

Barry Paine: Oral History Transcription

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1. How Barry became involved with the BBC and filmmaking

BP: My name is Barry Paine and it is a great privilege to talk to you about the great days of television in the sixties, seventies, eighties, nineties, up to the beginning of the twenty-first century, in which I was privileged to play a small but, from my point of view, wonderful role.

How did I get interested in the whole thing? Well, I suppose it goes back to when I was five years old and this is a long story so sit down and make yourself comfortable. The days of cinema, when we saw films like *Fantasia* (1); when it came out I was five years old and we went to see it and my parents tell me I conducted the whole thing from the beginning through to the end. And I think theatre, which also included a performance at the Bournemouth Pavilion of *St George and the Dragon*, where I was given a silver medal by this wonderful character who stepped off the stage in shining armour and gave me a medal. I was suddenly across the footlights and into the silver screen from five, six, seven years old. And I think probably after that, this was during the war of course, in the 1940s. I spent a lot of time in news theatres. We had cinemas which showed a complete programme of news programmes, documentaries, news, features, not feature films, but just shorts. The programme lasted about an hour, it continued going round and round, and I could be left in a news theatre quite happily watching the programme twice or three times round. My mother probably knew she could leave me there quite safely, well reasonably safely, and I knew how to look after myself. Cinema

just grabbed me, moving pictures was just a wonderful idea. I knew nothing about television at all. I wanted to work in the movies, I wanted to be a film star, basically, I wanted to be an actor. I am going to do that at some stage in the next couple of years, I am quite sure. But you will know the answer to that, of course, by the time you are hearing this, and if it didn't happen, well there you are - that's life. I think my grandfather was in theatre, so there was a little bit of genetic input really. My young cousin is an orchestral conductor, James Judd.

So there we are. I knew nothing about television, so it was really just cinema and radio. Now radio throughout the war years was absolutely the focus of one's attention. I would be bathed, sitting on a table in my liberty bodice, listening to ITMA (2), Tommy Handley, and all the famous radio programmes of the past. Listening to the famous Frank Gillard broadcasting direct from the front during the Second World War. And curiously, as fate happens, just a year or so ago I spoke with Frank about those very broadcasts, I sat for half an hour talking to him and isn't life strange, how it comes full circle just like that.

So, I am spending my time at school doing photography and doing a little bit of filmmaking - at school I got my hands on a camera. Then off to university, by which time I think, again I knew nothing about television and one didn't bother to watch television while at university. They did tell me there was a fellow called David Attenborough who was making some programmes called Zoo Quest (3) but I don't remember ever seeing any of those on transmission. I wouldn't let my parents have a television set when I went home. Well, actually not until I went to university did they get a television set and after my first term I went home and they said, "There's something in the living room of which you will disapprove." And I went in and there was this great staring eye in the corner of the room and I said, "You've given in, how awful." But then, of course, I started to watch it like any other fairly normal human being, and I could see that there were some interesting things about it.

Then of course I went off to things like the radio show in London, and there you came face to face with the live television studio in action, being shown to the public. I really went there to meet Dick Barton who was visiting the radio show. I went to see the radio people, you see. But there were these funny things, people with lights and cameras and dancing girls and all kinds of big show-biz stuff going on and cameras running up and down tracking on dollies, and this all looked rather exciting, looked a bit like a film studio, so I paid attention to that.

So at university, a curious thing, my tutor, who is now Professor Dr J.M. Thomas who was for a time at the Royal Institution, running that. He told me a story, he said, "you know when you came to university I asked you, what do you think you are going to do as a career?" I was studying biology. He said, "You know, you told me exactly what you were going to do for the rest of your life. You didn't know it," he said, "But you told me exactly what you were going to do. I believe you said, 'Wouldn't it be a wonderful idea to apply the techniques of cameras to biology and to produce many more biological stories to people through the medium of film'." It wasn't unusual in those days, the Shell Film Unit had been doing it, and I saw a film called The Rival World (4), which was about locusts in Africa, and I remember seeing that at school. It was shown to us in the classroom, and I remember seeing that film and I thought, "Gosh, wouldn't it be wonderful to be able to make a film like that." Then I tucked it away and everybody said I should be a doctor or something so I trundled off to Kings College Hospital and got myself admitted to the Medical School. Then I failed all my A levels, so that decided me that I was probably not going to be a doctor because six years of examinations was not going to be a good idea given that I had failed at the first hurdle of four of them. So I spent the next year at school not being allowed to act, not being allowed to make films, not being allowed to take photographs, but being told to do a lot of biology by a very good biology mistress. So I did that and ultimately I still had a little bit of a problem because I still had a year to go where I was in the photographic industry, where I joined a quaint little firm called Ilford Ltd, which may or may not still be in existence. I lived in Ilford and Ilford Ltd was a wonderful firm, I was an apprentice in the Rodenside Colour Laboratory working with dye chemists investigating colour photographic emulsions, and making test emulsions. I was operating

coating machines and working in the dark most of the day, but having day release to study photography and also to study filmmaking. We had filmmaking in the evening, which was quite good. A chap called Roger Mandel would come down from the British Film Institute and I also knew Paddy Bonell from the British Film Institute and John Huntley who, at the moment, is still going strong and who is an authority on film music. And those courses, and courses in a place called Clarence House in Thackstead, where I went to enjoy drama and filmmaking, all were my theatre school and my film school. Film schools did not exist in the fifties and sixties apart, perhaps, from I think there was a National Film School at the time. But they were not by any means common and there was no university, at the time, offering a film course until Bristol, I think, offered drama at one stage.

So I came out of university having done a lot of plays, a little bit of biology, managed to scrape myself a sort of degree, should have stayed to complete my honours degree but got a job at the BBC because they had seen that I had made a film by then and the BBC was expanding fast in 1961, the doors were wide open and it was, "Come on young man, come into broadcasting, this is where the world is going to be." It was too big a temptation to resist, so I told my Professor, Rogers-Bramble and Professor Crisp, who had been my first angels who had financed my first film. I said, "I'm really sorry but I'm off into television and broadcasting." Actually there was something in me which still said I was going into radio, I still was not that enamoured with television, curiously. I did a general trainee interview, two interviews, in London where they grill you like mad on everything they can think off and I was offered an assistant film editor's job out of that, but I turned that down and I went into radio. My young brain was saying no, broadcasting is radio, it's nothing to do with television. Very curious. Lo and behold, there was I finishing up in Broadcasting House, London, that wonderful, I hope it's still standing, that wonderful Broadcasting House, the big ship standing in Portland Place, in London.

2. Early days at the BBC in radio

Portland Place, go into number 5, Portland Place, sit down in a basement room and a voice says to you, "Good morning Mr Paine. On the table in front of you there are three scripts, one is a weather forecast, one is a concert programme and one is a news item. Would you please read those scripts?" This is one's first encounter with the BBC-proper: an empty room, a disembodied voice and a microphone. So I read these three things, and I shall remember all of them really, but the concert programme was a piano concert by Yvonne Loriod and she was playing pieces by Messiaen. In those days my French wasn't bad, but I looked at Messiaen, it terrified the life out of me, I think it came out as m-e-s-ial, I think I pronounced every syllable that I possibly could. But there you are. In those days, of course, one spoke rather proper, one actually spoke rather splendidly because you listened to the radio and you heard people say, "This is London," and I always wanted to say, "This is London," so I was on the road to doing this and I got a grade 1 on the grade of 1 to 8 probably, in those days. Which upset a colleague of mine, Peter Bulgard, who is still broadcasting, I listen to him every night on the World Service, he got a grade 2 and he's never really forgiven me.

However, Grade 1 meant that you were suitable for domestic services. Grade 8 meant that you were never to be allowed near a microphone under any circumstances whatsoever. Of course, around the turn of the century these priorities I think were reversed and of course now you have Grade 8 which are the ones that are on the microphone and the Grade 1's are finding it hard to get any work. Help, help, help. Anyway that's just the nature of the knife. So now I'm brushing up my Essex man accent because nowadays that's the way you have to speak, right, in order to get on the broadcast.

So, Broadcasting House, London, drama department, plays from the 1950s, wonderful experience, plays with Val Gielgud, John Gielgud's brother; Val Gielgud's last production, The Lark by Jean Anouilh, which was full of all the names of broadcasting from the 1950s, from my childhood really. People like Heron Carvic, which is a blast from the past, actually, but these were wonderful film actors in there like Leo Genn, who I got



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to know very well - lovely man, Leo Genn. There was a new actress from Australia, came up, whose name I can't remember, I have it down somewhere but I can't remember, who played St Joan in Anouilh's Lark, and I was the chains, everywhere Leo Genn and this lady playing St Joan went during interrogation, I would go and rattle the chains. And that was what radio broadcasting was really about, you were rattling chains and rattling teacups and also learning to operate the studio equipment. Training was done in those days just off Marylebone Road, the building now I believe has been pulled down, I think it's gone, 29 Marylebone Road, but that was the headquarters of BBC training and they took in a number of us in a little batch. Somebody said that when we applied there were about 900 applicants for one job, there was a very keen competition to get into the BBC and there still is.

So, one learned to operate, basically, playing discs. I think all sound effects, the ones that weren't the rattling chains and rattling teacups, were coming from discs, and you found that there were highly skilled people in the BBC who could do an entire programme playing discs, and when I say discs I mean 7 inch discs, 78 rpm, revs per minute, and they could set up those discs on a bank of turntables, about ten turntables, and you could keep those discs spinning. It was like the guy with the plates on the sticks, the juggling act, where you had a stick wobbling with plates on the end - you set your discs spinning and you set one playing which would give you a background sound, and you had one next to it which would be the continuation of the same background sound and you could keep that running by alternating them, by going back to reset them. Anything else you played in separately according to the script, and you marked it out very carefully on your script where all your discs were and you had racks of discs and you could change discs. I did not take this to a high degree of perfection because it takes years to learn how to do that really well, but there were one or two people who could do it very well.

I remember, coming to Bristol, actually when I first came to Bristol there was an exhibition celebrating 40 years of broadcasting in 1962. We did something like that, we set up a demonstration to the public showing how programme effects were done on discs. Nowadays, of course, that is something totally out of the archive and all those of us who did it are almost in the archive. In fact, I am in the archive now, I guess. Yes. A very subjective experience this.

I went from Broadcasting House and drama and all those wonderful programmes to Bush House to broadcast to the world where I could really say, "This is London." You get rather fed-up doing that after a time because it does get rather boring. Then I was training as an announcer and the interesting thing there - there was a lovely lady called Miss McLeod, who was larger than most of the chairs that she sat in, and she would take you for microphone training. I remember she would sit you down and she would say, "Mr Paine, what does the red light mean?" And I would think, "Well, you know, chap's turned a switch on, red lights go on." "No, no, no. What does it mean in broadcasting terms?" Well, you fumble a few things in response. "No, I'll tell you what it means in broadcasting terms. What it means is that the time has come when the programme, as billed in the broadcast magazine Radio Times (5), that time has been reached and the audience has made a date with you to listen to what you have to say in your programme. The red light means that the channel between you and the audience has now been opened right from your microphone through to the transmitter and that the time has come." It also means that anybody else outside should not come into the room while the red light is on. But this was her interpretation to me, the red light meant the time had come. What did the green light mean? The green light meant that the studio manager had opened the pot that opened the microphone up. The last break between you and the transmitter and the listener was now open. Green - and go - you are on. And then she would say, and how many people are listening to you? And you would say, "Three hundred and fifty million." She would say, "No, only two people are listening to you, possibly one and you know both of them." You remember things like that and you think, right, who am I broadcasting to as a broadcaster? I'm broadcasting to my best friend, or I'm broadcasting to my mum. I'm just talking to my mum, I'm not talking to three hundred and fifty million people. I'm talking to you, you are listening to me and I'm holding your attention. And that is the technique for broadcasting they teach you right at the very beginning in the BBC and you never, try not to, forget it. It also means you don't get half as scared as you might do, as I was doing last week to an audience of three hundred people, where your heart

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is thumping like mad and you are absolutely terrified on stage. Broadcasting is theoretically a little easier. On the other hand it is a much more intimate medium, and you don't believe anything that I say unless I actually believe it and transmit to you the fact that I believe it. The camera and the microphone will winkle out any insincerity in how you speak and what you are saying. And it will also pick up any little degree of passion that you have for what you are saying.

So, okay, that's a digression. Down to Bristol. I left London to go to Bristol. People said to me, if you go to Bristol you will never come back. Of course, I never did. And a little attachment to Bristol: to a gentleman called Pat Beech, who was in BBC Bristol, who interviewed me and pointed out that they were looking to acquire one or two new studio managers and it seemed that I had one or two qualities that they were interested in and would I be interested in coming to Bristol? Well, of course, you didn't actually say no at all then, you said, "Yes, yes, yes, of course I would love to." So I went to Bristol in the coldest year that we had had so far in the twentieth century, I think 1962 - the winter of 1962-1963 was an incredibly cold winter. Bristol was wrapped for about three weeks in fog and ice.

3. The move from radio to television

Anyway, the cold, fog, ice and whatever was the most extraordinary and Bristol was just wrapped in this fog and ice, but suddenly I moved into a really quite extraordinary place. Here, broadcasting consisted of radio and television. In London television was miles down the road in a place called Television Centre and radio people did not really talk about it in the same breath. There was a huge division. You began to meet television because one's friends had friends who went to television. A good friend of mine in London was a man called Bryant Marriott who became Controller of Radio 2 and his girlfriend at the time had gone off onto a programme called That Was The Week That Was (6) which was a highly subversive piece of broadcasting in London under Ned Sherrin and was encouraged by the Director General, Carleton Greene [Sir Hugh Carleton Greene] at the time, and it really shook the airwaves because it was satirical and it was making fun all the, well of any icon that you could think off. It was the ultimate iconoclastic piece of broadcasting. But people went off to this strange thing called television.

However in Bristol, television and radio were part of the daily norm. There was a television news programme going out every evening and as a radio studio manager one of my jobs was to go and spin those discs, those funny little 78 rpm shellac discs. And this was done live, of course, every night. So you were actually doing live broadcasting on television. It frightened the life out of me. I was in a room, I couldn't do anything, I only had a turntable and a screen, but it was really quite exciting and I only knew half of what was going on. There was a control room somewhere, of course one went off ultimately and had a look at this control room, studio control room. You also had to choose all sorts of funny pieces of music for those programmes. You would have a fashion show and there were wonderful archives of music which would all be suitable for a fashion show: really boring sorts of music. Everything was rather clichéd in those days, there was nothing terribly —. Occasionally you might offer up something a little avant-garde and the director would say, "No way are you going to play that on my programme tonight." But one always tried.

Of course, Bristol was full of cutting rooms and they were all engaged on natural history films. There were other films going on as well, documentary films, very much avant-garde documentary films - John Boorman who became a very famous film director, was head of documentaries and he was making series like Citizen 63 (7) and The Newcomers (9), which were new style fly-on-the-wall documentaries. We heard a lot of that in later years but these were very much filmed in that fashion. I went to one or two locations in Clifton in Bristol where they were shooting and sat on the floor on a cushion next to a strange gentleman called Tom Stoppard who had a whole new career opening up in front of him but who had just finished being a reporter on the Western Daily Press (8) and we would watch them shooting sequences with A.C.H. Smith and his wife in The Newcomers (9). Here was a whole different sort of style of documentary making being hatched up in



Bristol and one could work in the dubbing theatre on those programmes. But there was also the Natural History Unit. Now at that time, curiously, Richard Brock was in the Natural History Unit and being a young fellow who had just joined working for a producer called Eileen Maloney, he and I came into contact. You don't need a degree to make natural history programmes but at that time we decided that there was only, Richard and myself were the only people who had any formal qualification in natural sciences, and he said, "Why aren't you with us?" And I said, "Well, I am half way now, because I am working with you now." It had not really occurred to me too much that the natural history unit even existed, not being terribly familiar with television. I very quickly got familiar with television and suddenly I was in a world where there were the most amazing things happening. There was Armand and Michaela Denis floating through the building, and Hans and Lotte Hass were coming to and fro, and suddenly here were household names and people in this wildlife sphere of broadcasting which were becoming part of my professional life. I still had this romance with radio, and I was still working on radio and I was still inventing characters for radio on Saturday mornings, spinning discs and inventing a Spanish gentleman called Manuel Dexterity, because every job in the BBC that was advertised in those days you were expected to possess manual dexterity. So you see I lived in Spain and my father said to me, you know you must apply for a job for the BBC, they are looking for Manuel Dexterity. I come from a very big family in Madrid you see, and my father is a poor fisherman in Madrid. He is poor fisherman because he live 500 miles from the sea, 400 miles from the sea. That's why he poor fisherman, he has nowhere to cast a net.

That kind of thing was being broadcast on the Saturday mornings at the west regional home service and exciting quite a lot of the school children. We used to get a tremendous mailbag from school children all writing in to Manuel Dexterity, one of whom was a gentleman called John Turner who nowadays broadcasts on [BBC] Radio Bristol, and he said to me, "Were you Manuel Dexterity?" And I said, "Yes signor, and my brother Juan, and my other Juan. All my brothers were called Juan. When my mother had me she said this is definitely the last Juan - so they called me Manuel." Anyway, that is a long story that digresses, enormously.

So, you can get the idea, one was totally enmeshed in broadcasting. There is something about broadcasting that just takes you over, and you are into it whether it is radio, television or whatever. My film had found its way into the Natural History Unit film library. I was working on the building of the suspension bridge in Bristol, it's probably long gone now maybe, but the first big suspension bridge in Bristol was being built and I was working up there when I moved into the film unit. Now I moved into the film unit because I had been trying to get a job with BBC2. BBC2 was starting in 1964-5, around that area and everybody was being boarded for a job as a production assistant at that time. That meant not that you were going to be a secretary, you were going to be a producer, that was one down from a producer - production assistant, assistant producer, producer. We were all after those jobs in BBC2 that were coming up and I had an interview in London with Grace Wyndham-Goldie, Huw Weldon, and Tony Jay [Antony Jay] who subsequently wrote Yes Minister (10) I think: a high-powered interview. I was half-an-hour late for it, stuck in the traffic at Shepherds Bush - I nearly abandoned the car. But anyhow they were very good and Grace Wyndham-Goldie spoke to me, and somebody said if Grace Wyndham-Goldie spoke to you then your career is alright, she's interested in you. I think it was people who knew her from Lime Grove. She worked in Lime Grove very much with the famous Tonight (11) team, Donald Baverstock, Alasdair Milne, all those guys. However, she, I think, had passed a message to Bristol, that this chap's all right, but he doesn't know anything professionally about making films, but I think he should. So I then met, one morning in the canteen, I met John Boorman who I mentioned, who was head of documentaries, and he had seen the little film I had made as a student. He said to me, "You want to make movies, don't you?" And I said, "Yes, I am certainly interested in filmmaking and radio." Forget the radio. He said, "I've just seen your film, it's an interesting film." And he said, "You know what's wrong with it, don't you?" "Oh, yes," I said. Of course I thought it was perfect, I thought it was wonderful, I thought it was just - you know. And he laughed because he knew I was lying through my teeth, and he said, "Well, we think you ought to learn what's wrong with it, and there's a job coming up which is a regional film trainee, and it's going to train you in camera work, sound recording and film editing, the complete works. It's a three year traineeship, and I think you should apply for it." Which I did, and in the customary fashion of BBC boards, I obviously got it because somebody decided I was having the job. That's another long story about working in the BBC. So I got this traineeship and it was wonderful. Off to London to Ealing Studios, the famous film

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studios, I mean that itself is just something to blow the mind. You remember when I was five or six years old I was in love with British cinema - *Oliver Twist* (12) and *Great Expectations* (13) - and right through my schooldays - *Scott of the Antarctic* (14) - I was in the very studios where *Scott of the Antarctic* (14) had been filmed on acres of water and lots of salt I seem to remember. John Mills, who was an inspiration for most film actors of my day and most filmmakers I think, who made that film. This was a David Lean Production I think and I only ever met David Lean once in my life, but I did meet David Lean and that's got to be another one of those wonderful full-circle things that happens to you in life. But here was I, being trained to make films in Ealing Studios. They were at that time shooting a mammoth series called *The Great War* (15), and the main studio at Ealing was filled up with the trenches of the Great War, over which they were tracking with a gigantic crane with a Mitchell camera - 35 mm Mitchell camera on the end of an enormous crane, with a wonderful cameraman with the name of Tubby Englander, A.A. Englander who was one of the characters of the BBC. This series on the Great War (15) was really something and it was wonderful to watch that happening.

What else did we have in there? At that time we had Dick Emery, great comedian - wonderful comedian, he was doing all kinds of things at Ealing studios. All his little jokes and games and trick photography and whatever, was all done in Ealing. And the very first of the *Dr Who* series (16) was being done with William Hartnell and I remember watching that and in those days if you wanted to do a superimposed shot you had to do this matt process with bi-packs in the camera shooting with a blue screen behind the film. It was all very technical. I didn't pretend to understand half of it at the time but we were assistants, or trainee assistants to the cameraman, loading this Mitchell camera with this material. But this was real movie-making. Suddenly I had come full-circle; I was actually in a real television studio - real film studio, shooting 35 mm film on real sized cameras. This was most exciting. One was out on night-shift shooting *Z Cars* (17), with Ken Westbury. I was second assistant to Ken Westbury, clapper-loading with *Z Cars* (17), and we were also shooting in the studio with *Z Cars* (17). I remember Jock Weir and Fancy Smith, the famous actor Brian Blessed, who I saw in pantomime just last Saturday doing *Captain Hook* - another full-circle in life I suppose - sitting in their old police car, being rocked on rockers in front of a back-projection screen with a smoking 35 mm back-projection projector churning out some night-scene as they chased along a road at night. And we also, I remember, filmed there Jack Warner doing his famous, "Evening all," for the first of the, well the earliest of the crime dramas, *Dixon of Dock Green* (18). And there was also a French series going there, the famous *Maigret* (19) which was being done with Rupert Davies, was playing *Maigret*, and I had a great affinity with Rupert Davies because he and I went to the same school. So in between takes I was anxious to appraise him of this fact and discovered that he was not too ashamed of this at all and we sat and we had a wonderful chat about our old school, and then he went back lining up a shot. I always remember him, while they were lining up this shot he had a marker pen or a biro and was busy writing all over the bosom of the lady he was working with, the actress. He was busy writing. Well there you go. I hope she's got a remover as it were. He was a bit of a lad, but known for that.

4. First films for the BBC

But what an exciting world to move into, this tremendously busy, terrific output of the BBC. The dubbing theatre at Ealing, a very big dubbing theatre, in which I was to record one or two films myself in later life. I remember watching Derek Cooper record a series called *Travellers' Tales* (20). Half hour programmes, just adventure - adventure travellers' tales. We're in 1962-3. And there was Derek Cooper, and listening to him. Dark-brown voice, very nice - excellent microphone manner, and very impressive and this was beginning to interest me, to listen to narrators at work and to see narrators at work. And we were making exciting little films about how to operate the foot-joiner. There was a thing film-editors used to join film together, known as a foot-joiner. It was nothing to do with joining your feet together, it was just operated on treddles - sorry I can't do that. Your feet operated like a sewing machine, and everything was done by the feet, and if you weren't careful your feet allowed things to crush your fingers in it. We did a wonderful film about the operation of the foot-joiner. This was economy in the BBC, you get the trainees to make a film then we can use the film to train the trainees, so it was quite an interesting way of paying for the film stock. But it was a very, very



thorough training, camerawork, film editing. I remember film editing: I was assigned to the two Walters, there was Earnest Walter and Ted Walter, his son. Ted Walter's assistant was a gentleman called Tom Poore and Tom Poore and I got on very well together and Tom Poore, in fact, about a year later came to Bristol and we worked together for many years.

So, end of training at the BBC and back down into Bristol and working with the film unit. Now really you were training on the job unlike a film school where you make wonderful films and you will hope to sell them at the end of the course, although sometimes now films are commissioned by film schools in advance and they make them for the screen. Here you were working on the job, you were working on Animal Magic (21) with Johnny Morris. I remember being second camera to Jim Saunders filming the washing of the elephants at Bristol Zoo, which is now an archive piece of film. Many things at Bristol Zoo, including one episode of filming the pigmy chimps at Bristol Zoo where I left the filter-slot out of the side of a Bolex camera. If you look in your museum you will find a Bolex camera and it has a filter-slot in the side which you can take out thereby allowing light to go into the camera through that to the side leaving a little bar, fog, down the side of the film, which is the most enormous embarrassment when you come to view the rushes in the viewing theatre. We always viewed the rushes in the viewing theatre, a great ceremony every morning in Bristol. Rushes would be viewed. Cameramen would be invited to come, they seldom did, although they should have done. But you did come and watch yards and yards of endless rushes and of course it is very embarrassing when up comes your bit with a fog down the side.

But Bristol was very exciting, very exciting film unit in those days. Christopher Parsons in that time was making some very exciting films for the Natural History Unit, not least among them the first colour film The Major (22) the oak tree - I think it was the first, among the first colour films being made anyway. We were transmitting films that had been made in colour. My first job in the cutting room had been to lash up a famous British Transport film called Journey into Spring (23) which was a 35 mm colour print which was going to be transmitted in black and white, of course, at that stage in 1963 colour was a little way off - 1967, it was coming.

We did just about every job you can imagine, I think, in the film unit as trainees. Sound recording of course. Howard Smith, wonderful sound-recordist who smoked more cigars in a day than I can imagine but who was unstinting in his effort to tell you about microphones, and about machinery and whatever. The interesting thing about sound in those days, we were shooting 35 mm drama, particularly we shot a series on Children of the New Forest (24), lots of Roundheads running around in the New Forest and a producer called Brandon Acton-Bond, who used to frighten the life out of me because I never understood exactly where he was coming from. But he had a great reputation as a drama producer, certainly for children's drama, and shooting 35 mm black and white stock. I remember being second unit cameraman which meant that you were dispensable really. I remember lying behind a log with a 35 mm silent arriflex, shooting 35 mm silent arriflex, while a gentleman dressed as a cavalier dashed towards me and leapt over me on a horse, he jumped on a horse over me, while I was doing the shot from under the horse. I think it would be done with a remote camera nowadays because people would wonder about the insurance. However, how exciting.

We also used a camera called the Camiflex which was a huge device which could shoot 35 mm separate magnetic track at the same time as it shot the 35 mm film - the film was running on one side and this block of iron, which it was really, was running on the other side, 35 mm track and this was wired away to a large mixing-desk where Howard Smith would sit being able to mix several microphones onto this 35 mm set-bank track. But it was a lot of weight to carry round, very cumbersome and a heavy camera to move on location through the forest. But the 16 mm camera was of course, very well with us. Thank goodness we did not have to carry the Camiflex up onto the top of the Suspension Bridge - that would have been a whole different ball-game. But the 16 mm was alright up there. I remember it being incredibly cold though, and trying to load a ten minute magazine on an Arriflex at about minus 10 or whatever on a February morning with an icy wind blowing across was a memory I shall cherish. Working with the producer John Dobson on that and the

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presenter was a wonderful broadcaster called Tom Salmon whose heart was in the south-west of England, he finished his days down in Plymouth but for a time was also in Bristol. But again, wonderful rich, fruity southwestern voice, I think Devon I suppose - was it a Devon voice? Anyway, certainly south west England - a very fine broadcaster, a person to be listened to and taken note of - how did he do it? One would take note of how things were being done.

I remember in those days we did have still going in Bristol, just flashes through my mind, we did have one of the wonderfully old-school announcers. Remember I said in the days when I left university you probably had to speak a bit like that, but we had a gentleman in Bristol called Hugh Sherriff, a wonderful continuity announcer, who would always be immaculately dressed every day with a wonderful rosette along the lines of the dinner jacketed readers of the 1930s, really. The secret of that though was really was that in the 1930s nearly everybody wore dinner jackets in the evening and when they came in the evening to broadcast, you had to be dressed to match. That was the secret behind the wearing of dinner jackets in the 1930s. Hugh Sherriff was an absolutely wonderful announcer, who would use this old voice. There's a terrible story about him. Hugh Sherriff came into the BBC club one evening, and he spoke to a fellow producer of mine, the late lamented Ron Webster, I remember, and Hugh came in and he had just been giving a talk and he said, "Do you know, I've just been talking to the Women's Institute in Littleton Tradwell," or somewhere, "and do you know, they didn't know who I was." Ron said to him, "Really, Hugh? Who were you?" So there you are you see, one thing about being a voice on radio, of course, you are not recognised. Being a voice of any sort has rather intrigued me, the idea of being a voice - that people don't know who you are. It is quite good to be able to go into a restaurant and order a meal, without somebody knowing who you are, until you speak and somebody says, "Oh, don't I know you?" that's quite fun when it happens, but a lovely story really. Who were you? I sometimes forget who I am sometimes.

5. The Life Series with Desmond Morris

Tremendous changes happening in the BBC in that period, 1964-5. BBC2 I think was on air, had started and Peacock had started it off, Michael Peacock, but then David Attenborough had come in and had taken over BBC2, and he naturally wanted to get some natural history on it. He himself had had this wonderful success with natural history in the 1950s, from London, Zoo Quest (3), and had now been seduced back into the managerial realms of the BBC which was very good for all of us, because here was a way onto the network, he wanted natural history on television and one of his big friends was Desmond Morris. And Desmond Morris, who had a lot of television experience from Zoo Time (25) with Granada was available and the idea was to do an animal behaviour series called Life in the Animal World (26) on BBC2 which would be a fortnightly series and would alternate with a scientific series from London called Horizon (27), and they would go out on a Wednesday evening at about 9 o'clock on BBC2 when about three people were probably watching - actually it was probably about 100,000 which I think in television terms is the equivalent of three people. And this would be a programme which would present animal behaviour. We were thinking of long words like ethology and we were going to introduce ethologists to television and we were not going to make any concessions to using long words. In other words, I was parting faith with talking to my mum really. She was going to have to try and keep up. Now this was broadcasting natural history for big boys, this was the sort of feeling that was going on. We weren't going to dumb it down, we were going to jolly well say it how it is and these are the people that are doing the work, people looking at animals in the wild and we were going to have them in the studio and we were going to have discussions on pretty esoteric topics like aggression and —. I can only think of aggression - that was one of the earliest ones we did - the earliest one that I was involved in. But there were many other topics around life, birth, death of animals, how they live in the wild. The whole of animal behaviour was coming under the microscope and we were going to go through the whole encyclopaedia from A to Z. Of course at that time we had just about every major ethologist was still alive, with us I suppose in those days. People like Niko Tinbergen and Alister Hardy. Ernst Mayr the evolutionist and Peter Scott, Konrad Lorenz, all people that Desmond Morris was very familiar with, that I knew from studies as a student, these were names, these were names in textbooks.



So I had managed to get myself a job at that stage on the production team. So I had finished my film training, hadn't quite finished my film training, and I was lifted out of the news cutting room when I was cutting Points West (28), the evening news with the fastest cutter in the west, Jim Cryer. Where I had also learned how to work on a lot of other major natural history films. I remember, one should say in the cutting room, that I had had the experience of working on the Durrell series with Chris [Parsons] in Sierra Leone on Catch me a Colobus (29) where I learned how you cut out all the blue bits from film because Mr Durrell was a well-known expletive-deliverer, and he had also done Two in the Bush (30) which I had also seen in the cutting room so one was aware of how these films were put together, how they came together in the cutting room. In those days as assistant you even cut the negative, you actually took the negative and did the negative cutting in the cutting room wearing white gloves and all that technique. But again having mentioned Gerry Durrell one should say that I had watched Gerry Durrell recording commentaries in the studio, Two in the Bush (30) was the first one and also then Catch me a Colobus (29) and again Gerry Durrell was a very inspiring broadcaster that would make you want to tell stories. He was a past-master at storytelling in the animal world and so one carried this sort of inspiration with one as well into production now into life in the animal world.

Studio based programme: one of the big things at the BBC was we always had these things called studios and everyone was saying what the hell can we do in the studio? Because it was quite an expensive device to have around, a studio, and lots of cameramen. In the old days I think it began really with people having outside broadcast units that drove into studios and were doing things indoors. But now we had a permanent indoor studio, we had now moved on to 625 lines, can you imagine - 625 lines from 405 lines, which was like looking through a five-bar gate watching television by comparison. We'd moved onto 625 lines. I remember having a television set which had the dual standard, you switched from 405 to 625 on the front of the television set, changing standard. BBC2 had got this new standard and so life was, well in some ways it was a little —. I was off-track a little somehow. Natural history was going to go forward into a lot of outdoor filming, a lot of major overseas production and foreign broadcasting. Here we had this little side-line of a studio show where you could discuss natural history. It was very exciting, it was intellectually exciting. That sounds a bit portentous perhaps but I think for the first producers on there, there was Richard Brock and myself, and John Sparks were the three production assistants working for a producer called Ronald Webster who had a lot of experience in television and was a great enthusiast for starting series and who had a very sharp mind for picking up subjects very quickly and he also was very magpie-ish, that you could suggest an idea to him and he would suck it up very quickly and develop it himself as well. Also he gave all of us our head really, we were all very quickly studio directors, suddenly we were trained in directing cameras in studios and this was a technique that everybody needed in those days. But also we could get out and do a little bit of filming abroad. For example I went to Seewiesen where Konrad Lorenz had the Institute for the Verhaltensphysiologie, the animal behaviour institute. So here am I sitting with Konrad Lorenz watching fish in his study. I thought the other day, he must have been about the same age as I am now which I thought was a salutary thought really. Here am I sitting with this venerable old man, you see, in his study watching fish, and I got to know him quite well. This was one of the great privileges of working in broadcasting that it does mean you can pick up the 'phone and ring almost anybody in the world, no matter how eminent, and ask them something. It was a wonderful privilege until they discovered that they ought really to be asking you for a fee for doing this. It came the moment when that realisation dawned.

Mostly the relationships between the Natural History Unit and the scientific world were very, very good at the beginning and remained very good, I think have remained good, with one or two minor exceptions - but we were not all perfect on our side of the camera either. So this was quite an exciting studio programme and of course took us into colour. As well as the black and white series that we were doing, we went into colour. In 1967, we all shipped off to London because only London had colour and we all trained in Lime Grove. I didn't really believe colour television until I saw it and then I saw it and I could hardly believe that it was actually true. I remember that moment, looking at the screen and thinking that just ought not to be possible, that somehow is unreal. Being very familiar with colour photography and colour film I thought no, it's never going to match anywhere near colour film, but it was pretty good. It was very good. The system we were using, the

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625 line Pal system, I think I had probably seen the American system before somewhere, at the Expo 1958 in Brussels I think I had seen a distant television screen flickering away there but it hadn't really grabbed my attention for some reason. But here was real live, living colour and we did a programme which sadly was lost from the archive, they didn't keep the very first studio natural history programme which was about colour in animals and we had all kinds of amazing things in it, I remember going off down in Chiswick, I think, to David Attenborough's fishmonger, or his tropical fishmonger I should say, really. Where he got his tropical fish from, and they were very pleased to welcome anything from television coming in and we got these guys to bring all these tropical fish into the studio - neon tetras and wonderful things that would be colourful and put them in front of a studio television camera and the effect was absolutely miraculous, I mean it takes a lot to inspire television engineers but they were really excited by what they were seeing, putting their cameras into these fish tanks. It sounds very naïve really, but there was a lot of excitement in that studio. Gosh - look at all these fish. And it really was amazing colour.

We ran into all kinds of funny things. We were doing signals - animal signals. So we had to have a Scotsman, in true Desmond Morris fashion, we had a Scotsman in his full kilt and hat, showing the signals of making yourself taller with a big hat, and also wearing a sporran which is a genital signal - three tassels, need I say more. We also had to put a little more hair on his knees I remember, because he had to have hairy knees and we had a Scotsman unfortunately who didn't actually have hairy knees so make-up actually were sticking on hairy knees. We had him on a little plinth, and I remember on another little plinth we had a lady who Desmond Morris felt that it was absolutely essential that we show the colouration of the female nipple - this is very much Desmond Morris country we're moving into now - and we were supposed to show the colouration of the nipple and the areola and all that sort of thing. So, we had a lady on a plinth with one bare breast. Now this was having a terrible effect on the Scotsman with the hairy knees. He was chasing her around in the canteen, I think, all the time and Ron [Webster] said, "We've got to keep the Scotsman away from the model." So we were having terrible trouble, we were busy rougeing up the nipples to make the colour a little bit more.

You had to be very careful with colour in those days, I remember. You weren't allowed to take a drink before the studio performance because this caused you to flush a bit, your faces would become red if your alcohol content had gone up, and BBC hospitality in those days was fairly generous and you could reach a pretty high flush if your contributors were imbibing. In the old days it just sort of unwound them a bit and made them a bit more relaxed but it showed up on colour television - so the rule was not too much booze, well none really, before transmission.

6. Favourite stories

Gosh - that reminds me of a terrible story. I had to direct the Duke of Edinburgh once in Lime Grove studios, I remember a very important Grade 1 broadcast and we had a lot of hospitality on the day before the broadcast and we all sat in one of the tiny hospitality rooms in Lime Grove studios - all demolished now, of course the studio. Little rooms and you had lunch, beautifully served - BBC fashion, lovely. Duke of Edinburgh, Nicholas Crocker, head of the unit, and I sat at the other end of the table next to the Duke's equerry. I remember the first thing the Duke was to do was to swoop all his prawns and whatever out of the dish and they all went into his lap, I think onto his serviette, which was somewhat disconcerting really when that happened. I leaned to the equerry and I said, "Should we all do that?" You know, thinking that royalty does something, you follow suit, and then nobody's embarrassed. They served an awful lot of wine that day I remember, one after the other we kept having the glasses topped up and comes the time we were going to go to the studio - I had to go back to the studio, so I had to go out first so I had to stand up and make a sort of make the little bow and go backwards out of the room and went out backwards into the corridor. I got into the corridor and suddenly realised the corridor was just doing that a little bit [indicates tilting] and I thought, "I've overdone this, this is not a good —, whatever." However, we had a very good vision-mixer that day, who had been in Bristol I remember - Hystead, Ron Hystead. I said, "Ron, I don't think I'm feeling too well but I

think it's all going to go well, isn't it?" He said, "Don't you worry." Somehow we cut our way through this programme, actually it was very good. I was never asked to do another royal broadcast, I think it was probably the end of my broadcasting royal career, entirely. But I did broadcast a couple of times later with the Duke of Edinburgh, so we almost know each other. Oh dear - royal tales.

Funny how things come through your mind isn't it, like this? That's taken me to outside broadcast. I mentioned outside broadcast. The BBC is very proud of its Outside Broadcast Unit because they were really very good. They had got a lot of experience and I did have a little chance to be with them. Actually I have had two experiences with outside broadcasting. One when I was right back as a studio manager when I first came to Bristol where we went to the circus at Swindon: Bertram Mills' circus, which was the old style circus, where we had animals and the whole thing. That was an amazing circus. My participation really was sitting in the back of a large BBC van, the pantechinon, on a heap of ropes and old rubbish with two monitors with two of these discs, shellac discs, one marked laughter and one marked applause, and the idea was that as the acts went through if the director, Derek Burrell-Davis, wanted a little more laughter or applause I would be asked for accordingly and I would feed in laughter and applause as required. Broadcasting is all a cheat, you have to realise that. But there I was, sitting lonely in my van at a circus, but I did go off and have a drink in a pub and I spoke to a guy at the end of the bar, actually, who was full of interesting stories and I suddenly realised afterwards. Somebody said, "You know who you were talking to?" I said, "No, I haven't got a clue." They said, "That's Coco the clown," who has to be about one of the most famous clowns in that part of the twentieth century, I think - Coco the clown, wonderful guy. So a great privilege from that particular outside broadcast.

7. The flea

I want to go back to the Life series (26), the fortnightly studio-based programme, black and white as it was in the beginning, on the beginning of BBC2. We were looking around at that time, of course, for all sorts of ways of doing things. We did not have much film in the library suitable for our needs. I remember on one occasion wanting to show two impalas fighting and there wasn't a shot of impalas fighting in the library, can you imagine? And I actually had to commission an artist to go and do a drawing from two impalas fighting which I've got on my wall upstairs, just to have an image to show, television being about images. However, one of the intriguing characters we made a film with in those days was the honourable Miriam Rothschild, part of the great banking dynasty but also an authority, like her father, on fleas. I wanted to make a film about fleas. Now fleas are very, very small and that is only one trouble, you have also got to find stories as to what fleas do beyond the obvious like spreading the bubonic plague. Well, there was a wonderful story of the flea, which is the rabbit flea, which is a creature which is very attuned to the hormonal content of the blood of the rabbit. So here is a wonderful biological cycle of young fleas living in the ears of rabbits, or rather fleas feeding on the blood in the ears of rabbits, monitoring the blood, deciding that the female is about to give birth and migrating from the ears of the rabbit down onto the nose of the rabbit so that when the rabbit licks the newborn young coming out of her so the fleas hop onto the newborn and start feeding on the blood on the newborn. It's a fascinating little cycle and an intriguing story and was all wrapped up with studies of the rabbit flea and the, as it were, the broadcasting of myxomatosis in the early 1950s against the excess of rabbits that we had in the country in those days and Rothschild had been closely involved with that. So the fleas were one part of the programme, of course the other part of the programme was Rothschild herself who was just the most amazingly wonderful character, I think one could say an eccentric character in many ways, and television thrives on eccentricity, you need to have some sort of eccentric feature about you to really hit it big on television and Rothschild is just a natural for that kind of thing and I wanted to do a conducted tour of the flea. So there were several things I wanted to do: a) I wanted to build an enormous flea, which I did at the Wellcome Institute in London, we built an enormous wax flea which could sit alongside her in a chair and she could do a sort of geographical tour of the structure of the flea, but we could also show what the fleas do.

Now as it happens at that time, Chris Parsons had come across some young guys in London, sorry - young



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guys in Oxford, not —, well they had graduated not long before, and he said to me, go and sort these guys out, see what they are up to. They are to be found under a staircase in the old zoology museum in Oxford. So I duly did this and I found there, under the staircase in the old museum, Peter Parks and Sean Morris and shortly after I met those two, John Paling - he came in a little later. Peter Parks was quite an extraordinary person and has proved to be even many millions time more extraordinary even than one could have imagined at the time, since then. And they had something really exciting to show me. My basic question was what sort of filming are you doing? They were doing close-up photography, what we would call macro-photography and also sort of photo-micrography, photo-cinematography - photography through the microscope. But there are all sorts of problems with photographing through a microscope, it is something I had done and stills when I was at school and I remember being fascinated with being able to photograph slides just using an ordinary camera down through a microscope. So I had an affinity with these chaps and they had taken this a long way further on. They had an extraordinary piece of apparatus which they called their optical bench. Basically they had a camera on one end and they had a platform at the other end, which they could hold —, well anything: a small capsule or the animal itself or a platform anyway on which they could place whatever they were photographing, an animal with something on it or a phial of water with animals within it. The idea being that the whole thing was built on a rigid device of iron, solid iron really. So that when the camera vibrated so anything they were photographing would vibrate, so the idea was that there was no vibration because everything was synchronous, everything was held rigid. They could also light things in the most imaginative way, and they could photograph with what we called dark-ground illumination so if they wanted to photograph water fleas in water, the water-flea would be beautifully illuminated and would be on a black background and they could do the same thing with an ordinary flea feeding on the skin of a young rabbit. They showed me the most amazing pieces of film they had done as test-pieces. I remember seeing a fish-louse on the tail of a stickleback which John Paling showed me, he was a fish parasitologist and I was just knocked out by this, I thought it was absolutely wonderful. As a marine biologist I had always wanted to photograph plankton and make a little film with Walter Garstang's poems about plankton with the pictures and the words going together. I may yet do that, or should I say, I may probably have done that. Who knows, perhaps. Let us hope I have. However, if I haven't, make sure you do it.

These guys came with me to Rothschild's farm, or farmhouse, up in Oundle in Northamptonshire and we worked very hard with the rabbits and the rabbit fleas and we produced the most amazing story. And so Oxford Scientific Films was an organisation that was born from that first contract between the BBC and Parks, Paling and Morris, who turned themselves into Oxford Biological Films for that purpose and they credit us with their first commission. In their book they say we paid them £120, they were always very cash-orientated, or rather John Paling was very cash-orientated I remember he even used to charge me for his 'phone calls. But that's a very long story. But their career took off from that point all over the world with Chris Parsons and subsequently with other organisations in the field of specialist macro-photography and of course a lot of wildlife photography was to depend on such people and many people followed suit with OSF, in Australia, Jim Frasier and Denzy Kline for example. This was a field that was going to open up, the need to photograph the very small, and to find the stories among the very small, I mean you can only have so many elephants and tigers and lions, the big ten, running around, but the rest of natural history filming takes place in the world of —, as Chris would say, of creatures much smaller than a hen's egg, I would think. Indeed, that went on and I would imagine is likely to go on, there is always some new story in the world of the infinitely small. So Oxford Scientific Films was born that way and the Life programme (31) made great use of that, I think there was another chap in the same programme on fleas, yes, Eric Lucey was at Edinburgh University. Eric Lucey was an expert in high speed photography and I wanted him to photograph fleas jumping. If you make a film about fleas they have to jump and the answer to make them jump, is first you have to freeze your fleas I think, it's hard to say. But he could photograph fleas at 8000 frames per second, 8000 frames is 100 feet of film going through in a second and that demands a very special camera and you also have to be able to trigger your fleas to jump and he could do this electrically, he told me, he had them sort of cooled down but he could then detonate his fleas at the right moment, just when he was running his film. He got the most amazing piece of film of fleas jumping through the frame up and back again. That was quite an interesting scientific thing here because having photographed your 8000 frames a second and your jumping flea you actually can measure per frame where the flea has got to and how far it is jumping and what position its legs are in and all this sort of thing. There is a lot of biological work that could be done on that piece of

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film. A biologist called Henry Bennet-Clark in Edinburgh saw this piece of film, so here was a wonderful piece of espionage going on, he got hold of the film and he did a study using the data that he got from the film and he produced a paper on the jumping of the flea related to the mechanism of the flea's jumping which is a substance called resilin in the knees of the flea, and he produced a paper. Well of course, Rothschild was really upset about this and she said, "He is not allowed to have this piece of film and how dare he plagiarize her work," and all this sort of thing and I had to point out to dear Miriam that in fact it was the BBC's film. "Ah yes, Mr Paine," she said, "but it's my fleas." So here we are, who do we contract? The flea? The film? Whatever. Anyway, but this paper was published, it was read at a meeting of the society of Experimental Biology in London and it was rather like the meeting of Wilberforce and Darwin, I think - there were two scientists arguing about whether there was plagiarism taking place or whatever. I went along just to observe the official reading, but she would not allow this man to appear on the programme, Henry Bennet-Clark was forbidden from appearing in that particular programme. Eric Lucey came and showed us how he did it, but Bennet-Clark had built a model of the flea from the film and the measurements in the film, we had a model jumping flea in the studio. So television is full of personalities, and personalities that sometimes will talk to each other and sometimes won't.

So that particular Life programme (31) was bringing all sorts of personalities like Rothschild into the television studio. We did one with all the people who were interested in biological clocks once. They were a school of people who all knew each other all over the world, Jurgen Ashov from the Max-Planck Institute in Germany, and I went to film there I remember, filming the young ladies who were put in the bunkers there to study for their degrees but also to be locked away for a period of time and all their bodily functions measured while they were underground, which was quite an interesting observation in itself. It was all very sinister really, this bunker, and I remember meeting Konrad Lorenz once who said to me, "If you know what we are learning from the alteration of the biological clocks, Mr Paine, you would never fly in an aeroplane again." And he didn't, he used to go to America by sea, by 1967 he was only going by sea. However, the rest of us are still flying to and fro across the Atlantic reasonably healthily.

8. The arrival of colour television

So, Life (26). Well, we covered all sorts of subjects in that series: aggression, smell - I remember doing a series, a programme, on smell, Desmond Morris knew nothing about smell, we none of us knew anything about the mechanisms of smell in creatures. This is what it was thriving on. The idea was to take a subject which maybe we knew nothing about, but let's see who does know and let's get those people together to talk about it. We had a gentleman coming in with all sorts of cup and ball systems of molecules fitting each other. I remember we filmed, again in the Max-Planck Institute we had the butterfly - the large butterfly - the Hercules moth, rather, the Hercules moth with the huge antennae and the pheromones and the sensitivity of the moth picking up on the pheromone from about a mile away, or something - that kind of —. Fascinating knowledge about the sensitivity of male moths at night, and females fanning the pheromones, or the males fanning the pheromones out for the females to detect on the antennae - or is it the other way round? I can't remember. One way or the other anyway, we have a lot of moths still so the moths know which way round it goes. Again, exploring this world of the very, very small.

So, Life (26) was taking us from the studio broadcasting into colour. As I have been reminded there were some colour programmes going out before the colour service had officially started, from the Life team. We were presumably all film programmes being put together, something like perhaps I think maybe we did gelada baboons - perhaps the baboon programme might have been one that was done all in colour. Richard Brock made a couple in the Serengeti which were transmitted in that programme slot and all the time we were alternating with Horizon (27) that was in London and we were trying to stop Horizon (27) doing anything remotely resembling ethology. There was a sort of wonderful rivalry going on, a sort of gentlemanly rivalry, but people were very jealous of their patch and I think I remember David Attenborough ruling on the rivalry by saying that anybody can do natural history in the BBC, but the day anybody does it better than they do it in

Bristol, then Bristol has to look to its laurels. So the answer was back in our court, that we had to keep doing it better, which of course we did - most of the time.

So, we have got colour coming up 1967 and we have talked about the colour system - we had to move the office from Bristol to London I remember, the Life office had to go to Villiers House off Ealing Broadway tube station. We had to go to an office there in order to operate into the studios in London: TC6 in London was the first colourised studio, I believe, and our studio programmes would be recorded there.

Recording was quite an interesting thing in those days, of course, because we were recording on these huge Ampex machines I remember, we did not want to edit too much and you could only do very careful edits because every edit you did had to be performed through a microscope. The engineers had to cut the tape only where the signals would join exactly, and if you look at diagrams of the old brown videotape the signals were recorded slightly diagonally on rotating heads, I think, so that you could by developing the magnetic image on the tape using an iron filing solution, the engineer through the microscope could see the edits on the tape and he could line them up exactly so that all the pulses and things would not flip when the thing jumped. It was quite a technique. So you did not do too many of those edits in any particular programme and you tried to cut your studio discussions on the buttons in the studio perfectly but quite often you wanted to shorten so you had to do one of these technical cuts and that was always a little session after the recording session, you would head off to the edit suite and it would take you another three or four hours to get the programme together.

We had wonderful things like work to rules in London, I remember in the studio, but that happens I suppose in any institution. We had a system one day when all the cameras were working to rule in the studio and you only had so much studio time. So I remember, as the director, I was busy discarding captions and all things that I didn't actually need to have on the programme that I could possibly put on live on transmission when it had to go out later, at least we would get through the day. In the studio you had five cameras, one of which I think was a trainee, and everybody was working to rule, so when you tried to direct the studio if you said, "Pan right," in a discussion the camera would pan right and he would go on panning right until you said, "Stop and hold it," or, "back a bit," and this becomes a little bit irritating but it is possible to do if you are careful about how many times you do it and there were an awful lot of wide angles in that discussion, I remember, because it got a little bit tiresome, particularly camera four who is not allowed to do anything other than captions, I think, really. So camera four did all the caption work that we could fit in. A fairly tense day which, of course, is quite difficult in the studio for your contributors but on the other hand we did not come to blows, everybody was very gentlemanly about it, I think. A cameraman came up and said, "Thank you for being, you know, gentlemanly." I said, "Well, we weren't going to get anywhere without." But it did lead to a very interesting session in the presentation studio in London. They have a presentation where the programme will go out from every night and we went up there with several of our captions and the studio caption in the studio there and we were able to add captions live on transmission and I remember that particular thing was a programme called War on Birds (32). It was about bird strikes with aircraft and the qualia birds in Africa which were being got rid of by dynamiting the trees, and war on pigeons. It was general, sort of, anti-bird - war on birds and whatever. And I wrote a billing. One of the producer's jobs was to do a billing for Radio Times (5), it was the ultimate chore of all time that you had to write this small paragraph which would make the viewer decide that he could not possibly do anything else that evening other than watch your programme, so it required a little bit of sharpish writing which I did write about the war on birds, and that birds do to us, and how vital they are to us, but how at times they get in the way, and we have to find ways of dealing with them, some of which can be quite brutal *et cetera*. And a real wag in London - there was a programme going out in those days called Late Night Line-Up (33) and the director of that was a chap called Jim Smith who had come up from Plymouth and Jim Smith knew me and Jim Smith decided to dramatise my Radio Times (5) billing for Late Night Line-Up (33) and he had taken the obvious double entendre between how we get on with birds, and in those non-PC days birds was a respectable phrase for young ladies or whatever, and he took this and he dramatised this Radio Times (5) billing. I don't know if anybody else has ever had a Radio Times (5) billing dramatised, but they were doing this the night we were doing this programme and anyhow, somehow we finally got through it. I have a feeling that Mr Attenborough

at the time was watching this go out and he could tell that we were in difficulties with the programme and he was saying, "Oh, they're trying to tart it up by doing the captions from the studio," or something. Anyhow, we got it on air, and half the thing about broadcasting is getting the thing on air, get it done in the time that's available under whatever constraints the industry or fortune throws at you, so it was an interesting baptism of fire under industrial action. I didn't actually have to go through that again ever in my career I am glad to say. Thank you, all my colleagues.

So there we are. Into colour in London, colour opens with Life (26) in the schedule, and there is another programme in the schedule of the time, of course, at that date - this was 1967, which was The World About Us (34) which opened with a programme on volcanoes because as David [Attenborough] still tells everybody he wanted to sell television sets and one colour that will sell colour is red, and volcanoes do not have to be any exact colour like inebriated faces, volcanoes can be red and they look wonderful, they look marvellous. BBC from Bristol also did a film which included the scarlet ibis I remember from Jan Linblad and scarlet ibises are red and they look marvellous on colour television. The World About Us (34) was a series designed to sell colour television sets.

I went back to Bristol. Life (26) carried on for not too long because Desmond Morris wrote a book called The Naked Ape (35) and had to flee the country for tax purposes. We then went into a series of guest presenters people like Kenneth Allsop, and several other people, a chap from the newspaper - The Sunday Times (36) - several guest presenters came in. Napier, John Napier did it once or twice, from the Royal Free Hospital, primatologist. The series went on for a little while without Desmond in this way but I think it died a natural death. Those of us who worked on it didn't really feel that we could carry it on much further. It had been through the full gamut of ethology and that subject, and it may or may not have been deemed to have worked as a programme that uses long words and whatever, maybe television was changing. I didn't really want to take it over and carry it on at the time, I had been off on a training course in London, I think. They always train you in the BBC after you have been doing the job for a hundred years, you then went to school and learnt how you should have been doing it properly. But I went to London and had the wonderful experience, well you do producers' courses and also I did a film director's course I remember, which actually took me to the Ealing Studios where I actually had a film crew on the set —. I was back to Scott of the Antarctic, directing two actors on a stage in Ealing Studios. Wonderful - been there, done that.

9. Management course

I came back to Bristol. I think I was also sent on a management course, I think, which was one of the most boring experiences. That was a dreadful —. Yes, we went to an experience in the famous Evesham, engineering training, also management training. We did a management training course there. With Christopher —, oh dear, who is the cricketing, cricketer —, famous cricketing commentator of the 1970s, still going —. Christopher —. Nevermind. Anyway. He was on it. Right. Evesham - wonderful. Lots of boring games, management games and all that kind of thing actually, but we all, like a lot of naughty schoolboys, we all thought we would much rather be making television, so we all decided to make a television programme. And we did. The chap in charge of the course was a gentleman called Mr Clegg. There were engineers being trained at the same time and they had television studios there, so we said to the engineers, "You guys game for making a programme in the middle of the night?" And they said, "Yes, we'd love to make a programme in the middle of the night." So, pure naughty schoolboy stuff, we spent most of the lectures writing scripts underneath the desk, we were working out this television script, and part of the script included an item which was called a Clegg Watch. Now, BBC Bristol had got into all kinds of interesting things with outside broadcasts at night like fox watches with foxes being watched underneath houses which created wonderful audience responses and they did badger watches which were outside broadcasts, not on film but on live outside broadcast cameras, watching badgers. And so on my management course we were doing, or I did - my part of the programme was a Clegg Watch, and I remember we were late at night in the studio and we opened the doors of the studio into the blackness of night and we had a gentleman out in the bushes in a

dirty mac leaping from bush to bush with the lights picking him up in the distance and you would see him flit from bush to bush. Real childish stuff really. But my god it was much more exciting than doing the management course. Of course, we played this tape back at the end of the course at the end of course dinner and we weren't quite sure whether Mr Clegg thought this was a good idea or not, that this had been going on. I remember coming back to Bristol, and the head of programmes in those days was a wonderful man called John Elliot who had created wonderful series for the television on the oil - Mogul (37), he created Mogul (37), and all these things, I remember, and I remember him saying to me, "Well, you didn't do as well as we thought on your management course." I said, "Well, no, it was the most boring experience in my life and we made a programme instead." So anyhow, life went on, life goes on from there. I fell among thieves I think really. What fun that was.

10. Children's television programmes

So back in Bristol, I went on to children's programmes. We did so much, we did a lot of different —. There was natural history, lots of features from Bristol, but Studio A was always busy with something. I mentioned the Children of the New Forest (24). The staff canteen in Bristol BBC was always filled with characters in costume. You would have roundheads and cavaliers walking around one moment and you would have all Lorna Doone's guys walking around, Carver Doone and all those characters, the famous MP at the time, wasn't it? Andrew Faulds, who became a Socialist MP, was a great villain as Carver Doone, I remember, he was quite a good party-goer in Clifton in Bristol, too. Bristol canteen was always lively with people doing all sorts of things. You had Take Hart (38), Tony Hart was doing children's programmes showing art and what you could do artistically, to children. There was the Animal Magic (21) series that was going out then with Johnny Morris, and several other children's programmes like Treasure House (39) which introduced Serendipity Dog to a whole load of children, a mechanical robot dog that was always coming up with bright ideas and happy-chance finds. There was then a series called Tom Tom (40). I worked on Tom Tom (40), which was a live television programme for children. Again, the training of doing television gallery-direction was useful because suddenly we were doing live television programmes every week, and live programmes were better than edited ones because once it had gone it had gone and you didn't want to know about it. Recording was expensive, I think, in those days. People didn't like recording because they didn't like cutting the tape as I said because that was expensive to do, and for some reason in those days, yes, we were in colour, I suppose - were we in colour with Tom Tom (40)? Gosh, I don't know. For some reason, a lot of times you found you had to have - your film inserts had to come from London, from the **telecine** machine in London which was something that happened right back in the Look (41) days of BBC, in the early days of Look (41), **telecine** inserts were from London. During the programme, they were sent down the line. Again, **telecine** in Bristol occasionally, or was it the video inserts? It might have been video inserts. Anyhow they were inserts of some sort, it was probably video inserts. That would have been 6 —. No we were still on BBC1 and BBC1 was still 405 for a long time I think. They must have been video inserts. Anyhow, rather quaint that you have to have your inserts into programme coming from 120 miles away, in other words your programmes going up the line to them and they put in the video inserts and that goes out to the transmitter. Anyway, there's a diagram about all that I'm sure that you can look up. But it was a bit quaint, a bit quaint. But on the other hand, it was very good quick-thinking stuff, television, something about live television taught one to think fairly quickly on one's feet as did news editing. Editing was always a very good way of learning to know how to find the best bits of film in any piece of film. If you have got 100 feet of film, two and a half minutes of film, and you need to have ten seconds out of it and you have got to find the best ten seconds, it teaches you to find the two shots that count, so that was good. But that was a phase of Bristol when Bristol had the studio which was very lively and that went on for quite some years, hosting programmes from London.

11. The World About Us

But I had gone off by then, I think 1969, I moved over to The World About Us (34), and my first World About Us (34) film was a film which I didn't have any input to the field-work on, was about lemurs, as one might imagine, in Madagascar (42). There was an Oxford expedition and R.D. Martin and a gang of students from Oxford went to make a film on lemurs and, Alison Jolly, I remember working with Alison Jolly on the script for that programme, and I remember asking David Attenborough to do the commentary. David Attenborough at that time was the Director of Programmes and a slim forty-seven probably, about then, at that time. I remember recording the commentary with him, it was the first commentary that I had written of any length, I had been doing all short pieces, but first commentary of any length and thank god he liked it. "This is readable," he said. He changed a couple of words here and there and we recorded it in Lime Grove, and we recorded it blind. I remember we recorded just in a studio one evening, being a busy man he hadn't got any time, and I remember getting back to Bristol and it didn't fit, and my goodness what do you do then? I remember speaking to David on the 'phone and he said to me, very perceptively, "You're not happy are you?" I said, "No, I'm not." I said, "It doesn't fit here and there." "Alright," he said, "I'll come and do it in Bristol and we'll do it to picture." He came down to Bristol and I made some cuts in the text here and there in the meantime, and he recorded it again. Which was a great relief to me, as you can imagine.

However that was the start of, for me, of a long career with The World About Us (34) series which took me all over the world really and also Chris Parsons allowed me to read the commentary on the next film I made which was in the Seychelles (43). Nobody had been to the Seychelles, can you imagine? When you went to the Seychelles in 1970 you signed the visitors book at the Information Office, it was a British colony in those days under Sir Bruce Greatbatch who was the Governor of the Seychelles, and it was very much a British colony, and there was a new cruise ship going there the Lindblad Explorer, and we made a film on the Lindblad Explorer and travelling to those islands which featured all kinds of exciting things like a mutiny on the ship because it broke down in the middle of the Coral Seas and we had a mutiny, and as I pointed out at the mutiny meeting, the BBC cannot be party to a mutiny but we could actually stand by and watch and record what happened if you want. Fortunately, the mutiny didn't actually take place, I'm glad to say, all sorts of other things took place but not the mutiny. Somehow we survived and limped back to Mombassa a third full of water and all that kind of thing. It was an exciting trip and exciting experience for filming, we saw our first coelacanth in a chest freezer on the Comoros Islands on that particular trip. The World About Us (34) was a sort of series that would allow this kind of thing. You didn't know where you were going to be at any particular moment.

The World About Us (34), as far as I was concerned, ran from 1969 when I joined it until 1987 when I made the last production that I did with them. Key ones that stick out in my mind for example is, there is one in Australia actually, in 1973 Green Australia (44) which I also wrote a book about called The Green Centre (45), which is probably crumbled away to dust now, and that was tremendous rains in Australia, the most rains they had had in the history of white exploration of Australia. The whole rainfall map of Australia was black. I and an Australian producer, Ken Taylor from the Australian Broadcasting Commission as they were then, went into the desert to make a film about the whole changed face of the Simpson Desert. It was an extraordinary botanical story and a biological, zoological story as well. The worst time of all to make a film about natural history because everything is spread out, it is easier when everything is coming to water holes in deserts, when everything is spread out it is not easy. It was an extraordinary experience with an Australian camera crew, who themselves had never been into the middle of their own country, into the dead heart. It was an interesting experience, it was the first of two films I made with that same crew and curiously the following year I went back to make a film called The Bay in the Balance (46) which was an environmental study on Westernport Bay just southwest of Melbourne. For that particular film I got hold of my old friends in Oxford Scientific Films, even John Paling who by that time hadn't been talking to me for about ten years because I charged him for his 'phone calls, John Paling came down with Peter Parks to Australia with all their

equipment. I had managed to persuade the government of Victoria, in Australia, to pay for all their equipment to be brought down to Australia, and we filmed the waters of Westernport Bay in Australia, which for them was a beginning of a long Australian relationship where they filmed about everything on the Great Barrier Reef and all around Australia that you can imagine. So that was the beginning of an excellent partnership between OSF and Australia.

12. Wildlife of New York City

In those days at the BBC you tended to make an awful lot of films together at the same time. I seem to remember making a western in Oregon (47), a film about the wildlife in New York City (48), and a film about Iceland (49) simultaneously, so I was commuting between Iceland, Oregon and New York City all at once. In Oregon I was with a very famous wildlife cameraman called Ronald Eastman who worked with his wife Rose as help-mate and sound-recorder and whatever and we made a film about Steens Mountain in Oregon which was a very strong western flavour with real western heroes who actually get gunned down in the middle of the film. Iceland, of course, with Robin Crane, cameraman, who was up there all through an entire summer making a film about the Icelandic summer; and New York City which was a really special programme made with a very famous broadcaster in those days, Kenneth Allsop, a writer/broadcaster, author of books on bootlegging in America and hobos in America, and a great Americanophile, if that is the phrase.

He said to me one day, had I read a book about the wildlife of New York City, and I said no I hadn't - quite a famous book on the wildlife. And I read this and I said to him, "Yes, I would love to do a film with you," and we set out on a little voyage of discovery about the great city of New York and the wildlife that lives there, which is much the same as the wildlife of any great city superficially but coloured by the animals of America of course coming in on the fringes. Instead of foxes and badgers you have raccoons coming in to raid the dustbins, for example. At that time there were no peregrine falcons in New York, so we could only show where they had once been, now they are back and I hope still back in that city. We went down the East 14th Street sewer and to the top of the World Trade Centre which at that stage had not quite been completed, so the top floor of the World Trade Centre was really an open platform with not much underneath it other than the lift that came up and deposited you on the open platform on the top. But what an exciting city that was and to go with Ken Allsop was really exciting because he knew the places to go to like the Old Algonquin Hotel where the writers hang out, the Dorothy Parker set in the 1930s and 1940s, I suppose. He was very keen on that historic part of New York and I remember it was quite a difficult thing for Ken, as it turned out it was the last programme that he did for the BBC. I remember we had a lot of trouble with writing the script together. He overwrote the script which is quite easy to do, I know that as a scriptwriter, it is very easy to write everything that you see in the pictures and when I looked at what he had written for the script he had actually written everything that you could see, which is page one really. I was quite surprised that he had got that wrong and he came down to the BBC with me and we worked all night before recording, I said, "We're not going to record - we are going to work all night. Maybe we will record tomorrow or maybe we'll postpone it." But we did, we worked all night revising the entire script. He left in the morning and went home in the morning and a few weeks later we did manage to get it completed and ready to record again. He recorded the commentary and reached the last page and he said, before the mixer could shut the pot, "And that's the last film that Kenneth Allsop makes for the BBC." We shut the pot and we looked at each other a bit quizzically, the mixer and I, and Ken came out and he went across the road and bought some champagne, I remember, and came back for some champagne, and he stayed for a little of the mixing of the film, we started to mix the film and he stayed for that. And then he said he wanted to go home, he was about to leap into his E-type jaguar and dash off back to Bridport, so I took him to the door and he shook my hand and he said, "Goodbye for ever." I looked at him and I said, "Well, I hope you don't mean that." He didn't say anything else and he went. The programme went out on the Sunday and the following Wednesday, I remember Ken — 8 o'clock in the morning there was a news announcement that he had actually been found dead in bed at home. And this was a tremendous shock to everybody and I remember the head of the unit, Nick Rose at the time, the phone went almost immediately and Nick said to me, "It wasn't your fault, you know, it wasn't your fault." I said, "Well, I hadn't really thought it was." But what a shock and almost in the

same broadcast we then had Paul Fox who was at that stage was Director of Programmes I think, or was he BBC1? BBC1 I think - Controller of BBC1, Paul asked to give a comment on Ken Allsop as a broadcaster, he said, well apart from many other comments about Ken's work on 24 hours (50) the late-night news programme, he said, "But I will say, there was a programme that went out last Sunday about the wildlife of New York City and he said it was full of colourful ideas, it was full of the sort of wit and observation and sideways looking and clever inventive broadcasting for which Ken Allsop is known as a broadcaster and journalist and that," he said, "is as good an epitaph as he could possibly wish to have." Which, of course, I hear - wonderful, here's my film, and Ken's film, being praised, but here is Ken who is an extraordinary and wonderful broadcaster, suddenly gone for whatever reason - which we don't know, really.

I remember going to the funeral which was an extraordinary event with the guitarist Julian Bream played there. Ken's daughter, I remember, reading Thomas Hardy's poem about —, which has the repeated phrase about, "He was a man who noticed such things," and she got through that. Everybody from broadcasting you can think of was there in that small churchyard in Bridport and Ken had a grave tucked away against the wall. It is a film that we made together - I said to Betty, his wife, I wrote to her immediately and I said to her, "Well, whatever accolades this film gets, this is Ken's film." And when I saw Betty I said, "Did he see it?" she said, "Yes, we were up in Wales, we had been looking for red-tailed kite, I think, in Wales, and we were late home, and we stopped in a petrol station on the way, and we watched it in a petrol station on the way." She said he thought it was a good film, looked fine, and she said he said, "I didn't give him enough of my time, it's his film," and I said, "Well, there's two complementary statements: I say it's his film, and he says it's my film. The answer is we actually made quite a good movie together." And that is how I feel about it, it was a special film to me and to Betty and to Ken's family. So television is more than just broadcasting to the public; there is a lot of human stories behind the programmes that are made around the people that make them.

So that was the wildlife of New York City. A film I had tried to make for twenty years was a film about mushrooms and toadstools which was called in the end *The Rotten World About Us* (51), a good old gag of a title, which caught the imagination and people remembered it, people noticed it. It meant a lot to me to do that film and I made that with Oxford Scientific Films, again. They came in and did as much as they could, they found it a very difficult subject and in fact a large amount of it defeated them entirely which was, I remember, a little embarrassing to them because the amount of footage in that film from them was quite small. There is a lot of stills and there is a lot of ancillary shooting that we used around it, but they got commissioned to do the whole thing and they got away quite well really. But it struck a note.

13. The Rotten World About Us

So *The Rotten World About Us* (51) with this terrible pun of a title became a very important film to me - to do. I think I said that the only thing I had —. Not the only good review I have had but one that you remember because it was so good that I didn't believe it. I remember the review was read to me from London. A neighbour gave it to my mother and my mother read it to me and I said, "They're pulling your leg," I said, "Where is this thing?" It was from the *London Evening Standard* (52) and the chap had said that he had just watched a film which had got a lot of good things in it and whatever. And then it said whoever made this film should be given all the awards the industry can give to him, or something. Then he said, "I realise I have not only been watching the best script of the week but I have been watching the best film of the week." Anyway, it was over the top I thought, in a way, but I was immensely pleased because it was a terribly important film.

I remember it being so important because we got to the point where we had actually got all the material together, all the stills, all the stuff from OSF. We had practically wrecked the OSF laboratories with the mushroom toadstool that had spored so much that it filled the entire premises with mushroom spores. But we got all this footage together and I remember getting into the cutting room with the film editor, David Aliband, and we had a cutting script and we got up to a point, and all that, but I sat there, and it is rather like the guy

sitting on the edge of a cliff where you freeze and your hands grip the edge of the cliff, or whatever. I was so terrified of making a mess of this film that I couldn't start it, and David said to me, "Well, where do you want to begin?" I said, "I don't know, it's a hell of a good movie we've got here, we've got a b....y good film. I've waited twenty years to do this." This was the one I had talked to Grace Wyndham-Goldie about. He said, "Why don't you go and get yourself a cup of tea in the canteen and then come back in an hour, and I will have made a start. All right?" And I said, "Well it sounds daft, doesn't it, but I think I'm going to do just that." And we did that and I went back and he had started cutting something, and I said, "No, no it doesn't go that way at all," like producers do. Anyhow, together we got this little piece together and he made a real work of art of it, a really good job, and it resulted in this great, crazy review. Also it resulted in the arrival of a tile, a wall tile, it's actually here somewhere - it's sitting around somewhere, with a mushroom on it and it came from a broadcaster called Trevor Philpott who was very famous in Britain for a series called The Philpott File (53) and this tile arrived and this little note from Trevor Philpott and all it said was "I would have given my right arm to have written that script." Now Trevor Philpott is no mean writer and broadcaster and he teaches commentary writing, so for me that was quite an accolade.

I always knew that writing of the commentary script was something that I really enjoyed doing, and not only the writing of the commentary script, but also the voicing. I had voiced the fungus film as well, The Rotten World About Us (51) and most of the films that I made I was allowed to do my own commentary, even to the point sometimes I used the pronoun 'I' to give it that personal touch. And Philpott used to say to me, "You are the nearest thing to me that I can think of in broadcasting, you do your own thing and you're getting away with it." I said, "Well yes, I realise I am and jolly glad to be doing so."

14. Turning freelance

But, in many ways I have always been a sort of performer, I have liked to stand up on a box and talk, you can tell that from what I'm doing now, and I am always in a play any moment I can get into a play. And I remember my first morning in the BBC for example in 1961, I think almost the first thing they said to us, "Anyone who wants to be a broadcaster was just on the wrong side of the organisation." So I thought, now wait a minute, what do I do? Do I leave or do I go along with this? I thought at that time, having decided not to go to drama school, having come out of college, but to go to the BBC, I thought, well I will go along with this for a little while and see what it's about. So I had gone along with it for, well, in all I went along with it for twenty years, because there came the moment when the BBC has it's wicked way with you and wants to turn you into a little bit more of a suit and hand you lots of money and make you, sort of, run things a bit and that never really grabbed me as an idea. I'm not very good with money, I hate giving change to anybody. If people say to me go behind the bar and take —, I hate giving change. I can't count up quickly. I had a terrifying headmaster when I was about six years old who used to beat me over the head when I did my sums and I've had a horror of mathematics ever since. And Nick Rose, the unit head, used to tell me I could never organise a piss-up in a brewery. So I was quite prepared to believe this and I was left in charge of the shop one day, I remember, Chris Parsons went abroad when he was starting the Life on Earth (54) series, and he vanished abroad leaving me to run The World About Us (34) for three months which was a very interesting and enlightening experience, running, beginning, or trying to take over a series and run the series for a little while. You suddenly realise that you are everybody's enemy, up to a point. But by the time you've decided that you didn't like so-and-so's choice of narrator and you wanted to change him, the time you've spoken to somebody who has got a triple-first at Oxford University in history and English and you've told him that he's got something wrong and you want to change the script and he insists on having his name taken off the programme, I can live without this. You go to London and you buy a film from London which you think is very good and then you suddenly decide that you are out on a limb on your own and that you are taking your own decisions, which is what it is about really, and you then say, "No, sorry. I know you perhaps didn't want to buy that film, but I'm buying it because I think it is worth transmitting." There's a certain frisson about doing that of course, sticking your neck out, and the thing doesn't actually come unstuck.

I commissioned a lovely film from India with Philip Wayre who was an old India-hand who could make films about tigers and you can't see tigers very easily in England - in England you can't see them very easily at all - in India you can't see them, at that time, too easily in about 1977, somewhere around there. So we made a film called *Twilight of the Tiger* (55), which didn't have many tigers in it which, of course, is the first criticism somebody gives you. They say, "We didn't see many tigers," and I said, "Well that's why we called it the twilight of the tiger." But we did see some.

Long story, I suddenly thought no - I didn't really enjoy the executive side of it, I much preferred the scriptwriting and the broadcasting and the voicing. I had won the Glaxo Travelling Fellowship Science Writers' Award for *The World About Us* (34) programmes, one of which was about the rainforest in Monteverde in Costa Rica, and I decided I needed to make use of that prize money, which was about £1000 I had won, and the BBC said, "Well why don't you go off and make use of that," so I did. I thought I am going to go off, and I am going to go around the world. I'm 45, I must have been then - 46, something like that. Time to go round the world, and I thought I'll go - to see if it's round, and I'll go to the west and I'll come back from the east and I'll go back to some of the old locations where I have been and I will visit one or two locations where I think I want to make a film in the future, which was a very exciting thing to do. It was exceedingly wonderful to just take off and go freely - as free as you can go, as free as the airline schedules will allow you, to go round in a reasonable time. Set off through New York, off through Oregon, down through California, Baja California, Hawaii, Fiji, and whatever, through Australia and meeting people that I had been on the way. God bless the BBC, they never sent me the bill for the fare, they bought me an airline ticket and they never sent the bill. So in retrospect and the space of time that's gone, I thought that was very nice. I came to the conclusion it was a mistake, at one stage, and I thought I will just keep quiet, but then, I don't know, I thought perhaps somebody thought well, something else will come out of it, other than what he has done. It cost me about £4000 to go round the world, in all, that trip - three months, and it was an experience of a lifetime and I never settled down again.

It's, I suppose you could call it the midlife crisis - 45. I had found a lot of exciting things going round the world, for example, I had come across the story of the mass spawning on the Barrier Reef and the scientists from St James University at Townsville had been studying the mass spawning of the reef and that resulted in a radio programme which I picked up there and also an article for the BBC Wildlife magazine (56) which was probably, I think, maybe the real first scoop of my life because we managed to print that story in BBC Wildlife magazine (56) before the scientific paper itself was printed, by permission I would hasten to add, complete with photographs from Townsville. So that was an exceedingly exciting thing to do and there were all kinds of things that happened on the way round there: the Serengeti jubilee of the National Park in the Serengeti itself was an amazing event, with Bernhard Grzimek was still alive then at that meeting, with Jane Goodall was there. So that itself as a, I can't say as an old Africa hand because I have only scratched the surface, but I have been there quite a lot making films there, so the Serengeti was very special to me for *The Natural World* (57) series. Three programmes actually: on kopjes and flat topped acacias and giraffes I think I covered in the Serengeti.

So I got back to the BBC in Bristol and I don't think I actually settled down for six months, I found it very, very difficult to just get the mind together, and I think it was probably time to work out exactly where one's life was going and I think, again, I was always nagged by this performing thing, I was always nagged by this craziness of wanting to be an actor or something, and if you have that itch it is something which just won't go away. I had a drama teacher who always said to me, the only happy actors are amateur actors, and that had probably kept me on the sane side of the business for a long time. And I thought, well I am not going to shuffle off this mortal coil without actually having a go at being a performer, the time has come to do it. So I had a particularly good annual report - the BBC always had a wonderful system of annual reports where you were told how good you were - sometimes they told you how bad you were, which was really the idea of the thing. But I had one which was particularly good. Philip Daly, who was the Head of BBC Network Production Centre in Bristol, who had tried to get me to do this some years before when he was editing *Horizon* (27). He said to me, "What does that tell you, your report?" I said, "It tells me I should resign at this point, and get out

and swap ships and change career and do something else.” And he said, “Good, fine.” He said, “I think you’re absolutely right.” I had just crossed a sort of huge rubicon at that moment, frightened the personnel department to death. Barry Smith, I remember, said, “Are you sure you know what you’re doing?” I said, “No, not really, but I’m just being crazy.” And bless his heart, he said to me, “Well if you find it doesn’t work, you know you can always come back.” I thought, well that’s a very nice thing to say, but I thought that would be a tremendous admission of failure if it ever happened. One doesn’t do that, but no - I said, “No.” I resigned, and I said to Phil Daly, “How are you going to try and persuade everybody you haven’t given me the push?” He said, “We’ll find a way round that.”

It was a peculiar sort of resignation in many ways, because what I did - I just changed hats. I changed over to being a freelance writer and narrator, an available presenter, in-vision presenter, and an available guest producer, and I retained my BBC office, would you believe? And I retained my assistant, the same assistant that had been saddled with me for the last fifteen years or so, I think, really. Who was one of the great assistants of the BBC, Sheila Fulham, who Chris [Parsons] had trained admirably, or rather Sheila had probably trained Chris Parsons I think, probably. She went back beyond all of us into the dark ages of the BBC, and when we first began to work together she complained to personnel that she couldn’t work with me and I complained to personnel I couldn’t work with her and there we are, we’ve been working with each other twenty years or more ever since. It said something about —, well we were both pig-headed or something I suppose. Anyhow, I find myself in the same office and I’m making guest productions but working also as a freelance producer in the voice-over area. As it happened, a producer in the features department of the BBC, they were doing a series called Day Out (58), he joined the BBC, he went to seek refuge in the BBC, and I was asked if I would like to present the Day Out series (58) and In Vision series (59) with a very well-known broadcaster at the time, Derek Jones, who did a lot of work for the Natural History Unit as a voice. So I moved on-camera for two series of the Day Out (58) programme about local cities/towns around the west, which I thoroughly enjoyed, absolutely wonderful. It went very well until I was replaced by Angela Rippon who came back from America and was prepared to rejoin the BBC for a peppercorn rent. So there you are, that came to an end, but what an experience - that was very good and one picked up one or two other little jobs in vision after that. I didn’t become Terry Wogan because I never saw myself as a chat-show host.

15. The Natural World

But I did —. I was given the first series —. We changed the name of The World About Us (34) to The Natural World (57), I guess I think I am probably responsible for that. We had to change the name for internal political reasons that we wanted it all in Bristol, then London said they wanted it back because we used to share the titles between the series between London and Bristol and London said they wanted to retain the title and we said in that case we will go alone, and if we are going alone, what can we call ourselves? I remember saying, “Well World About Us, the natural world about us, The Natural World (57), do that.” We took a decision and we became The Natural World (57). I was asked to narrate the entire series of The Natural World (57) when it started under its new title. Personally, I am not entirely in favour of series having single narrators all the way through because I think it rather straight-jackets producers’ intentions. And as a performer there is nothing worse than working for a producer who doesn’t want you. It is lovely working for producers who do want you, but there are other guys who, fair enough, they might want a lady, for example. There is nothing wrong with that, so choice is quite good. At the moment I have got David Attenborough saying to me, “You’re after Wildlife On One (60), aren’t you?” And I’m saying, “Well, you’re never going to stop, are you?” But there you are. Were he to stop, and we all have to stop one day, it may well be that a series like Wildlife On One (60) would benefit from then a change into a number of voices. All that is up for discussion and all that kind of thing. But personally, the idea of being an out-of-vision voice had always appealed to me, not having a face, keeping your face off television is quite good because you retain your privacy, but I have always been fascinated by the out-of-vision voice. Okay, go right back to when I am five years old in the news theatres in Bournemouth and in London, there were always these voices, voices like Bob Danvers-Walker, is a name going back onto films, the narrators of all those wonderful films like Night Mail (61), all the great documentaries. I was in love with the sound of the old documentary, and the old

documentary had old documentary voices, so one had to not sound like an old documentary voice, but the idea of the disembodied voice had always been, for some reason, been a profession that appealed to me, and radio of course. Of course, the other thing about that is that the voice bears no relation to how you look, now unfortunately you can see how I look but a lot of people when they are listening to film-recording, they had no idea what I look like. It would be lovely to do an identity-kit experiment one day, to get people to draw what, or use an identikit to say, what is the face that goes with this voice? To see whether everybody has a different face with that particular voice or whether there is a —. An interesting experiment that I think we should do. There was a neighbour of mine, actually, down the road who used to say to me when she was slightly inebriated, at least I hope she was slightly inebriated, she used to say, “Isn’t it a shame that something as beautiful as that comes out of something like that.” And I used to try and remember the thing about Winston Churchill, you know, “You are drunk, and tomorrow I shall be sober,” or something like that. I can’t remember, but there is a joke about that somewhere. “Madam you are ugly but —.” No, “Mr Churchill you are drunk, Madam you are ugly but tomorrow, I shall be sober.” It’s a very old one that is.

So it always intrigued me to be a voice, so I did take that up as a recording, became —. I am often described as the voice of *The Natural World* (57) or the unnatural voice of the world, or the whatever. I describe myself as a voice for the wild because I think that it operates on two levels. I intend, and I know Christopher [Parsons] is going to goad me, I intend to write a book and the title I have in mind is *A Voice for the Wild*, because I think it operates on two levels, that I have earned my living as a voice for the wild, among many others, I am not the voice for the wild because there are other people in the same business, but I am a voice for the wild. As a voice and also as a person who through writing and film-directing gives a voice to the wild outside, and I think that is probably what all of us working in the wildlife film industry, until this moment, and at this time, our primary function has been to give a voice to the wild animals and plants that can’t speak for themselves but require a medium for that message to be transmitted to the rest of —. To you and to me. I think that is really what wildlife broadcasting has been all about. Whether it is going to become in the future all about just getting people’s bums on seats, as they say, I don’t know. I hope not. God knows where we’re going with the number of channels that are coming out, possibly with more wildlife than anybody would ever want to see on all those channels, possibly wildly under-funded, therefore not very good. That doesn’t necessarily follow because a lot of things can be very good done on a shoestring of course - we did that in the early days. But just where it is going from that point of view, I don’t know. But for me it has been a privilege to have been a part of it for all my life.

END

Glossary

Telecine: A machine which electronically scans film and converts the visual information into a television signal.

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100 YEARS OF WILDLIFE FILMMAKING

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