I shot from. But I spent an afternoon talking to a prisoner in his cell, which he had decorated. He was gay and he was one of these prisoners who was running the prison virtually. He'd got tins of stuff in his cupboard, he'd got a comfortable chair, he'd got a red light in it. And he was one of the wittiest men I have ever been in the company of. When I came out, having laughed myself sick with a lot of camp jokes, I had a lot, a lot of awareness of the prison system. He'd taught me a lot about relationships and what was going on and what was not going on, and how to manipulate the system and so on. There was no prison officer in there with me, we were completely alone. I then discovered that he had murdered a cell-mate by putting a billiard ball in a sock and hitting him until his brains fell out. This is a man I'd been with for a couple of hours, enjoying myself. And um - I had to make this in a hurry because it's the kind of place where you can outstay your welcome very fast. In fact we were never, ever in any trouble until the very last day, the very last shot on this. We were in one of the wings and somebody emptied some piss over us - it just didn't hit the camera fortunately, or any of us. But the reaction of the prisoners to this was amazing. They felt really betrayed by this man. Because we had behaved properly, we were warned not to take in cigarettes, not to indulge in any kind of private favours, not to take any letters out, all that kind of thing. And we obeyed those rules and so we were never, ever asked to do anything, it was made quite clear. But it was an amazing experience, being in a prison for two weeks, plus all the visits I'd had to Holloway and other places, Durham and so on. So um - and prison of course is no answer to anything. I mean when Michael Howard, our Home Secretary says that prison works, we know what a lie that is. Of course it cannot work! Did you know I won the Queen's Jubilee Medal for my contribution to documentary film when she had her Jubilee?

**Rodney Giesler:** Really?

**John Krisch:** Oh yes! I could wear it for our next meeting if you wish! [Both laugh] So now we go on to talk about features. Have I talked about Unearthly Stranger?

**Rodney Giesler:** You mentioned it.

**John Krisch:** Yes.

**Rodney Giesler:** Wasn't that the one you had to rewrite in a week?

**John Krisch:** Yes that's the one, oh you've got a good memory, yes, yes fine we've done that.

**Rodney Giesler:** We covered that quite well.

**John Krisch:** The Avengers we talked about?

**Rodney Giesler:** You mentioned that you'd done it because you knew Julian Wintle.

**John Krisch:** Yes that's right. [Break in recording] The one which I like most but which was a pain to do was Decline and Fall, Evelyn Waugh. I wrote the script with Hugh Whitemore, whom I suggested to the producer, who was a man called Ivan Foxwell, who'd made um - a film about one of the wartime escapes. I can't remember - he made The Quiller Memorandum just before this with Guinness and Max Von Sydow. And before that he'd made - oh I can't remember what it was called, it was quite a popular film.

**Rodney Giesler:** It'll be on the record anyway.

**John Krisch:** Yes. And it was a book I liked very much. But I didn't want it to be made in its period. It seemed to me that it could be considered timeless and that if it was made strictly in the twenties then it would finish up as a film with funny frocks and funny shoes and funny hats, which is where the emphasis would go because it would look so strange. So I didn't - I didn't um - I suggested that we moved away from that. It's got... [long pause] I don't know whether I can talk about this because it is so full of betrayal, that whole relationship with Foxwell. It's very difficult for me - um - I know that anything that I say will be filtered out, I hope, of any... [Break in recording] Okay. Yes, Decline and Fall we made - I think it was the last film to be made at MGM. Wonderfully designed by a man now dead, called John Barry, whose first film it was as a full production designer. He was assistant to Elliot Scott who was the principal designer at MGM. It had a wonderful cast - it's difficult to know where to start. Wolfit's last film it was, Donald Wolfit, Leo McKern, Colin Blakely, Donald Sinden, Genevieve Page from the National Theatre in Paris, Robert Harris, Paul Rogers, Patience Collier, Felix Aylmer. And an unknown called Robin Phillips, playing Paul Pennyfeather, who didn't do another film but became a very fine theatre director, which is really where his love was. But the relationship between the actors and myself was extraordinary. In fact the whole atmosphere of shooting that film, in terms of the actors, was unique. That they would come in especially to see each other's rushes, if they weren't on call they would motor down just to be a part of it. It was absolutely extraordinary, the affection we all had for each other and for the piece. And there were those associated with it who simply couldn't - they never became a part of it, in the front of house department. And because they couldn't be a part of it were less than straight in their behaviour. The film - the editing of the film was something I wasn't involved in, which hurt. I can talk about this because this is fact. In every director's contract is a paragraph which makes it clear that the director's cut is a fact, is a first cut. My agent then was The William Morris Office and they put a package together of Ivan Foxwell, the producer, and me, and Genevieve Page, who was also with them, and maybe one of the other actors. And the person who looked after Foxwell I think also looked after me, but it doesn't matter, it all happened within the office. When I arrived home on the evening of having

just finished shooting I found the head of The Morris Office on the doorstep. And he said, "You will not be going in tomorrow to start cutting." And I said, "Well of course I must, it's the next stage." He said, "If you look at your contract you will see that that paragraph is not there." Now I had not read the contract, that's what you have an agent for - although I have nobody to blame but myself, I should have read it. But the Morris Office and Foxwell had colluded to have me off the film, so that he could control it, because he had had no control over the relationship with me and the actors - that's my theory. And what happened then was quite extraordinary. It was made for Twentieth Century Fox through Ivan Foxwell Productions, and when the Fox office here heard that I wasn't going to do - wasn't allowed to do the director's cut, Stuart Lyons who was head of it said, "Well there are two sets of rushes." Which I knew because every day that I shot there were always two sets of rushes, one had to go to America, to the Fox office there. And he said, "Why don't you cut the second set of rushes?" Well - no, he said, "I want you to cut the second set of rushes, I want to see"... you know. But it was impossible, there was only a month in which to do it and I was very tired after shooting for fifteen weeks, and tired too from the politics which had been going on which finally lead up to my not being allowed to do the cut.

**Rodney Giesler:** Couldn't Stuart Lyons overrule Foxwell?

**John Krisch:** No, no because it was his production - apparently not. And the American office didn't want to get into it. Zanuck was told and just didn't want to know. It was a domestic argument which Lyons must sort out. But it would have meant - it would have been monumental, it would have been physically impossible. It would have meant getting everything back from America, numbering it, getting an assistant and trying to beat this deadline. I was just not physically up to it, or emotionally by then, I was drained by having shot it.

**Rodney Giesler:** But which version would have been finally accepted anyway?

**John Krisch:** Well exactly, exactly. It seemed to me - I mean it was a very, it was a great - it was a great act of faith in me that Stuart Lyons suggested that, and I think they would have financed the cutting room and so on. But as you say, whose would it have been in the end? And when I saw the film finally at a preview I was very angry. I had made a very black comedy, which is what the book is, and Foxwell had turned it into something, where he could - something sentimental. If I tell you that I wanted Benjamin Britten to write the music, and he got Ronnie Goodwin, you will see that we weren't exactly playing on the same film. So in spite of it not being twenties, Ron Goodwin's title music sounds twenties. So it all gets off into a muddled kind of start. But there are parts of it which - I mean the look of it, which is what I am responsible for, and the level of acting and just the 'tone of it' - to quote a line in the film, Dr Fagin's 'tone' [chuckles] is very striking. [Slight pause] It er - I'm sorry that I can't go into the politics of it. I learnt a great deal about how to handle the politics of major filmmaking from that film, but I didn't act as I should have done. What I should have done, when I knew what was going on, is stopped and flown to America, flown to Zanuck and said, "This is what is going on." But I didn't, I just put my head down, got deeper into my relationship with the actors and put the stuff on the screen - and that's something I would never do again. Not to ignore what was happening - there was an attempt to get me off the film. And Fox wouldn't hear of it because the rushes were so good, and this was Foxwell trying to get me off. We had the um - the what's it called, the people who put up the bond?

**Rodney Giesler:** The guarantors.

**John Krisch:** The guarantors in and um - I was paid a very nice compliment by them. They didn't want me off the film and they said, "Well in any case with what we've seen, there are only two directors who could possibly begin to match what you've done and to make it look as if it was the same film, and both of them are dead." And I said, "Well who are you talking about?" They said, "Asquith and Hamer." So the relationship with them was good but it was a very, very tense film. And the blackness of it is only there in places. I like it more than I did, I mean I was blind with fury when I saw what they had done, how it had been badly cut, how it was out of balance, the sequences were just not balanced. But the sentimental music was really the spoiler. But anyway that was done. And then the next feature I did was also a problem! [Laughs] There was a film called The Man Who Had Power Over Women, which was running into problems. The director on it was going through some personal difficulties, is all I can say. And it was made for an American company called AVCO Embassy. And they weren't too pleased with these personal problems which were making their way into the script. And so they fired him and I was asked to take over. The shooting hadn't started, we were still casting, there was about six weeks to go before shooting, it had all been booked at Twickenham. And the designs were there for me to see and the first thing I did on the first day was to sack the production designer and make his assistant the designer. The leads were cast, and it was Rod Taylor and Carol White and Jimmy Booth. Those were the three parts cast, all the rest I had to cast. It was about an agent who's looking after a pop singer, a sort of Tom Jones type character I suppose really. But the agent, played by Rod Taylor, is in his mid forties, in his midlife crisis and is wondering about what he's done up to that point in his life that's been worth it and is it worth continuing or is this the moment to make a change? And it paralleled with me quite a lot because I'd had quite a lot of bruising in the film industry, not with the documentaries but with features, and I was wondering really whether it was worth continuing or not. So there was a lot of - I understood the psychology of it. And this pop singer that he's looking after gets a girl pregnant, the office arranges an abortion and the girl dies. And it's that moment which really is the pivotal point to this man's life as to whether he's going to continue. It was a very difficult shoot. Rod Taylor did not get on with Carol White and um - no I can't talk about this either, this is another problem area. Can you stop a moment?

[End of Interview]

**Document Actions**

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