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Sidney Samuelson CBE, Entrepreneur, Chairman of Samuelson Film Service.

Interviewer, Alan Lawson

Side One.

Q: Sidney, when and where were you born?

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SAMUELSON: I was born in Paddington in Warrington Crescent I think it was. A nursing home on the 7th December 1925.

Q: What kind of schooling did you have?

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SAMUELSON: I had in, until the age of about nine when my father's fortunes were up and down but nevertheless he was reasonably comfortably off, I was at a private school and a grammar school, but everything fell apart about three years before the war and suddenly I was at a council school and I left that council school at the age of 14 very happily being extremely anxious to get out to work.

Q: Eh, did you, you obviously, did you have any special training after that? Did you take.....

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SAMUELSON: Nothing, none at all.

Q: Nothing. Um now er before talking you know more about you um I would like to ask you about your father and his brothers. Um, first about your father. Can you recall your kind of early childhood memories of him at all?

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SAMUELSON: Yes, that's G B Samuelson and my earliest film memory was going to his studio which was Worton Hall at Isleworth which subs, subsequently became the Korder Studio and then became the National Coal Board something or other. I don't know what it is now. And I can remember as a perhaps five or six years old and being taken to the studio and my father was directing, he was also producing, and he must have also been editing because he had, if you can believe it, film round his neck and

that was nitrate stock and er he must have been making Quota Quickies which you know about Alan because you worked on some of them.

Q: I think in fact that film you came to see him make I was working on.

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SAMUELSON: Really, I, all I can remember is that Wendy Barry was in it. And there was a scene, they had a mock up of a railway carriage and a young actor had to be thrown out. I suppose the camera was down on the floor looking upwards and the thing was being rocked around and this young actor was having difficulty in doing a proper leap and my father all twenty stone of him went up into the carriage and demonstrated how you fall out of a railway carriage. And the other memory I have, film memory was going on location for another Quota Quickie to Cornwall and I think it was called The Wickham M..Mystery a story my father wrote as well.

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We lived in Wickham Road, Hendon and that's why it must have been called The Wickham Mystery. And we all went down on the sleeper to Cornwall, the whole unit and that film starred a lady called Eve Gray and an Alsatian dog, that's all I can remember, its a long time ago Alan.

Q: (Laugh) Now, were, was there a close knit between your father and his brothers or?

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SAMUELSON: Not really, between my father and his sister Ralene (?), yes, his brother Julian who became the great theatrical producer at Drury Lane and was known in the late 20's and the early 30's as the King of Pantomime and put on spectacular shows at Drury Lane and other theatres. He was a chartered accountant and I've, the family has always been told the story that he was rather full of himself and to the extent that as teenagers when they were all living at home, the four children in Southport where my Grandmother, who I never knew had a little tobacconist shop, that Julian did not um lower himself to eat at the same table as the rest of the family.

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So er, and there was no money in the family at all but whatever could be found must have gone into giving at least, one, the eldest son er a descent education and to be fair to him, and I can't remember him at all incidentally, er it we've always been told he came, when he did his finals he

came fifth in England. I always used to think as a child “Well that’s not very good coming fifth, if you come first in England. ...”

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However, when you realise that perhaps two thousand young accountants take that exam I suppose to come fifth was quite good. So he must have been pretty brainy. His other brother Laurie Wylie he was a writer and used to collaborate with my father sometimes I suppose on screen plays, with his brother Julian on er the libretto and the script for shows but I don’t think he was ever a great success. The only show that I was told that, that I can remember was a Lupino Lane show called Sweetheart Mine which was about 1937 or 38 and I, we were very proud to see on the poster written by Lauri Wylie.. But that’s the height, of - that’s the maximum amount of fame that I ever knew about.

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Q: Now, now coming back again to your father um I can remember my father who um you know had a very soft spot for your old man um he told me he ran a coach company.

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SAMUELSON: Yes. He ran this coach company when I suppose one of the regular crisis that our industry goes through and always has done and I suppose always will and there was a situation that my father analysed, the railways at that time were expensive and he found that by taking a coach full of people, they used to call them charabancs in those days and they were open topped jobs, folding hoods. He could take people to Brighton for the day for much less money than railways were charging. And it was a huge success very quickly.

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The were really three problems that caused him to lose it all. I think the first one was that as he had no capital the coaches that he bought in quick succession were all on credit, the second thing that happened was the following summer was one of the wettest in history and people who had the choice of travelling on a charabanc with a folding canvas hood and risking bad weather or compared to going on the train to Brighton, Margate, Bournemouth or where ever it was, they decided, they opted for the train and the railways slashed their day return fares on at the weekend in order to get rid of these coach people and certainly in my father’s case they did that and he went bankrupt.

Q: Em, er my, I remember my father was saying he had a crooked manager?

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SAMUELSON: It may well have done. My father er was a wonderful trusting man, and the result of that was he often got people who as they say today, took him to the cleaners. And maybe he had a manager who er was doing that. I do know that one of the directors of the company, because I saw a book about what they called the 'pirate buses' of the late twenties and my father used to run a bus service as well - that must have been during his coach, charabanc days er

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Sidney Blythe was listed as one of the directors. Sidney Blythe was a camera man for my father as you no doubt know. And er but there must have been yeh, a manager who was - probably had his hand in the till or who knows.

Q: Talking of Sidney Blythe, Sidney in fact worked for your father didn't he at Worton Hall

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SAMUELSON: Yes, yes he did. Yes and on the film that we - of my father's that was we probably may know most about which was called "She", Rider Haggard's "She". It's been made several times since and my father's version was not the first, it was about the third or fourth I think. I never liked the story, why about eight versions of it had been made I have no idea. But the reason we know a lot about that film, was it was shot in Berlin, there was a celebrated um legal action against my father by his principle artist who he brought from America called Betty Blythe who she maintained er had not been paid.

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Incidentally my father won the case and er also um they definitely had financial troubles because the a young second assistant director was called Arthur Alcott and he told me once that they had to get out of Berlin and the bills hadn't been paid and his job was to secretly take the negative on the train across the border which he managed to do and he was very proud of that and he never looked back in his career with my father from that day onwards. My mother, bless her, also told me that no young girl would ever sit in the back seat of a car with Arthur Alcott . Anyway that film was made in Berlin and we actually have a copy of that film and my mother had a small part in it.

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Furthermore there's a wonderful production still that we've got of the whole crew in front of this ghastly, cheap looking set. But it's interesting because it's got three cameras all hand cranked but it was a three camera job which seemed to me must have been a big deal in those days. And my father is sitting there with my mother, very, very pretty, and I, that was

in March 1925 so I've worked out that I was there as well as I was born in December 1925, only not terribly visible.

Q: (Laughs) Um, then what, um did the sound films presumably rather kill Worton Hall didn't they?

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SAMUELSON: Yes. I've always understood that what money my father had he'd got invested in silent productions when overnight they became obsolete. And there may also have been an element of my father, like many others at the time thought that talkies were a passing fad and the quality was so awful at that time why would anybody take it seriously? There may have been some of that but certainly he lost everything.

Q: Then, then that's when he started doing the, er the, got into the bad old days of the Quota Quickies wasn't it after that?

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SAMUELSON: Yes. I was told Alan, and you'd know more about this than I do that you got a £1,000 a reel and they had to be six reels and as long as you could see a little bit and hear a little bit it, it didn't much matter because often in order to meet their quota the exhibitors showed these films to the cleaners in the morning who were taking out the sweet wrappers and things and all they had to do was to prove that they had shown that film, that British film, in their cinema.

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And um, er he certainly must have got back in by writing, producing, directing and editing some Quota Quickies and in fact the photograph on my wall that we were just looking at er is very interesting to us because I can remember as a child going into my parents bedroom one morning and they were sleeping on the floor. And the reason was that all the furniture was at the studio which was the Stole Studio on that particular film, Threads. And of course I can look at that still and I can recognise the furniture, some of which my mother still has.

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Q: It's funny you should say that because I can remember when the film we were er I worked with er with Dick over at Worton Hall, I think it was called Jealousy. Erm and er Dick kind of laughingly said "Oh, oh this furniture is from the old man's home". And you know I did not believe him at all. (Laugh) And you confirm it. Wonderful.

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SAMUELSON: Yes, yes that's right. Yes, well it would save renting it wouldn't it Alan?.

Q: Yes, yes and a pound a foot isn't, wasn't very much.

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SAMUELSON: Well I've often wondered what it would be relative today. What would, if er if we're talking about say 1932 and you've got £6,000. Whatever you've got £6,000 for how much in real value is £6,000 1932 today? Er, would it be 100 times, would it be 50 times? If it was 50 times that would be £300,000. So what could you do for six reels for £300,000? I suppose you could make a film of some kind, it was black and white in those days. Er, yeh it could be done. If, it would be interesting to know what the figure that you must multiply by is, in those what, fifty, sixty years.

Q: Yes, but I think you, don't you also have to take into account I think standards too because er, although you know um there were some bad technically Quota Quickies but the majority of them were of a reasonable technical standard.

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SAMUELSON: Um, oh I think there were. I can remember the shooting in Cornwall with Eve Gray with her hands tied behind her back on a rock with rough seas and she was rescued by an Alsatian dog and bloody thing would not do what the trainer had promised it would do. But I remember all that and I, I really believe that they must have put it together and said well we'll all have a holiday in Cornwall at the same time. But we were all staying in boarding houses and, but there were production values. In that film.

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I remember a little tiny open Austin Seven which they bought, and which took part in the production. And I can remember it being pushed off a cliff for a scene. It was terribly exciting. Er, they (laugh) come to think of it they probably paid £10 for that little old car. And er, so yeah I think they were probably some of them were all right.

Q: Now, er now, now coming back to you. What on earth decided you to go into the film business?

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SAMUELSON: Well, you have to remember our situation at the time. It was immediately, it was at the beginning of the war, the war started in September '39 and I became 14 in December '39. Now the previous summer there had been new legislation which said the minimum school

leaving age was now up from 14 to 15. I was distraught, Alan, because the family was so poor at that time. What was - and my father had been unemployed for about three years and I mean unemployed. Nothing, nothing, nothing. And it was very important to, for the boys, that was my brother, David, who's eighteen months older than I am and myself to get out to work and bring a bit of money in.

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Furthermore, the Lancing Council Senior Mixed which was the name of the school I was at was not a very good school. I had no er, er incentive to do anything except get away and get out to work as fast as I could.

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Of course we'd been brought up on cinema even though my father had been out of it for some years and unable to get a job (noises in the background) of any kind. But nevertheless when I knew that a local cinema was being built in Lancing (phone), I applied for the job of rewind boy. And I got it. Now, of course going back to the new legislation which came in in the summer of '39 ah,

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I'd still got another year to do at school but the war started and they rescinded that law and put it back to school leaving age is still 14. I considered I was therefore done a great favour by Hitler that I could get away from school when I wanted to. And so I started in the box at The Luxor, Lancing, a fellow called Basil Fortesque ran it. And then as the war went on people got called up all the time and we were pretty stretched up in the box but having started off with a fantastic chief projectionist who had been pirated from the big cinema in Worthing, the ABC, er Plaza, and I know that he got £4 a week at the Plaza and was pirated away for four pounds ten to open The Luxor, Lancing.

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Now he was a most ghastly man, Alan, and he, he was a disciplinarian, but he had very, very high standards and although it was a time of great misery to me and remember I was 14 and when I see a child of 14 I consider he or she to be a child. And my parents, as stretched as they were, said I must have a suit to go to work in, and Burtons who did a man's suit at that time for forty-nine and sixpence, that's two pounds nine shillings and sixpence they did a youth suit for thirty-five shillings. I had a youth suit and it was a grey check and all I did for the first four weeks of my working life for this terrible man was scrub and polish and I was actually through the knees of that suit within four weeks.

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It was probably made of cardboard anyway cos thirty-five bob wasn't much even in those days. But he set a standard of what the job was to put film onto a screen which I've never ever forgotten. And in his day there was never anything on the screen that was out of focus, you could never detect a change over because the incoming arc had not been properly trimmed. There was never a change of sound level from the first reel to the second reel, because each new change of programme he used to be sitting in the back of the circle listening to everything and making notes and then a chart was produced which said "When you go from roll three to roll four the fader on the incoming projector has to be set one point lower" or one point higher.

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And if anybody muffed a change over of course he went absolutely crazy. Now I've never forgotten that but, so I have strange memories of him that he used to have me in tears and I really mean in tears. A, but he set a standard which I've used all my life and when I was given, Orson Welles talked about making a movie as being the greatest toy train set anybody could ever have, my train set was one day when I was told at BAFTA that they would like me to look after the theatre and how it should be designed and what the technical equipment should be and that was my train set. And I did that theatre at BAFTA and whenever I go and see a film beautifully projected I think about how lucky I was to have that opportunity and actually it was Bill Chipperfield who caused that picture to look as good as it does in BAFTA.

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Now (phone rings) what happened then was that the, as people left er I actually had to be taken off scrubbing and taught how to rewind. I mean you'd think there was nothing in rewinding, I had to be taught to rewind. And I was taught how you ran the film through your thumb and you kept the film against one inside of the flange of the spool because nothing was to be ridged cos it would damage the film. And you had, so that when you finished rewinding and it was 2,000 foot roll the, the side of the film on the spool had to be absolutely flat.

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Nothing sticking out. Er, and so there was a bit of training in that and then you were trained how to do a join and it was of course they were all hand joins with cement and scraping off the emulsion and so on. And then a most wonderful thing happened, and that was that the, there were four projectionists of which I was the forth. The, although I had never been allowed to lace the machine or er let alone do a change over or anything like that but on the chiefs day off which was a Friday the second used to let me do it all. So I knew how to lace the machines, I knew how to er do a change over, I knew how the er the bringing up of the stage lights and tabs

and how everything done and how, how you did your change and faded in the non synch and all that stuff I knew about sort of secretly.

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Now what happened was that the second was called up, and so we were left with just the chief who had to come back in the box rather than sitting at the back of the circle er because we were down to three which meant that we were really down to two because I didn't know anything at that time did I? Officially. And then the chief had a flaming row with the Managing Director Basil Fortesque and he walked out and he took with him the third who was his protégé. He'd brought him in, also from the Plaza, Worthing.

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And Basil Fortesque was then left with nobody in his projection box. The film we were showing incidentally was called Raffles, starring David Niven. And, I said "I can do this". And for two days I ran the box at the Luxor, Lancing. And I mean, I ran it. There was nobody else. I laced the machines, I did the change overs, as soon as I'd got the incoming machine running and everything was ok I then had to take the reel off the bottom, go and rewind it, lace up the next reel for that, do the change over, run around, push the tab button, bring up the colours, go over and do the non synch. I did it all for two days of absolute glory and it was a kind of land mark for me in my career .that I had this huge, relatively huge responsibility at the age of 14 and Basil Fortesque thanked me.

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Now Basil Fortesque at that time was like, relatively like, what could it be? Could - It could be like a personal thank you from the Queen or the King or whoever was in. And for Basil Fortesque to say "We've got two extra people coming and thank you and I'm going to promote you to third" all in, all in at sort of two day euphoric period um that sort of set me up for a long, long time. So, er, that's a rather long way of telling you how I got into the industry but that's how I started was as an apprentice.

Q: What were you being paid?

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SAMUELSON: Well I'm, I can tell you, my children will know exactly how I would reply to that, they'd all sit, if they were all here they'd say in unison "I'll tell you exactly". So I'll tell you exactly (laughter) I started at ten shillings a week which was a real pain because four pence was taken off for my stamp and so I didn't even get a note in my first pay packet. And then before all this business with them all walking out had happened, after I would think two or three months, my father said "If you don't ask for a rise no-bodies going to give you one". And I said, "Dad, I've only been there

three months” - and I knew the chief hated me anyway and er or else how, why would he give me such a rotten time.

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Anyway, I had to go and say to Mr Fortesque, “I’m wondering if you could see your way clear Sir”, which must have been words my father had given me, “to increasing my wages”. And I remember the words. Basil Fortesque said, “Well now Samuelson, what are you earning?” . I said “Ten shillings a week Sir”. Well he said, “Well if I give you a twenty-five per cent raise what would you be earning then?”

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And I’ve thought subsequently and thought what a bloody cheek, I’m on ten shillings a week and I also have to be a mathematician to get an increase. Anyway, so I got the twelve and six pence and at that - the time which I think children today would find difficult to understand, of my nine and, nine shillings and eight pence that I got, I gave seven shillings to my mother.

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And when I got an extra two and sixpence raise I gave, one and six pence of that to my mother. Now I didn’t think this is really rotten that I’ve got to give the money to my mother it was just how families who had nothing survived in those days. And - er, and so I finished up at the Luxor, Lancing as the third, oh and I also, when the doorman left, was called up, er, one of his jobs was to put the posters up at the front. Now when the cinema was built it was built with the main entrance in the middle and a shop on either side but because the war was going there was no way you could fit up the shops and buy plate glass and something or anything like that.

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So what they did was boarded them up and they used to have posters done for the films that were showing and er on what would have been the shop fronts each side had posters of what was showing this week and what was coming next week. Now that meant somebody had to be up there with one of those glorious buckets with a long brush and slapping paste around and matching the four parts of the poster. When the doorman left without even asking and realising that the posters were sitting there and there was no one to put them up I went and did it. Not by anything er for any heroic or kindly reason I just couldn’t keep my hands off the opportunity of slapping the paste around and smashing up the poster.

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And I got an extra half a crown a week for that and suddenly Alan I was on a total of twenty-two and sixpence a week. Seems ludicrous now, but I sort

of felt I'm in the big time. I'm 14 years old and I'm earning all this money. To keep it in perspective I know because everybody smoked in those days, I smoked at the age of 14, a packet of decent cigarettes, 20 Players for example was eleven pence ha'penny, just under a shilling, right? So you got twenty packets for a pound. Yes, I smoked Woodbines which were five for tu'pence. So they were the equivalent a packet of twenty would have been eight pence, two thirds of the price.

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So you would have got thirty packets of twenty for a pound. So, I don't know what thirty packets of cigarettes of today is worth but nevertheless that was the equivalent ar, um, I, I, I got the equivalent of let's say forty packets of cigarettes today. Now if cigarettes were at, what are they, about £1.50 arn't they (at least, yes, at least – voice aside) so I was on the equivalent today, I suddenly was earning £60 a week. And er, I then, my father still had great difficulty getting a job and I think the problem was Alan, having been so well known, and having been a producer and a director and employer of many er hundreds, maybe thousands of people.

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None of them either wanted to give him a job or felt they could give him a minor position because they would be obviously say, "How could you give G B Samuelson a job as a clerk?" . And of course my father just wanted a job and I remember that on the estate where we lived in Lancing we bought this bungalow, I can remember the sign which had at the bottom of the estate and it was like the rays of a sun and it said, "Freehold, garage space, large garden, modern kitchen" and so on and that was on all the rays and in sun in the middle was the price which was £650. And they were still building them and the foreman, as kids we all used to muck around on the site, and you got to know all the builders, and the foreman got £5 a week.

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And I remember my father saying "My god if I was earning £5 per week...". I mean it would have been er we would have been comfortable I suppose. And he couldn't get anything and the last job he had in production was just before the war, Sam Smith of British Lion who had been my father's partner in better times gave him a job at Beaconsfield Studios as assistant editor on two films. One was called The Chinese Bungalow and the other was Sandy Powell in a comedy called All at Sea and my Dad was the assistant editor if you please and got a few pounds a week but he had to have digs up there so there couldn't have been much left but at least it, as, it,

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My father was able to say "I am not a drain on the family", because having worked for himself all his life he had (phone) no dole, nothing, further more

he was diabetic and the insulin had to be paid for and we all survived out of a um little tiny shop that my mother ran, a little drapery and wool shop. And when at least when he got this job for eight weeks at £5 a week he wasn't a drain on the little bit of money that was coming in. So um (knocked mike and scuffle and restart/continue).

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Then about February of 1940, 1940, no I'm sorry, 1941 I'd been at the cinema by that time about 15 months my father did manage to get a job. It was a ghastly job, it was in Birmingham and because of the fire risk with all the nitrate stock the distributors who were all in the centre of Birmingham had been told by the Birmingham Watch Committee or Fire Brigade or someone, that they'd got to get out and take all their film with them out of the centre of Birmingham because if, if it had been hit of course twenty streets would have gone up if, because they were all there, MGM, and Warners and Fox and Paramount and Colombia, were all around John Bright Street in Birmingham.

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They'd moved out into a country house about five miles outside Birmingham in a place called Great Barr and they'd all moved in together. And you can imagine there were absolute ructions cos they all hated each others guts and there was a further complication that the repairing of the prints was done there as well. And you can imagine what kind of ladies were in war time, in Birmingham where all the women were working in factories, you can imagine what a, a, calibre of female was left to do film repairing. So the place was not only like riot town er on the two change over days er but it was the rest of the time it was like a sort of an unofficial brothel and the KRS, the Kinematograph Rental Society decided they must have a neutral supervisor that they would appoint. Now, who would want a job like that? And my father took that job because it was a job

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And um we then moved up to Birmingham and so I left the Luxor and then worked in cinemas in the Midlands and got a huge amount of experience because I joined ABC and I was put on holiday relief which meant that I went from cinema to cinema to um relieve the third projectionist or sometimes the second projectionist so he could take a weeks holiday. And I therefore worked in places like Walsall, West Bromich, Darlestone, Tipton, Dudley, Bilestone as I call them, all the garden cities of the Black Country. But I, what it did for me, was of course I worked on different equipment all the time and I was so interested in the job that on my days off all my time as a projectionist I used to go on my - and look at the other cinemas.

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I would get on the bus from Lancing and I would say go to Brighton and I would go to the Astoria which was the big ABC house there and ask if I could see the box. And nine times out of ten I would be taken up there and they'd show me the equipment and so for a kid I suppose I had a tremendous knowledge of projection equipment of all kinds and sound systems of all kinds because there were many, many makes in those days. And then when I went and did - worked at all these different cinemas in the Midlands I think there could have been very few types of equipment that I had, I didn't know about.

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Um, now what then happened was that my mother was still trying to keep the little shop going, she was up in the Midlands and had a manageress there and of course it just went down and down and down. I remember one Saturday it took thirty shillings and er so my Mother used to had to go - spend of her time trying to keep the shop going (cough) excuse me,

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And in the end part of the family moved back. My father stayed because that's where his job was. He used to come on (cough) he used to come on (phone), well they were called long weekends. They were really short weeks and um I went, I stayed up there still working in cinemas, by this time I was a second at the News Theatre in Birmingham and I thought I'd got a pretty good job and I wasn't going to risk er moving and not getting another one. My brother David was a projectionist at British Movietone and he said "I don't think that you should be working in cinemas all your life what are you going to do?" and "You ought to try and get into this side of it."

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I got my holiday and travelled home on the train to um go back to Lancing were the family was more or less living again, and on my way through at Euston I thought "Well David's working for Movietone" having worked at a news cinema I knew all about new reels and which one was which and which were the good ones and which were not so good and of course (phone) I thought the king of them all was Gaumont British News. And so I got myself on the tube and went to er Wardour Street and boldly walked up to offices and film house of Gaumont British News.

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I saw a lady there whose name I can't remember and she said "Oh well there isn't anything here er but er of course or production is down at Lime Grove Studios. Er, you could go down and see if there is anything there in the cutting rooms". And she was kind enough to phone, so I actually had someone to go and see and I got a job in the library. And, but it was a foot

in the door and the man who interviewed, interviewed me was the edi..editor and commentator E.B.H. Emmett, Ted Emmett.

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And I then started, and I was on thirty-two and sixpence I think, but of course I had to live somewhere. And we lived, and so I lived in Lancing and had to all out of thirty-two and sixpence a week had to pay for the season ticket. But my Mother, bless her, realised that I needed to be helped to hold this job because this had a future in it and being a 'projee' was, was, I was a second already so what was I going to be, a chief one day. Big deal!

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So somehow or other I managed to hold this job at Lime Grove, in the cutting rooms. I..... picked it up very quickly what, what went on. I used to er watch the how the whole process, the reels were produced two a week and I think Tuesday nights and Friday nights were when the reel was recorded. And then it went into the lab and the prints made all through the night, and hundreds of prints were made. And on my (phone rings) last train that I could catch from Victoria to get me home was a stopping train at 8.42 which went to Brighton and then you got another stopping train along to Lancing.

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The last through train to Shoreham and then you picked up a stopping train just for one stop was about 8.20 and if I, er I'm so scared that anybody if I said I know everythings not finished, not that I was doing much on the actual production of the reel - but I sort of was pleased to be there, to be involved. If I.....I wouldn't say to them "Do you think I can go now because if not I've got to get bus" to...right....from, this was from Shepherds Bush to Victoria and I'll miss my last train.

00:42:34

So I didn't used to say anything and then when everybody finished and all went home I used to kind of keep out of the way and I used to then sleep on floor of the vault. And I never told anybody because I didn't want them to say oh what a pain, nuisance, I mean he, he, he has get away early or if not you find he's sleeping in, in the vault and we can't have that. And I thought I'd lose the job so I used to, I should think about one week out of four I didn't used to go home.

00:43:12

I couldn't get home and I used to sleep up in the er one of the library vaults where I knew nobody would ever come nosing around there and er I was there until I went into the Air Force which was at the end of 1943.

Q: I better change over now

END OF SIDE 1

SIDE 2

Q: Who was editing the reel then, do you, can you remember?

00:00:03

SAMUELSON: Roy Drew was the senior editor, he's dead, a fella called John Morris was an editor and a fella called Bill Rowe was an editor. Now that is not Bill Rowe who (no, no) became er an eminent sound supervisor at Elstree. And the fellow in charge of the library's name was John O'Kelly and he then went with the library when it moved to Rag Labs. And I think he's now retired. Very, very nice man. And then his number two was called Art Grosvenor and the second, the deputy commentator, was a fellow called Bill Calper.

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Now Bill Calper is interesting because he used to say to meyou know sometimes if you didn't fancyall - that journey home er you could always come home with me. I've got a flat in Earls Court. Now I knew nothing from nothing in those days. I suppose, I mean I was 16 and 17 and I suppose kids of 16 and 17 know everything today, but I remember saying to my Mother er, there's a very nice man who's er the bosses deputy and he does the Irish reel.

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We did a special reel for Ireland which mustn't have any war time stories in it cos Ireland was neutral. And I remember (cough) a raid on Berlin went to Dublin as a firework display from the air (laughter). Anyway, er I said to my Mother he's a very nice man and he says that if I don't fancy the journey home when we finish late I could go home with him. And she said to me "I wouldn't". And she didn't actually tell me why (no, no) but she was absolutely right because I subsequently realised he was an absolute raving queer.

00:02:09

And um, er, God knows what would have happened if I'd of accepted his invitation. (laughter) Anyway, that is just an aside. Um, and er, and it was a very, very busy putting out those war time news reels. And then I went into the Air Force

Q: What hap, what, what did you do in the Air Force?

00:02:33

SAMUELSON: I went in as a navigator and because the war ended I in fact never qualified, I never finished my training. And then it was a question of - of course we all had demob numbers and having gone in before I was 18 and having gone in relatively late in the war, end of '43, I had a very high demob number which meant that I didn't actually get out until more than two years after the war ended. I got out July '47 because I was waiting for demob number 57 to come up. And, er I managed to get myself taken on, there was a scheme called EVT Scheme, Educational Vocational Training it was to prepare servicemen for civilian life. Now cos I didn't know anything really that I could instruct in except that I'd always done my own enlarging and up in the loft. So I put myself in as a photographic instructor and got away with it. We went up on a four week course to learn how to be teachers and I got acting sergeant because I was now an instructor and I was posted to Headquarters of Fighter Command which was at Stanmore.

00:04:02

And the unit there that sort of provided the staff for the Headquarters was like a little Air Force Unit. And I was the EVT instructor there. Well of course people were falling away like nine pins because their demob groups came up so who ever was doing this job suddenly he wasn't there because his demob group came and he said Cheerio! And it was long before they sort of got themselves organised as a peace time operation. (Cough) And I was put in because they didn't know what actually to do with an instructor in photography I was put into the education department and there was Flight Lieutenant - probably an ex school teacher or former school teacher was in charge and there was a Flight Sergeant and there were a couple of Corporals and so on.

00:05:00

And it was all for airmen who wanted to do courses of various kinds and had arrangements made to go to night school . The other thing was they used to run a course for er a typing course so anyone, any of the WAAF's in Fighter Command who wanted to come and do a four week typing course er, it was organised at headquarters at Fighter Command. The Flight Lieutenant was demobbed, the Flight Sergeant was demobbed, I suddenly became (laughs) the senior officer. I was an acting sergeant, suddenly I running the educational unit at headquarters at Fighter Command.

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Nothing to do with actual Fighter Command but the unit that serviced Fighter Command. And so I was running these courses andI often thought about it, I mean I had this abysmal education and suddenly the only person that if someone said "Oh could I speak to whoever's in charge of your educational department?" (laughs) they got me. Poor devils, anyway

um then I was demobbed, I could have gone back to Gaumont News but because they were obliged to take me back but actually I'd only ever got in there because people who were older than me had been called up

00:06:27

And they of course had come back earlier than me. And they had said I could go come back and work in the library for six months which was the minimum was the period they had to employ me, and I thought I don't want to be in the library and in any case in six months I'm going to be fired. So I trudded around trying to get fixed up somewhere in something else and eventually somebody said to me there's a man who worked for your father called George Pearson and he's the producer at unit, a government unit called The Colonial Film Unit, and who knows maybe you could get a job there.

00:07:15

I had no ACTT ticket incidentally which was always a problem cos, and it was used as an excuse. Well we couldn't take you on even if we had a vacancy because you haven't got a ticket. And of course I'd been to ACTT and they said you've got to have a job before you can apply for a ticket. That terrible vicious circle. Anyway I did manage to get in to see George Pearson a marvellous old man. He must have been pushing 80 then and I got a job in, as a trainee and I was in the camera department an ano.....another assistant camera man there at the time was Peter Sergeant.

00:08:00

And another assistant was an eminent director of photography now called Bob Painter and Billy Williams another eminent director of photography he was an assistant there because his father Billy Williams senior was a camera man and used to do work for The Colonial Film Unit from time to time. Anyway I got in there as a trainee and I um heard that the unit was going away. No, I'm sorry Alan,

00:08:32

I used to go out on jobs as a super numery and I can of course soon learn to load Newman Sinclair magazines and I made myself very useful on the unit. I was a good; I would say schlapper to have around, a good bloke who didn't hesitate to help hump the boxes out of the truck into where they were going to be used and back again afterwards. And this was on odds and sods of jobs that were done in the London area and then they were going, the real crew, which was a cameraman called Hal Morey plus Peter Sergeant er plus George Pearson I think, was directing and one or two others. Somebody recording sound I suppose and they were going up to Bungay in Suffolk or Norfolk, somewhere like that on location.

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You know, staying in a hotel and all that and I was terribly envious of course but nevertheless my time would come I hoped. And dear old Peter Sergeant said to George Pearson you know “Sidney is a terribly useful bloke why don’t we take him with us?” Suddenly Alan, I was off on location doesn’t sound like much does it? But I was so thrilled and I worked like a beaver and I was oh so grateful to Peter for saying “Why don’t we take him?” . And so I started to get to know things er and then another funny thing happened and I don’t really know this is terribly personal stuff so I hope it’s not boring

Q: No, no not at all, no, this is what it’s all about

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But for the Colonial Film Unit we were suddenly making a film of the Malaysian or Malayan Badminton Team who were over here. I don’t know how it came that somebody must have said er, and I suppose Malaya was a colony at that time, and their badminton team was over and they wanted a film made about it to send back. So the Colonial Film Unit got the job of making this film and they were playing at the Kelvin, no not the Kelvin Hall, some hall in Preston and it was a very large hall and by that time I had realised the importance of cutaways because how do you make something that took three hours go out in an eight minute reel if you’ve got no cutaways? And I remember there were two camera men, Peter was one and er Hal Morey was the other, and they were doing the filming and I was just the bloke loading the mags and so on and we had a spare Model A Newman and the,...

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I realised that (phone) we’d filmed the matches and there was no way that anybody been able to get any cut, cutaways. And as the and then the event was over and I must have been.....how can I put it? I don’t know how I could have been so brave but I got hold of the referees microphone and I said, “Ladies and Gentlemen before you go you may have noticed that we are making a film”. Can you imagine, I actually took the bloody microphone and said all this and I said “We have two cameras working and one of the requirements we haven’t been able to get is any shots of the audience, would you mind staying in your seats while we do some filming of the audience?” They all stayed there and I said “If you could imagine that I’m the players” cos I was down on the court, I said “Please don’t look at the camera”.....well, I mean old Hal Morey and Peter must have thought this is all unbelievable. (Laughter)

00:12:53

And I think its unbelievable today. The enormity of the nerve that I had, anyway, they got their cutaways and er so I was sort of well accepted Alan

as a, as, as a assistant (phone) with the Colonial Film Unit and had some narrow, narrow scrapes, one of them was that I was the only assistant for three cameras and I got about say twelve Newman Sinclair magazines to unload. Well we had a dark room there and I worked out that of course the way to do it was to have a system. So I put all twelve magazines in a line and then I put twelve empty four hundred foot cans one above each one with the lids off and a black bag - and I then switched the light off.

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And then keeping my system going I opened all the twelve lids and then I went around and took each roll out, put it in its black bag and put the lid on the tin and so on, and so on, and so on. I then switched the light on and realised that my system had only worked to the extent that having opened twelve magazines I'd actually only taken the film out of eleven of them. (laughter) And there was one roll sort of winking at me and I switched the light off and thought Oh my God. And then I thought "What do I do?" and I hadn't got the guts to tell anybody what I'd done.

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I decided er, obviously I was going to lose my job, but somehow, for some reason I decided er, er I kidded myself that it would be all right and I just sent the twelve rolls to the lab which was Kays West End which was in Soho Square at that time and we were in Soho Square as well. Of course didn't sleep during the night and about five o'clock in the morning I was onto the lab and no they hadn't got the print yet. And half past five and six o'clock and er eventually I was able to get a report and they said well there is one roll has some edge folding but it doesn't get into the picture area. (Laughter)

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So er that silly little story, Alan, has always convinced me that I've been a lucky bugger (laughter) cos I wasn't entitled to er to happen to me. So um, then er in 19, February 1948 they, the Colonial Film Unit had a unit working in East Africa. And they needed, I think they had thought they would have a local assistant and there wasn't anyone, there was no local in Kenya who could do the job. So suddenly I was being sent to East Africa. Now that doesn't sound like much today does it to go out to East Africa cos everybody travels everywhere but this was adventure and for a number of reasons. First of all you couldn't just go and buy an airline ticket because there were priorities and you could only travel er through the government. You had to apply for a place and you had to really be a VIP or a government servant. Er, well I was a government servant so a ticket was produced and I flew to East Africa by BOAC. It was a DC3 and a Dakota and you what, and you, the way it went was you stopped the first night in Marseille and a bus took all the passengers which was perhaps, what thirty of them? And the crew to a hotel and you,]

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We all sat down and had dinner together and next morning we had our breakfast together and then we all got in the bus and went to our airplane which had been refuelled and we then flew to Malta and we night stopped in Malta.

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In fact it was so windy that they could not take off the next day so we had two days in Malta. Now Alan, I'd never been out of England, I'd never even been to Scotland er this was just wonderful and Malta had no rationing. It was the first place I'd been to were the shops were full of goods that we hadn't seen, this was '48, we hadn't seen for eight years and one of the items in a grocer shop I saw was tinned pineapple chunks. Something that my Mother had on Sundays, we used to have a tin of pineapple chunks and I know that my Mother, that we were a family of six, four children and my Mother and Father, she used to count the chunks and nobody got more chunks than anyone else. Anyway I went and bought myself a tin of pineapple chunks (laughter) took it back to my hotel room and horror upon horror, course I'd forgotten a tin opener. (laughter)

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And I can tell you Alan it is impossible to open a tin with any kind of ingenuity if you haven't got a tin opener. You just can't, you cannot open a tin, so I had to look at that thing all through the night and I couldn't get at. So then we went to from Malta, we went to a place called El Adam (?) in North Africa and then Cairo. Night stop to Cairo. I mean Cairo for God sake I'm in Egypt! And someone else is paying for all this and then um next was Wadi Halfa (?) er to refuel and then night stopped in um Khartoum on a barge on the Nile. And then to um a little place called Juba in the desert and then er to Entebbe and then Nairobi.

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Took six days to get from London to Nairobi, and then by biplane to.....er Zanzibar which was where the unit was. So suddenly Alan I'm in Zanzibar! Now when I hear and have to deal with youngsters in our industry giving people a hard time because the accommodation on location is not up to the required standard and they are banging their timesheets I always think back to "Why don't they realise how lucky they are?" like I realised. I thought it was the most wonderful thing that could happen and what have I ever done to deserve these wonderful opportunities that I got.

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And further more I was being paid, I'm in Zanzibar, I'm on the other side of the world in an exotic place er I'm getting an allowance and I'm getting a salary. Anyway, what happened then and this is where the luck come into

it the camera man Wally Hewitson had a row with the Colonial Film Unit people and left. Now who is going to be the camera man? Me! So suddenly I was jumped up and was shooting stuff for the first time in my life. Not doing it very well incidentally but got away with it just about.

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And then I was out there eight or nine months and then I came back to London and the Colonial Office Film Unit was then being sort of folded up and I, but I worked on a few other jobs for them, and then the Nigerian Film Unit were, had formeder a a as a local film unit. Ar, but they had a director Lionel Snazelle er er who worked for them and they hadn't of course they couldn't get a camera man in Nigeria so they'd, through the Colonial Film Unit they had agreed.

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The Colonial Film Unit agreed to um interview potential camera men run a board and get someone who would be working for the Colonial Film Unit for the first tour with the view to him - .staying with the Nigerian Film Unit afterwards. I put in for that board and I got it, and I got the job. I'm been married six weeks, it was a single passage - but it was very important to us because, first of all we had no money and second of all er it was as a cameraman and it meant I'd made that step which was very very difficult from being and assistant on documentaries to being an actual camera man.

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And the whole idea was that we would put up with this ten months of separation because we would be able to save the deposit to buy a house of our own. And indeed during that ten months we saved three hundred pounds. Doris was working and living at home with herparents cos er we we had er two rooms in my mother-in-laws house in Finchley. So there were very few expenses and er we saved three hundred pounds. In those days you could get into a house with three hundred pounds. You could get a semi detached in Kenton or Queensbury or Kingsbury for about two thousand five hundred - and you could get a ninety per cent mortgage if you were working er so in theory you could get in.

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In fact it was never quite enough a) because when I got back from Nigeria I was out of work and b) there are always the other expenses like the legals and like you can't get the mortgage until you repair the roof and all that stuff. And er I said to Doris one day and that was 1954 by then, I said "We're never going get a decent deposit together" because I was never earning enough to save anything. (phone) and I said "Whenever I work they have to rent a camera for me and they pay ten pounds a week". They used to rent it from a guy called Ian Struthers.

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And I said "If we, if we had our own camera when it was paid for we'd still have the ten pounds a week coming in and then we could get a deposit together". And Doris said "Well what does what are you driving at?" and I said "I could probably put our three hundred pounds as a down payment on a camera, which would cost about eight hundred pounds". And that's what we did and that was the camera.

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And Bob Hill and er no Ted Hill, and Bob Hume of Newman Sinclair they said "Well alright if you pay off the five hundred pounds in a year at ten pounds per week we won't charge you any interest". Well what that meant Alan was, when I was using the camera of course on a job I got ten pounds a week in. When I wasn't using it it was essential that I got ten pounds a week from someone so when I was coming to the end of a job I used to phone every cameraman I knew and say "You know I've got my own camera and I prepare it myself and it's got six matched Cook (?) lenses and it's always in good condition and you can actually take it away and shoot with it. You don't even need to shoot tests if you don't want to you have my word that it's alright".

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And I used to get work for the camera when I wasn't using it. And that's how it all started because what happened was that I would come home and be in the middle of a say a ten week job and my wife would say to me "so and so was on the phone and would like to book the camera for six weeks from Monday, But of course I had to say no er because er you're not due to finish this job". And that was when I thought if had one camera to use and one to rent that would be living wouldn't it (yes). So that was when my brothers chipped in a bit of money and we got the deposit together on the second camera and we were then in the rental business. That's really how it started.

Q: And you were you were er were er, where were you running it from?

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SAMUELSON: My home in Whitcliff Avenue, Finchley (oh)..... ar and um then eventually in about, I have to relate this to my children, I know I can work out dates because I know w.. how old the children were or whether they had birthdays at that time, and Jonathan was not quite three must have been '57. (Yes)

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We did get our little house in Cresspenny (?) Road Hendon and then I had a whole room - for the - to keep the equipment in. And that was when I would have first been in touch with the BBC would have been would, have been from the spare bedroom at 4 Cresspenny Road (?) That's where you would have phoned me or I would have phoned you. (Yes) And there are still people around Alan who say and I sometimes meet them er at some I don't know, the Royal Television Society some some (yes) senior executives says to me "I used to be a production manager with " Basic Films or World Wide or someone like that. He said "I can remember bringing you camera back and your wife came to the door with a child under each arm and said I suppose you wouldn't mind bringing it in and taking it upstairs would you" (both laugh).

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So it's a bit - it's quite charming really.

Q: But then you, then you enlarge and you went up to The Borroughs didn't you?

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SAMUELSON: Then we took in er July 1959 we took a huge step, which was we took on an overhead (yes) which was a half shop in the Borroughs, number 27, six pounds ten a week plus rates and because I was still working as a cameraman, because no money was really taking out of the rental income it all went, the rental income went back into expanding the line of equipment that we had I, I still worked as a cameraman and that was what we lived off.

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And I had become freelance to make it easier so I didn't get sent on assignments that I didn't want to go on because er it, to go to Pakistan on a picture about oil surveying for four months was not good news for me by that time. Whereas as a freelance a) you got more per week as a freelance and b) I could say thank you for asking me to er to go to Burma but um do you mind if I turn this one down and er at the Borroughs I was doing I suppose less and less .

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Well I didn't do any long jobs at all I might go up to Manchester for three days but I would phone Doris two or three times a day somehow to say, so she'd tell me what the calls were. When we moved to the half shop in the Borroughs I did take on a full time employee, a woman to answer the phone, take the messages, type the invoices and so on. Her name was Lily Gillan she stayed with us for a very long time, well she stayed with us until

she retired. Er, and um... and then eventually I didn't do any work as a camera man I realised that er I was now a business man more than anything else and was running a rental company.

Q: Let's go; go back to the, the time you were a camera man. What type of films were you making?

00:29:51

SAMUELSON: All documentaries (er hum) and this is another thing I think about thatof course there were no commercials until the tail end of my career as a camera man. Now, commercials are perhaps the most important part of our industry as far as film technicians are concerned (yes) and it's the most buoyant part of the industry because it's regular and you know that whatever happens a certain number of commercials are going to be made.

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Also very high rates of pay go to those who are working on commercials. When I was a documentary camera man I used to think how wonderful it must be to be in features but I don't suppose anything like that will ever happen to me. I won't have that kind of luck to get in anywhere, further more as a documentary camera man what can I drop down to to get into features? Er I can't afford to be a clapper loader and what else would I qualify for. I wouldn't be good enough to be a focus puller on features so I'm er just not going to have any chance to get into features.

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And in fact I never did. When I hear of features that are being put together and the production manager is having difficulty getting crew members because he's got a certain amount to pay for a six day deal and you've got these kids saying why would I work for you for six days when I can just do two days on commercials and earn the same money. And I think how appalling that they wouldn't want to work on a meaningful production they would rather work on something about Lux liquid because of the money. Er ah that is is a is beyond comprehension to me that anybody would not say ok so moneys not everything but I'm going out and we're going to make an eight week picture and so and so is directing it and so and so is photographing it and I'm bloody lucky to be working with those two (yes, yes, yes) It doesn't apply anymore.

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So, um that's yer, so I'm a documentary camera man and I was a documentary director camera man on quite a number of pictures and assignments. And the last sort of regular work I did was actually particularly for the BBC where Sports View that phoned me and it may have been you who phoned me Alan and said they want a er personality er

profile on er one example I remember is there is a fellow playing for Bristol City whose really good his name is Brian Clough and I would go down, that was all I was told, er I would go down with, it would be myself as sort of director cameraman an assistant.

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I would take a few photo floods and a sound man if there was going to be sound and I would go and they would have, the Sports View office would have phoned the manager of Bristol City and arranged we'll say for me to meet Brian Clough at the ground at 8am and I'd work out something with him and deliver it to Sports View and they'd cut it together and I loved it because it was only one day and I think they were very happy because they used to just say "Get Sidney to go and do a story er on..".

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I'll tell you another one I did when I took Michael, my brother Michael as my assistant, we had a very good prospect as a high diver, his name was Phelps, Brian Phelps I think it was. And his problem was that there was no, he was a Londoner, and there was no pool with a, is it a five metre board? Or a whatever it is, the Olympic height board, the nearest one was Cardiff and each weekend on Friday he went, not on a sleeper, cos he had no money, sat up in the train to Cardiff after he's finished school or work or whatever it was. And then he practiced all day Saturday, they used to rope off a bit of the pool so he could go all the way up and er do his diving. And then he used to come back. And we did a story on how one of Britain's Olympic hopes what he has to go through in order to train. And so it was that kind of thing and then eventually I stopped doing even that kind of job because I needed to be in the office.

Q: Then you started providing crew didn't you then?

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SAMUELSON: Well at that time I was already providing crews because I would take on

Q: Yes, just yourself was it or did you

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SAMUELSON: No, I would take on the sound man (yes) and I er, er don't know what it was but I would probably say its £120 all in. (Yes, yes) Plus mileage (yes, yes) expenses and so and I suppose that suited the Beeb (yes) that that they knew where they were, they got the whole thing for £120 and

they'd get a decent story out of it and it was probably much cheaper than sending a BBC crew (laughter) for all I know.

Q: I know I could never understand how they worked out their costings.

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SAMUELSON: No. No, no well those, those you asked er what I was doing as a camera man that was really the last thing I did. And then since then I've just done very attractive and special days here and there like (inhales) um, what can we say, the final of the World Cup in Madrid (yes) we were supplying the equipment on it and they wanted extra camera men for the final and they wanted someone to do the Royal Box and er they said is it something you'd like to come over do Sidney. And I said if I can take my son Mark who's a football fanatic as my assistant, yes. (laughter) So nothing more involved than that um, so it's a long time since I've er

Q: And now um where, where did you get your crews from just fr..

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SAMUELSON: You got to know them and one would recommend another (yes) we've had a number of fathers and sons and (yes) daughters through our hands. And er you also got to know those who were bad news and didn't use them anymore. We, at one time we probably had on staff twenty permanent crew members of all grades (really) not cameramen (no, no). Did I say not cameramen er we had my brother David eventually joined the firm he was of course a cameraman full time.

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Um but assistants, sound recordists and assistants and electricians and grips. (yes, yes) And we would supply them on all sorts of different kinds of assignments. Commercials for example they would book the dolly from us and say we'd like one of you grips Fred Fry if he's available. Er ... the, and we used to service the Beeb and the ITV companies with complete, with equipment and crews, the reason that all fell away and it's been a great disappointment to me, was that the Beeb particularly found that they could go to a cameraman who had bought his own camera (yes, yes) and although it might be a camera we would consider to be obsolete and nobody would rent from us like a 16 mil Ari DL (?) (yes) which was quite a noisy synch sound camera

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A cameraman would use it himself if it was his own. And put up with its short comings. And of course they could do, get it much cheaper than coming to us because er we were, and the camera man would say like really I suppose like I used to do, ok this is what it's going to cost you for the day. (yes) Whereas by the time we were in that situation people where on

timesheets. (yes) So at five thirty they were on time and a half (yes, yes) and so on and so on. But I had er the the the a very interesting conversation er probably seven or eight years ago because we were getting very little ... straight forward rental from the BBC. And um coming to think of it Alan I don't think that is really for this (No, no fair enough, fair enough) For , f , it's not really for for recording. Um, so ask me another question. (laughter)

Q: Well um.....I, I think in fact we er we want to go er now on to, didn't yer um you started providing er World in Action didn't you?

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SAMUELSON: Yes, that was a wonderful contract for us. They, when Granada set up World in Action it was run from Golden Square (yes) and they decided thatthey'd used us many time that instead of taking on the overhead of their own crews and and the production team to run those crews and so on they did have a contract with us. And for the first two years everything that was shot for World in Action was shot by Samuelson crews with Samuelson equipment. We were still at Hendon (yes) when that was going on. And, so when there was a crisis in Katanga do you remember and there was a war going on in what used to be the Congo (yes, yes) what was his name that bloke (Chombi) (Kalonji?) Chombi, (yes) yes amm (cough) they er suddenly a crew was needed, camera man, an assistant to go out there and do a story with a Granada World in Action director and researcher or whatever er we just got a phone call saying there's a plane out of Gatwick tonight at eight o'clock and we need a camera man on it with equipment and so on and would be equipment for sound and, for sound and silent and we did that for two years and we also we also had a similar contract for Candid Camera for years and years and years it was all shot by us

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And we geared ourselves to provide the specialist equipment that was needed. I can remember introducing a radio mike to Candid Camera (yes, yes) for the first time. Didn't work very well but never the less (laughter) it was a big step forward (laughter) because until then er the interviewer Jonathan Routh on all these stunts he had to have a microphone here (yes, yes) and his thing was used to have a cigarette in his hand. So he'd be smoking like this in a rather affected way (movement noise on mike) it was the closest you could get the mike to the victim (yes, yes) and of course you had to have a cable running out of him somewhere. (yes, yes) So er er a radio mike was fantastic.

Q: Um did you did you provide editing services for for this?

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SAMUELSON: We provided editing services not for them we would perhaps provided editing equipment on dry hire. (laugh) Moviola (I see) synchronised (but not crew, not editing crew) Not, no I don't think for them no we never supplied it editing crew. They had their own staff people. Michael Rabiger was one of them I remember. But we did have a wonderful contract at the Borroughs for Hamburg Television. Norddeutscher Rundfunk (yes,oh, yes that's right) and they used us for everything and there the German Producer Dietrich Koch had been provided with a beautiful flat in Bryanston Square (sniff) and he loved working with us so much and of course he used um to simply get in his car every morning and drive to Borroughs Hendon and he, we provided him with offices and cutting rooms and cutting room crew. And he said why do I have to have this flat in Bryanston Square everything I ever do is in Hendon.

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And we actually bought a flat and they, Norddeutscher Rundfunk paid to us so that their producer could be in Hendon. (phone) And when we bought this building half of it was to be, to take our rental company and the other half was to be the expanded offices, cutting rooms and studio for Norddeutscher Rundfunk. And that main office which has got the extra height (yes) that was to be the studio. There was a political upheaval just before we moved, in Hamburg. The head of talks Dr Preusker (?) was suddenly out of favour. I can't quite remember what it was that he did that was naughty but he was out.

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And as it is with the way of these things Alan, when the chief goes anything he has initiated, has introduced, is running goes with him. They closed their London Bureau. We were left with this huge ... overhead of this building, which we'd only gone into because half of it was we'd got a customer for. And it had goneer we were teetering on the brink of bankruptcy at that time.

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As to, because how were we going to maintain the cost of what we'd done here without that customer. I went over to Hamburg with my brother Tony to explain all this (breath) and they said in a very efficient ..m Germanic way, but Mr Samuelson, we understand your problem but you have no contract. We don't understand why you consider we were responsible. And I said absolutely true but then we've transacted for the last three years all this business with you we've never had a contract it has all been verbal between your London Producer Deitrich Koch and ourselves. Which of course Deitrich Koch was there and confirmed this. They were quite good; they gave us a interest free loan to get us out of our difficulties. And we paid it back as and when we could. I can't really remember how long we took to pay it back but I suspect it was about three

years. But it was a very close run thing then. It, it wasn't our fault (no, no, no) ah but never the less perhaps it taught us to get things in writing.

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On the other hand our whole business is run on the telephone (yes). Nobody ever writes to us and says this is the equipment we need they telephone.

END OF SIDE 2

SIDE 3 Part 2 of Interview recorded on 4th April 2001

Alan Lawson - The copyright of the recording is vested in the BECTU History Project the date is the 4th April 2001 and I'm at Sidney Samuelson's house in Hampstead and we are resuming an interview that began, in believe it or not, in 1988.

SAMUELSON: Now you're going to ask me questions.

Q: I, ar, well indeed I do. Um as I was saying er, er, er this is a resumption of the interview that was done in er, begun in 1988. So I think we can fairly say its taken ten years in the making.

SAMUELSON: We certainly can.

Q: (Laughing) I, I, advertise it that way. Sidney we left off as I um recall from the transcript at the time you were supplying World in Action with, with equipment but not crews. Um shall we progress from that moment on chronologically?

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SAMUELSON: Well just to put that point straight Roy, we provided equipment and crews, as far as camera and sound was concerned and lights, but we did not provide crews for editing. We may very well have provided editing equipment but I think they had their cutting rooms; well they must have had them in Golden Square because that's where Tim Hewett the producer was. And so they probably had their own cutting rooms in Golden Square. I don't remember them having cutting rooms at our place, as it were, although we did have cutting rooms there and (Uhum) people would come and go.

Q: They were very frequently cutting until a moment of going on air were they not I think, ummm in those days? It was...(well they) It was, it was, it was very much um er a headline news operation, was it not?

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SAMUELSON: Yes, it was and I'm sure I would have remembered because there would have no doubt been some all night (mm) periods and one of the jobs, perhaps the one I best remember was the Aldermaston March. Where, and the sit down in Trafalgar Square, and only about two days before it happened, I think it was all on a Sunday, only perhaps on the Friday, maybe the Thursday before, Tim Hewitt, this amazing Australian, he called me and he said, "All I'm going to need this weekend is twenty-five cameramen with equipment".

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And, we delivered, that would have been equipment and crew. I don't know how we got it together; we must have called on a lot of favours from other people who had equipment, who would supply it to us. And we had an arrangement whenever we needed to borrow equipment, which was that list price less twenty per cent. Can you imagine Roy, what you printed in your catalogue was what you got And (no deals you mean).

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No deals - and it was really the best way to work because we could estimate when we, a new piece of equipment came into our inventory, well we need to earn X per day and per week for that piece of equipment. And built into that calculation would have been all the costs of supplying that equipment. Shelf space, the degree of maintenance that was likely to be required, the reliability of that particular piece of equipment, the demand for that piece of equipment; because we always had some items that you knew you could never ever get your money back on. Like a thousand millimetre lens, now when somebody needed a thousand millimetre lens they really needed it, to do a shot of the moon or something like that, but they would only need it for one day and you would need a lot of days to get your money back.

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But we had items like that because we wanted to be the firm, and indeed I think we were (you were) where whatever was available anywhere was also available at Samuelsons. And we would have to work out of course the capital cost and how long it would take to get our money back, if indeed we were going to be able to get our money back. Because those items like a thousand millimetre lens they were, you might describe them as extraordinary (yes) items. And from all those various figures we would work out what we needed to get per week.

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But also built into it was day and night, seven days a week service which cost money. And the fact that you could phone Samuelsons, the only firm in the world you could phone at eight o'clock on a Sunday night when a truck had backed into your camera and you have a crew of eighty and

you've got five more shots to do. And that, we were the only people you could phone and a man in a white overall would pick up the phone and s.. would be told had happened and what was needed. And either the production company would send their transport to pick it up while we were getting it ready or we would arrange the transport (mmm) to take it to where ever they were.

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And all that, of course, has to be paid for. But the customers used to love the service. And when you think of it, the cost of hiring equipment is a tiny, minute part of the budget. And if by paying a tiny little bit more you get the reliability and the backup that we used deliver it was a great bargain, especially when a truck backed into the camera (true) and knocked it over on a Sunday. So that's what we used to do and it all changed when two factors came into it. One is business tailed off, I suppose I'm talking about the early '70's there wasn't too much business around it had been very, very good in the second half of the '60's. I'm talking about feature films.

Q: That was when half of Hollywood was shooting here wasn't it.

00:07:10

SAMUELSON: Yeah (yes) that's right. And the very fact that the, we were the only really the only professional rental company..... We got a whole lot of that business. All the big feature film ... makers and their camera men mostly from Los Angeles would come to Cricklewood. And I will never forget a great veteran, legendary camera man called James Wong Howe, when I'd shown him round and introduced him to new equipment we'd developed ourselves er he said to me "There's nothing at all like this in Hollywood", and there wasn't.

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And talk about one stop shopping, there was no conception of, of that in LA, you'd have to go to, I would say, half a dozen firms (yes) on average to get what you could have from us from under one roof with e everything set up and fitted together and made sure it was all ok before it out. And ... what the other factor was, because of the shortage of business and coupled with other people, sometimes individuals, sometimes three or four guys got together and bought a big of equipment there were a number of competitors, which is absolutely normal, but due to the shortage of business they felt the only thing to do was to get the business, was to er discount and that's when the discount race rate started.

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And it was very, very difficult for us because we were a high service organisation but that meant we had a high over head and I would say after about five years of wondering what on earth we were going to do to um

combat the problem. Of course we were discounting as well. We simply had to stop our policy of saying our list price is the price. (u hum) That's, that's how we work. We had to start introducing discounts and because we were introducing discounts and because we were the best people to, to put in charge of the equipment if you were a film maker because you know, you knew what was behind us. An Arriflex is an Arriflex is an Arriflex but if you got it from Samuelsons you got a lot more than that. Some years into the discount struggle I remember we, my brothers and I had a meeting and we decided we can't, can no longer afford the R&D department. All those skilled guys in their white coats we just could not afford to keep them. (M mm) And I would say that from a department of ten it went down to two. Which was all we could afford. And I was devastated that we would have to cut off what (movement) was fundamental to the service we were giving.

Q: And a pride and joy too, I....

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SAMUELSON: And a pride and joy (uhum, uhum) absolutely right and an example would be for a film called Scrooge directed by Ronnie Neame photographed by Ozzie Morris which was based on the Christmas Carol story (um). Ozzie came up to see us before the production and he said I'm trying to find ... something that will give me an effect that I'm not sure has ever been used before. He said there's a scene where it's all about the ghost of Christmas Present and you actually see an array with um er um what's his name Moor. (Roger Moore?) N, not Roger Moore, Kenny More, Kenneth More (oh right, right) and he played Scrooge in it and towards the end of the film there's a great array of presents and they're illuminated by candles and of course you could put star filters on to give the candle however much effect you wanted. But Ozzie wanted more than that, he wanted them to have a kind of a pulse. T, to flicker and we worked out a special rotating filter.

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Now a rotating filter, r, making a filter turn in front that was no big deal, that's been done thousands of times before. But that only caused if you had a star filter on, it only caused the star to move round, it didn't make it move (flick) eccentrically. (Right) And we devised a rotating holder but it was on an eccentric cam so the filter didn't rotate of the same axis. It sort of just moved oval shaped and that caused the star effect to, to pulse. And I don't know if anybody else in the world would have made, designed that piece of equipment, made it up, rented it for one day, and whether it ever got used again I don't know.

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But that's what we did and after all they were probably booking a truck full of equipment for ten weeks (mmm) so making something special and renting it for one day for a fiver er th th that was ok as far as we were concerned but also of course word of mouth because Ozzie must have gone back and said I've been up to see Sidney and he's brother David is going to design a piece of equipment for us that'll give us an effect that you've never seen on that.

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And Ronnie Neame would be telling someone else and so on and so on and so on. So we had that name and when we had to amputate part of the back, the backup er it was a sad day for us. And the discount rates, it came to a head when a production manager phoned me and the conversation was something like "I've told you er th, th, Sidney how much I've aprec, apre, a a, I can't even say it, appreciated your service and how many pictures h have you done for me, I suppose six". And he said "But I've got a picture coming up, I'm going to send you our list of what's required and I just want to say to you, it's no good you reminding me of how good your service is and the twenty-four hour aspect of your service and weekends coverage and the maintenance standards" he said, and these were his exact words, "Don't give me any of that crap, just tell me how cheap it's going to be".

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Now when I heard that and had recovered from the floor, (laughs) I realised that the business is different now and you see we would be talking about so little money. It wasn't how much was it going to cost because where ever they went, however much it was discounted they would always have to pay something. So we're actually talking about the difference between the rate that we felt was appropriate and what they could get it for with a lesser service, a lesser backup elsewhere. It was only the difference between the two that we're talking about.

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And, I'm probably going on a bit on this, but it was really fundamental to what happened to the business when competition came, shortage of turnover, and a discount race, and it changed our company because we could no longer say, "Yeah let's um, let's take a chance on that, it looks, it looks rather good". And like when Argenor, the French lens manufacturer brought out their ten to one zoom lens, ten to one. I can remember when we got the first four to one zoom lens and the, they were so thrilled about it and the head of design or someone like that at Argenor phone up and said you've got a lot of our four to one zooms; we've got something we want to show you.

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And they came over with their proto-type ten to one and I my brothers and I, we all looked at it and said God this is going to sort of revolutionise things if the qualities good enough. So we shot some tests with it there and then and had a look at them next day. It was about F4 was maximum aperture, and so it wasn't a fast lens.

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And between four and five six it, it wasn't too good on definition. Once you got five six and down to whatever, eight or eleven (cough) it was outstanding. And they had told us that they were going to be able to produce two a week. And I think we decided to take a huge chance and we said we want ten of them and we want the first ten. We wanted er to make sure that whoever, when they heard that there was a ten to one zoom er that they would know that they could get it from Samuelsons.

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I suppose part of our thinking was well if production is going to be so slow it's going to be good that for some time er they only place they can get them is Samuelsons. But we had to lay out the money and it was a frightener because it took a long time, perhaps three months before the customer base realised that there was a ten to one and we advertised it. Some of them would have said well that's all very well but who can afford it because we would have to set our price to make it worthwhile to cover the huge cost, relatively huge cost, and once it caught on it was one of the best investments we ever made because we never had them in. Once people realised that you didn't just rent the ten to one for one special shot you could actually stick it on the camera and leave it there. (Shoot the whole bloody movie on it). And look at the time it saved.

Q: It changed the appearance of films too.

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SAMUELSON: It changed the appearance of films and by that time Roy the idea that emerged when zoom lenses first came out that if you've got a zoom lens on the front you must be doing that, or doing that and by the time the ten to one was there I think the view I had was a general view which is, if you notice that it's a zoom shot you've failed. What you should be doing is using the zoom to get a shot that you couldn't get any other way and it might be that it was a zoom which was part of a track in or a track out or a pan or a crab shot to the left or the right or whatever.

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But the zoom enabled you not only to follow that couple to the door, but as the door was a good way.... er, er at the back the set and you wanted to keep the dialogue going between these two, er, you could be gently zooming in

so that you've got them bigger at the end of the shot although they are further away. And people started designing shots that embodied the zoom.

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And... we actually with a modification brought out the first twenty to one zoom in the world. And I remember taking it down to the set which was Putney Bridge and it was it was that film with Dickie Attenborough called Rillington Road about Christie the murderer, the serial killer. And it was the shot, I phoned up the director who was an American guy, can't remember his name (Fleischer was it) yes, (Fleischer), that's very good, Dick Fleischer.

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And I said I don't know whether you've got any use for it in your particular movie but we've got something a twenty one zoom, a twenty to one zoom for thirty five millimetre. And he said let me think about that. I'm not even going to charge but if you've got a shot where it would be really good to have such a tool er let us bring it down. And the shot that he worked out was a kind of a long shot of London..... seeing Putney Bridge where they discovered Christie, where he was eventually arrested.

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So you went from this great wide angle and you went in and in and in and then you realised that standing and leaning on the bridge was Christie. And that was the shot, so ... I think we played our part in creatively in the industry, although nobody would have thought it because a it, it didn't say on the credits er twenty to one zoom by Samuelsons or anything like that, neither did we expect it. In those days (cough) we didn't even put our name on our transport vehicles.

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The colours were fairly unique so people in the industry would know when there was, when a truck went past in our colours er that, that was er er was Samuelson equipment delivery going somewhere or other. And we used to, our, our watch words at that time were "An anonymous service to the British Film Industry". That all changed when we had people who ... somehow or other raised the money to buy a bit of gear. They were probably technicians themselves, they were operating; one of them had lock up garage at the end of his garden.

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They had nil overhead and I suppose one way of looking at it is that our overhead had got, was no longer sustainable as the market conditions had changed so much. Also Roy I was never under any illusions that people in all walks of life liked to give an opportunity, liked to give a

chance, liked to patronise the little guy. And the fact that Samuelsons was so much bigger than anyone else there's it's a kind of facet of human nature to just um keep them in line and let's make sure that they don't think that they've got it all.

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I don't think we ever thought that we'd got it all and I was always er wary, I was always aware of how necessary it was to be able to say well I'm sorry if we can't do it a deal on this one er we do have, er er there are a number of other firms that you can go to so it's not as if I'm saying if, if you don't accept um our pricing structure (cough) you can't make the movie. The, it was never anything like that, there were always other people. They just, - they weren't as good as us and the difference was that the customers, in order to save money didn't mind, or would take a chance on getting the, er, getting a lower price, th and I remember going along to see the head of film at the BBC, that would be somebody who was head of film after Alan was

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And I said to him "Well I want to talk to you because we don't seem to get much business from the Beeb these days and you used to be a major customer. And what is this? There must be a reason?. So he said "Well it's just price". So I said "Well what do you use as an alternative to us? Is it that much cheaper, other firms?" and he said "Well it's not that much cheaper but um we have a lot of our own cameramen who buy their own equipment and some of it we sell when we want to update a model, when we want to go say from the sixteen mil Arri BL to the Eclair sixteen which is much quieter then we've got all these sixteen BL's which the cameramen don't want to use because there's something better on the market so we're obliged to update - but if they own the camera themselves and they've bought it at a good price and are renting it so that they're getting their own salary, as well as er er rental for their own camera they will use the 16 BL if it's their own."

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"They won't let us supply it to them, they want the Eclair but they'll use it themselves". And I said to him "Well a couple of weeks ago we got a call er at lunch time on a Sunday from your crew in Belfast, there'd been an incident, and they'd had to run for it, and the sound recordist had dropped the Nagra and the problem was still going on and they needed a replacement Nagra". And I said "We had one on a plane out of Heathrow at three o'clock". I said "if the if something happened to the camera the cameraman owner would only have the one, what do you do for a replacement?"

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He said “Well we phone Samuelsons” (laugh). So I said (cough) “Well it seems to be a tricky one for us cos of course you will get another Nagra, you’ve got another Nagra out to Belfast the following day on the Monday and we got our Nagra back er which is er understandable, you’ve got a shelf full of Nagra’s of your own but of course we get one day rental and we’re really just the back up for all these guys who you’ve sold cameras to”

Q: Yeah, you’re the insurance company

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SAMUELSON: Yeah. And he said “I don’t know how we can”, I said “I don’t know how we can manage”. And he just said “Well that’s the BBC policy at the moment and I’ve got a budget to work to. It’s very difficult for me to keep within that budget, and I have to save money where ever I can”. And that’s just about as good a reason as I can think of because he admitted, they take a chance on it.

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And so the business..... the business changed in the 70’s and became very, very different. Another big event was that the Rank Organisation, I would say it was around about 1970, they decided that they were not going to have it - that their selling Arriflex cameras because they were the agent for Arriflex, Rank Leisure Services I think was the company, at Shepherds Bush. And, they wer, they had noticed that most of, the biggest customer was Samuelsons and they’re not using them, their renting them. And they seem to be expanding. That was their board room thinking.

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And I know all about what happened because of a phone call I received from a guy, a total stranger, who said, “The Rank Organisation has commissioned a report on the camera rental business in this country. It’s ninety-five pages long and Samuelsons are mentioned on more than fifty pages and I’m in a position to make a copy available to you”. And I thought “My God, what am, what am I hearing here, it’s got to be a report in absolute confidence or else why would they do it?”

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They wanted to know what the situation was to decide whether they’re going to invest a huge amount of money and open a company in opposition to us. So I thought if it was the other way round and a competitor of mine was offered a report, a confidential report about my company. what would I hope would happen. I hope that the chairman would phone me and say, just to let you know um I’ve been offered a report that

must be an internal confidential report about your company, what would you like me to do? (movement).... So I phoned John Davis who I didn't know very well but of course he must have known about the Samuelsons, because he must have (cough) been the one who said "Ok um we'll have to fork out the money and have a report done" Ah, I couldn't get directly to him I think he would have considered I was a bit too much of an upstart for him to be worthy of receiving a call back.

Q: He wouldn't take your call?

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SAMUELSON: Eh, he didn't take my call (right). And I said well can I leave a message, say Sidney Samuelson called and I'd like to talk to him on a confidential matter. (movement) I suppose the following day a chap called Ed Chilton phoned me, I don't know if that name means anything to you? (no, no) He was chairman of Rank Leisure Services. John Davis being chairman of the Rank Organisation. And Ed Chilton listened to what I had to say and he said "Well I think the way we'll do this is that we will (phone)

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I think that Ed Chilton must have spoken to lawyers and they decided to do it through their pub, PR company in other words nobody from the Rank Organisation was going to meet, make an appointment to meet this guy. And so I made a call on their behalf and arranged an appointment at the Grosvenor House and he said "I will bring you a page of the document where you are mentioned several times". By you, he meant the company.

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And what happened was, an appointment was made, the guy turned out to be accountant, the middle man, and he had been given..... he was in. Sorry, a senior executive of the Rank Organisation had given him a copy of the report saying see what you can get for this and we'll split it and the person to phone would be Sidney Samuelson. And they arranged an appointment ... at Grosvenor House and this guy turned up. They had several watchers there.

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Oh, I think I had been asked to tell him that I didn't know whether it was going to be of use to me but I would like our PR people to look at it to see whether it was of interest. So that kept our name out of it and also kept the Rank Organisation's name out of it but it was all done by the Rank Organisation. And sure enough, the meeting took place and there was the page of the report which I never saw. And ... the guy was a um apprehended - and there was a court case and they put this senior

executive in the dock and the only thing he could be ever convicted of was stealing Rank Organisation property. The paper on which the report was printed. Nothing else.

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And we knew that the Rank Organisation was really serious about opening up in competition to us and they did. And it was a nightmare time as far as we were concerned because the first thing that happened was they couldn't get the business. They didn't realise that there's more, er, it's one thing to import cameras, check them out and sell them, it's another thing to run a service. (mmm) And they'd got five or six people working for them, all good chaps but they hadn't a clue on how to set up a service that it's difficult if you close at five o'clock if you've got Samuelsons who are open all the time, that doesn't drag customers to you.

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And it was a great shock to the Rank Organisation especially as (cough) the same Ed Chilton who had phoned me on behalf of John Davis and made all the arrangements, on the opening day of Rank Rentals Se, Rank Camera Rentals, I think it was called.

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On the opening day he appeared in their main office where they were all gathered around the big desk (cough, movement) with the telephones on it which weren't ringing. He came with a tray of two bottles of champagne and six glasses and he said "Here's to the end of Samuelsons". Now..... we were terrified that, that this huge organisation was able, would be in a position to run their business for as long as they liked without necessarily making it pay until they'd seen off (mmm) their competition. Because compared to their size we were small and t compared to their financial resources we were minute.

Q: Xerox was the money machine wasn't it?

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SAMUELSON: Yes, absolutely right. (sniff) And it really ... worried us. And the first thing that happened was they bought a competitor of ours and the reason they bought him was (noise) er they wanted the guy who was running it who was an ex camera engineer, they wanted him to manage this place because they weren't getting any business at all. So they bought his company and the equipment and amalgamated them and so that was the first thing we did. That only caused us to believe that they were more, definitely serious as to what was, what they intended. The next thing was we noticed that however much we tried to discount our quotes somehow or other we still didn't get a lot of the business. The really big movies of that time we got (movement) because those people didn't want to take a (more

movement) chance and were not interested (movement) in saving (movement) two hundred and twenty-six pounds a week. (movement) or whatever it was.

Q: Ranks was nobody's favourite company either were they?

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SAMUELSON: No, no, you're absolutely right that must have all (cough) co, come into it. And I think there was a degree among the clients of resentment of how is it that Rank who sell the cameras (cough) are now er um nosing in on their best customers business. Didn't do them any good. Well, we found cos we used to follow through on everything if we'd given a quote on a picture and we didn't get it um we would find out who did get it if only by looking at Screen International and finding out who the camera man was (cough) and there were very few camera men who I didn't know well enough to pick up the phone and say, (cough) "Hope you don't mind asking you but I was hoping we were going to service this picture for you like others we've done for you, and did anything go wrong on previous pictures cos I notice we're not doing it, doing your current film?"

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And they would say something like "Well, I'm afraid it wasn't up to me and there was a considerably lower quote came along" And I would know who he was going to tell me were the supplier, and he would say, it's Rank Camera Rentals who are doing it. So we always knew where they were going and nearly always when we didn't get it Rank got it.

00:42:02

And then we found out, which nearly killed me off that Rank had put it around that whatever Samuelsons quote was they would discount it. Well you can't really win when you've got that kind of competition. And to make sure that we were right in our assumptions as to what they were, what their plan was a quote came along and it was for a Michael Winner film (cough) and it was in Spain, it was a cowboy film and had quite a good ah quite a good star in it, not Michael, Kirk Douglas but who's the other, Burt Lancaster, I think was in it. I'd have to look it up.

00:43:01

And my brother Michael and I we said "Well we don't actually don't like doing films for Michael Winner because we don't like the way he treats our people who (cough) who may be involved so let's not worry about getting the film". And we put in a quote of about half what it should be, because we wanted to see what would happen. And Rank Camera Rentals discounted our fifty per cent quote.

00:43:38

All that did for us was to tell us that we'd got serious trouble. And while we were working out over the next few weeks what on earth we were going to do (phone) and we realised we were going to probably have to reduce the size of the company and slash the overhead.

00:44:04

And in doing so we would probably come bit ordinary as far as service was concerned and that didn't please us at all but what alternative was there other than going out of business. And out of the blue a friend a supplier of er um editing equipment phoned us up and said I thought you'd like to know that Ed Chilton walked into the main office of Rank Camera Rentals and said we're closing down as of noon today. (Sniff) And they did (u hum). And for several reasons that we've been talking about, they just couldn't make it. It wasn't enough to have all the money you could possibly need, you had to know the business, and the business in rental is all about relationships as it is in other parts of the business. And I hope that's not too dull but it's a side of the industry that is not often talked about and there is very little knowledge on it but it has its ups and downs like the British Film Industry has its ups and downs, and that was our worse time.

END OF SIDE 3

SIDE 4

Q: No, that gave all sorts of insights I think in, in, into the business. Um, may I just ask a couple of questions now, give you a break. The um company is what, still private, family owned and self financing or or, um.....

00:00:16

SAMUELSON: No, the story there is.....

Q: You must have some stage and enormous amount of money invested in equipment, um, (yes) I'm, I'm curious how you financed.

00:00:27

SAMUELSON: We, we were self financed (uhum) by and large we were self financed until..... let me explain how we came to be self financed because none of us had any money. What we did was we all worked and made our living to pay for the groceries and to er buy the kids their school blazers and things like that, and whatever the equipment earned we put

back into buying equipment. And in the first five years we had absolutely no overhead at all, the business grew from one camera which was kept under the bed when it wasn't working in my mother in laws home because my wife and I had two rooms in the first part of our marriage in her mother's home in Finchley. And then when we eventually got a house of our own we used to run the business from the spare bedroom. And my wife used to type the invoices at night and I used to prepare the equipment at night. And I suppose we must have, before we moved out of my home to a half shop in Hendon I suppose we must have had about six, seven, eight cameras and a whole lot of ancillary like of course tripods and dollies and things like that, and special lenses.

00:02:25

And, all of that was done without a penny being spent on overheads because we didn't have any staff and we didn't have any rent. And that's how we built the business for the first five years and I think I probably have told earlier that I went on location, on a contract to Nigeria for ten months (yes, it's in there) it's in there, and saved three hundred pounds which was to be the deposit on the house but we spent it as a deposit on our first camera. And when it came to a second camera, when I was still paying off for the first one, my brothers chipped in a hundred pounds each which they hadn't really got, but they managed somehow, and that's how we bought the second camera. And then it was self generating and we earned enough to buy other things. And there was no overhead whatsoever and that's how we financed the business. Now when we had our half shop in Hendon it then became a full shop because we rented the shop next door and then the shop on the other side of a passage leading up to a yard. Then we rented the yard when we got into transport and so on. And it was in 1966 that we went public and of course that brought in some money. And then we had not much later than that, we had um um, what's it called, where you issue shares, er you, you, you do a share offer. And the public (yes, a floatation) can subscribe, a float, well we, we had (you had already) in 1966 we became a public (a public operation) (sniff) company, but you can then er, er, er, not a floatation (um) a, a, a (mean a) you can issue more shares (yee) and you can sell them (to your own shareholders) to you own shareholders (yeah) or to anybody (um) who wants to buy them.

Q: A rights issue do you mean ?

00:04:43

SAMUELSON: A rights issue absolutely. Anyway, um er we did a couple of those, and er a very big step which I've probably have also been into er, er a sort of a watershed for us was when we became the agent for Panavision. Have I talked about that?

Q: No you haven't that's er an important question.

00:05:04

SAMUELSON: Well, it, it is. I'd noticed that ... the credits on movies of course I'm talking about American movies, more and more it wasn't a credit for Cinemascope it was a credit for Panavision. (Noise) Nobody knew much about Panavision and Panavision had no branches they were just the company in Los Angeles that supplied only lenses. And they then provided attachment anamorphic lenses for Arriflex cameras.

00:05:47

And then they were asked by MGM if they could please produce some anamorphic lenses because Fox were ruling the roost, as that's where Cinemascope came from, and it was their development and their money that brought Cinemascope to the market and the Chairman of Fox at that time was a fellow called Spyros Skouras and it was he who gave the go ahead to put some money into these new fangled lenses. The anamorphic lens was originally designed by a French man and it was a lens to benefit a gunner in a tank. So that he could look through and see a wider picture than that little slit would allow him. And from that, that an example of that gun turret lens was taken to Fox and they decided to develop it and that is how Cinemascope was born.

00:07:17

Now of course the other producers, the other studios they couldn't bear what they were reading about this new process and how Spyros Skouras had saved the film industry which was being er, er, nibbled away by television. And then they had to approach Fox and say well can you supply us with lenses for our pictures? To which Fox said yes, this is what it's going to cost you and the bit that really got up the other studios noses was they demanded a full screen logo with music which said "photographed in Cinemascope". Everybody knew that it was a Fox product and people like MGM and Columbia and Paramount and Warners. They just didn't want to be beholden to Fox.

00:08:24

So the way MGM got out of it was they went, they decided to shoot in seventy millimetre, of course, just to be technically accurate that meant shooting on sixty-five millimetre, that's what the negative was and printing on seventy millimetre, the other five millimetres being for the track at the side. And only in Russia incidentally did you shoot on seventy as well as printing on seventy.

00:09:02

There's a bit of trivial information for you.

Q: We'll come back to that at some stage. I'd like to um right.

00:09:08

SAMUELSON: Ok. And (sniff) so MGM decided they were going to shoot for seventy millimetre release. (noise) And they went to a guy they knew was very interested in optical development for cinema (movement) Bob Gottschalk (coughing) excuse me. And Bob had a camera shop in Beverly Hills. And he said well yes, I can er develop a process for you and it was called Super Panavision. And it was cameras and lens, the cameras were not exactly the same and had an entirely different movement but the Mitchell Camera Company had produced seventy millimetre, sixty-five millimetre cameras. And Bob modified those cameras to make them better, introduced a better movement and that was Super Panavision. I believe the first film was called Greengage Summeror am I wrong?

Q: No er I, that was done here (was that done here?) Was David Sare (?) directed that as I remember didn't he?

00:10:36

SAMUELSON: Right well then I'd have to check that one as well. If it wasn't that it was a title like that. Anyway, and then they said what about making us some anamorphic lenses? And Bob Gottschalk brought out a series and those were the Panavision lenses. And I saw his original test film which he showed to demonstrate how superior his anamorphic lenses were to the Cinemascope lenses. Because once they'd got started, Fox Cinemascope they never put any money into improving their product and if you looked at the Robe and How to Marry a Millionaire you would see what I mean. Especially on close ups where they did no favours to actresses of forty who wanted to look twenty-five.

00:11:41

And Bob had put, had found a bit of film which must have ...er, er,er, wh, wh, no, he, he shot a bit of film, he found a Fox Cinemascope lens which may have been the worse one that they ever produced and um he did a split screen of a nice looking young girl shot on the left hand side with this old Cinemascope lens and on the right ha, with all its distortion and the puffed out cheeks and things and on the right hand side he had one of his, new, Panavision lenses of the same girl. So you saw the two and why would anybody bother with the Fox equipment - it was nothing to do with money it was just to do with quality. And that was the end, the beginning of the end of Cinemascope, it just died.

00:12:42

Well I'd noticed that Panavision was appearing more and more, I'd also asked around from the one or two people I knew (movement) on the equipment scene in the States (movement) did they know anything about Panavision and the w, w, w, what do you mean? I said well er if you want to use Panavision over here you have to send to Los Angeles for it and there's no back up at all. And they said oh well, er I, don't wait waste your time because the man who runs it is extremely difficult, and doesn't want

anybody to be handling his equipment except the paying customers. And so you won't get anywhere with him. Anyway cut a long story short Roy, I got on an aeroplane and I went to Los Angeles and I I wrote to him.

00:13:44

Now coincidentally ... Freddie Young had just shot Lawrence of Arabia and it had won an Oscar. It was the first prize Panavision had ever got. And of course tt Freddie could do no wrong as far as Bob Gottschalk was concerned. And apparently Freddie had said "I hear that John Davis came to see you before you sign up with his organisation to represent your lenses you ought to see Sidney Samuelson, you will have never heard of him but I can tell you that he serviced a picture for me um called". m, m, I'm so terrible at names, um, The Seventh Dawn it was called and it had William Holden and the girl had the name of Capu, Capucine, one word.

00:15:02

And I had just got the first of a new type of crab dolly called a Moviola Crab Dolly. There was a McAllister Crab Dolly that was well established but they wouldn't supply to us because they supplied through Shepperton Studios. So I had to go and find something else and Moviola, the editing people had, for reasons unknown decided to invent, design, manufacture a crab dolly. So I went out and bought one, I think sight unseen, it was just that I couldn't bear it not having a crab dolly when every picture of any note used the crab dolly. And I remember when this item appeared through the doorway it was the first that we knew what we bought and it was two thousand seven hundred pounds which was a lot of money at that that, at that time.

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But it turned out to be better than the McAllister Crab Dolly. So er we had got the best product and people gradually found that that's the one the production manager to book when they were starting a picture. Anyway that was after we become established with crab d.. as a supplier of crab dolly's. And when we first got it I had to find customers (noise) and Freddie Young who I didn't know until that moment he had um he was just lining up this picture, Seventh Dawn, and was doing tests at St. John's Wood Studios.

00:16:56

I managed to get in touch with him, don't know whether I wrote or what and I said "I've got a new piece of equipment, it's the first one in the country, could I bring it down and show it to you?" I took the crab dolly in the back of a van down to St John's Wood Studios and this grand old man came out to meet me to look at it in the van. And as a sort of a courtesy and I said "Can't we take it out and take it on the set?" So he said "Well I don't

want you to go to all that trouble cos I don't know whether we're going to need it or not".

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I said "It's no trouble at all". So the driver and I got it down, rolled it down two scaffold boards we'd taken with us and we somehow got it onto the set and they took the... they were all mouths open cos it was gleaming with, in its newness. And they took the camera off whatever it was they had it on, like an old Vinton Vellocilator (?) or something like that and put it on our Moviola Crab Dolly.

00:18:11

And they then carried on doing these, I think they were makeup tests. And of course they were itching to use it, but you don't usually do crabbing and tracking shots on makeup tests. So they, Freddie said well let's um, on the next one let's start back and from the side and lets crab in onto a shot like this. And they thought it was marvellous. And Freddie was so friendly and he said to me I never knew you Dad but I knew all about him and that goes back to my first credit which was e e e a movie about the First World War which that was actually shot in Lime Grove Studio in 1918. And of course at that time Roy, my Dad was at his zenith as far as being a power in our industry.

00:19:16

Anyway he sort of said "It's nice to meet you" and all that. And then I got a phone call from him..... saying.... Oh yeah I think what happened was, we'd packed it all up and put it back in the van.

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When I got back to Samuelsons, at, we were still at Hendon then, um, they were all (laughingly) sort of trembling saying Freddie Young has been on the phone and wants you to call him back. And they then stood back while I made the phone call. And he said, "Yes, I'd just like to let you know, please er reserve the dolly for us cos we want to take it to Malaya for the film".

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So that was that. Then he said "So what other equipment have you got?" And I said "Well we've got cameras" and so on. He said "Have you got a Mitchell?" Because in those days Roy, every feature film the principal camera was a Mitchell BNC. I was saying to a cameraman the other day called Bob Hewk(?) I don't know if you've ever worked

Q: Yes, I worked with him)

00:20:32

SAMUELSON: ever worked. You have - I was with him last weekend I think and I said to him, "I still think of you Bob as the man who owned not one but two BNC cameras" - which actually subsequently we bought from him. But he, I don't know how it came about but he had two BNC cameras which he used to rent out.

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But his problem was he didn't rent anything else so if you decided to rent all you equipment and you wanted to take one of his beautiful BNC's you'd got to go somewhere else for everything else. He had nothing else, didn't even have geared head I don't think. Anyway um I said "I used to, when I saw you walking past I would think to myself my God, he's got two BNC's cameras". Anyway, to go back to Freddie Young he said "Have you got a BNC?" And I said "No but I've got access to one, why are you asking?" He said, "Well, I suggested to our people that they come and see you and maybe you could service the picture for us". It was our, I can't say it was our first feature film; it was our first BNC film.

00:21:53

There was a wonderful character, a cameraman who owned quite a lot of equipment including a BNC, his name was Bunny Onions bet you'd never heard that name.

Q: I've heard the name (cough) I, I didn't know him.

00:22:06

SAMUELSON: Well Bunny used to let me borrow equipment, not borrow it, he he would er let me have it at a twenty per cent discount so that twenty percent gave me a margin to cover going to get it, checking it out, and sending back afterwards and so on. And um, so I checked with Bunny that his camera was going to, wasn't booked on anything. And I phoned Freddie's production manager and I said "Just to let you know that we could service the picture with er whatever is required including a BNC".

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They came to see me and I took them round and of course I wasn't able to show them the BNC but I made no bones about it. I said "I don't know if you've ever worked with Bunny BNC but that's the one that I'd be supplying but it would all be checked out by us before hand and all the equipment would be put together er for your crew to come for however many days they want to come to check everything through."

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At the, at the time with a half shop and a couple of other half shops attached to it only available it must have been going through my mind where the hell will I put the equipment for them to check it out. Anyway, they gave us the job and we, we hired the Baptist Church Hall in Hendon to be where the equipment was checked out and I remember I had to get volunteers to stay there at night because it was such a security risk if someone broke in, there was all the equipment lined out.

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They took about three cameras and anyway, that's how we got that first feature film with the BNC. And apparently Freddie had said to Bob Gottschalk "I, before you ss, before you do a deal with the Rank Organisation, it may not be the best people to go to and I think you should go and see Sidney Samuelson because"

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He, I think at that time I don't remember whether David was with us yet. I suppose he must have been, I'd have to check the dates, because David more or less came to us when we got the contract for World in Action. Anyway, um..... we did that picture and Freddie said you should, to Bob, "Before you do a deal you should go and see a chap called Sidney Samuelson who has got a company with his brothers and they're very good".

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Now Bob, being Bob Gottschalk did absolutely nothing about it. Er, he wasn't going to phone this guy in London and er waste his time, he's too busy doing that and in any case he wouldn't want someone else handling his equipment, supplying his equipment and so on. So I managed to, when, when I wrote to him and said I was coming to America and could I come and see him I did get a message back, I don't think I got a letter, I may have done. But because Freddie had given me credibility (movement) he did deign to write to me and say if you're in Los Angles er I will show you Panavision (movement). And I knocked on his door and they let me in and er took me into the office, he and his er number two and three and asked me all sorts of questions. Some of them nothing to do with cameras and lens flange focal depths and things like that. Er I thought a very peculiar line of questioning, but I realised sometime later that their all, the pe the people who were Panavision were all gay and nothing at all, didn't bother me in the slightest except I think they wanted to know where my sexual orientation was. (laughter) And (laugh)

Q: Their breaking the mould do you think?

00:26:56

SAMUELSON: Well maybe. Anyway they showed me around and I was able to ask a number of questions and I think I convinced them that I knew what I was talking about, if that doesn't sound too pompous. And he said well, (cough) and then I went back again spent another half a day there and of course the most wonderful thing would have been if he would have just said to me, do you know I think I'm going to let you be the representative of Panavision. But he didn't! And I went back and the weeks went by and I thought well he's never going to do anything. I used to concoct reasons to phone him to say er I just had people in and they've got a picture to do and I talked to them about Panavision, why didn't they think about doing it anamorphic. And of course they're nervous I would say, that what about if something goes wrong? How long will it take to get a replacement from Los Angeles for goodness sake? That would be the lenses I should add Roy because ah er the cameras he didn't supply cameras so the lenses were matched to whatever BNC camera was going to be used. And it had it wasn't a reflex it had an external view finder and as as the focus changed, done by the focus puller as somebody walked towards camera we'll say, the focus pullers control knob was linked to the outside finder to take care of the parallellex (?).

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So as the (cough) um, as the person, the actor came closer, the finder had to angle its self round er to keep in more or less where he should be in the view finder. That's how it was done in those days. Anyway, um so the lenses, the Panavision lenses came from Los Angeles and were matched to the BNC Mitchell and any other camera that they were going to use.

00:29:19

And, so I would try and make out that I was generating a whole lot of potential business but, but the customers were nervous about what would happen if there was a breakdown or something fell over, or whatever. Anyway he neverhe never took the bait and I also remember that after my second meeting in Los Angeles I thought, because my wife was with me, the most wonderful thing would be if he's said well while you're in town I'd like to take you to dinner. And he never did um that all came later. But then what happened was that they were starting to shoot the Bond film that was called Thunderball.

00:30:18

And they had rented Panavision lenses and Panavision converted Arriflex's with attachment anamorphics on them and they, their first day of shooting was in Weymouth..... and they couldn't get along with the gear. I don't know if some parts were missing or adaptor plates weren't there, or British stuff didn't line up with American stuff. Anyway um I got a phone call, when I, where I, I came home one evening, we'd been out somewhere and we had one of the first answer machines in my home. It was about this size and you couldn't record the message yourself you had to use the firm who

supplied answer machine, you had to use their female, beautifully spoken (yes, I remember ???) message taker. Can you remember that? (cough)

Q: Yes, and enormously expensive .

00:31:22

SAMUELSON: And enormously expensive but I thought we're getting calls from all round the world including America (cough) and the time difference is such that some of them come late at night and so I thought one of these answer machines. (Laughs) It was very funny because the operator would sayum, the I think sh she may have said um "The office is closed at the moment, but if you would like to leave a message" and I would hear the person the other end who had never come across an answer machine saying

00:32:05

"Hang on, hang on, just a minute, what are you saying dear, what do you mean, is Sidney there or, or, or is he not there?" And so on, you'd hear all that going on in the back ground. Anyway, when I came home about eleven o'clock one night there was a message from the number three at Panavision, Rick Hendrick. And he said "Oh, this is, I'm phoning for Mr Robert Gottschalk and he would be pleased if you would phone him back and the matter is urgent". So I thought "God, I have to be out when the phone call eventually comes through I have to be out". Now I would say it was about nine months after I'd visited Panavision when this happened. And, I phoned him back and he was in terrible rage.

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He said "You told me all this stuff about, that you've got good technicians and that they know how everything goes and now we've got these IDIOTS in Whymouth where ever that is (cough) who saying not only is the e e equipment, they don't say it's not functioning they just say it doesn't fit together. Now you've told me about your so called marvellous chief engineer, Bill Vicar".

00:33:40

Bill Vicar actually was the chief engineer at Rank Equipment, Rank Leisure Services and I'd pirated him wonderful guy of about sixty at that time.

Q: We recorded him at Glebelands as a matter of fact.

00:33:54

SAMUELSON: Oh you did, oh I'm so pleased

Q: Way, years ago, yeah

00:33:58

SAMUELSON: Good because he subsequently died yes. Anyway, he said "You told me about this er er so called um chief engineer, I hope he's better than those who that are in the camera crew on this film er er because I want you to send him to Whymouth tomorrow"

00:34:26

And I said, "First of all we'll do it but second of all we haven't got a deal yet". He said "You're going to get the deal don't torture me with things like this. Get th the equipment put together properly, phone me and we'll work something out".

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It was like one of the watersheds in my business life was to hear that. Now the reason I've told you all that Roy is because it was not only a watershed for me it was the same for our company because Panavision was the system that everybody wanted use.

00:35:13

It was a bit expensive for some peoples tastes but if you were into shooting in anamorphic at all you were not probably making a cheapo.... low budget film, you were probably making a medium to high budget film. And I went over to Panavision and did the deal and I took my brother Tony with me because Tony is not technical at all but he was huge importance to the development of our business because he's a trained barrister.

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And when he couldn't make a living at being a barrister, cos you really needed at that time a sort of private income for about ten years till you got a name. So he went into city and he understood the city, so that when we went public, it was Tony who took us through that.

00:36:15

And he also has a proud claim that the most important thing he ever did in all his years with Samuelsons, he avoided litigation of any kind. We never had to go to court about anything. And that was a good thing to have done because nobody wins except the lawyers it seems to me if you go to court. Anyway we had the deal with Panavision and it brought into our building er, by which time we'd moved to Cricklewood and we'd gone public and we had really..... really nice premises there.

00:37:00

It brought all the Hollywood greats in there and.... d'd'd among them, as I told you was James Wong Howe. We had a all the top camera men came and the fact that we could make something special for them that they'd have to fight for even if they were working in MGM er they just thought it was remarkable.

00:37:26

And a lot of the expan, expansion of our business was sort of on the back of Panavision, they came to us for the Panavision lenses and while they were getting the lenses of course they got the cameras. Subsequently the cameras were also made by Panavision; the best camera in the world for many, many years was the Panaflex (u hum). There are now a couple of other cameras that are very good, Movicam is one of them but the the the trick, the difficult bit is to make a camera that's steady, holds it focus etc is one thing but making it quiet is something entirely different. And Panavision came out with their Panaflex which was quietest camera around and the lightest in weight and the smallest is size. So it's no surprise it took the business. Anyway it brought the um big movie makers to Samuelsons and erwe expanded and expanded and

Q: Was was Panavision also the motor for your international expansion?

00:38:44

SAMUELSON: Nnnno!

Q: You'll come to that in all probability.

00:38:48

SAMUELSON: Well I will. Let me just deal with it while it's in our minds. I, it wasn't entirely responsible for us opening and I'll list where we have. Our first overseas branch was in Sidney and then we were also in Melbourne and Perth. And then we went to France and we were in Paris. We bought a company call Algar (?) Cinema and kept the staff except they didn't, they'd just lost their camera engineer but that suited us because, and I'm sorry if I keep going off at a tangent. But the best camera engineer in France was called Gee Tournery (?) and he worked for the big, traditional camera equipment supplier called Chevro (?) in Paris, but he couldn't get on with the boss and the boss was another of these rather difficult characters' and so he had left.

00:39:57

And he came to see me in London and he said "I don't know how it would work out and whether I'd be, I'd get a work permit, but should you ever need a camera engineer I've heard all about your company and I'd like to come and work for you". As it happens we could use him because in those days production, feature film production companies used to take a camera

engineer with them when they went on location. And I think we were responsible for changing that. Nevertheless a big film would take an engineer with them. If Charles Bronson was making a film in Spain he would have Ted Warringham as a camera engineer who did nothing but take the cameras in after the days shoot, clean them, oil them, do anything that needed to be doing to them and deliver them to the crew the following morning. In this case, when I said to Gee Tournery (?) "I could use you on locations but I can't take you on staff it just wouldn't be allowed and you'd have to have an ACTT ticket and that you would never get" um I said. "But we have ideas about opening in France". He said, and it was really a great compliment, ego massage if you like, he said "I'll wait". And he did and occasionally we were able to send him on really big pictures out of France but to be the engineer and when we opened in France he became our chief engineer. And then we opened in four states in America (cough)

Q: Why Australia because Australia in those days was not known as (movement) a great film making country was it and yet you opened what in three locations there.

00:41:51

SAMUELSON: We had a lot of production, producers etc from Australia who used to come to Europe to shoot (mm) not only on feature films but on documentaries and sports films.

Q: Commercials?

00:42:10

SAMUELSON: Commercials probably (mm, yeah) yes, yes. And I think we may have had so many people who said "Why don't you open in Australia (laugh) we've got nothing there". And so we did and it was a great success. Now while it wasn't because of Panavision that we opened in these territories it's certainly true to say that without Panavision we would not have opened. Because it gave us um.... an automatic catchment area er we knew that if we opened in Atlanta when a feature film was going to be shot in the south west of the States it would probably be Panavision. Panavision didn't ever have the monopoly but it wasn't far short of it.

Q: Well I'll tell you something. For those people who were making the films there was a certain eclair (?) to using Panavision it was a reflection of one's own self and standing.

00:43:15

SAMUELSON: Absolutely right. Had one customer in Poland who who shot a whole feature film called the Battle of Neretva, a big film and no, sorry not Poland, Yugoslavia. And he shot it on a single fifty

millimetre (laugh) Panavision lens (laughing - yes). That's all they could afford and they were so desperate to have the credit on the end, photographed in Panavision one lens. Anyway the territories...er we

Q: I think, think we'll go onto a new tape then before you run on on those.

SAMUELSON: Right

END OF SIDE 4

SIDE 5

Q: Aaaand take three of Sidney Samuelson, yeah.

00:00:03

SAMUELSON: I'll just round off the territories. (cough) (movement)

Q: Just looking at the times going, quarter past four.

00:00:11

SAMUELSON: Ah,(Are you alright for time?) yes. (movement) I left out one which was Holland and that was definitely because so many people in Holland said for God's sake open a branch (noise) to service our industry. And originally just dealing with Holland (noise) (cough) it was pretty successful and it was relatively simple to service a branch in Holland because you could get there so quickly. And we took premises actually on Schiphol Airoport which was the previous airport for Amsterdam, well really for Holland I suppose, um before the one at the moment, or maybe the one at the moment is at the other end of Schiphol.

Q: Oh well Schiphol is still there (oh yes) well yes,ya

00:01:06

SAMUELSON: Ok, yes. Well the bit that had been the passenger area became the freight area and we had offices (movement) and storage actually next to the runway (cough, er hum). Um anyway we found that management of a company abroad is a major problem and you can't supervise it as well as you can if you were on the spot. And in Holland particularly another er difficulty emerged and that was that once again when competitors were emerging themselves, they had to have staff and ok, administrators, people taking the bookings, it's not too difficult to convert them to taking bookings for cameras and lenses and lights and things.

00:02:10

The real problem is having a skilled.... q q yeah qualified engineer in charge of the maintenance. And able to deal with emergencies. And we, there was no alternative, we had to bring a local engineer, usually we went for an instrument maker if we could find one. And we had to bring him to London for about six months and train him. He's got the skill as a precision engineer but he didn't know anything about Panaflex cameras. And of course later, the elec electronics that go with cameras. And we had to train them, which was hugely expensive because you've got to not only pay their salary, you've got to pay for them to stay somewhere, er the per diem.

00:03:10

And then we would send them back and everything would be fine and I think on three occasions, three guys who got to know what the rental business was about and where everything came from er they kind of talked to mates, friends of mates, the wealthy uncle of mates and said you know if we bought two or three cameras and what goes with them I think we could run a business and I'm already trained to be the manager and the engineer. (and) So they could set up again with minimal overhead almost a one man band and the only reason they could do it was because we trained the bugger.

Q: Couldn't you contract them for a certain period to at least have the initial benefit of the training?

00:04:05

SAMUELSON: Well of course it never happened immediately (no) they needed to get to know the business

Q: Get a bit more experience still (yes) and then take over, right.

00:04:15

SAMUELSON: And you see I can't complain too much about this Roy because that's actually what I did. I went out and bought a camera (right) and (and Bill Vicars at some stage) and pirated Bill Vicar. Absolutely right, and anyway, we found it very difficult to get the people who were technically minded but had business sense.

00:04:40

For example I went over to pay a visit to Holland which wasn't doing very well and the manager was a guy who had actually come from the UK, been one of our people. But..... he was very, very good as a number three and no good at all as a number one because what he was good at which enabled him to be an efficient number three, even a number two perhaps, um was nothing to do with business sense. And the kind of thing that I found was

that the staff driver who drive, drove the truck had been given a company car and I said we don't give any of our drivers company cars Ken why has he got one? And he said well, he's a really good man and he turns his hand to anything. And I said why is it a Mercedes? And he said well to augment his wages he does cab work at the weekends.

00:05:54

And I thought we're paying for a Mercedes, the bloke shouldn't have a car at all, we're paying for a Mercedes and the running costs and no doubt the petrol is signed off in the company's name, (cough) the mileage is going up and he's earning the money on our backs and the company is not doing very well. That's just a rather poor example of someone who couldn't see anything wrong with that at all, he thought.

Q: I remember him, I had dealings with him.

00:06:29

SAMUELSON: You did. Such a nice guy

Q: Yeah, yeah, he preferred golf to running a business.

00:06:35

SAMUELSON: You're right. And, and he eventually, he's still there in Holland and (laughs) he, he was on British Rail when he joined us and we trained him and we were very proud of him because he was, nothing was too much trouble. What we did was, we over promoted him. Now he, he's retired now and he, but he became after um the company, we closed that company, he became a grip in Holland. And I think he must have made a comfortable living and what a wonderful guy to have on the crew but not to be in charge.

00:07:16

And he was um quite a character because on one of my trips over to Holland um I was at, at our um, he was already over there um. No he, he tra, on that one he travelled with me and um er er made a passionate farewell to a lovely girl called Jean who was a young widow who we knew was his serious lady. And when I got off the plane with him in Holland there was another one there um giving him just as passionate an embrace as he'd just had a couple of hours ago in Cricklewood.

00:08:05

And er so he was, he was a great guy but absolutely no good at all in management. And finding people who are good in management, I'm sorry, yes, who are good in things to do with money, cash flow, turn over, staff salary scales are not usually any good at all with things technical. And the

ideal is that you have someone er for one job and someone for another job. But if you've got a small company you sometimes have to look for a degree of versatility so that if somebody is you technical one he's got to understand how the business runs as well and use his common sense.

00:09:06

And ... the other problem that we've had, and I've been guilty of on the one hand wanting to give people who'd given great service to the company in one respect, I wanted to give them a promotion when a vacancy came up. And I'm guilty of over pro, promoting on a number of occasions. And this fellow that we're talking about is a good example. But on several other occasions it is because we've..... promoted somebody where they would be in touch for the first time probably with money, company money, and they were unable to develop into being. Do you remember I said to you there's a Yiddish word called mensch, and er a good example of the use of that word is. They were not able to develop into being a mensch, having come from the lower ranks and I had several occasions where I'm afraid they had their hand in the till. And it's always a great sadness to me and of course instant dismissal is the ONLY way because what's that French expression as an example to the others.

Q: Yes, pour encourager les autres

00:10:39

SAMUELSON: Yeah, yes that's right. And you just can't have anybody who you can't trust. So, that manifested it's self in Holland and in the end we felt that we, we just couldn't make it pay because of the level of staff we had to have and there wasn't enough business to sustain it. And there were all these little competitors around.

Q: And people make a lot of money in Holland too, don't they (yes) they're paid extremely well.

00:11:07

SAMUELSON: Ye, yes, yes. So er, er, er, um we, we had to, w we had to close Holland (cough) and the catalyst of closing it was there was a major robbery. There was a break in and we were cleaned out n, now how can I put it. Of all the equipment that was in demand but some of the older stuff that didn't go out very much was left on the shelves. (a selective) Now what do you make of that?

Q: A selective robbery, no?

00:11:40

SAMUELSON: Yeah (yeah), we think so. And so much so that so that the insurers at first refused to pay out because they felt that it must be an inside job, and..

Q: Was that you're feeling? Possibly?

00:11:56

SAMUELSON: Possibly. I mean how would a common or garden burglar know what to take ?And

Q: It's not exactly ram raiding is it (laughs)

00:12:09

SAMUELSON: No, no it isn't. The equipment was found about I think five years later in Belgium. A lot of it still together. And the one helpful thing about it, about cameras is they've all got a serial number. So either you've got to file it off, which tells its own story or it is traceable and normally can cameras such as we supply are used not privately but they are used publically. So you're in with a chance. Now to go back to your original question um what happened (cough) (movement) was that in the early eighties we were acquired by a group that came into our lives. I don't quite remember how called Eagle Trust. It was.....I'm sorry in the late eighties, did I say the early eighties?

Q: You said the early eighties, yes, yes

00:13:15

SAMUELSON: No, I meant the late eighties. And er of course we had major competition by that time because Lee's had been visited by an ex member of our staff. Great guy who turns out must have said to them if you put the money in I'll open a camera department...er...and I know, s, I know how to do it. So they became er they were always by far the biggest lighting rental company. But they were, they then had a major camera department, which was major competition to us and there were a number of others. There was also, came into the business I'm afraid a way of doing business that was not really above board. I don't really want to go into it but um what went on was not how we were used to running a business. And I er er u it was very, very difficult to cope with and it um..... it got quite vicious at times. And there was a degree of corruption that we had certainly never engaged in but we we had never come across until that sort of period. And..... I.....n, n, n I wouldn't say we were disillusioned but when this group approached us and said we're worth two hundred million. It doesn't sound so much now but ten years ago, twelve years ago.

Q: It's it's two hundred billion these days isn't it.

00:15:20

SAMUELSON: I suppose so - and I can't get my brain round what a billion is actually. Anyway they were looking for, they were in a group in the Midlands, I would say with twenty different companies in ten different industries. And they..... they told us and our advisers that they were worth two hundred million with with no debt. And they were looking to get into the media industry and they were looking for a flagship company to start them off. We at the time had plans ... to develop our company into other areas but didn't really have the money to carry it out. So here was er an answer and er none of us were all that young. I mean eighty, we're talking about um say twelve years ago so I was already sixty something and so as they - part of the deal was that they wanted the management to stay on

00:16:36

And it also meant a th, th, th at that time of our lives that we would be um er er er um seeing some of our personal assets turning into money and it was as I say a a at a time when we didn't mind the idea of that at all. Because although we were all wealthy er it was all in shares. And so this seemed like an opportunity and it was still going to be called Samuelsons so there was no diminishment of pride or anything like that. And it turned out that the chairman of this group er was an absolute fraudster. And he ... was using... the companies own money to buy shares at the time of the offering.

00:17:39

To cut a long story short (cough) he was er charged with fraud and he went down er I to er um, he was in prison, he got nine years. But meanwhile the finances of the company were in.... complete disarray. Put it that way. And a company doctor was bought in, a chap called David James, and you'll notice I'm not giving the names of the baddies, only the goodies. Anyway David James came in; he's the chap who's now in charge of the Millennium Dome. And um a lot of selling off had to be done

00:18:29

But the only company really out of Eagle Trust that was really any good was Samuelsons. (cough) But gradually..... um (cough) we um had to dispense with the services of the old time founders um, my brother Michael he er bought the lighting company and that became Michael Samuelson Lighting. I was asked to stay on for a number of years as President of the company. But I was, I was no longer er Chief Executive, I think I was originally Chairman and, no, I think I was originally Chairman, I stayed as Chairman but not Chief Executive and then I became President. Which I always describe as being promoted sideways.

00:19:30

And then I er became the British Film Commissioner which is another story that we can talk about. And the company was really broken up and the, eventually Panavision had opened their own company, I always think a bit like BMW because th they had a company that was the er sole distributor for BMW and they did so well that BMW said I think we'll sell our motor cars in the UK. And something similar er happened and Panavision acquired er the Samuelson Camera Rental Company and I was no longer President at that time.

00:20:26

But they, they bought in those companies. They, they had their own company and it was long after Bob Gottschalk died, I'm sure it would never have happened if he'd lived but another bizarre part of the story that he was murdered by his then partner and er that was the beginning of the end of the relationship er which was a very close one between Samuelsons and Panavision, specifically Robert Gottschalk himself. (cough) Panavision was bought by Warner Brothers and er, n no first of all it was bought by a firm called Kinney no it wasn't, first of all it was bought by a producer and I'd have to think of his name. And Bob was furious because it was bought for four million dollars, again it doesn't sound like much but this was a long time ago

00:21:31

And.....he sold it to a firm called Kinney, I believe for about twice as much within a year. And Bob always maintained he sold it because he needed working capital to come into the firm and this guy promised that there was no problem with whatever he needed. And then he found that within three months that the staff were not going to be paid if Bob didn't put personal money into an account in order to pay them. And of course when when it was resold immediately after from a um with a huge profit for the guy who'd done nothing (movement) for the company at all Bob was furious about that. Kinney, he wasn't too thrilled about Kinney either because their main business was car parks and e e er (funerals) funerals. Oh, do you know about them?

Q: Sure, Steve Ros (?)

00:22:33

SAMUELSON: That's right (um). And then Warner Brothers (mm) acquired Panavision and Bob, he liked to do theory but not in practise because of course Warner Brothers wanted him to report all the time and deliverer, er, er, er, er financial plans and forecasts. And Bob hated all that stuff and when he was called to New York for er, er, um to report on why it was all costing so much money and all that kind of thing he used to be angered beyond belief. And then Warner Brothersmust have sold it.....they must have sold it e e e.... what happened?

Q: Did Annamerlise (?) have it for a while?

00:23:31

SAMUELSON: They did, they did. And they had mortgaged themselves, it was all done with what do you call it, development money. What do you call these people who say come to us with your plan and we'll put the money up for you (well) to buy the company.

Q: Leveraged I suppose. (yeah) I, I, I degeared (?)

00:23:54

SAMUELSON: Yeah and (hmm) and er once again.

Q: That, that was part of the er climate during the eighties and

00:24:02

SAMUELSON: Yeah, yeah, that's right

Q: Is once again now.

00:24:05

SAMUELSON: Y, y, yeah. It is. And (cough)..... Anyway, so Panavision e er expanded and they the Lee's bought Panavision but completely overstepped (noise) their resources, further more I think they had a crooked finance director. ...And

Q: Well I don't think John or Benny were exactly strangers (laughs)

00:24:37

SAMUELSON: Well..... I've (needed to) your absolutely right and I'll just say this because I've decided not to go into the personal relationship

Q: Fair enough, don't agree with me.

00:24:49

SAMUELSON: Er no, I'm afraid I do but I'd just like to say that um I never had a problem with John Lee ever. And I think if it wasn't for what happened we would be quite good friends. And when I see him now er ... I I would never not walk over and say hell, how are you getting on and so on cos poor man I think he must have had a stroke cos he hasn't got the use of one arm or something like that. No problem with him at all. His brother ... undoubtedly had a paranoia about me. And um a good friend, a senior

camera man..... it was only the other day when he said I know you don't come to um the gatherings that we have once a year. The BSC lunch at the Conservatory at Shepperton he said but I'm really hoping you might come this year. And I eventually told him why I don't come and that was because I refused to (movement) be insulted in public in front of so many of my good friends by Benny Lee. And he couldn't see me in the same room without abusing me in the foulest possible language (hmm, really) that you can imagine. And there was no reason for it, er he once said to me ... you know we should put our two companies together then we would rule the world. And I said, Benny I don't want to rule the world and if we put our two companies together we would have a virtual monopoly and all that would happen is the customers would say we've got to find er er someone else to get our gear from. We're not going to have, we're not going to be forced a certain firm because it's the only firm. And it was all very unpleasant and pretty viscous and a pity.

Q: It would have flown apart anyway because (oh yes) because the two I'm sure could not of worked together.

00:27:27

SAMUELSON: But, we could never of (movement)

Q: The Lees were so foul mouthed (yes) which was another thing, Sandy's were never that.

SAMUELSON: Yes, ju ju just switch the recorder off for a minute....

00:27:38

SAMUELSON: We recorded the bit about, that we were acquired by this Midlands conglomerate did we?

Q: Yes indeed, right. - (arranges self - restart)

00:27:57

SAMUELSON: Um, th, th, the end of it was that we were acquired disastrously by this company, Eagle Trust. The chairman turned out to be a fraudster. He was charged and received a nine year sentence. Don't know what he does now, not particularly interested. And the company was broken up and the, the company doctor came in. Samuelsons was the only ... element that was really worth anything. It by and large eventually (cough) was acquired by Pana,

Panavision, the film bits were. But we had for an example and audio visual company and that was not acquired by Panavision and so on. And.... er, that was, so that that there is no family involvement in Panavision, eh sorry, what was (phone) Samuelsons at all

Q: We're resuming on the 2nd May. Sidney um we were talking about the last days of the family involvement in Samuelsons and your subsequent role.

00:29:17

SAMUELSON: What happened was that (tea cup) the acquisition by Eagle Trust was an absolute disaster. I may of said this before but just to recap on it... We were told they were this huge successful Midlands based conglomerate worth two hundred million with no debt. This is about 1989 and they were looking for a flag ship company in which to enter the media industry. And it sounded very, very good. ... And we eventually did a deal with them. And they acquired ... our company on the basis of a share valuation of thirty sh shillings per share. It's interesting I think to just ponder what might have happened because and energetic ... suitor at the same time was Robert Maxwell. And we have often wondered what would have happened if we had gone along with him. (cough) We didn't go along with him because he ... his offer per share was (tea cup), did not reach what Eagle Trust wished to pay. I ... assume that if it ... if we had done a deal with Maxwell (cough) and incidentally it was contingent on ... the family still staying to run the company. But if we had done a deal I suppose we would have been sold off before the think, the Maxwell empire collapsed. But who knows and what difference does it make (cough) anyway.

Q: Well as I remember, the Maxwell Companies individually didn't go under did they. The things like the Express Gr..., the Mirror Group and er the various others, the publishing houses, they all survived.

00:31:53

SAMUELSON: He had used the Mirror Group Pension Scheme (that's right) hadn't he (yeah, yeah, yeah) and presumably would have used our pension scheme.

Q: Was Samuels entirely or largely family held at this point?

00:32:04

SAMUELSON: We had the majority (hmm) by far (right). Anyway ... we went with this other company and it then turned out, and I may have said this before that the chairman used his own shares, the company shares, to pay the share holders to acquire Samuelsons. Which of course is against the (it's illegal u hu) law and he was .. subsequently. Well two things happened. One was ... a company doctor was brought in when Eagle fell away and that was a chap called David James who is currently trying to sort out the Millennium Dome. To see if any value can be extracted at all, that's just by the by. And I had been..... when, when David James Organisation took over, still keeping the name Samuelson, but when his henchmen came in to run the company I was promoted sideways. er My

brother Michael bought the lighting division because they started selling things off. Of all the companies that Eagle Trust had in the end the only one that was any good was Samuelsons. Most of the other companies were er er total disaster. And they were nothing to do with the media industry of course. They were the people who ... as an example of the kind of company they had, they had a company who made these great big trucks that you see s stopped at side of the road when they are emptying the bins, those trucks that take the rubbish.

Q: The garbage, the garbage trucks (yes) and whatever they pick up. (yes)
um

00:34:20

SAMUELSON: And (cough) it was quite a lucrative business (tea cup) and then they got themselves into trouble because they thought they'd be very clever because there was going to be a shortage of the chassis which were made by various companies but the main people seemed to be Mercedes. So they bought, committed to Mercedes total output of these refuse, the chassis for refuse trucks ... for I don't know how long and it coincided with ... the local authorities selling off their refuse businesses to private enterprise and the private enterprise wishing to use the existing trucks that they bought in when they acquired the whole thing from the local authorities and the bottom dropped out of new vehicles.

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And this particular Eagle Trust Company was stuck with hundreds and hundreds of ch chassis each of which was worth thousands and thousands of pounds. Anyway ... the last company... to survive was Samuelsons and they eventually sold that off. By which time I'd been promoted sideways to President and then I retired as President at the time of the end of my contract with Samuelsons which was December 31st 1990 on my sixty-fifth (sniff cough) not quite on my birthday but when I became sixty-five.

00:36:12

And I was ready to retire however in the February, like six weeks after my official retirement I got a call from the DTI, the de d ar Department of Trade and Industry . And it was on behalf of the then Minister, Lord Alexander Heslith his name was. And ...would I go and see him. And so an appointment was fixed and I went to see him and he had interesting, an interesting proposal. And all my life Roy I've m r there are a number of aspects that are constant. One is I feel I'm the luckiest person I've ever come across. And I mean that. ... And by being lucky I think I have had pure luck on the number of occasions notably it's come about through being in the right place at the right time.

00:37:30

And this was another example of that because he asked me if I would set up an organisation ... to promote the British film production sector, especially abroad. To monitor ... when Stephen Spielberg was about to make a film and was looking for a European location but hadn't decided where, to get out there and convince him that the UK was the place. (sniff) a a An exa, an absolute example of that was saving Private Ryan where they couldn't make up their minds where they were going to shoot the actual landing.

00:38:18

And of course that was only a third of the picture and the other two thirds was what happened after D Day. And I happened to know Spielberg and cut a long story short, although we didn't get the beach head because that was done on the coast of the Republic of Ireland. Not because it wouldn't have been for ever other reason better to shoot it in the UK because this is where the production infra structure is, this is where all the Second World War vehicles and uniforms and all that stuff. And the crews of course are here, and they don't have any of that to speak of in the Republic of Ireland. But they did have a very good area to use as the beach head and although we had matched it north of Newcastle the tides were so high that it cut down the shooting day because it takes that much longer for you to get your beach back after the tide has gone out. And you have to stop s shooting that much earlier cos you've got, got to get your vehicles all off the beach before they're going to be overrun with water.

00:39:43

And they had a better (cough), logistically better beach in the Republic. But of course all the gear and the props and the costumes and s crew members they all virtually came from here. And the other two thirds were shot on Hatfield Air Field and we, the British Film Commission had a lot to do with getting finally the agreement with um ... what are they called. B Is it BAC, British

Q: Well it's now British Aerospace (British Aerospace) it was British Aircraft (yes) Corporation I think yeah.

00:40:28

SAMUELSON: I remember having to make contact with the head of their property services on a Sunday afternoon (cough) at his golf club because we had an ultimatum from ... th th the Spielberg Company to say what the hell is going on here are we going to get it or not? Or we are we going to have to rethink this whole thing? Anyway what the Minister said was, that the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher at that time, has agreed to fund an organisation to promote the industryand it will be under the DTI because it's all to do with trade, export in a way, hidden export if you like. And the money is there (cough) and I was told, instructed, to find the person to set it up. And it hasn't ... proved to be easy because it's a new organisation; there isn't a national film commission anywhere in the world. There are

lots of film commissions in America where the whole idea of film commissions started and there are indeed two or three in the UK, the first one being in Liverpool. But there is no role model, there is no national commission, there is no government funded commission (phone) that represents He said.....where did, what was the last thing I said, I know that there was a little bit that I didn't quite finish.

Q: Um, oh dear. The um Spielberg Company was saying. Oh this, no, this was setting up the organisation but you said (yes) that there was a commission in

00:42:31

SAMUELSON: Yes, it's what, it's what Heskith said (Liverpool um) where did I get to, Liv, there was, there was one in Liverpool (um) but there was no national commission. This is it. There was no national commission meaning there was no central body which said, we don't mind where the movies are made as long as they're made in the UK. The Liverpool Film Office they worked diligently to bring production in but they wanted it to be in the north west (uhum). They were not interested in production if it was only going to be shot in Devon. So

END OF SIDE 5

SIDE 6

00:00:01

SAMUELSON: And he saidddd "so Margaret Thatcher has agreed to provide the funding and I was told to get my people into looking for the person to set it up, plan it, organise it, run it". And this is the great ego message he gave me, Roy he said, "when my people ask around your name keeps coming up".

00:00:32

(Now when I said I'm a very lucky person, the luck here was that ... I was available to do it. If he'd asked me a year earlier I..... simply would not be, have been able to take it on because I was still under contract. And therefore they wouldn't have done what they wanted to do; they would have found somebody else. And when I did become available it would have been too late.

00:01:07

So I feel I was very fortunate in the timing. Secondly, if I'd been asked by the Minister of State of a Board of Trade if I would ...set up an organisation to promote the bathroom fitting industry I would have had to turn it down because a) I don't know anything about bathroom fittings and b) I don't want to know anything about them. But to be asked to set up an organisation to promote an industry that I've been involved in all my life.

00:01:41

And my Father and Grandmother before me how lucky can you be, and to be available to do it. So that's how ... the timing worked out exactly right, immediately after I'd retired, within six weeks I was already on to what I called the coda, to use a musical term of my ... business life. And I became the British Film Commissioner.

00:02:13

It was a wonderful business arrangement because like my Father, having struggled with the problems of running a business, of the cash flow, of the finance director saying if we don't get some of the money in that people owe us I don't know how we're going to meet the salary bill this month. And all that stuff, to have an organisation where .. the money was there, the government provided the money.

00:02:48

.. Of course you had to be, you had to keep within what they had agreed to provide, which incidentally was one point three million a year.

Q: Did you regard that as sufficient, as (no) generous, no, right.

00:03:04

SAMUELSON: But it had to be sufficient. The effect was that much of what I would have liked to be done, couldn't be done because there wasn't the money there to pay for it. (cough) I would have liked to have made our presence known to many more film production centres in Europe particularly. Ar, there's simply wasn't the money available to have either myself or someone else travelling around th selling our wares as it were which are pretty formidable.

00:03:42

And I soon got to know that nobody really has on offer what Britain has on offer. And that also applies to a certain extent to the United States because a lot of what we can do, we could do much more economically than it could be pr provided in the States. That's why so many film companies

producing movies would go out of the central cities Los Angeles, Chicago and New York and go to what they call over there right to work states.

00:04:24

In other words if you have a feature film and you shoot it in ... East Jesus, Nebraska, if you only need four drivers on the production you only have to take on four drivers. Whereas ...if you want to shoot in New York, the Teamsters management arrange a meeting with you and look at the script and tell you how many drivers you need. And if you say that's ridiculous we don't need ten drivers it's just hard luck because that's how it's going to be.

00:05:13

And also they provide the drivers. It's not as if you can say well I, I've got a guy who's arranged the unit cars on six pic pictures with me before and he brings the drivers. And just like the guy who arranges the musicians when you have recording sessions they don't mess him about because they want to work on the next picture. You've still got this very out of date union system in the States, .. in a lot of the States. I suppose the majority of them, where you are working to union conditions that existed here twenty years ago.

00:05:59

So Britain has a much more common sense way of working and it was very attractive because you are getting excellent people and you're getting them at a more reasonable rate. It's my personal view that it may have gone a bit far the other way because as I understand it (cough) all technicians are on "all in" deals these days. And sometimes the hours they are expected to work are excessive. It's funny how you can't have a happy medium.

00:06:39

Q: Indeed yes but it's always um (just how it is) ups or downs isn't it (that's right) um, one, one factor is always predominant.

00:06:48

SAMUELSON: Well ... the British Film Commission was the most wonderful opportunity for me and it was I think I can say .. a great success.

Q: You started absolutely from scratch in effect.

00:07:05

SAMUELSON: The room next door for six months was the first office of the British Film Commission (cough) When I say the room next door I'm sitting in my home and it was one of the rooms that I er turned into an

office and equipped it because a report had been done of the setting up of a Film Commission, a National Film Commission, it may have said.

00:07:38

And I was given that report by ... Heskith and asked to go away and read it and when I came back to see him after reading the report.... I.... warned him through his er personal private secretary that we, nay, may not be able to agree to me setting up this organisation because if I have to adhere to the report that's been produced by accountants in the north of England, there are thirteen items which I would not be able to accept because I don't think it could be done properly if those items are er ... a requirement.

00:08:32

And so it was agreed that there would be a meeting with his staff for me to lay out what I was not prepared to accept. And I started with the first one (sniff) er which was the name of the Commission. They had got it that it should be er er The Filmthe Film, not fFilm Commission ... er The Screen Commission of the United Kingdom. And I had to explain that the word screen is nebulous, it could be about the screen manufacturer.

00:09:20

And we must call it a Film Commission because everybody knows what that means because of the example set in the United States that if you're going to make a movie in Mississippi you get on to the Film Commission there to see what services and facilities are av available and to get the contacts in place. That's what you do. And everybody calls it a Film Commission and they said "yes but we, we want this organisation to cover television".

00:09:56

And I said "it's implicit, it does cover television but it's called a Film Commission". Very difficult to make people in the industry understand that. And then it all came out and they said "well the problem is that we have to use United Kingdom because you see if we say British, if we say the British Film Commission we've got trouble in Northern Ireland. They, the word British does not apply to them". So I said "well, hasn't anybody told Lord King this". He was the one who ran British Airways at that time that flies in and out of Belfast forty times a day or something like that?

00:10:45

And I said "Then why haven't you changed the name of the BBC? BBC has a Northern Ireland, it's not UKBC it's the BBC". And that was the kind of problem I that had because the way I, I saw it Roy is that if I was going to do it. I had prepared to retire and I had several people who had

said “Well when you retire er I would very much like you to be a non executive director of our company”. And that kind of thing.

00:11:25

And so it wasn't take it or leave it but if I was going to take it I wanted to do it the way I felt it should be done and my reasons were related to the years of experience I'd had on the production side of this industry. And Heskith said a most amazing thing to his people, he said, because we hadn't even through the first question, my first query to agreeing that. He said “Why is this man sitting here? This man is sitting here because when we've asked around, who shall we get to set up this new organisation to promote the industry, what comes back is try and see if you can get Sidney Samuelson he's just retiring”. (cough)

00:12:25

“And now the things that he feels are necessary in order to do it we're making waves about”. And he threw the report that had been produced in the north along the table and said “Go away and set it up in the way you think is right”. And I did, we never went through the other twelve points.

Q: So you had a limited experience of civil servants then.

00:12:57

SAMUELSON: A limi de, well of course (cough) You can't walk away from them they're still there.

Q: Hmm, it sounds like Yes Minister (cough)

SAMUELSON: Pardon

Q: It sounds like Yes Minister

00:13:08

SAMUELSON: Tch ehh..... Not quite because there are some good people and when and I do know a little bit about the way government works now. I knew nothing about it then. But if I just tell you that from May '91 when the setting up of the British Film Commission was announced at the Cannes Film Festival and followed by the announcement that the government had asked Sidney Samuelson to ... set up the organisation..... From then, May ninety-one till December... ninety ...seven, I reported to nine different ministers in six and a bit years.

Q: Same department but different individuals.

00:14:09

SAMUELSON: Same department, different names in so much as originally it was the DTI and then it became ... the Ministry that was set up and was called the Ministry of Fun which was for David Mellor to run. And that was called the Department of National Heritage or no, is that the one that it, it became the Department of National Heritage when Labour came in. So it's had three, the organisation I worked with (cough) had three different titles, nine different ministers. And the we

00:14:58

Q: Sorry I was going to say it reminds me of Fred Allan's definition of a network Vice President. It was someone who came into the office at nine o'clock in the morning and found a mole hill on his desk and it was his duty to make it a mountain by lunch time and it's its (laugh) true of civil servants.

00:15:17

SAMUELSON: The. What saves the system I found is the permanent staff and although they don't come off it very well in Yes Minister ... the guy who was in two of the organisations.... th th the Department of National Heritage, that was the second one, and the third one is the present one which is um the Department of (culture) Culture (t t tourism is it) Tourism and Sport (hmm yeah) right. When, er er er when I was er, for the first few years the PPS was a fellow called Haydn Phillips, absolutely brilliant.

00:16:09

And a really good guy as far as understanding what it was we were getting at and how our industry was not just like other industries. Ande, understanding how much long time relationships matter and how you have to be able to take decisions like instantly. And how if I needed to fly over to Los Angeles, I needed to be able to phone the travel company and say can you get me out tomorrow.

00:16:48

I, if I was going to have to apply for the funding to get a return ticket to Los Angeles we were dead. And he was absolutely great. There were one or two people below him who I thought were just awful. And... there is so much kind of... their own personal ends come into it so much. And their promotions and I had one guy who was quite senior and who I didn't get on with very well. Not.. because of a clash of personalities but simply because he couldn't understand how the film industry works. And (and they could do it better) they probably thought so.

Q: That's what I mean.

00:17:48

SAMUELSON: Er e s bu, although I had a um autonomous e arrangement there were still things that I had to go to them and endless business plans and reports for the future. And I just had to explain... one film could come up which will turn our industry around but only for a period, then it will go away. And I don't know when the next one will turn us around. And by that I talking about when a film like er um um Mission Impossible came to Britain instead of anywhere else.

00:18:31

And of course Saving Private Ryan, and from Saving Private, Saving Private Ryan, Band of Brothers a television series that Spielberg has master minded. That was shot in the same place at Hatfield, a massive production. And they of course couldn't understand why I couldn't, couldn't give um er what's the word. I couldn't give er, er, er, er, um ... give.....

Q: Assurances or promises or?

00:19:04

SAMUELSON: Well, I I I wasn't able to tell them what we would be doing in a year's time. And I can remember with this particular guy he asked if he could see me and he said.... "I've just been looking at your contract" and I should explain to you that I'd said all along "I don't need a contract gentlemen. Whenever you're ready for me to go, I will go. So I don't need a contract". Nevertheless they had to set out the terms of the er er er employment of a British Film Commissioner. Not just me but any British Film Commissioner. And

Q: You were precedential after all were you not. I mean as, as the innovator I can understand the point that the (yeah) yeah.

00:20:02

SAMUELSON: Yes. And we didn't quite know how it was going to work out. And the agreement was that I would be there for two years. And....he said, "We're coming up to the two years that you've been with us and it doesn't say anything in the agreement that that two years in the case of the first British Commissioner is renewable. So I'm..... I've decided that it's not renewable". And I said "Why", because at that time Roy we were in in our stride.

00:20:48

There was a lot going on and I fe, I did not want to walk away for no reason. They've got to get somebody else; they weren't going to close it down. And I was prepared to continue with the good work that we'd already created, developed. And... he's s, he said "Well if if it was renewable it would have said so". "Well", I said "It but doesn't say

anything". And I said "I think before we go any further you should go and talk to the department's legal advisors because I would prefer to stay".

00:21:33

"Of course if anybody's not satisfied with what I'm doing I should want to hear why they're not satisfied and I will walk. Nevertheless I would prefer to stay and continue with what I'm doing". And he said "Alright, I will seek advice". I never heard another word (b) and I was there another four years.

Q: They are nay sayers aren't they, it's easier to say no than to say (absolutely) yes and if it doesn't say it's renewable equally it doesn't say it is not renewable (no) it seems an extraordinary attitude.

00:22:13

SAMUELSON: It wee, I, I thought it was an extraordinary and I know there was a bit of personality attached to him saying what he said. I've decided that as it doesn't say anything that it's not renewable. Er he would have er p p preferred me not to have been there. Which was sadly nothing to do with the kind of job I was doing.

Q: It was a way of getting you out.

00:22:40

SAMUELSON: Yeah absolutely. And they played the age card a great deal. You see they have to retire... at sixty I think, I was sixty-five when I joined. And that really got up a number of peoples noses. And by this time I was sixty-seven when he said "The two years is up. We were w we were only thinking about you being here for two years". Um and that was the kind of thing you had to put up with because th they were not.

00:23:23

Some of them were very good and dedicated and I'd hate to be a civil servant because they keep changing you around. This was the other thing that... the, not only does the er government change, but civil servants change. And it seems to me that when they've gotg grade two seven three stroke A stoke one four nine they're pretty desperate to make sure that when the time comes they'll get two seven four stroke A stroke stroke four two six. And, but in order to get that promotion they had to go somewhere else. They are not allowed to stay in the same job.

Q: So whatever expertise they've have acquired is is (yes) lost.

00:24:18

SAMUELSON: Yes, you lose it. And so that was a problem and lack of money was always a problem. However we delivered... remarkable value for what they did pay.

Q: What were your great achievements in your eyes?

00:24:35

SAMUELSON: Well the great achievements I think were. We paid, we played a big part in the resurgence of the British film production sector. I spell that out because it we could be as busy as anything with masses of work and business for the suppliers but sadly not necessarily making British movies. But.... we would make much more out of servicing a film for Spielberg than we would out of making half a dozen low, medium budget British movies.

00:25:22

Which may or may not succeed. What we had to do was promote the making of British movies just as much, probably more than servicing foreign movies but the job of the British Film Commission was business. We were not there to set up British movies. We didn't have the money or the expertise to do that. We were there to promote the business, the servicing (right) business not exclusively but that was what the job was.

Q: Where mostly were you dealing with the American companies for example?

00:26:08

SAMUELSON: Oh yeah. Th th (here) the American companies. It would be a bit of both and I had learnt from running my own business for so many years you need to b be there. However good the telephone is and the fax is The fact that you turn up

Q: On the West Coast?

00:26:30

SAMUELSON: On the West Coast. And when a question is arises you're there to answer it. Is very different to writing letters and that kind of thing so.....

Q: Did you have a man on the spot in LA to keep his or her ear to the ground?

00:26:46

SAMUELSON: We have now er we didn't in my time. (so how) But we were very well represented er by the number two in Los Angeles I'm talking about, the number two in the er er um Consul General's Office. And there the Consul General is still much involved. (right) But I think it's the fourth Consul General since the first one when I first arrived there. (cough) And the, the achievement was I think could be monitored pretty well by the amount of work there was for British technicians and British suppliers.

00:27:37

And a lot of that was to do with the fact that there was ... an efficient organisation who could deal with the initial enquiries or could seek the initial enquiries. In other words to be proactive rather than reactive. And to be known and to be instant. No messing about, we did not close at half past four on Friday's and open again at half past nine on Monday. Ah w we we put it around that we could be obtained and we were known as an efficient organisation, as a er ... pattern of how it should be done.

00:28:36

And at the same time another job was to help to get the Area Film Commission set up in the UK. When I came on the scene I think there were three kind of film offices, Liverpool, Edinburgh and Newcastle I think were the three. And I think there are now thirty-three. (u Hum) And they of course all have to fund themselves, they've got no central funding.

00:29:10

And the London Film Commission when it was set up, because the British Film Commission it wasn't their job to say oh you're looking for a factory on a green field site. That wasn't our job, that was the job of the local commissions (cough) Excuse me. Andhow could a commission, an organisation, a body in London have knowledge of finding a factory with two tall chimneys on a green field site in Yorkshire.

00:29:51

That has to be done by people who are in Yorkshire and who know. And so all of the film commissions they all have their facilities and their own local knowledge and further more permissions, permits... their availability there is from place to place. Where you're allowed in Yorkshire you may not be allowed to shoot in Lancashire. Whether the local authorities will make car parking available they may do in one city and not in another.

00:30:31

And it's only the local knowledge that enables you to answer the questions like that. And local location managers, that wasn't the job of the British

Film Commission. But helping t t to get the local offices set up (hmm) was part of the job.

Q: The services that the Commission offered were they all gratis, free of charge?

00:30:54

SAMUELSON: Yes. They were. I felt that was very important, we make no charge. However I believe.... charges are being introduced, have been introduced by some of the local offices simply because they can't survive without income. It's been the th there have been disappointments for example although it wasn't my direct responsibility, but when the London Film Commission was being set up..... we hoped that the BBC and all the ITV companies would make a contribution each year, and they didn't.

00:31:40

And they give various reasons, one of them is we is we have our own location services we'll manage; we haven't got anything in the budget to pay to the London Film Commission. And the London Film Commission was absolutely on its uppers at one time. And so finance is the major problem. However with what we had available ...somehow or other we managed.

00:32:17

And we got a lot of concessions..... I had very good contacts with airlines so ticketing was not as expensive as it might have been. We had a presence and we still do have a presence at the Cannes Film Festival every year a and again, you see government doesn't understand you can't come up with a figure; you can't quantify the value of being at the Cannes Film Festival. Because you may talk ... to two hundred producers, all of whom have got projects... many of which may shoot in the UK.

00:33:08

Some of which might not shoot in the UK and some of which might never be made at all because they never get the finance together. Th the e the government people who are paying for the British Film Commission representatives to be at Cannes they can't understand that, it's very, very difficult.

Q: It looks like a freebie doesn't it.

00:33:33

SAMUELSON: Absolutely. The very fact that its Cannes, they think it has, it's a question of um er stripping off and drinking Martinis on the beach.

Q: Yeah, getting down to the beach.

00:33:47

SAMUELSON: And do you know Roy I can put my hand on my heart, I can really put my hand on my heart and say in the, suppose I did about six festivals, never once have I relaxed on the beach. I've never sat on the beach ... and and ... just had a drink and enjoyed the sun.You, there isn't time for it any of that stuff.

Q: True enough but on the other hand reciprocal entertainment and a luncheon for key people is.

00:34:26

SAMUELSON: Absolutely, and we did, we didn't do, I can't say we did a lot of that because we couldn't afford to do it. But we were invited because Technicolor always had a big lunch and it was important to be there and we were invited because of the networking facility was there. Quite often I would be introduced as one of the speakers after lunch just to talk about what the b British Film Commission was there for and please come and see us in the Pavilion or wh wherever we had our place.

00:35:00

And we used to ... we used to not think too much of expensive receptions on the beach because there were at least six a night.... and more at lunch time and they were all the same so much as there were, sometimes there was a meal, but mostly it was just drinks - pickups going round.

Q: And five pounds for a cup of coffee.

00:35:32

SAMUELSON: And five pounds for a cup of coffee. And I don't think the guests... would know just whose party it was. So that if we (cough) sent out a thousand invitations and four hundred people turned up for drinks at eight o'clock on the Carlton Beach. I doubt whether, whether many would remember "Oh yes, this is the British Film Commission's party". Because there are so many of them and whenum...ee, how can I put it.

00:36:06

When everybody is something, nobody is anything. In other words the party on the beach at Cannes, it sounds so good but there are so many

parties on the beach at Cannes. They're all expensive and I'm not sure that you get the value out of it

00:36:23

Q: It's sss somewhat I like what they say about advertising that fifty per cent of it is wasted but nnn but you never know which fifty per cent. And I suppose that's true of a party guest list. Someone might come up trumps but so many of them are free loaders and er.

00:36:37

SAMUELSON: Of course they are and you see the same people all the time (mm, gate crashers, right). And you get the people who are over there; I don't know how they finance it, year after year. They're not with a company and of course they've all got cards on which says producer and anybody can be a producer. And I don't know how they do it and there are people, and some of them are women and they're there every year and you know you can't risk even saying hello, how are you this year, nice to see you again because you are then going to get involved, talking about absolutely nothing for goodness knows how long.

00:37:24

The trick is to pick out the people who you should be talking to and somehow avoid the others. Not easy.

Q: Sure but this is why hierarchies are, are rather necessary I think so that you can know who you're dealing with.

00:37:39

SAMUELSON: Hum, (you know) yes.

Q: Mind you it's fun to sit on the garden terrace and see it all going on.

00:37:47

SAMUELSON: Well, if you can afford it. And I pppp I remember a terrible thing happened to us once where somebody said to me somebody well respected and . either chairman or chief executive of an important organisation and said, "Well what can I do for you, ...Sidney, can we ... can we arrange breakfast at the hotel?" And I said on this occasion "Oh that would be great". And he said um, "Well have you got people you'd like to invite because what a could organise for you is the balcony at first floor level".

00:38:35

Which is about one of the most beautiful locations in the whole of Cannes. You're looking over the Croisette and there's the sea, and there's the people walking up and down, and the sun is shining and the breakfast comes all beautifully served with starched napkins and so on. And so I gathered together about twenty people who were important to us and I knew were in town and invited them to breakfast er through the good offices of this helpful friend.

00:39:11

And then I got the bill and it was like thirty pounds a head for breakfast. And there were two things, one is I thought he was.... er delivering some largesse to the British Film Commission, because he was in a position to know that we were all struggling for funding. And of course when I found that we were getting the bill. I mean, I I knew the Carlton well enough to say I want to bring thirty people to breakfast and they would have said yes Sam.

00:39:51

Er so I didn't actually need him to do that for me, but then of course having that shock that he wasn't sponsoring it, then the amount per head was just (and their goes the budget) it is unbelievable over there. Do you know if you haven't got your room booked at any of the major hotels the only way you have a chance of getting in for a night or two is through the concierge and you pay. Well when I was there people for the middle weekend, is the important weekend, before that it's building up to it and after that it's running down. (sure, sure)

00:40:37

And it's a thousand pounds. That's the tip for the concierge, the all powerful concierge of the Carlton, that's the kind of money that goes around, just (yeah), it's just amazing. And of course those people who take the yachts and I know all about the yachts because. I mean the private yachts because I used to get invited to, I'd find out where each producer is staying and I'd get through and say can I come and see you.

00:41:12

Just find out what they're, what they're up to. And they would be on these palatial hundred foot yachts; I don't know how many thousand pounds a day they paid for them. Anyway, that's Cannes.

Q: Well right, that being so um I think I think I'll put a new tape on cos we're getting toward the end.

END OF SIDE 6

SIDE 7

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Sydney Samuelson CBE - Entrepreneur - Chairman of Samuelson Film Service

Interviewer Alan Lawson

00:00:02

Q: We're onto tape four now. Erm, I did have one question about Cannes before we leave that as a subject and that is on what kind of level, w we were talking about hierarchies, on what level were you dealing? W, line producers, or executive producers or the head of the studio or, or, or how so?

00:00:17

SAMUELSON: Well it would be at a mixture of all those but (cough)the person who is most important to the British Film Commission is really the line producer. The one who actually does the organisation, the one actually commits to this service and this facility so that what Britain has to offer by way of an infrastructure is ... of main interest to the line producer. Let's use the Spielberg example on Ryan's Daughter, (*Ryan's Daughter* ?), Saving Private Ryan.

Q: They were related probably!

00:01:04

SAMUELSON: Well, ... Stephen Spielberg himself would not be interested in how many ... ex D Day amphibious vehicles were available ... in the UK, but his line producers, as part of his job to say well we've tracked down, in his report on Second World War vehicles, American Army trucks and so on. It, the report that he puts through to ... the production designer probably as to what can be amassed for the main long shot, it's the pro, it's the line producer who wants to know all that stuff.

00:01:56

So it would be the line producer who actually wants to know just what the locations, what is available on the locations. So as far as the sheer business is concerned it is the line producer. However, nobody pays for the line producers to go to Cannes. .. It's no different to when I tried to going to Cannes on behalf of my own business, there were, I felt two kinds of people

there and they're virtually all producers. Leaving aside all the so called glamour side where they bring starlets down and er have them in bikinis on the beach and so on.

00:02:48

Whi, I'm nothing, never been involved in any of that stuff, that's the publicity department. But I wo, I worked out that there were two kinds of producers. There was A producer who had made a movie and was at Cannes to sell it. And there wers a producer who wanted to make a movie and was at Cannes to try and get it off the ground, to try and er pick up territorial ah, ah, advance payments, to sell the rights of this new movie to Germany for a hundred thousand dollars or whatever it was.

00:03:28

Those were the two kinds of people principally who were there. None of them, remember I'm talking about when I had at look at Cannes to see if I should be there on behalf of my business. None of them ... are interested in where they're going to get the cameras from. The one who's made his movie doesn't need any cameras and the one whose about to make his movie doesn't know if he's going to need any cameras.

00:03:57

So it was a complete waste of money I felt. And, but for the British Film Commission, we were interested in everybody doing anything, particularly those who were hoping to get a film off the ground because we'd be taught, talking to them on the basis of how I always used to describe it as, we may not be the cheapest but we give the first value, the best value. There's absolutely no doubt about that at all.

00:04:29

And um... I'll think of a... f b, I'll think of which film it was but I'd spent a lot of time talking about a certain movie that which a lot of special effects in it. And we lost it, we didn't get it, and it went to Ireland, southern Ireland. It was at a time when they'd put incentives in place and we couldn't match those incentives. A lot of my dialogue was with government trying to explain to them how important it was for us to deliver tax incentives like they did in Ireland.

00:05:13

Er, and by and large it was without success. And we lost that picture and I remember meeting the producer sometime afterwards. He said "I wish I'd listened to you because we would have saved a lot of money if we'd made the picture in the UK. We had to bring virtually everything from the UK

and pay people's per diem hotels which would, we would never have had to pay if we'd made the picture in the UK, certainly in the London area where everything is to be found".

00:05:51

And that was part of our selling strategy. We also had to be aware and explain to producers, well you're thinking of ... shooting in Ireland and using an Irish crew. Two things you've got to keep in mind, they have two and a half good crews, meaning they can service well the crew for two pictures and even get some way towards even a third picture shooting at the same time. So if you're a fourth picture you're in terrible trouble. You are going to have to bring people in, you're not going to find them locally.

00:06:33

And the second thing I would say is, in certain categories you will not be allowed to use British crews, for example, the electricians and one of the major equipment and crew expenses is the electricians, lights and electricians. And the union is so strong over there they won't let you bring in any electricians at all. What you must remember is where as Social Security, National Insurance etc in the UK is eleven per cent, you'll find that in Ireland it's, I think it was close to thirty per cent.

00:07:22

That's a huge expense and there were other things, I think there was no VAT on hotel bills in this country but they are, there's VAT in the Republic. That kind of information wasn't always (hmm) known (that's right) to whoever was doing the budget.

Q: And the Irish weren't about to point it out were they.

00:07:47

SAMUELSON: No, of course not, of course not, anyway (cough) going onto other things. My main charitable involvement as far as the industry is concerned.

Q: Well before you do that Sidney (yeah), forgive me. Umm, you're still British Film Commissioner and you serve (no, no). Well that's it but, but, but we're still talking of the time (oh, right, yes) which you were and we haven't concluded that part of your life.

00:08:12

SAMUELSON: Oh, ok. Well, it went very well and I was very satisfied with what had been achieved with a very small staff, dedicated people. One of my other thirteen requirements when I went to see Lord Heslith was I wished to pick my own staff. That was a real problem to them (yeah)

because, and I kind of understand it, the government way is that you advertise the posts and everybody has an opportunity of applying for the job.

00:08:54

On the key positions I knew who I wanted ..already. And I felt that there was going to be a a a terrible waste of time because when you advertise a job in the British Film Commission you are going to be overwhelmed and they've all got to be dealt with. Um

Q: And a lot of them are time wasters.

00:09:18

SAMUELSON: Well a lot of it is time wasting, however I do kind of understand and accept that if it's a government post everybody should know about it. I just wanted to get on with it and it isn't the way that the government does things. Just let me finish off, you might say ... why was your office for the first six months in your home? ... The report said that the announcement would be made by the Minister at the Cannes Film Festival in May 1991 with a view to operations starting, British Film Commission being on stream in April '92.

00:10:07

And I said in effect "Are you mad?" Once it gets known that there is a Film Commission in place and the idea of the Minister coming to Cannes was to get maximum publicity. And the government at that time was pretty desperate to have some good news to announce. I said "The phone will start ringing and if they can't get a reply w w what a way to be starting off when people are saying well we heard all about this British Film Commission, you try and find them".

Q: It's not a serious outfit.

00:10:44

SAMUELSON: That's right. And the trouble was (cough) they said "Well we wouldn't be able to have the money in place um for at least six months. It has to go through this department and that department because it's a new organisation, it's not like say er er um Health needs some extra cash for something or other. Or ... the Ministry of Ag and Fish needs money to be slaughtering cows who have got, there's a risk of them being diseased."

00:11:18

It was nothing like that, this was new money that was required. And I said "Well we've just got to have a presence if you're going to announce

it.” Cut a long story short they could not provide the money and the way the British Film Commission was financed for its first six months was I went to my bank and on my personal credit they provided the fund. Coutts in the Strand with my guarantee that if they didn’t pay in the end I would pay. I knew of course that they were going to pay in the end.

00:12:05

And Coutts knew as well but never the less it was my credit worthiness that enabled us to start right away. AND the phone did ring, AND we were in business handling enquiries immediately. And I had just one member of staff er for the first five months of the six months, like a, a all purpose co-ordinator, er Amanda Sparks. She had already got her ear marked as Marketing Manager and she came here and did everything that I didn’t do.

00:12:42

And including of course all the correspondence and setting up our data base and all that sort of stuff. Anyway just just one person. And, what was the other thing I wanted to tell you? That the least expensive way, I wasn’t going to enter into a lease for offices in town, the least expensive way of doing it was for me to provide office space here. And so the first address of the British Film Commission was 31 West Heath Avenue. And ... I know that some of the civil servants didn’t approve.

00:13:34

And I, my feeling is I can’t help that. The main thing is for people who are coming to Britain to make a movie when there’s full unemplo, unemployment at that time, that there’s an organisation that they can get on the phone and if it doesn’t sound too pompous and there’s Sidney Samuelson at the head of it. Cos I was well known in the production circles (cough) , obviously, and er so that’s why the office was there.

Q: And people actually c came here to...

00:14:13

SAMUELSON: Occasionally, (yeah) but most of it was, I would go and see them th th th. A really good example was that a producer from Disney, he would, from Disney LA, he would be organising a picture, he was going to be in charge, line producer as it happened. And the Disney Office would give him an office to work from while he was setting up the production, looking at which studio had space and which directors of photography were going to be available.

00:14:56

And all that stuff which was exactly what we needed to be involved in to say well have you thought of so and so. Or did you know that um, er, we've also studio space er at Elstree. Elstree did more or less close for some time but for those three small, medium sized stages that you want we can also see if we can get you in at Elstree. (cough) So... I would then go and see them in their office and that was what happened mostly.

00:15:35

Most of the visitors who came here were those who, like printers who wanted to do our stationary and things (laughter) like that. Occasionally I would say do you mind, and if it was someone who I'd known for years and years, I'd say "Well I've got my office at home at the moment do you want to come and have a cup of tea with me and we'll talk it through". So it did happen occasionally but what was important was first of all the phone, second of all the fax and third of all an address.

00:16:10

And that's what we did. Oh and the other thing I wanted er to say was um the. I used to have to..... apply.... for money to be reimbursed in order that I could keep Coutts happy. I couldn't say you're not going to get anything for six months cos quite a lot of money was going out. And we were entering into a lease for the office in Baker Street and all that kind of thing. And it was not possible to get the money approved.

00:16:56

In other words I'd send in a detailed account of everything that the, I obviously opened a separate account, but everything that had been... laid out. There were two salaries by that time (uhum) and um er all the other expenses there were. Quite a lot of travelling in that first six months and um it was very difficult to Not because they were not going to pay it in the end but it took such a bloody long time (noise) for it to go through the various approvals.

Q: It must be very disheartening always to come up against that kind of bureaucracy.

00:17:38

SAMUELSON: No, I had to come to terms with it and another, and lots of other kinds of bureaucracy that drove me internally crazy. (hum) But there's nothing you can do about it because that's how it's done.

Q: What other than to be disheartened and say right you know stuff it which I s. Did you ever reach that position?

00:17:59

SAMUELSON: No. (no) No, no (cough) I didn't and just to um put it in perspective I didn't do it for the money. My deal was, and I proposed it, was that each day I work I want two hundred pounds... And I'm not expecting any pension, National Health Insurance, if I go away on holiday for a week I don't get paid. So I think I delivered them value and... I did it for the sheer pleasure of doing something that needed to be done and I was able to do it well.

00:18:51

I'm sorry to be saying all the time how good I am in effect. But it did go, it did, it did.

Q: Well it did indeed, yes.

00:18:59

SAMUELSON: It did go well and I was the right person for them to fix on (that's right) to start it all off. Got a very good, the second British Film Commissioner, Steve Norris, excellent guy, excellent. He was a producer in his own right and number two to David Puttnam for years and years. And um the last film he did as producer was, what was it called now..... have to think of that as well. Anyway er it was a couple of years ago now. Yes.

Q: We're, your the ending of your incumbency year that you gave up did you, that was the the - you you finally retired as it were.

00:19:49

SAMUELSON: Yes I did and we were in discussion er for a good few months because it took a good few months to identify my successor. And um so d it was no surprise, nobody appeared in my office and said "How long have you been here not counting this afternoon?". A and so I knew it was coming and Steve and I worked together for two months, November and December, ...

00:20:20

A er and I left on the thirty-first of December and they gave me a most lovely, what shall I say, farewell present and in fact by my Chief Executive a chap called Andrew Patrick um on behalf of everybody else he said "Well what would you like? We want to do something." And I said "Well I don't

want everybody sitting down to dinner and then three people standing up and making a speech and then me". And they said "Well that's ok but what would you like?".

00:21:06

I said "Well supposing all my friends, colleagues, business friends ... supposing we all had a drink at BAFTA and then you could show one of my favourite films, and anybody who wants to stay on for the film can stay on and everybody else can go home". And, so that was what was agreed.

00:21:32

And one of my most favourite films came about because my son Mark phoned me late one night, I suppose about ten years ago now and he said "Dad, I've just seen your life story at the Curzon". And I said "Oh yeah what's that?" He said "You won't have heard of (cough) it's it was an Italian film and it's called Cinema Paradiso (ha, yes) and it's all about a little fellow in the projection box". And that's where I started as the notes that I've been reading will tell you.

Q: A lovely film.

00:22:09

SAMUELSON: Ah really, a lovely film. And so that was the film that was set on. And it was a most lovely evening cos um Chris Smith was one of the speakers. And ... who's the other, whoever was his Under Minister, and then a previous couple of Ministers were there. I think David Mellor was one of them although I only worked with him, how long was he a Minister, three months?

Q: Well yes, I I wouldn't (whatever, anyway) I don't remember.

00:22:49

SAMUELSON: And it was full of humour and wit which is what I wanted and um I read out .. when I said my piece, I've just got to go over and get it and I can, it's just over there. I do my best not to throw you into confusion.

Q: I'll unplug the mic (oh ok) if you're moving any distance (noises)

SAMUELSON: Well I'm not going far (noises - moves off - disucss tea)

00:23:30

Q: Just introduce what you are going to be doing.

00:23:40

SAMUELSON: Right, this. I'm going to read, Roy, a piece that was said to be, by my staff er just before I retired. And it says 'Lord you know that I'm growing older, keep me from becoming talkative, or possessed with the idea that I must express myself on every subject. Release me from the craving to straighten out everyone's affairs, keep my from the recycle of endless details, give me wings to get to the point.

00:24:10

Seal my lips when I'm inclined to tell of aches and pains, they're increasing with the years and my love to speak of them grows sweeter as time goes by. Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally I may be wrong, make me thoughtful and not nosey, helpful but not bossy, with my vast store of wisdom and experience it does seem a pity not to use it all. But you know Lord that I want a few friends at the end.

Q: Did that strike home.

00:24:45

SAMUELSON: Yes (laughing) (it's lovely) I love it (m mm). Anyway um so I dwelt on that and the er er indignity of receiving such a er er memo from my staff and all sorts of funny people spoke and it was the most lovely occasion instead of being a bore which retirements do's sometimes are. (yeah, the gold watch). The gold watch, yes. (cough) So I um, oh I did get a present from my actual staff and it has a little story attached to it which I also love.

00:25:31

My chief executive, Andrew Patrick was not what you would call particularly worldly. And he came down from the Midlands and was constantly surprised by London, West End sophistication. He was a er er a guy with a very basic experiences, he was very bright but had not been in too many five star restaurants, put it that way. Anyway they all decided they've got to give the old boy something when he retires.

00:26:19

And Andrew said "Well I come in and out of Liverpool Street Station, twice a day I walk past a very nice fountain pen shop, so perhaps we'll buy him a fountain pen". And so he went in and saw one that he liked and it was a sort of tortoise shell coloured and he s said to them "I'd like that one how much is it". And they said "Seven fifty". So he thought well that's not very much, however perhaps we'll buy him something else.

00:27:00

So he's writing out, gets out his credit card and she gives him the little docket and it's seven hundred and fifty, cos it was not looking like tortoise

it was tortoise shell. (laughs) So of course he had a terrible fright and said “No, well I don’t think so, I’ll have to think again about that”. Ah but h, er later he told me the story. (noise) But they bought me a beautiful pen, I actually leave it in my dinner jacket pocket so I know if I’m ever out somewhere and I need a pen (cough) I’ve always got my favourite pen with me.

00:27:44

And it’s safer there than it is for me to use it every day, but they gave it a film connection, of a film that they, that we’d talked about and they knew that I’d, I really enjoyed. And they had engraved on it ‘To Sir with Love’. So that was the, the other present that I had when I left the Commission. So it was very amicable (cough) and I felt privileged to have had six years of involvement which I knew I could do a decent job and which I wasn’t expecting.

00:28:24

And er, so when I actually retired I I was then... must have been seventy one.

Q: Yup (yeah) Well a huge bonus those, those six years.

00:28:40

SAMUELSON: Yes (yeah) wonderful. Especially doing something that I loved doing (really useful). Yes, yes. Anyway to go onto my charitable involvements I suppose the longest term connection was CTBF. Everybody knows Cinema and Television Benevolent Fund. And I had joined the fund just as a kind of paying member years and years ago. And then somebody must have said to me “Why don’t you stand for council”. And I did. And ... (movement) I was then on council for a few years and I came up with an idea, we were always looking for new ways of raising money.

00:29:36

And I came up with an idea of having a concert of film music ..at the Albert Hall and done on a big scale. .. And my plan was to invite composers of film music to conduct a symphony orchestra. And, not me, but somebody, I set up a subcommittee. Somebody came up with the idea that we should call it ‘Filmharmonic’, one word. And that was the title of a series of concerts. The first one was in 1970 and it was called ‘Filmharmonic 70’ and I think the last one.

00:30:28

I think there were twelve of them all together. And do you know we never had an unsold seat. And over the years I invited all the great film music composers. I suppose the greatest was John Williams and he came

twice. Henry Mancini came twice. All the British Composers like Ron Goodwin for example um ... they all were guest conductors, all without fee of my series of concerts.

00:31:09

It was hugely successful and I think on the last five occasions it was televised. ... And that was kind of the major, personal fund raising (cough) er th fund raising effort. I also, when I was fifty-six, I ran, t th the London Marathon started. And the second year I managed to get a place to do the Marathon and did it for er fund raising for the CTBF.

Q: Was it really that long ago? Twen, twenty years of so?

00:31:58

SAMUELSON: Er, well it was '82. (ah right) So it's er nineteen years ago. (um) Fifty-seven zzzz, yeah, that's it.

Q: That's astonishing, it doesn't seem that long.

00:32:09

SAMUELSON: And it was very difficult to get in. Somehow or other I pulled some strings and er managed to get a place. And I then set about training, such as it was to run the twenty-six miles. Not run, jog would be a better word. And I think I raised twenty-two thousand pounds which doesn't sound so much now but it was not bad.

Q: It was a good couple of dollars twenty years ago.

00:32:41

SAMUELSON: It was. It was. And er all I did to train for it as I've never been very athletic, I can't, I have no co-ordination like throwing balls or catching balls and things like that. (coughs) Every, one of the two weekend days I ran an extra mile so I gradually built it up during the six months before the event. And I had never done the twenty-six miles but I had done twenty-three miles.

00:33:18

And I knew if I could do twenty-three nothing would stop me doing the last three on the day. And what I used, what I found was it was much more satisfying if instead of doing what I originally started doing which was to, if I got up we'll say to twelve miles, that was the task for this Sunday. I would run outwards six miles to where ever I got to and then I'd run six miles back making twelve miles. But I found it was much more satisfying to run outwards the whole of the distance I was going to do.

00:33:55

Because somehow or other it was much better to be able been able to say er well I did twelve miles and I got all the way to where ever it was. It was a sort of a psychological thing. And I remember the furthest I got was Brentwood in Essex and if somebody had said to me a year before that you'll be able to run to Brentwood I wouldn't of believed them.

Q: I'm astonished.

00:34:22

SAMUELSON: Well I... did finish and the way I put it is that I finished the 1982 London Marathon for charity and I came in only thirteen thousand and sixth places behind the winner. And I did it in four hours and thirty-five minutes and of course the top athletes, one day if somebody's going to do it in two hours I think. They do about two hours and twelve minutes and things like that so um it took me quite a long time but I did finish it.

00:34:59

And that was the CTBF. The other major involvement came about in a strange way. I became quite e, it sounds like er bragging again. Let me just say I became well thought of because those sitting round the table were so elderly. It's funny me saying that cos I'm seventy-five now. But they were extremely aged and I was somebody young, but also somebody who was doing something. Lots of people sit round charity committee tables but don't actually get down to doing anything. Don't actually say what do you think of this for an idea?

00:35:51

We have a, a concert of film music there's lots of people who are film music aficionados, that's the music they are interested in and indeed that was the truth because we sold all the tickets always. And the President of the Fund at that time was Sidney Bernstein's brother Cecil. Cecil was like the number two, he wasn't the Chief Executive of Granada but he was kind of Sidney's er e and I don't think he would even be Managing Director. But he was Sidney's Senior Executive.

00:36:42

He was always there, whereas Sidney was out and about. Er er a most lovely man. And he was the President and he became in a manner of speaking my mentor because he was in this very powerful position. He was so astute and he was so kindly and I think I used to feel I'd like to model myself on him. And he used to invite me to lunch at Granada, Golden Square, which I always enjoyed because it was in I don't know how many private rooms they had but you sat down in a private room and a butler served you with a very lovely lunch.

00:37:32

Not extravagant but never the less (cough) nicely done, put it that way. And I used to look forward to those meetings and I should think I met him er perhaps every couple of months. So I got to know him very well. He died suddenly, he was probably well into his seventies by that time and also on the Council and very strong figure was John Davis. ... And at one of my great a a benefits is that I'm not easily scared of people. (cough)

00:38:29

That applied th th that was manifested in the behaviour of John Davis to others. He was a really brutal man with his mouth. And I remember when a new homery, Honorary Treasurer of the fund was appointed, a very nice guy and of course qualified, Colin Wills his name was. John Davis took and instant dislike to him and he gave him a most terrible time. Whatever report he put in, John Davis found fault with it.

00:39:18

He was rude and arrogant and I remember once phoning Colin after a meeting and saying "I'd like to apologise as a member of the committee of the way you were treated by John Davis". And he said "It's alright, you don't have to worry, I know what he is, it's not for nothing that he's known as the Beast of South Street".

Q: He was a monster wasn't he.

00:39:45

SAMUELSON: A monster that's a very good word. Do you want to cut?

Q: No, no, it's coming up, in er another two or three minutes.

00:39:52

SAMUELSON: Anyway, (cough) John Davis was on that committee when Cecil Bernstein died. Just dropped down dead I think on the pavement. And he was asked by the Council, it was not a committee, the Council if he would take over the Presidency. I'm absolutely sure that those who'd been there a very long time, there was a degree of fear in his appointment in so much as "Well I suppose we better ask John Davis to do it". And so the next thing I found was that John Davis was the Chairman, the President of of the Council.

00:40:47

Well, that's ok, we can carry on. And the first thing that happened under his Presidency was that a submission was put in to close down Glebelands. Do you know what Glebelands is?

Q: Yes, of course I do.

SAMUELSON: You do because

Q: Maybe we should explain for the tape

00:41:11

SAMUELSON: Glebelands is a quite magnificent mansion which was donated to the fund by William Jury, many, many years ago and it's a residential home for retired members of the industry. And the, there was a proposal that as it's seldom full, don't know how many residents it takes but I would estimate about fifty. That it should be closed down and the fund should concentrate on providing help when needed for people in their own homes where they've lived all their lives and where their roots are, families and so on. And

Q: Now was this idea coming from JD or or

00:42:01

SAMUELSON: No it was coming I think by a sub-committee lead by John Davis. But there were others who didn't want that to happen including all those who had given up their, er their own homes, maybe years and years ago and who had, Glebelands was their home. I as I did say am not easily scared by individuals. I became the leader of the other side much to John Davis' annoyance.

00:42:45

And I remember a meeting was called at South Street of all those concerned and the, I had two people with me, in other words, on my side and prepared to speak up against John Davis and that was the Chief Executive, or General Secretary I should say of NATKE whose name I can't remember and Alan Sapper.

Q: I think we'd better flip the tape.

END OF SIDE 7

SIDE 8

00:00:02

SAMUELSON: And Alan Sapper, they were the two who supported my contention that the way to deal with the Glebelands, so called problem, not enough residents, was to make it better known what we had on offer there. Because, there are bound to be lots of people who would be so much better off if they had someone to look after them. But then it was raised that, the trouble is that nursing care is only available up to a certain point.

00:00:37

And then if people get really sick, I found out that they disappear between breakfast and lunch. And they were shunted off to a fully equipped nursing home. And all, and the only way the residents came to know about it was that one of them would say to another at lunch time, "Where's Ethel?" And Ethel who had become infirmed had been removed, that was how they did it.

Q: Disappeared!

00:01:13

SAMUELSON: Disappeared! (laughs) And so I said "What we need is to put in the extra care that is needed, not throw them out". And I'm sure that a lot of people at that time didn't come to Glebelands because they realised that when they became really unwell they would have to be sent somewhere else.

00:01:42

And, so that was my main point, that we should keep it open, make it better known, and keep all the residents that we've got, assure them that they are never going to be moved on and to fund the building of an extra care wing. Well John Davis, when, that meeting must have been before he was appointed as Chairman when Cecil died, President I should say.

00:02:16

And when Cecil died, John Davis at the next Council meeting um, he said "I want silence in respect of the death of Cecil Bernstein", and of course everybody was silent for two minutes or whatever it was. And then he said "I've been asked if I will take over". And he said "I will only take over, I will take over but I will only do it until the end of the term of three years that Cecil had to run". Which I think was about a year and a half.

00:03:07

He said “And meanwhile we must appoint my successor and I’m going to ask Sidney Samuelson if he will consider succeeding me as President of the Fund”. I was absolutely dumb founded, because we’d had so many run in’s, especially because of Glebelands. So that’s how I became the President of the CTBF.

Q: That’s extraordinary.

00:03:43

SAMUELSON: And, I became, I can’t say close to Sir John Davis because he, he wasn’t possible to be close to him. But my wife and I were invited to dinner at his home and ... I was invited to South Street on several occasions to have lunch with him. And we used to sit at this gianormous Rank Organisation board room table er just the two of us, and that of course was all butler service and so on.

00:04:22

But if I tell you that, you didn’t, when you were at a meeting that John Davis was er going to be present at, you didn’t arrive late. And I can remember before he became President, he was in charge of the Finance Committee I think it was. And such was our relationship that they had a meeting of the Finance Committee, immediately before the Annual Lunch that the Fund has.

00:05:08

And it was at the Royal Lancaster Hotel and the Finance Committee met before the lunch and discussed the finance business before going to the lunch afterwards. And it was in a private room and he was the Chair of the Finance Committee and that’s handling all the investments which for the CTBF amount to millions. And I got held up and I arrived late, not thirty seconds late, the meeting had just started but I would say I was a good ten minutes, fifteen minutes may be late, not more, fifteen minutes late. When I walked in he said “Late, interfering with someone else were you?”

00:06:03

That’s what he said. (snigger) At the meeting, because he felt I’d interfered with probably the Glebelands. (his wishes, yeah) Yeah, and I know it seems strange but I was the youngest one who actually had any authority amongst those Committee Members. There were younger people than me but they were, you see I’m talking about 1970 ish, say ’71 that’s thirty years ago so I was forty-five. There were others of my age but they didn’t say anything.

00:06:47

And I remember, did you ever know um Cyril Howard at Pinewood (yes, indeed, yes) Well of course he worked for John Davis and he was on that Committee and I can remember when I disagreed with John Davis, and Cyril's face. I mean it was me that was disagreeing not Cyril but he sort of, he looked in terror, and I was I suppose, considered to be a mid forties upstart because I wasn't scared of him.

00:07:24

I I I would say they can only hang you for murder to myself. And if I thought something was right and that he was wrong, and I didn't agree with him I was able to say so, which was more than a lot of other people.

Q: Hmm, of course Cy was a great glad hander anyway but I don't suppose you got anywhere in the Rank Organisation at that time unless you were part of the court.

00:07:47

SAMUELSON: Yeah. I'm sure that's right. (mm mm mm) I'm sure that's right. Anyway um th then I became President of the CTBF and I became a Trustee. I think I was a Trustee for seven years all together. I think you become a Trustee when you're President and then you stay on for perhaps four years after you're President. Then you have to stand down. You can be re-elected, af, after you've stood down, I don't know for a year or two years.

00:08:27

I'm not quite sure what the rule is. Anyway, once I was President we were able to get the er extra care wing built. And I remember um Countess Mountbatten came and opened it. And nobody disappeared between breakfast and lunch ever again. (laugh) I also did things like, a lot of the beds had been endowed, and they had a sort of brass plaque above the head of the bed. This bed was endowed by so and so, and so and so, and so and so.

00:09:05

And a lot of them had been endowed years ago and none of the people involved were still around and I felt it was demeaning.

Q: It's a touch of the workhouse isn't it?

00:09:17

SAMUELSON: Yeah. And I got a lot of them taken away. Whether they still did that and the rest went or not I don't know. Now there was an

ending with my time with the CTBF. I stayed after I was President for two or three years, and Percy Livingstone, I don't know if you knew him (sure), or he succeeded me. And I think it may have been the next President but one, anyway it was Paul Fox.

00:09:54

And I was still on the Council, and then there was an announcement that the Committee Chairmen were going to be changed. It was said that it was something to do with the Charitable Status. Which I could never quite understand (cough). I don't think it was Paul Fox (cough), in fact I know it wasn't his initiative, but the way it was handled I found distasteful. There was a chap who was at one time the head of Rank Distribution called Frank Pool, don't know if you ever knew him. (yes)

00:10:41

You knew him? (yes) A lovely man and for about twenty years he had been Chairman of the Glebelands Committee. In other words the little Committee that looked after the well being of the residents. Arranged outings for them, listened to their problems and complaints and everything else. And his wife Kitty used to play the piano, so whenever there was a sing song Kitty was there to play the piano for them. And they were held in much affection.

00:11:19

I think they used to run the Tombola and Whist Drives and all that. And he did it for years and years. Suddenly he was simply told, "Well I'm afraid that we'll be asking you to stand down". Or he received a letter I think saying we're now asking you to stand down. And it, the reason behind it was the then paid Executive Director was Lieutenant Colonel, no Colonel Peter Ratcliffe, Grenadier Guards Retired.

00:12:05

And he may have been very good as a Colonel in the Guards but as far as human understanding was concerned he left a lot to be desired. And the way this was handled, not only with er er Frank, what did I say his name was? (Pool) Pool, there was another one called Harry Adley. And he, no Harry Adley was his father, the founder of Pearle and Dean.

Q: Um, er well I th th, oh God I knew them both. Um, the Pearle side or the Dean side? Um, Ernie?

00:12:51

SAMUELSON: No it wasn't, it it. (Not Ernie Pearle?) It's somebody Adley.

Q: Oh yeah, um (anyway) yes, I didn't know them.

00:13:01

SAMUELSON: Jonno (yes, that's um). And he ran one of the other Committees and he got a letter as well. And they were devastated, and at the next Council Meeting, and of course John Davis was still alive at that time, so he was there. I was not longer President, hadn't been for a few years by that time. And I queried what was going on. And the answers I got, for me entirely unsatisfactory.

00:13:49

Mainly because I didn't accept that it was necessary to do this. I couldn't really work out why, if the incentive there was to say to Frank Pool, "You've don't it for so many years we have to reorganise or whatever it is but we'd like you to stay on doing what you done so wonderfully for so long". None of that happened, nothing, and I'm afraid, I didn't lose my temper but I got a bit strong in that I thought it was disgraceful.

00:14:29

Not just for what had been done but the way it had been done. And I remember I said "Has anybody not thought of perhaps putting their arm around Frank Pools shoulders and saying I want to thank you Frank and his wife, has nobody thought of doing that?" Because I knew he'd just had the letter. (Hmm) And (bugger off sort of thing) yeah. I got up and I walked out.

00:15:02

I sort of regret it in a way, because I resigned, just wrote in and said I don't wish to be involved with the Fund. And I have never been too much in favour if, if the going gets tough, I've not been in favour of the idea that resignation is the way to deal with it. So I think if I was given my time again and I thought a bit more I could probably have done more good if I had stayed (yeah). So that's how I came to leave the Fund.

00:15:41

Do you happen to know a chap called John Marney? (no) He's National Screen Service (yeah) the people who do all the posters and trailers.

Q: I know the company but I don't (noise) him.

00:15:53

SAMUELSON: He's still talks about it. (laughs) When I (laughs) got up and er said my piece and walked. So, it's, it's rather unfortunate ending to my involvement but nevertheless I think I was there for about twenty

years. And er so I didn't care, and er I still know a lot of the people involved with Glebelands er but I thought it was just disgusting.

Q: Well it is, or it was (it, it was, yeah) discourteous and sad and really unforgiveable.

00:16:38

SAMUELSON: You see John Adley, just to finish off on this, is a bit of an old woman in so much as he talks a great deal. He has a point to make but it takes a long time for him to make that point. And I know that people used to find him irritating. But there are ways of doing things I feel Roy and they were not done as they should have been done. And particularly for Frank and his wife, so that's my CTBF.

Q: Hmm, that was a sad ending .

00:17:12

SAMUELSON: Adventure (?) And um, but it was a sad end but it was partly my fault, perhaps I should have thought

Q: I suppose (thought it through) that's that's the way you saw it at the time (yes, I did). And again if you, if you're up against people like that it's very difficult to turn a situation around, it would have been either you or the Colonel I suppose at some stage.

00:17:32

SAMUELSON: Well it might have been. I'm sure he wrote the letter (yeah) even though Paul Fox, President may have signed it. And Paul Fox asked me to come up and see him, he's been a friend for many, many years and he lives in Radlett where my son lives. And I did go and talk to him and. I'm being very frank for this tape aren't I. Um...

Q: If you wish to seal it for a period, in that we can do. I don't think we've said anything that is....

00:18:02

SAMUELSON: No, there is nothing that is. First of all there's nothing that's exaggerated, I've told it exactly as it happened. And there isn't anything obviously that isn't true. And there isn't anything that is not reflecting certainly how I felt at the time. I suppose what I should have done is walked out and then sat down at home and thought it through (right). And left it for a period.

Q: Did Paul Fox prevail upon you to return?

00:18:31

SAMUELSON: Yes, (he did) yes he did. And um (cough) I said “Not at the moment, maybe....”

Q: Well maybe that was the mistake (yes) had you'd gone back (yeah) maybe you would have had the power perhaps.

00:18:43

SAMUELSON: Er yes, maybe, maybe

Q: Anyway water under the bridge.

00:18:50

SAMUELSON: So, and then I'd been involved in, of course lot of charitable events that had been done for the Industry. Some of them through Variety Club but it was my brother Michael who was the Samuelsons Variety Club representative. And he was at one time the Chief Barker. But I...used to feel (cough) although we were all registered as Barkers, the four brothers, of the Variety Club, we couldn't possibly had four of us doing what Michael did.

00:19:24

Cos I think the company wouldn't have been able to pay for it. Because being a Chief Barker and being a big wheel on the Variety Club is expensive. You've got to have, you've got to be able to put money in. And then they disappear for two weeks for this, the World Variety Conference in Miami. And then the next is in Tokyo, and Sidney, Australia and so on. And so it's, to be involved (it's expensive) in Variety it is an expensive involvement.

Q: The Annual Film Performance - you must have been involved in that.

00:20:07

SAMUELSON: Well I was of course, as President, I was much involved in it perhaps I can give a view and tell a couple of little stories. The previous story about how I left the Fund being so um er being so awful. The Royal Film Performance was something to look forward to, and of course the President is the one in charge. And I used to really enjoy that because before that I had been organising the stage presentation for about five of the Royal Film Performances.

00:20:56

And putting on a show of some kind, and they varied. And I remember doing one about the British Musical and I had clips from a number of British Musicals and going back, oh, quite a long way. I remember Jessie Matthews in Evergreen and er ... I picked out the famous British

Musicals. And I remember my, whoever the compere was at that time his line was and I wrote all the stuff, "But there's one great musical, British Musical star who has appeared in several British Musical films who we haven't seen yet". Then we had a clip of a war time film with Vera Lynn in her uniform singing to the troops. I think it was at RAF Uxbridge and I think there was a couple of thousand of them there.

00:22:20

And they'd, it was part of the script and then the finish of it was that the compere said "But we're lucky enough to have this lady still with us, still busy and then on the screen. Because I used to do it cutting from live action to screen. On the screen was a record going round and the sound was Thank You for the Music which was Vera's latest record. And as she went into the second chorus "Thank you for the music" (singing) it was her, live, she walked on. And well of course you have a live orchestra on Royal Film Performance night.

00:23:21

And it was a great moment cos she's held in such great affection and there she was belting out the song. Her voice is good if not better than ever. So I've been doing those shows and the experiences (noise) with the Royals I've always found interesting, something to look forward to. And I remember while Colonel Ratcliffe (you're, you're covering the mike) Oh.

Q: It's alright.

00:23:58

SAMUELSON: How unprofessional. While Colonel Ratcliffe was in place as Chief Executive, I said to him "I've got an idea for the settling music". Now the settling music was that when you think of the Royal Film Performance the Royal person whoever it is, is escorted along the line of celebrities, industry glitterati, guests, a couple of guests from Glebelands (hangers on) and so on. And then they go into the theatre.

00:24:45

There is therefore a four minute period when the Royals are sitting in their place but all those who were in the line up including stars of the film have all got to be escorted into the theatre it's self to take their seats. It takes four minutes. And what happened before that was that the live orchestra always played something during those four minutes. I said "We've got a live orchestra, Stanley Black". Do you know who I mean by Stanley Black? (sure)

00:25:25

Was the conductor, one of the most brilliant arrangers that this country's has ever had. (coughs) "I'm going to write to the Queen Mother", who is the guest that year "And ask her if she would, if there is a piece of music that she would like us to play". Peter Ratcliffe was appalled and he said "I know about these things and you just don't do that". Well cut a long story short Roy I had CTBF notepaper at home and I wrote to her and said "We have the pleasure of a live orchestra.

00:26:18

Which happens so seldom these days especially at cinema events and I just wondered if there was a piece of music that you would like us to play especially for you". I got a reply saying "How kind of you to think of arranging a piece of music for me, I would love to hear". And I thought she would say something profound like Orbansector (?) or some regal piece of music. And she said "I would like to hear My Blue Heaven". So that was it, I spoke to Stanley about it, he had an orchestra of about thirty one, that's all you can get in the pit.

00:27:14

You know the pit comes up and out.

Q: This is where, the Odeon?

00:27:16

SAMUELSON: Yeah. And so he said " You know what we'll do (cough), I'll arrange it and in the middle we'll have trombone solo and I'll ask Don Lusher to do it". So the trombonist in the orchestra that evening was Don Lusher and then when it came to this piece of music he stood up and we put a pale blue spot on him and he played it like an angel. So that was a magic moment and afterwards when I was escorting her downstairs she said "I did so enjoy hearing My Blue Heaven played so beautifully.

00:28:00

You know it meant so much to the King and myself, that song". So you realise that they're just ordinary people

Q: Oh yeah, yeah, in some respects.

00:28:12

SAMUELSON: May of been their honeymoon piece (yeah) or what ever. Anyway...

Q: Well Noel Coward was a great mate of their for example even.

00:28:19

SAMUELSON: Yes. (yeah) So I believe. Um when er I um escorted. Before I was President but I was a Trustee, or must, maybe it was President Elect. Anyway, I got the number two to escort, was Princess Diana. So it was a Columbia film, it was called, it was Tom Courtney and Albert Finney that theatrical BAFTA. (The Dresser) The Dresser! And if you're sensible you know you've got that double flight of stairs to walk up with your Royal guest, you've worked out something to say.

Q: What you mean er er going out from the lobby?

00:29:09

SAMUELSON: Yes. Yes, and so I said to her as we set off "I'm afraid the line up is four people longer than we were expecting." And er she said "Oh, why's that?" "Well, it's a funny reason but the Colombia, whose film it is has just been purchased by the Coca Cola Company and would you believe it, four executives who know all about making fizzy drinks but not too much about cinema have found it essential that they come from Atlanta representing the Coca Cola Company.

00:29:58

So I shall be introducing you to 'em". And I said "I don't know them but I've got it written down and what they do". So she said "Coca Cola, *that's disgusting*, I won't even let my children drink it!" So I said "Well I don't think we'll say that to the four executives will we". And she said "Well I suppose not." When it was the Queen, Prince Phillip didn't come one year and for something to say while we're waiting for the four minutes er (cough) to er when the four minutes is happening.

00:30:41

Er I said "I'm very sorry that Prince Phillip is not with us tonight". She said "Yes well, maybe not, you know he's a terrible person to have watching a film. I don't know if you've noticed but if anybody on the screen asks a question he answers it out loud before (laugh) before the actor". (laugh Oh dear) And he said because at the end of the line up, what happens is a little girl, the niece or granddaughter of somebody on the Council presents a bouquet to the Royal lady.

00:31:30

And if Prince Phillip is there or Prince Charles, they get a copy of the programme, the brochure with all the advertising in it, the most important fund raising part of the evening. They get a copy of that but leather bound. And Prince Phillip, which I always thought was interesting, he said

“I don’t m, I don’t know how many of these you people have given to me”. He said “But you are amazing because you go to all this expense and I sit down with it in the theatre and you put the lights out”.

00:32:13

And I suppose he’s right, he never reads his expensive leather bound programme because as soon as he (noise) opens it the lights go out. It’s what we do, what we’ve always done and I suppose we’ll always do that.

Q: Doesn’t it go into the the Windsor Archive?

00:32:29

SAMUELSON: I don’t know.

Q: Well I mean it should do shouldn’t it.

00:32:32

SAMUELSON: Well it should do. The best of all is the Queen Mother. Doesn’t do it anymore. (cough) (coughs) Once again I came up against er er Peter Ratcliffe because when I took over as President at that time, until that time they had always alternated. The Queen one year, the Queen Mother the next year. I got a letter from the palace that she had felt that the time had come when she must reduce her commitments and she felt that the time of changing the Presidency would be the moment.

Q: Ok, you were saying she gave it up.

00:33:17

SAMUELSON: I got a letter from the Palace saying that er the time had come for her to reduce her commitments and she felt that at the time the Presidency of the CTBF had changed that this was the moment. And she wished the Fund great success (hmm) in the future. Well I told Peter that I was going to write to her cos I was looking forward to escorting the Queen Mother. He said “You just can’t do that, you just don’t do that kind of thing”. Anyway of course I did it.

00:33:57

And um I got a very nice letter back and um she said “I’m so sorry that you were um looking, I’ll looking forward to”. No “So sorry that I would be disappointing you and I will be more than pleased to ur accept your invitation to attend”. (Oh good Lord) So she did. (u hum) And um she has always got time for everybody, she always says the film is marvellous even when it’s pretty awful. One of the problems we had with the fund is that the film needed to be suitable, or was considered to need to be suitable.

00:34:48

Of course, ridiculous really because if you think that all the Royals of today, especially Charles, Phillip and Anne, if you think that they haven't heard every word that comes out of cinema screen I think you will (yes) be sadly mistaken.

Q: It's ludicrous to even, yeah. But it's all this wrong with this country, this kind of deference and this idiot Colonel saying you just (yeah) don't do things I mean like that. It's it's beyond belief still isn't it. Anyway we won't go into

00:35:21

SAMUELSON: Well I I I like our traditions. I and it goes all the way down to I I I regret that we're losing our red buses and I regret that we've lost our black taxi's. I liked that (h hum) that's what London was as far as I was concerned and that's all going through well advertising and what a mess it it all looks. Sorry I'm sorry. I don't mind the Royal Family at all. I don't think I'm what would be called a er Monarchist, I don't think I'd fight for them but I think that they're part of the business of Britain which is our tourist business which is one of our most important businesses.

00:36:08

And I think that I don't think they do any harm. So that's my view, that wasn't wasn't what I was expecting what I was expecting to be talking about on my er um BECTU History Project but nevertheless.

00:36:22

Q: Well this is you as an individual. (yeah) Um, I don't suppose we really we should get into it too deeply (no) because it you know, it's an interesting conversation but on the one hand there's the institution on the other hand the individuals. And I think one could talk about both those factors (yeah) for hours. Um so the CTBF um, your your your affiliation to them came to an end. The Veterans is yet another one that you put a lot of time in on isn't it with Cinema and Television Veterans.

00:36:51

SAMUELSON: Yes, I I was the President of the Veterans for one year, one only does a year and I'm still on their Council. And it's a differ it's a different organisation in so much as it's not a charity, it doesn't have to raise funds to do good deeds. It does have a small cash flow, it does make a substantial donation to the CTBF each year, and it does c provide a forum for retired members of the industry film and television, to meet up from time to time to have, to socialise.

00:37:41

And it does have an arrangement with the Society of Film Distributors, no I'm sorry, the CEA (the CEA isn't it, yeah?) To allow members to go to the cinema, not on Saturdays and Sundays I think, not at the weekends, but there is the CTBF pass available to members of the Veterans. (u hum) And I think you have to be in the industry for thirty-five years.

Q: Well it was forty and I think it's thirty now.

00:38:20

SAMUELSON: It's thirty now is it?

Q: I think so, they changed it because so many television people would never ever qualify for the forty years (oh yes, yes) so they reduced it (yes) to thirty.

00:38:30

SAMUELSON: Stan Fishman is the President at the (oh is he right) moment I don't know if you know him? (no I don't) Really (no, no) nice guy. And

Q: I I It seems to be weighted less in production, more in exhibition and distribution. (your absolutely right) Which yer which (absolutely) mostly they might be nice people but they are usually very boring.

00:38:46

SAMUELSON: Yere, (laughs) yr er. Well we won't go into that.

Q: Well we won't go into that right. Er so that's the veterans and of course there's BAFTA. Now we've got um well another two or three minutes (ok) left on this tape, shall we er um shall we er shall I prepare another tape?

00:39:03

SAMUELSON: Is it. Er, um I will probably go on a bit longer than two or three minutes.

Q: Ok, let me um BAFTA which I suppose is our most important (yes) non work type activity in the industry, right.

SAMUELSON: Yes.

Q: We're rolling.

00:39:21

SAMUELSON: Oh, ok. Well I became involved with BAFTA purely because I applied for membership and what I thought was quite interesting in view of what subsequently happened was that I was turned down as not qualifying for membership of BAFTA having not made the kind of contribution to the industry that was required.

Q: This was when? How long ago?

00:39:54

SAMUELSON: About thirty-five year ago. That would, let's see, yes about thirty five years ago. And I was smarting, I don't mind admitting, and I had just received an award from the British Society of Cinematographers, their award for my contribution to the film industry. Anyway I reapplied and I said "you may not be aware of er what I do and how my company has transformed the equipment business and has put Britain above all other countries in the quality of the facilities that are available.

00:40:55

And my company has had a major part of bringing this about and that is why the Cameraman's Society wish to pay tribute to that". And I was then accepted into membership. I was then asked only about a year later if I would like to put my name down for election to Council. Which I did and I was appointed. And it, it the Academy SFTA as it was known at that time, Society of Film and Television Arts. Which was an amalgamation of the British Film Academy and the Society of Television Directors I think it was called. That became the Society of Film and Television Arts.

00:41:53

It was a cottage industry, two rooms on the s first or second floor i a above a dress manufacturer in Great Portland Street. The paid Chief Executive was quite a nice person but was really not capable of developing SFTA into what it needed to be. And yet through a series of weak Councils she had been in absolute control of everything that happened. And as long as it was always going to be a small insignificant organisation, unknown outside of the UK, that's, that would have been ok.

00:42:50

Butthe year that I was appointed to be a member of Council, Richard Attenborough became the Chairman. And he could see that something needed to be done if the Society was to mean anything. Certainly if it was going to mean more than what it was at that time. It was a little organisation. And

Q: It's time, sorry.

END OF SIDE 8

SIDE 9

Q: Um it was a little organisation.

00:00:03

SAMUELSON: Yes (cough) It was a little organisation not going anywhere and Richard Attenborough became the Chairman and he wasn't having that. I'm not sure that I knew him before then. I should think it was mid sixties we're talking about; I'd have to look up the dates. But as we came down from the meeting, the first meeting of council, and I've always made a point of never saying anything at my first meeting for whatever organisation it is.

00:00:47

How can you say anything if you don't know anything. Anyway I hadn't said a word and the stair case down from the second floor was under lit and you had to almost feel your way down these stone steps to get out to the pavement. And as I walked down on my own an arm was slipped through mine and a voice said, "She'll have to go won't she". I think they might have been the first words that my long time friend Richard Attenborough ever said to me.

00:01:27

And of course he was right, and I was on Council, I think only one year, when at the next elections they, I was made Vice Chairman of the Film Department. There was Film, a Film Committee and a Television Committee. It was still SFTA and we used to have the SFTA Awards. And we getting bigger, we had them at the Albert Hall a couple of times, I'm afraid not very well done.

00:02:08

The first year that Dickie was involved was, and when I had not yet become evol involved, they had at the Palladium which was an absolute disaster. I remember at my first meeting it was an inquest on the Awards at the Palladium. The humiliation and the embarrassment, of all the things that went wrong and so on. And gradually we got a stronger Council and we

came out of it and when Dickie retired I was Vice Chairman and I was re-elected to be Vice Chairman when a chap called Aubrey Singer of the BBC.

00:03:01

Television Producer he became Chairman for two years and two years after that. After his two years I became the Chairman of SFTA. Which was a considerable way, if it doesn't sound once more too pompous for me to say it; it was a considerable way, a considerable distance from being rejected for ordinary membership. And we had by that time committed to re-building 195 Piccadilly and we had to raise the money and it was five hundred thousand pounds.

00:03:52

Now that is about twenty-five years ago I think. And we raised the twenty-five thousand pounds. I, the fund raisers were what I used to call the ABC

Q: Sorry you said twenty-five thousand, you meant five hundred thousand.

00:04:09

SAMUELSON: Ah sorry, f.... We raised five hundred thousand pounds, that's right. Twenty-five thousand. I was thinking of the donation that the Rank Organisation gave through John Davis and he had said "And I'm only giving you the last twenty-five thousand, (h hum) so if you don't raise, if you have a short fall you don't get mine either". Anyway that's neither here nor there. The five hundred thousand was raised by as I say by what I called the ABC.

00:04:44

That was Richard Attenborough, Lord Brabourne and Richard Cawston. Richard Cawston was Head of Documentary at BBC. And the first hundred and twenty five thousand pounds came from the Queen because Richard had directed the film called Royal Family and it was a huge success. And it made a lot of money of which the Queen received half.

00:05:14

And of course she was very pleased with its success and she said to Richard "I'm looking for a charity that it would be, too whom it would be appropriate appropriate to donate the hundred and twenty-five thousand pounds". And Richard said "Well, as a matter of fact The Society of Film and Television Arts is hoping to develop new premises and we have to raise five hundred thousand pounds, this would be a most wonderful start". And that's what happened.

00:05:52

The start of 195 Piccadilly's funding came from the Royal Family. And then, so there was then three hundred and seventy five thousand pounds to raise. Which was raised and the lease was signed and we started tearing out walls leading out onto Piccadilly in, in order to put in huge girders that hold up the Princess Anne Theatre. It was a major operation. Of course half million doesn't sound like much now (no) does it.

Q: It was a gigantic sum then.

00:06:29

SAMUELSON: But what happened was that galloping inflation started at more or less the same time. And the five hundred thousand pounds budget, it was carefully budgeted, became only fifty per cent of what was needed. And another five hundred thousand pounds had to be raised somehow. And certain things had to be cut out. I was by that time the President of the Fund, of the e, of the e f SFTA.

00:07:10

And, I'm sorry, I don't mean President, I mean Chairman of Council. The President was always a Royal, r r r, until she resigned last year it was the Princess Royal, I was the Chairman. And the fund raising had to start all over again and the ABC had to mastermind that miserable job. And we were never going to raise another five hundred thousand so we had to, excuse me, cut down.

00:07:48

I was called in to a meeting of the Trustees of the Academy who were people like Cawston, Attenborough, Brabourne, a chap called Peter Morley , do you know Peter Morley?

Q: Yes, he was a director in television.

00:08:08

SAMUELSON: Yes, yes that's right.

Q: Yes, yes, I worked with him.

00:08:09

SAMUELSON: He's another one and I think there was another one. And they said "We would like you to come onto the building committee and your responsibility is to do the theatre". And I came on to it and the first thing I did was a budget for the minimum amount of equipment to, for the Princess Anne Theatre, sixteen and thirty-five mil and the Run Run Shaw Theatre, sixteen and thirty-five mil.

00:08:48

And I remember it came to eighty-eight thousand pounds. Again doesn't sound like much now, then I was told there was no money available. We had to do the best we could to get open but eight-eight thousand pounds was out of the question. Now what I did, and I was put in charge of it, what everybody agreed was that even if what we could have basics the quality on the screen and the sound and the comfort of the seats must be top.

00:09:35

No compromise at all (uhmm, yeah). Now when we were still building, we had a bit of luck because somebody told to, said to me have you heard what's happened to the Scotia Barber Theatre. Did you ever hear of Scotia Barber?

Q: They made some pictures too didn't they, yeah?

00:09:55

SAMUELSON: Yes, yes that's right, that's right and they kept changing their name. Somebody said to me the only firm that is doing well in the British Film Industry is Scotia Barbers Printer, cos they kept changing their note paper. Anyway they built a theatre in their basement and I think it was in like North Audley Street or Audley Square or somewhere like that. And when they finished it and completely equipped it, twin thirty-five mil projectors, HMI lamps and all that.

00:10:29

The local, what are they called the Fire Committee or whoever comes in to look at fire safety.

Q: The Fire Brigade or whatever en..

00:10:39

SAMUELSON: It may have been Health and Safety whatever it was called (cough) in those days. They looked at it and they said "You can't have, can't use this theatre if there will be anybody other than your own staff". And the Scotia people said "Well that's absolutely impossible, the whole idea of having the theatre is to invite people to come here". And they said "You have no secondary exit and you are just not allowed to have a theatre with only one exit".

00:11:13

And so they had to close it down. Now that had happened a bit before I was starting to put equipment together for the BAFTA Theatre but somebody told me that they were surplus to requirements, they had been ripped out, and they were in the basement of those little pair of cinemas opposite the Dominion, Tottenham Court Road. They were called, at that time I think the Continental and I think it was (ee) a Kenneth Rive thing.(yea) They were independent.

Q: The Barclay or the Berkley (maybe, maybe) was one too.

SAMUELSON: There are two there.

Q: Yeah, that's right, I remember, yeah, Continental Pictures.

00:11:56

SAMUELSON: Anyway I went and up to the theatre and asked if I could see the Chief and I said "I've heard that you've got a couple of projectors and they're not, they're surplus. They've come out of the Scotia Theatre". The amazing thing was that they were double head projectors which was one of my problems because we needed double head. Anyway he took me down and showed me their basement and there they were all strewn about, a bit taken off here.

00:12:28

Um all on its side and so on. But I looked and I could see that everything was there except they'd taken the lamp houses because they were better than some lamp houses they'd got in another theatre somewhere. But the basic projectors, no sound, were there. And I remember saying to the Trustees "I know it's going to be tough but I need four thousand five hundred pounds now for two double headed projectors". And they said "But the building won't be finished for nine months".

00:13:05

But I said "We'll never get an opportunity like this". So the money was found and I think we left the projectors in the basement. I think we must have sent somebody up to tidy it all up and to put labels on it and so on. But we had they key to the whole installation, two West Star, excellent, virtually unused projectors. And then I went to manufacturers and said "I've got a proposition for you, I will give you a show room for your latest product in the most famous street in the world.

00:13:51

And you will not be charged a penny for that. You just come and screw it down and it will be rent free. 195 Piccadilly will be the address you can invite potential clients to come and see the quality of your work". And I did that with the sound, with the two sixteen millimetre projectors, the house decorative lighting and dimming, the adjustable screen that went from something four feet by five feet to simulate television right up to thirty two feet anamorphic.

00:14:43

The only semi failure I had. Oh I I I got double head sixteen mil play, er slave players cos the sixteen mil projectors were not double head. We needed for the small theatre there wasn't room to have four machines, two thirty-five and two sixteen. And I went to Zeiss through their distributor in London, Walter Door (?) who made a combined sixteen and thirty-five mil projector. Like all multi-purpose things it's a compromise for both.

00:15:25

In other words it's not the best thirty-five projector you can get and it's not the best sixteen projector. But they were both on one base which is what we needed. And the best I could do there is they delivered two for the price of one. And that's how we equipped the theatre. I could do very little as far as seating was concerned. I was desperate to buy British, nobody made modern cinema seats in this country and I had to go to France.

00:15:55

And I suppose they gave us a little bit of discount but not much. They were a major expense those two hundred and thirteen seats. But they are comfortable.

Q: They were endowed too, were they not, each each seat?

00:16:11

SAMUELSON: Each one. That came afterwards. Now I made a silly mistake there, I should have endowed them for five years, then after five years could have sold them all again. Anyway that's how we equipped the theatre. We cut out all forms of decoration in those two theatres and we just Duluxed the walls. And by some miracle the acoustics in that theatre are absolutely excellent. And there is no acoustic treatment at all.

Q: That is surprising, yeah. (it's just a box) One would judge it were designed that way.

00:16:49

SAMUELSON: You, you would, wouldn't you. We had no money for such niceties as theatre acoustical design. And that's the theatre. Now

since then through good relationships, with first of all Dolby, not only did they install Dolby. I don't think we had it from day one, I think that came a bit later. But not only did they install their state of the art system but whenever it's been improved they put it in for us. (mm)

00:17:27

So they've been wonderful and also the Barco Electronic Projector, have you ever seen it? (yes) BAFTA's it's very, very good.

Q: It's excellent, really it's astonishingly good.

00:17:37

SAMUELSON: It's the third one that Barco have provided for us. (right) So that's how the theatre was done and that's was my principal contribution to BAFTA. I was one of the three or four pushing to get it changed from Society of Film and Television Arts, Sifta was the best that anyone could think of calling it to The British Academy of Film and Television Arts.

Q: Sifter sounds like a venereal disease.

00:18:10

SAMUELSON: Well (laughs) men or salt (?) Anyway, um and I have been involved ever since. I was given the Michael Balcan Award. This is from the organisation that originally turned me down, for my contribution. No, the Michael Balcan Award is for British Contribution to Cinema and then I was made a Trustee. So I've actually got two BAFTA Masks which I'm very proud of because I'm not the kind of person who normally is honoured by the Academy. (coughs)

00:18:47

It's usually either great producers, directors, writers, actors and actresses.

Q: Well names the general public (cough) knows, yes...

SAMUELSON: Glitterati. And do you know Roy, something that I'm probably most proud of as by way of a contribution, is that about seven or eight years ago we had a crisis to do with our voting. And that was in one of the television writing categoriesthe. No, not writing, programme categories, best drama. The winner was announced and the producer of the one that was expected to get it but didn't through membership voting said. No not membership voting, through the jury.

00:19:54

Best Drama Jury would be about nine or ten people. They didn't vote for her programme and she complained, including to the press, that the voting was fixed. Because she happened to know that more of the Jury members had voted for her programme than for the winning programme, the so called winning programme. And it was a real crisis because the credibility (indeed) of the Academy's voting system was at stake.

Q: I remember it going on.

00:20:37

SAMUELSON: You do. We called it BAFTAgate. And it was thoroughly investigated and she had no case but I know what happened. And that is that she ... um wrongly went to jury members who were on that jury and asked them if they voted for her. Now if you're a freelance writer or whatever

Q: What are you going to say?

00:21:13

SAMUELSON: And er a busy producer says did you vote for me you're not likely to say no I didn't are you? And you're likely to say well confidentially yes I did, it was a marvellous programme and all that stuff. I'm sure that's what happened. She had no right to ask, and they had no right to tell her. But it's not easy if she's got power which she had. Now what's that got to do with me? Obviously I was part of the Council investigating what on earth could have happened.

00:21:50

And I was asked to write rules of procedure for jury voting. And of course part of my brief was to make sure that nothing like this could ever happen again. Because when we were investigating Roy, if you can believe it, the voting papers on which the jury members had written their choice had been destroyed. And you have to ask why had they been destroyed? Why wouldn't you keep them until the awards (noise) are over, finished, done? (yes, yes) And never the less the then Chief Executive said "Well they're always, we just throw them away".

Q: We've always done it that way.

00:22:44

SAMUELSON: Yeah. And so that was a little bit difficult to explain. And I devised the system that is used for example, the voting, the actual voting is on two pairs of carbonated papers. And one of them, I'm sorry, on one pair of carbonated papers, one copy goes to the Chief Executive and the other copy goes to the scrutineers. And by having carbonated papers

they're exactly the same. And we don't have a tick we have a signature against the one of the four nominations.

00:23:37

And things like that all the way through. And I'm, I'm sort of quite er er, it was quite a responsibility but a privilege to write, to formulate the voting rules of the Academy. Er which I did and which are still used and we've never had the slightest problem since then.(?) It's just not possible for um, it's not possible for anything to, to happen (whiter, whiter than white) that shouldn't happen. Yes, yes.

00:24:16

So that's my principle involvement with BAFTA and what else can I tell you. I'm happily three quarters retired, four fifths retired. I'm lucky enough to have a long and happy marriage and I find that this particular period when my wife and I can be in our home, which we love very much, in the place where we would rather live than anywhere else we can think of. This is a very good time of our lives.

Q: I'm delighted to hear that. Do you travel much, do you get about?

00:25:01

SAMUELSON: Well we don't travel very much. It is one thing to travel to Los Angeles when it's being paid for and it's quite another thing when you're saying on the one hand, because my wife doesn't travel very well. Er if we go on a eleven and a half hour journey, we're going to have to go business, and that's an expensive business.

Q: It's a very pricey business. Also there ain't a great deal of pleasure in it is there especially getting, going through the airport and going (ghastly)through the other airport. (ghastly, ghastly) It's all different all different nowadays.

00:25:39

SAMUELSON: And we're very lucky. The principle reason for me going over there, and I'm pleased to say that I get lots of invitations from organisations over there to attend this and that.The principle reason is our eldest son Peter lives there with his family. (h mm) Er he's got four children, but thank goodness they come here a lot. And Peter is here I would say six times a year because Peter Samuelson and his younger brother Mark Samuelson, they have a production company.

00:26:20

Samuelsons Productions believe it or not. And they work together, Mark does the UK end and Peter does the American end and they both have to

travel to the other side quite often. Just for the record they've done about four feature films, they have one coming out in the summer with Billy Connolly called Gabriel and Me. And they have the one before that was a thriller that Peter masterminded, shot in the States with Jeff Bridges called, and somebody Cusack, I forget what her other name is.

Q: Well there's a girl and a man Cusack. (well this is the girl) There's a John Cusack, yes, um well right yeah, there is one I know yeah.

00:27:17

SAMUELSON: Or is it, no I think the opposition to Jeff Bridges was John Cusack, yeah it was a man.

Q: What was, what was the pictures title?

00:27:27

SAMUELSON: The pictures title was Arlington Road

Q: Oh yes, I saw that yeah. (oh you saw that) Yeah, yeah the the bomber.

00:27:32

SAMUELSON: Yeah, (yeah) was quite good I thought.

Q: Yes, yes it was John Cusack I think yeah.

00:27:37

SAMUELSON: And the one before that was Wilde with Stephen Fry. And the one before that, their first one was called Tom and Viv. (saw that) You saw that as well, Miranda Richardson. And um Miranda Richardson and (who played Big Elliot) played Jennifer Elise (?) mother. Jude Law played Bosie oh no, no (no, that's Wilde) I'm sorry yes.

Q: I was thinking, was it, Tom Elliot, TS Elliot, um can't remember

SAMUELSON: Yes, an American actor, er (oh was it) yeah

Q: Peter oh I don't know, it's gone, I won't think of it

00:28:16

SAMUELSON: He was in that, he was nominated for an Oscar for that film that Stone did on Vietnam.

Q: Well, he's done several. Sassoon? Or Platoon or

SAMUELSON: I think it may have been Platoon

00:28:34

Q: The Tom Cruise film um, On the Foot, Born on the Fourth of July, they're the two (one of those two). Well he's done several Vietnamese pictures (yeah) in them yeah.

00:28:42

SAMUELSON: Very good actor. He played Elliott.

Q: Isn't that strange we should, we should be able to remember.

SAMUELSON: Eh, eh, my recall.

Q: We're getting old Sidney.

00:28:52

SAMUELSON: Yes, well my recall, my memory is not good. And my worse is the recall of names.

Q: Yeah, and fairly recent things too. (yeah) Probably like me you can go back into the (yes) past but er more recent events (yes) are hazy (yes) to say, to say. Right, which brings us in a way to the dynastic aspect of of the Samuelsons Family, how many generations now is it now beginning with you and?

00:29:15

SAMUELSON: Well we have five And how we have five is that if you start with my two grandchildren, my two children er that's one. And Peter's eldest daughter er works on production, she's now kind of transferred to theatre, so that's two gen. Oh let's go from the youngest (right), my (? age) granddaughter. My two of my sons, that's two generations, and then there's my generation, it's three generations. And then was my father, G B Samuelson and he made over a hundred films, that's four generations.

00:30:07

And my fathers' partner, when he first started with a rinky dink cinema in Southport was his mother, my Grandmother. So that's how we (???) claim five generations. And we wonder if it's a record in the British Film Industry but we suspect that there would be a family of, I don't know, electricians or prop men (possibly, possibly) who have got. They couldn't have more than six generations I don't think. But five generations will take a bit of beating because my father's first involvement was 1910.

00:30:44

So it's ninety odd years. And a lot of us have been involved with the industry in different, different ways. My father had such a terrible time financially (coughs) especially when sound came in and whatever capital you'd got and the credit arrangements you got was locked into silent movies which became obsolete over night. It wasn't a gradual thing. And once the cinema could get their sound equipment, once it was available they had to put in . And they were showing talkies from then on.

00:31:31

I suppose there must have been a time when both silents and talkies were shown even on the same night. Cos there couldn't have been enough product could there?

Q: It was so (but it was) it was a very expensive business to convert to sound (yes) so I think there was a kind of transitional period of two or three years (yeah probably) during which the flea pit still had the old hand cranked projectors for all I know.

00:31:55

SAMUELSON: Yeah, maybe. I worked in two cinemas where they had the old, what were called Western Electric Universal Base which was the projector that came in and it to have a variable speed motor because it coped with both sound on disk, which is what the Jazz Singer was. And sound on film. And they ran at different speeds so instead of just having a switch on or off it had a switch for on and off but then it had a speed control.

00:32:37

Q: It's a bit like today in that with digital, there are so many formats around and who knows which one is going to win out and that's I guess true (mm) of the early sound systems. Also those were the depression, the beginning of the depression years (absolutely right) so money was very tight for everyone I think at that stage um. Um you said much earlier before we started I think that you consider yourself to be extremely lucky.

00:33:04

So looking back how how do you um see that coming from, not humble origins but um.

SAMUELSON: Pretty humble. (laughs)

Q: Well deprived in a

SAMUELSON: Yeah immigrant Grandparents

Q: And here you are living in in in grandeous surrounding dare I say, er a lovely house um.

00:33:22

SAMUELSON: I (cough) I have had a lot of luck. I sometimes describe how it's happened as. Well I think you need; there are three requirements to get anywhere at all. One of them is you've got to have a bit of enterprise; you've got to be prepared to take a chance, risk something. I don't think everything will be put on the plate in front of you. You may have to look for it and you may have to take a chance on it.

Q: Did you ever live really dangerously in that sense?

00:34:06

SAMUELSON: Did I ever live really dangerously? Th th th, not really dangerously except that I went, I took a contract in Nigeria which I think in these papers here it's mentioned. But the idea of taking this job in Nigeria when my darling wife and I had been married six weeks. (phone) Excuse me. The idea of taking a ten months separation in Nigeria was because it enabled me to cross the bridge from being an assistant camera man to being a camera man.

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And secondly we'd be able to save a bit of money to put down as a deposit on a home of our own. We lived with my parents in law. We lived very happily with my parents in law but it was not like a home of your own. And I managed in the ten months to save three hundred pounds.

Q: We we, you you did cover that (I did cover that) in the original. What I had in mind was um the company for example ever in jeopardy a a brave decision had to be taken either an extend or an expansion.

00:35:24

SAMUELSON: Do you know I don't think it was. But we had to take a chance on investing in things, where if it hadn't worked out we would have had a real problem. Because equipment had at all times in history, in our industry has been very, very expensive. And I had to commit when, I remember, a firm called Argenor on in France, they brought out a ten to one zoom lens. And I had to commit, they showed me a prototype, and I think I committed to (when, sorry) to ten lenses.

Q: We, we did go through actually so

00:36:12

SAMUELSON: We did, we worked through all that. (yeah, right) (coughs) The only time (cough) that I think things were really rocky was again when we'd ... we'd invested heavily in a studio in Cricklewood on the basis that we had a very good regular customer from Hamburg. Norddeutscher Rundfunk and they had set up their UK production ..

Q: We, we, we, we've done this too, um I don't want (no ok) foreshorten you but on the other hand.

00:36:49

SAMUELSON: We had spent a great deal of money and then they closed down (right) the UK operation for political reasons. (so, so) And on Superman One we did a deal on a promissory note, I might have gone into this as well.

Q: No you haven't, we haven't touched on Superman. (ok and) This is with the er Salkinds.

00:37:11

SAMUELSON: Yes it was, yes it was (laugh) and um (as you clench your teeth). What was their line producers name, I can't remember now. We thought a promissory note was like money in the bank, it is not. And they reneged (um) and I think it was about four hundred thousand pounds. Again doesn't sound like a fortune now, but whenever Superman One (yeah) was being produced it would have been difficult for us to survive unless we got ourselves into terrible bank debt.

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If they would give it to us at that extent because it was a gianormous film as far as we were concerned. We had to pay Panavision. On our deal with Panavision was sixty/forty. They got sixty per cent of the rental income, we got forty. But, they on the one hand never said who we should do business with but, when we had rented their equipment, they didn't care, Panavision. That's not right, er it wasn't their problem (phone).

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When we rent, let their equipment go to a customer it was not Panavision's problem if that customer didn't pay us. We still had to pay Panavision sixty per cent of what the rental price would have been even if we didn't get the rental. Which I'm afraid from time to time happens. And on Superman they probably had throughout five Panavision cameras and all the lenses to go with them.

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And if Warner Brothers had not bailed out the Salkinds and the film had not been finished so there was no chance of us ever getting any position on money coming in um I don't know that we would have survived.

Q: That would have been a major risk. But they did finally settle, or Warners settled did they?

00:39:27

SAMUELSON: They did. (yeah) They came over, they took it over, it took a bit of time, they were still shooting and they paid us.

Q: Well it made a lot of money didn't it, the film.

00:39:40

SAMUELSON: It did, (yeah) but they paid us before they knew whether it (right, right) was going to make money (yeah) or not. They, they, they settled the debt.

Q: But Warners could not really afford not to in a way I suppose could they? I mean they might have legally had the right to.

00:39:52

SAMUELSON: Yeah, I suppose they could have said er taking it, er er we're taking it over but our deal is that all debts are off, we're not....

Q: They weren't taking over the debt.

00:40:04

SAMUELSON: Yeah. That could easily of happened. (I see) And um

Q: That would have been a problem.

00:40:10

SAMUELSON: So, I th, I I. The other two things I've always said you need some enterprise and to be prepared to take a risk. But also you need the luck that I've already spoken about. Being in the right place, finding yourself just setting up in business with one camera but finding that commercial television starts and there is a desperate shortage of equipment. So a line of customers who didn't exist a year before was in place.

00:40:43

And the other thing I've always felt is vital is you must have common sense. And I er worked with lots of really brainy, brilliant people much cleverer than me. I'm very ordinary, but they don't necessarily have common sense. And it's quite interesting because I've always thought my, of the four Samuelsons brothers, two were extremely brainy and the other two had the common sense. And both were needed.

Q: So it worked well (yes) as a combo (well very lucky). Well no I'm...

00:41:22

SAMUELSON: Lucky that we all got reasonably got on with each other reasonably well.

Q: Um, probably more than luck. (I suppose so) bask (?) (somebody said) But a combination of of the time, the place, the talent (yes) and the attitudes, yeah.

00:41:37

SAMUELSON: Yes, you see I, what I often think about, could I do it

again? Could I set up in the film industry to be a supplier and make it like I did before? I don't think so, I think there's so much competition now, the discount race. Which was so tough for us because we built our business on charging a reasonable price and being able to pay our way, while delivering an outstanding service. That's not the case anymore. A bit less service and cheaper is the way of things.

Q: Let me flip the tape.

END OF SIDE 9

SIDE 10

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Sydney Samuelson CBE - Entrepreneur - Chairman of Samuelson Film Service

Interviewer Alan Lawson

SAMUELSON: You're very patient Roy.

Q: I'm not, no, no so providing um it's six o'clock and um providing um. I can always go home on the bus if the tubes not. No problem. I'm er we're not keeping, keeping you are we? So that's kind of the luck thing. Looking back um happiest memories and I suppose most miserable memories if any, must be some.

00:00:24

SAMUELSON: My happiest.....my happiest memories. Wellwhen I suppose one of the happiest memories was when I went with my wife and two of my children and received a knighthood. And Prince Charles said "I very pleased to be doing this Sidney". Now obviously, we know each other but he'd never called me Sidney before. And on that occasion um it was just, I just thought it was a wonderful thing to happen. Only two of my children could go because you are only allowed three people.

00:01:22

And although Mark the youngest one said "Don't worry about it Mum, we'll tell you all about it when we get back". (laughs) (really) (laugh) (what a nice lad) That, that, well, (laugh) only kidding. (ya) And the er ... I think when I got my award for um contribution, British Contribution to Cinema. I'd no idea it was going to happen and we were sitting there in Grosvenor House and the broadcast was going out and they came to what, er to the Michal Balcon Award.

00:02:12

And the citation was read by Dickie Attenborough and Doris said to me "He can only be talking about you". And that was the first moment I realised I was going to get the Balcon Award. (total surprise) Absolutely.

Q: Really, I'm surprised they didn't forewarn you.

00:02:34

SAMUELSON: No, andthe (cough). One of the most miserable moments came precisely the same evening, not long lasting however. And that was after the Balcon and the broadcast was over the net working started. And people came leaping over chairs and tables to sort of get at me and say "how marvellous". (darling, yeah) Well, all that except one man who said

00:03:18

"Well Sidney, you've made all this money from the industry and now this, whatever next" and walked away.

Q: I know who you're going to say.

SAMUELSON: No, I'm not going to say (Jonathan). Jonathan? (Balcon) No. (wasn't) No that came afterwards.

Q: Ah, ah right because I er er want to go to, when we've finished I'll (yea) I'll tell you something about that.

00:03:42

SAMUELSON: No, Jonathan Balcon we know is nutty and it never worried me. I wasn't told what he said for some time, years I think before they told me what he'd written. He's just a hard ware, hard ware dealer isn't he?

Q: He was in insurance, he was at Lloyds.

00:04:02

SAMUELSON: Right, no he said about me.

Q: Oh I beg your pardon, I have no idea what he said.

SAMUELSON: My father wouldn't have...

Q: It was, yeah it was you who told me and I'd forgotten precisely (yeah) what you told me but anyway, we'll let's not um....

00:04:15

SAMUELSON: It was momentarily a bad moment. I had a bad time when business was not at all good. Business was bad and the only people who were making movies at all seemed to be Golan and Globus (snigger).

Q: The Go-Go Cousins.

00:04:42

SAMUELSON: The Go-Go Cousins. And the reason that we were not doing any business for them was that I had had to say to them when they phoned up for some more equipment for another picture. And they were very busy, making junk but nevertheless, it doesn't matter what my cameras were being used for. As long as they were paying, it's nothing to do with me er the quality of the product. I'm not in control of that.

Q: But didn't you suspect there was something very fishy going on?

00:05:17

SAMUELSON: Not fishy but just unstable and that um What happened? They made a musical which used Panavision lenses which is big time for them. And we couldn't get the money for it and we of course had had to pay Panavision. And when they phoned up for another production I said "I can't supply you with any equipment". I keep saying I, I would never have said I would always have said we.

00:05:54

It's just funny because I'm just sitting here it wasn't I it was

Q: Well yes but (but I was running it) you must have been a decision maker.

SAMUELSON: Yes I was. And I said "Until you've paid for the last lot of equipment I'm just not able to supply you with any further equipment". They then got into bed with the Lee Boys. (coughs) Whether there was anything more in it than that I don't know. But they did all their pictures.

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They'd got a camera department by that time and lights, and grip. And I decided because it wouldn't have mattered if there was lots of business coming from other people making movies but there wasn't. There were just not many movies being made except for Lees. And it was the year when Lee's were at their, apex of their um

00:07:07

...involvement with the industry. I don't know how many films a year they were making. And Golan and Globus I decided I'll just have to humble myself and go down and face them and say..... "It's a long time ago why don't we start again and we'll do some pictures for you". In other words I was writing off what they'd never paid for. And I was going through the kind of humiliation of kind of apologising to them, shouldn't have had to.

00:07:59

And my misery was compounded by the fact that the Lee's were.. Everything in Cannes was to do with Golan and Globas and the Lee's. And that's about the most miserable time. (coughs) And Menahem Golan did see me and I told him what I was there for. I said "I've only come to see you guys". And he said "Well I wouldn't mind Sidney but er you know that my partner he he won't have it". That, that was Globas. And I said "Well I'll go and see him".

00:08:57

He said “Well if you can see him, see what you can do”. And he wouldn’t see me, Globas. And I remember that I completely failed, I didn’t want to walk up and down the Croisette with all the Lee banners everywhere and I didn’t want to meet. I suppose I’m a bit of a coward in this respect. Um I didn’t want to meet so called friends who would point out my competitors great display and say to me “So what do you think of this Sidney?”

00:09:39

So I remember I went back to the Martinez Hotel because my flight, before I had to leave for the airport, the flight was not for four or five hours something like that. And I didn’t want to sit at the airport for four or five hours so I remember there are book stalls all the way along the Croisette, Cannes. So I remember going and buying something to read and I bought a biography of Roman Polanski. And I went into the hotel and I said “I want to check out at six o’clock is that ok”.

00:10:24

And it must have been late on in during the Festival because they said it was ok. Otherwise they would be saying “we’ve got someone waiting to move into your room”. But later on in the Festival the crush is over. And I went up and I laid down on my bed and I read about Roman Polanski and thought to myself his trouble is much worse than mine. That is the most miserable (really) moment I can recall. (well) There must have been lots of things that I’ve been unhappy about (yeah) when people.

Q: It sounds as if it rankles as much as makes you unhappy but um er you were I think better off having no further dealings with them. They were appalling people.

00:11:15

SAMUELSON: It may have been. They may have, I suppose I would have been so sensitive about not displeasing them that I would have given them more credit than they were worth.

Q: You didn’t think of attaching the picture? You probably couldn’t then.

00:11:34

SAMUELSON: Well I don’t know whether we could’ve done or not. We had this bloody promissory note which we thought was like money in the bank.

Q: Oh that was also with um no we’re talking about the Salkinds now or or

SAMUELSON: The Salkinds. Yes, oh we had nothing from Golan Globas.

Q: It was all worth none.

00:11:53

SAMUELSON: You see and then they got in, next thing we knew was they bought Elstree Studios. Which we were trying to get hold of, not that we particularly wanted to involve ourselves in a film studio cos they, they were doing no business at all. But it looked as if it was going to be sold off and to with the support of people like Spielberg and Lucas we tried to put a consortium together.

Q: I remember, yes I remember it very well and it was the idiot (yes) film industry at the time whoever it was (yeah) who who gave it to them based on their quite untrustworthy promises (yeah). Umm

00:12:35

SAMUELSON: Well it was first of all bought by someone else who sold it like two weeks later.

Q: That's right the Aus (at a huge profit) the Australian. (yes) Bond, Bond.

SAMUELSON: And he was the one who got it above us.

Q: Yeah, he got it from um EMI didn't he.

SAMUELSON: No the Walkers.

Q: That's right, the Walkers, yes, yes the Walkers got it from EMI didn't they. Oh it was such a crooked period (terrible) such a crooked period.

00:13:05

SAMUELSON: Terrible, just terrible and we were having to make people redundant. We used to have about ten in our R&D Department and we just had to cut that out. Customers wouldn't pay for it. And another miserable moment that I'm sure I must have said before on the tape was when a production manager with whom we'd done several pictures phoned for a quote and said

00:13:37

"I'm giving the list to all your competitors and don't tell me how good your service is and the quality of you back up, just tell me how cheap it's going to be". That was a pretty miserable moment because I realised that things were different now.

Q: That was I suppose the watershed period when it did all change (um) before it had been based on integrity and um professionalism. (yep) Well there are still pockets of it left I suppose but not not a great deal.

00:14:07

SAMUELSON: Er yes, if you've got something that nobody else has got The the way we worked was we had a lot of things we'd designed ourselves that no one else had got. (phone)

Q: Peroration I think.

00:14:25

SAMUELSON: It's funny all the questions I've been asked that's the first time I've been asked "what do you remember that was really miserable for you?" I'm sure there are plenty of things

Q: Er, a long and active life (yeah I suppose so) there's got to be some and (yeah). It's not schadenfraude that er er it's what one has gone through and it all adds to to what one is. One final and very brief question, any affiliation to the ACT, you must have been a member quite early on?

00:14:58

SAMUELSON: Yes, (cough) what happened to me there was I was with Gaumont British News, an assistant in the cutting rooms at Lime Grove until I was called up. That was the end of 1943. And I did four years in the Air Force and when I came out in 1947 I went back to Gaumont and they said "we haven't really got anything for you because the reason you got a job was because so many of our people had been called up before you.

00:15:38

But of course they're back before you as well. But we're obliged to take you on for six months so there's lot of refilling needing to be done in the library so you could come and do that for six months". And I felt that would be six months absolutely wasted. So I tried to get myself a job either in editing or in the camera department. (coughs) And whenever I got through the door, even past the receptionist to talk to somebody I came up with this terrible thing that I hadn't got a ticket.

00:16:18

Because nobody at Gaumont British News in 1943 had tickets, or perhaps I I wrong there, they may have had tickets. But there was no involvement with the union that I, that ever crossed my path. Nobody ever said to me "think you ought to join the union".

Q: It hadn't become a closed shop by that time.

00:16:41

SAMUELSON: Absolutely not. And so I was out without a ticket and whenever I got near to the possibility of getting a job when I said "well I haven't got a ticket" they said "we can't take you on. We have to go to ACT as it was then and if they've got people unemployed but in the grade of cutting room assistant or camera room assistant or loader". I would have been quite happy to get a job as a camera loader. UM Th th th "they have to be given first first chance".

00:17:24

And it was like a nightmare. And how I got in, I'm afraid it was a bit of a fiddle, in so much as I found someone who was the a producer at the Colonial Office Film Unit. They made films, instructional films, documentaries for the Colonies. There's a bit of antiquated word isn't it. And it was an old guy called George Pearson.

Q: Famous man.

00:18:04

SAMUELSON: A famous man. Oh good glad you know him. (oh yes) And I told him, I managed to get in to see him and the reason that he said "send him in" to the receptionist when she phone him. Cos I didn't know he was there. But he was sort of the producer so she phoned him and the reason he said send him in to see me er soon emerged because he said "I knew your father".

Q: He was a contemporary I guess, a pioneer along with your Dad.

00:18:41

SAMUELSON: You're absolutely right. He was my father's producer and he left my father with I think with good feeling on both sides but George Pearson said "I can't keep up with the pace, he'll kill me" And so he left and went, I think he set up his own company.

Q: He did (Welsh Pearson) he did and made some very famous pictures.

SAMUELSON: Yes he did. Er what was it named Quilly, Quincey, something, a series he made. Er and a lot of films he made. But he did some good ones for my, my father as well. Anyway um the for example when the First World War broke out my father phoned George Pearson and said "I've taken a room at Frascati's we're going to write a script about the Great World War and we're going to start shooting it tomorrow".

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And they were up all night writing a script. And they started shooting it and they finished it in a couple of weeks and released it with huge success. But that's why George Pearson said "I can't, I can't keep up with this". And so he set up his own company, a really lovely man. Anyway the reason I say it was fiddled was simply because George Pearson er knew my father and had regard, respect for him. And I told him that er I'm in this position where I haven't got a ticket and can't get a job without one and I cannot get a ticket without a job.

00:20:43

And they always got plenty of assistants who are unemployed. And he said "yes, but the producer still has the right after seeing all candidates to choose the one that he felt was be best for the job". And he saw all the candidates and I got a job as an assistant. So I'm afraid it was a bit of a fiddle.

Q: Well a bit of a fiddle but it you weren't alone (no) in in that

SAMUELSON: What would I have done?

Q: Yeah I know but I mean this happened so often.

00:21:29

SAMUELSON: My brother Michael from the time he came out of the Air Force having done his two years conscript service. When we first tried to get him a ticket, David and I were both in the industry by then, David at Movietone and me at the Colonial Film Unit. But the time it took before Michael actually got a ticket as an assistant director was nine years. So it was hard.

Q: Well, well, well I went through it too everyone did I guess and it was part part of the obstacle course was it not if you survived that then you (well) moved onto the next problem.

00:22:12

SAMUELSON: Well you were certainly determined if you got through that. And um but my relationship with the union has been pretty good over all those years. I'm very proud to be an honorary member of BECTU, my name is on board and I'm very delighted to see that. I had my disputes with them like they couldn't come to terms when the Nagra came out that it was rather ludicrous to have four men round it.

00:22:43

Just because sound was recorded with a thirty-five mil recorder in a three ton truck.

Q: Including the man sitting there reading The Daily Mirror.

SAMUELSON: Yeah. And another one, the cable layer, and how I had a dispute with them and was fined was because we were servicing commercials a lot. And we had a contract came through to do only a day on a Rowntrees Polo Mint commercial. And it was going to be shot in Brighton and Guy Hamilton no less was the director and he was just holding a microphone and kind of saying to people walking along the pavement.

00:23:36

“Could you tell me, what do you like about Polo Mints?” or “Do you like the hole in Polo Mints?” And they would say things “Oh yes I like”. “Why do you like that hole?” “Well I like putting my tongue through it actually” or whatever it was they said. That’s all the commercials were, quick cutting like that was to be the result. And so all we had was the camera set up in the back of the van with the doors open at the side of the road.

00:24:07

Focused on Guy Hamilton who only really wanted his hand and the microphone in shot and people stopped and said their piece about Polo Mints. And behind er me, I was the camera man, behind me was the guy with the Nagra. So I said to, oh and I had an assistant, camera assistant. So I said to the two other guys that we were forced to have on camera, and the two other guys we were forced to have on sound, I said “you needn’t bother to turn up just put, put in your chit and I’ll p, I’ll send you a cheque.

00:25:01

We had a little organisation at Hendon by then and we did a lot of this providing the crew with the gear. So I did that, now the sound camera recordist even though there’s no sound camera decided to report me to ACT and I was visited, can’t remember his name, officious guy and um I was told that I had broken the union law by not taking four members of the crew on location.

00:25:51

And I said “but I paid them”. They said “it doesn’t matter. If there was overtime by those who were on location driving back from Brighton then you didn’t pay them, you gave them a straight day and that’s not allowed”. And I was bloody well fined. And there was nothing I could do about it and it was at the time Roy when you were sort of scared. In other words you knew it was ludicrous if you were taking a little documentary unit to Africa you sort of didn’t want to tell ACT that you were even going.

00:26:35

Because you would have to take four extra guys.

Q: Um that's right, the least little thing. Tell you why I did a lot of commercials table top and it was three, three and three as a a absolute minimum.

00:26:47

SAMUELSON: Yeah. It did become three, three and three didn't it?

Q: Yes eventually yes and I think that also, well that was the end of ACT's power in there after it always, the Thatcher laws came in and it all began to crumble.

SAMUELSON: So does that deal with ACTT?

Q: I think it probably does yes, you didn't serve in any committee or anything like that? Or did you I should say, I shouldn't make statements I should ask questions?

00:27:15

SAMUELSON: Did I say the right letters?

Q: In the camera section?

SAMUELSON: Do you know I don't think I did. I'd become and employer.

Q: Right, so that disqualified you.

SAMUELSON: I don't know if it disqualified me but it would be wasn't, it would be inappropriate.

Q: It wasn't seen proper (no)

00:27:33

SAMUELSON: I mean supposing they were discussing how on many on sound (laughs).

Q: Yeah, well I think sound was always the worse of all. They were bolshie in the extreme. Well I guess we're in the final lap unless there's anything that's in your mind that you want to record for our posterities.

00:27:55

SAMUELSON: Well I think I'd like to say finally I've done my sixty-two years in this industry if you count the starting part which was cinema rather than film production. And I've had a lot of ups and downs

and I've had a most fantastic life I wouldn't have wanted to do anything else. Well I can't think of anything else I would want to do.

Q: I didn't even ask that question.

00:28:32

SAMUELSON: I th, occasionally ... there's something, I think that must be quite a nice job but then if you go into it. Like I don't know an air line captain (um), that sounds like an attractive job you're travelling around but it must be as boring as hell mustn't it?

Q: Well I would have thought so yes. The Commodore of the Cunard Line might have been um yes.

00:28:56

SAMUELSON: That might have been quite nice, there's only one of those of course.

Q: Well, yeah and they've passed into history too. Um

SAMUELSON: Have I got any regrets? Ask me if I've got any regrets?

Q: Do you any regrets Sir Sidney?

00:29:09

SAMUELSON: (laughs) I, they're superficial. I really of loved to be able to play the piano.

Q: I'll join you in that one.

SAMUELSON: Really (I'd love) I don't mean to perform; I mean to sit and play. I mean when somebody, I don't know, you're at a gathering or something and someone can sit at the piano and play. I would love to have been present when they, Lerner and Loewe invited some people round to their flat in New York and played them a score they had in mind for My Fair Lady. I would have loved to have been at those kind of events.

00:29:54

Which meant not much at the time but with what happened afterwards. The Gershwins used to do that and one of them would sing badly (yeah) because there wasn't anyone else, there weren't any singers there.

Q: I used to go to many auditions when I'm lived in the States. Not for My Fair Lady unfortunately, but um (yes) they were great fun (yes, yes). And one was listening, watching talent which was fascinating too. Anyway this is your story too, not mine, what else?

00:30:23

SAMUELSON: And I would like to have (laughs), I would have liked to have been asked to narrate Peter and the Wolf, especially if my grandchildren were there.

Q: Right, that's an interesting one.

SAMUELSON: That's all I can think of.....Yes, (well) how many people can truthfully say they haven't really got any regrets.

Q: Oh, I don't think anyone, if they do they're kidding themselves.

00:30:55

SAMUELSON: Yeah. Yes. I haven't got anything that I say "My God, was I mad to have done this or not done that?" I can't think of anything.

Q: Well yes and regret such as that are futile anyway aren't they? Beating your head against a brick wall anyway so (yeah) it's best put aside.

00:31:17

SAMUELSON: Yes, I'm er, well we discussed what happened when Eagle Trust acquired us I'm sure a lot of people would have found it impossible to live with and I've found it entirely possible because money isn't everything. And I'm not a rich man, I'm sort of ok asset wise.

Q: Comfortable I would think.

00:31:48

SAMUELSON: Ok, asset wise. Because we've got this lovely home but er I'm not cash flow rich and but I'm ok. I'm not complaining, I'm seventy-five for God's sake. But um, yeah we would have to think very carefully before we embarked on two business class returns to Los Angeles because there's several thousand pounds involved and that's one thing either if someone else is paying for it which is the best.

00:32:23

But even if you're paying for it it's something if you have a salary or income coming in every month and it's quite different if you don't. And when you get to be my age you're not expected to er er have a salary coming in. So I've got no complaints that's that's for sure.

Q: Well it's been a very rewarding series of sessions (well) for which we thank you.

SAMUELSON: I'm very grateful to you Roy for taking all the time (no, no, no) and asking some pertinent questions.

Q: It's been a pleasure and I think useful, I know useful. (zip) So thank you very much and may you pleasant retirement continue for a long, long time.

00:33:11

SAMUELSON: Well I hope so because um it's very enjoyable.

Q: I didn't know until I saw earlier this afternoon on your wall that you're also a doctor.

00:33:22

SAMUELSON: Well, well I'm a doctor (in future I will) but I'm an honorary doctor (well yes indeed) Honorus Calcer (?) it's called.

Q: Not not bad to be.

SAMUELSON: But, but people who have honorary doctorates are not supposed to call themselves doctor.

Q: Oh I didn't know that.

SAMUELSON: Yes, that's absolutely true.

Q: Oh I would be tempted.

SAMUELSON: Yeah, well I would be tempted, I would love to er er um er be a Doctor Samuelson but it isn't right.

Q: Not like Germany where everyone's a (everyone's a bloody doctor aren't they) Herr Professor (yeah) or Herr Doctor.

00:33:54

SAMUELSON: Yeah, yes, no er er um, that was very nice and there I am up there with my gown (robes, yes) and all that. It was at Sheffield er and er I'd been helpful to Sheffield Hallam University and its own northern media school which is all part of it. And do you know what the nicest thing was, the citation. Had the, their Dean of English studies I think it was who came, asked if she could come and see me.

00:34:37

And she sat, just like you've sat for two or three hours asking me about my life and the way I felt about things. And she then went and wrote the citation and we all went up to Sheffield and it was something of course with

my educational background, council school leaver aged fourteen I would never have expected. And so it was a very happy occasion. Not quite like getting the Balcon and um as, but I was, God I've been so lucky.

00:35:24

And perhaps I er er lucky is the wrong word, fortunate. There's a lot of people around Roy who have marvellous ability and no luck at all. A great friend of mine is a camera man called Michael Reed. Are we recording (yes) good. And Michael is such a great guy and an outstanding camera man. One of his films is what I consider to be just about best photographed Bond film. It was called on Her Majesties Secret Service.

00:36:02

And Michael did that, it was the one that had that odd ball James Bond called George Lazenby. (oh right) And Diana Rigg and the Lazenby was such a pain in the arse that when the film was over Cubby said "I just want to forget this experience and I don't want to be involved with anybody who was on the picture". So Michael was the baby thrown out with the bath water. It's not fair.

Q: It's not a fair world.

00:36:42

SAMUELSON: And he's done some really marvellous picture. I don't know if you ever saw a film called The Hireling with Sarah Miles and Robert Shaw. It won Cannes, that year but it wasn't a film that was a box office smash, beautifully photographed. And Michael's just not had any luck, he's done a lot of good pictures. I don't know if any of them have been hugely successful because people thinking.

00:37:21

Someone, a producer is looking for a camera man, if you say what about so and so, and he. Let's say the camera man who Four Weddings and a Funeral was not an outstanding camera man, competent but nothing more. But he will get so much work (it rubs off) because he's associated with success. And Michael (cough) he's a man of principle so if he is sent a script that has things in it that he finds either distasteful or

00:38:01

Unacceptable morally he just doesn't do it. Well he's retired now and er I've known him for, well since 1950 and he, he was my assistant. And I've always thought what a, there are not too many people like him around. Absolutely trust him with your life or you money or anything. And er ur but he hasn't had luck.

Q: But that is part of the business, the breaks isn't it.

00:38:43

SAMUELSON: The breaks.

Q: Yeah something like that.

SAMUELSON: The breaks, you're right. You're right. But you see he had a kind of break on the Bond film (the Bond film). It's a big film he did loads.

Q: But things go nasty that's what happens isn't it sadly.

00:39:00

SAMUELSON: Yeah, yep, yeah. And he goes right back and we used to sit back and swop stories about our experiences and he worked for, what was it Monty, Berman and Bob Baker I think they were called. And they were real cheapo's and the stories that Michael told me like when they were shooting a hospital scene and they wanted to have a busy corridor and reception area with people in white coats walking around and they had them sort of walk through.

00:39:37

They only had about six people but somebody, a civilian, a patient would walk through and then dash round the back of the set, put a white coat on and glasses and walk through again. And and all that kind of stuff. And he told me about Bob Baker, when they hit the big time. I think it was with the ss Saint.

Q: I don't know.

00:40:05

SAMUELSON: Yeah, I think it was with the Saint

Q: . They were on the Saint were they, right.

00:40:08

SAMUELSON: They were the producers (yeah) and suddenly they're at Elstree with a series of thirty-nine to do and Monty Berman is in a, he was also the camera man. He's in a great big office which must have been for some star in ABPC's earlier days and it had a plinth platform on which a ginormous desk was set. And there was Monty Berman, and Johnny Goodman, who just phoned me, went in at lunch time to ask him something, Johnny being the production manager and he saw.

00:40:49

I can only illustrate it. He saw

Q: We've got one minute

SAMUELSON: Sitting at this huge desk with his shoe, sticking (noise) a

Phillips rubber sole over a hole in it. In these gigantic surroundings because he didn't want to pay to have his shoes repaired. (yeah) Anyway um I met a lot of people all kinds and I um suppose that's that's life isn't it. (and) Thank you Roy.

Q: This, this is your life Sidney Samuelson, thank you very much indeed.

00:41:29

SAMUELSON: Oh that was another great moment, This is Your Life.

Q: Ah, we've got some, shall I go onto another tape?

SAMUELSON: If you want to I mean are you...

Q: Um, I'm not sure there is one to tell you the truth.

END OF SIDE 10