

## Jean Hartley: Oral History Transcription

**Name of interviewee:**

Jean Hartley

**Name of interviewer:**

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c. 100 minutes

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**1. How did Jean start as a “Fixer”**

*Int: Jean, it's great to see you again, over for Wildscreen.*

JH: That's right, again.

*Int: It's exactly 20 years I think since you started.*

JH: It is.

*Int: And you blame it all on me.*

JH: That's right.

*Int: God knows why*

JH: You got me into it.

*Int: But I remember coming out to Kenya to do a Christmas special for BBC on the bird race [The Great Safari Bird Rally] (1), seven teams rushing around Kenya in 48 hours to see how many birds they could see.*

JH: That's right.

*Int: All of them twitchers.*

JH: Yes.

*Int: And you were co-ordinating that race, yes, and you hadn't thought about doing films at that time.*

JH: I hadn't, no.

*Int: So what happened? I mean that whole trip was a nightmare of co-ordination. What on earth attracted you to get into the business?*

JH: Well, I was organising the event and if I'm organising seven teams of people it didn't seem to be such an enormous step to add two film crews as well.

*Int: But trying to get the two film crews around Kenya, around secret locations and routes over 48 hours to film the seven crews, that was a nightmare.*

JH: It was fairly challenging.

*Int: With all the breakdowns remember?*

JH: There were some breakdowns, yes, and the teams were very secretive and I was the only one that actually knew their routes. I think I shared this information with you so that you could follow them but one or two teams you didn't spend quite as much time with as the others.

*Int: They were still unpredictable because some of them had breakdowns and didn't make their destinations on time.*



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JH: Yes, it was a long 48 hours wasn't it?

*Int: It was. I remember we were trying to get out of the Rift Valley because we had to get to the coast by that evening to do a night shoot, and we broke down halfway up the escarpment and we were stuck. I remember you came and rescued us and you fixed up a private charter aircraft to get us down there on time. It was amazing what you did.*

JH: I don't remember coming to pick you up. I do remember the flight to the coast with Terry [Stevenson, leader of one of the Kenya teams], I think, wasn't it? Yes, it was all rather a long time ago but it was fun and we did well. We raised money for the children's hospital which was what it was all about to start with. It just seemed to me that it was fun filming. You had a lovely team of people.

*Int: Yes, I did, I was very lucky.*

JH: You had a lovely team of people.

*Int: Two lovely crews of people.*

JH: Yes.

*Int: Yes, very patient, very tolerant.*

JH: Yes, and they knew their birds as well which made sense to me. It wasn't very long after that you rang up to tell me that the show had gone out and that it had gone down well, Christmas Eve was it, or New Year's Eve or something?

*Int: Christmas Eve.*

JH: Christmas Eve. Then you said very casually, "oh, I'm coming back in two weeks time to work on a three part series called The Great Rift (2). Do you mind if I call you if I've got a problem?" And of course I said, "no, call me". It wasn't very long before you started having problems and I don't know, I just ended up working on The Great Rift (2) for two years on and off.

*Int: Well I remember you seemed to know everybody in Kenya, everybody was just a phone call away.*

JH: Yes, well that doesn't change.

*Int: So we need a permit for this, permit for that, taxi here or hire car there with just a phone call and you made it seem so easy.*

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JH: Well, it was easy for me but I think in those days you used to bring your own PAs [Personal Assistant] and people and they didn't know their way around. They got ripped off because they went to the wrong place to get a car or they went to the wrong place to get a hotel booking, and they could have got a cheaper one nearer to where they wanted to be, that kind of thing. It seemed to me to make sense that you needed somebody on the ground that knew their way around, to help you with these problems. At that time there was nobody looking after documentary crews.

*Int: That's right.*

JH: There wasn't really. Somebody would get you a licence and say here you are, there's the bit of paper you want, off you go and there was nobody helping.

*Int: But you were different because you really did look after us. You opened your house to us.*

JH: Yes, all your crews came and went.

*Int: So that got you started?*

JH: That got me started.

*Int: Great, and so you established your company?*

JH: I set up the company in '88, about August '88, as you came to the end of The Great Rift (2). You suggested why don't you go to Wildscreen, it's a festival for people who make films, you'd meet some people. So I came along to Wildscreen, met people, picked up two films to sort, my first two official clients as Viewfinders Ltd. They both won **Emmys**, I thought that's a good start, and it went from there. I do remember you saying, look, I'm a bit worried about this, I'm not sure if you're going to get enough work. You're not going to get enough work, that's what you said.

*Int: And 75 crews this year alone.*

JH: That's right, yes.

*Int: And you're up to 800 now, I think, in total?*

JH: Very close to 800, yes.

*Int: Not bad I have to say, not bad.*

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JH: Well, I don't think anybody else had done quite that many as a **fixer**.

*Int: No, and it's just not wildlife is it, it's everything?*

JH: It started off being wildlife because I wanted an excuse to get out and enjoy the wildlife which I love, the birds particularly and the animals as well. But it developed into any documentary. So we're doing athletes and we're doing plants and we're doing malaria, and we're doing things like that Street Kids (3) [for various charitable organisations, e.g. Feed the Children], those kind of things. Well the logistics are just the same, whether you're photographing birds or children with HIV, but the logistics are the same.

*Int: That's right.*

JH: So I have become the sort of documentary person.

*Int: You have. You've established a very, very good niche there. But you've had some black periods as well between the high points.*

JH: It hasn't all been completely smooth and, yes, I've always had something to do. There was a time maybe, what two or three years ago, when everything slumped and it went really down. There were no tourists, there were no filmmakers, no work and I actually thought maybe I'd better get another job just for a little while.

*Int: A few years ago it became very unfashionable suddenly for people to film in Africa, I remember that.*

JH: Well, this is a cyclical thing that happens. Let's do lions this year, let's do elephants and then, oh God, everyone's had enough of lions and elephants, or let's go and do polar bears.

*Int: Not another African film please.*

JH: Yes. So then you get four years of polar bears or sharks or whales or arctic foxes or whatever. Then suddenly somebody says, well isn't it time to make another lion film and they all come back.

*Int: They'll always be there.*

JH: I think they'll always come back as long as we've got the animals and as long as it's still quite easy to do.

## **2. Meeting Armand and Michaela Denis**

*Int: Can we, Jean, step back a little bit? Let's go back to the very, very beginnings because you met, as a child, Armand and Michaela Denis?*

JH: I did, that was in about 1955, I think.

*Int: Because I met Michaela as well, I never met Armand. But tell me about Armand and Michaela because they were real legends at the very beginning of wildlife filmmaking.*

JH: Well I wasn't conscious at the age of 10 or whatever it was, 8, I wasn't conscious that they were filmmakers. But they were living in a tent, or they had a camp, at the coast in Malindi and I was in a hotel just over the road. My folks used to have a holiday every year at the coast, and being bored with adults and things I went walkabout and I found this tent and I thought, ooh. Then I found they had animals and that, of course, attracted me because I love animals. They had two very cute meerkats, tame meerkats, and they allowed me to take these little meerkats for a walk on the beach. Every day I used to go and take these meerkats up and down the beach. Of course, they attracted attention because you don't get meerkats in Kenya. They loved the crabs.

*Int: How old were you then?*

JH: 10 [actually aged 12]).

*Int: About 10.*

JH: About 10, yes, something like that, early 50s. Michaela had written a book called To Ride a Rhino (4) [actually was Leopard in my Lap] (5).

*Int: Yes, I remember that one.*

JH: You remember that. I got a copy of that and she and Armand signed it for me and, now I look at it, Des Bartlett signed it, this is way before he met Jen.

*Int: So what was Des's connection with the book?*

JH: Absolutely nothing at all but he was staying in the camp and he was then filming for Armand and Michaela. Curiously they just came to stay with me, Des and Jen, this year for a month, sorting out Armand's old film stock, rolls and rolls and rolls.

*Int: 35mm?*



JH: A lot of it was 35mm, a lot of it was colour, a lot of it had sound, a lot of it was the original film. I found it in an old store in Michaela's house in Nairobi after she died.

*Int: So are you doing something with that film then?*

JH: I'm not doing anything with it but Des and Jen painfully, painstakingly re-rolled it on an old windy up machine.

*Int: Are they going to transfer to video then?*

JH: They're trying to list it and find out what's there, and they're going to transfer what they can. There's feature length films from the 40s they found.

*Int: Important archive stuff then.*

JH: Very important archive stuff. They've got another pile at Mombasa with Michaela's adopted daughter. They've got another pile in Norfolk and they moved yet another pile from Tucson, Arizona, to Norfolk. So they're trying to just get all the collection together and then decide how to transfer it on to something that's going to last.

*Int: Because all that material should end up in archive really.*

JH: Well that's the idea, yes. Des is nearly 80, 79. They need to get that done quite soon.

*Int: They do, yes. Because also that old film is all nitrate so it's quite dangerous actually.*

JH: Absolutely, yes. You can still smell that funny smell.

*Int: Sweet smell, yes.*

JH: Although it was not in cans, it was just lying around on the floor in this damp old store, heartbreaking.

*Int: So what else do you remember about your childhood because your mum was an ornithologist, she was a keen bird watcher and you're an ornithologist.*

JH: Well I'm a bird watcher, I mean quite a good bird watcher but, no, I'm not professional in any way. My mum was always very keen on birds and plants and animals and things. So I kind of grew up in a beautiful place with nice weather and lovely gardens and lovely plants and birdlife all around. It's very hard not to get sucked into that.





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*Int: So what did your mum do for a living?*

JH: Well she looked after me and my brother. She went to Kenya in 1928 having never been out of England before. She went on a boat.

*Int: So she was English?*

JH: She was English.

*Int: And your dad?*

JH: Yes, they both came from Wigan.

*Int: Right, so they're both English and they emigrated.*

JH: Both English and my dad was working for Brooke Bond, the tea company.

*Int: Okay, that's the connection then.*

JH: Yes, and he went out to Kenya to build a tea factory, the first one in the country. On one of his trips to England on holiday he met my mum at a party and they got together, and eventually mother went out to Kenya on a boat and married him in Mombasa. As soon as the ship docked they went straight to the cathedral and got married which is really quite sweet.

*Int: That's lovely, isn't it?*

JH: Yes, and they were married for over 60 years.

*Int: Fantastic. And your brother, where's he now?*

JH: My brother's in England, he's in Surrey.

*Int: What's he doing?*

JH: He's retired. He was with ICI, he was an agricultural sort of person. He left Kenya probably as I got back to Kenya in the 60s, late 60s, early 70s, he came back to England and I went back to Kenya. So we kind of crossed. He's quite a bit older than me so he's always a little bit ahead of me when I was growing up, and we didn't see a lot of each other. But he knows Kenya well.





*Int: So your mum was keen on birds, so you were keen on birds, but then you got into doing underwater as well.*

JH: That was in the 70s.

*Int: How did that come about because you had the first underwater photography exhibition in Kenya, I believe?*

JH: That was in 1979 or somewhere like that, early 70s.

*Int: What got you interested in doing scuba then?*

JH: A bunch of friends decided that it would be nice to start a diving club, there wasn't one. So I'm a founder member of the sub aqua club that still operates in Kenya now. So we started a club, we became a British Sub Aqua Club overseas branch in about 1973, somewhere like that. I was treasurer, I was secretary, I was chairman, - there weren't very many people involved to start with and now it's huge. I got a camera and I started taking pictures underwater, and had an exhibition of underwater photos which was the first in Kenya, yes.

*Int: Were you a photographer before that?*

JH: Not really, no.

*Int: But you were so impressed by what you saw underwater that you felt you wanted to.*

JH: Well, there was no competition you see.

*Int: Come on, I don't believe that was the reason.*

JH: No, it was a challenge, it was more difficult than taking pictures of things topside. So, yes, it went quite well, I sold a lot.

*Int: So did you stop doing that or do you ever dive now?*

JH: I don't dive now.

*Int: Why?*

JH: I don't have time, it's called filmmakers.



*Int: It's time, it's nothing else?*

JH: Yes.

*Int: But it's nothing else?*

JH: No, it's time.

*Int: So when was the last time you dived?*

JH: Probably 20 years ago I should think.

*Int: 20 years. It's exactly when you set up this business.*

JH: Exactly, that's my point.

*Int: And it's all my fault then?*

JH: It's all your fault exactly, yes. But you've been back and made other films, it wasn't just The Great Rift (2).

*Int: That's right.*

### **3. Helping filmmakers with their problems**

JH: You kept coming with more problems.

*Int: A lot of gorillas and stuff like that.*

JH: Mountain gorillas

*Int: Mountain gorillas.*

JH: Yes, two mountain gorillas [Gorillas in the Midst of Man (6) and Gorilla (7)].

*Int: So it wasn't just Kenya in fact, you took the whole of East Africa and Central Africa as your patch.*



JH: Well, there wasn't anybody else so I ended up doing Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, the whole lot because there wasn't anybody else. Now I just do my patch because other people have sprung up in neighbouring countries to do that.

*Int: Yes, but you've got more than enough to keep you busy now.*

JH: Yes, I have, I've got quite a lot to keep me busy, yes. But Rwanda was a challenge, wasn't it?

*Int: Yes.*

JH: Because war broke out in the middle of your shoot.

*Int: A huge challenge with the war and genocide and everything. It was ghastly actually.*

JH: Well, before the genocide you were holed up in Ruhengeri and not able to move.

*Int: We were, we were under fire for seven hours and that was something I'll never forget.*

JH: While I was on the other end of the phone. You couldn't get through to anybody else except me for some reason. You couldn't get through to England or Canada or anywhere.

*Int: No, it was bad. We had George Schaller with us also lying on the floor.*

JH: That's right, eating Kim's [Kim Hayes, sound recordist] brownies if I remember.

*Int: With bullets bouncing off the walls. Yes, I'll never forget that day. So what other funny moments can you remember about organising crews? You must have a lot of funny memories and anecdotes. What's the funniest thing that ever happened, funny, disasters?*

JH: Disasters I tend to put out of mind, I don't really remember any huge disasters. Sometimes things are just fall about funny and you make a note that one day I'll write a book and that'll go in there but right now I can't remember.

*Int: Yes, you did say you were going to write a book about this.*

JH: I am.

*Int: And didn't you have a funny title for it? I'm sure you mentioned a title sometime.*

JH: Well, what is it? Probably a senior moment.

*Int: It made me roll about in laughter. I can't remember what it was now.*

JH: Nor can I.

*Int: But I think you should do it.*

JH: If you remember please let me know because I think I've probably forgotten what the title is.

*Int: Because I remember a friend of mine, he used to do a lot of expeditions and he started to get quite serious illnesses and accidents on almost every expedition he went on. Then he gave up expeditions and he decided to write a book called Expeditions make me sick, and I'm sure your title was something along that ilk.*

JH: Really but I actually don't remember the title.

*Int: But I can't remember it. Anyway you should do it.*

JH: Well, yes, it just does take a little time. I mean all I'm doing at the moment is making a note of something that I think ought to be.

*Int: But you do amuse us because every few months you write a funny email about some sort of amusing experience you've had with the crew.*

JH: Well I put a few things in my newsletter. We do a newsletter every quarter and I do try and make that fairly light, and put something amusing in.

*Int: Yes, but some things are a bit more personal they're not for public consumption.*

JH: Well sometimes they're things that are not for public consumption you might get. I don't put them in my newsletter not always, no.

*Int: About people we both know.*

JH: Yes, well, there is a bit of that, yes.

*Int: But come on, tell us one or two funny stories.*

JH: They're not very printable.

*Int: In 20 years.*

JH: In 20 years. Chinese television, now that was quite a challenge. I was ordered by the ministry to look after this crew, ordered. I said "Do I have to?" And they said, "Yes." And I said "Why". And they said "Because we don't want to and nobody else wants to, and somebody needs to keep them under control." I was told they were a crew of six people, Chinese, coming by road from Addis Ababa, in Moroccan vehicles with Tunisian drivers. It's a recipe for disaster, and an Italian tour guide. They said "Can you go and meet them please on the Ethiopian border on Monday?" And I said "No." They said "But you have to." And I said, "No, I don't. It's going to take me until Monday to get there. I'm not going there, they must come by plane like everybody else does. I don't want Moroccan vehicles in this country. I don't want Tunisian drivers because they don't know where they're going, they don't speak the language, I don't speak theirs. Come on, this is not going to work very well." So eventually six Chinese people arrived by air from Addis and I tried to then take control.

*Int: Plus the Italian tour guide as well?*

JH: No, she didn't come. I wondered about that.

*Int: So you had six Chinese arrive by air?*

JH: Yes. Only one spoke English. In two and a half days their bill – "Will you do this, will you do this, will you get that, will you buy this —." Came to \$7,000 in two and half days. I sort of said, "Well, how are you going to pay for this, I'm not going to pay anymore until I know where money's coming from."

*Int: So actually they wanted all this stuff and you were forking out of your own?*

JH: I wasn't actually forking out but I was committing - booking vehicles and permits and stuff on my company and I wanted to know where money was coming from. I mean it came. Their accountant was in Spain and he was a Somali, it gets worse. I did get the money and that was fine but I was concerned about this tour guide. I had to drive the English speaking Chinaman to the airport one day, he wanted to buy tickets and I said, "You buy tickets, I no buy tickets, you buy tickets, your money." I'd had enough of this. On the way to the airport I'm driving along thinking, "What can I say?" And I said, "Oh, by the way when you arrived I was told you were bringing an Italian tour guide. What happened to this Italian tour guide, I haven't seen her?" "She called us bunch of — idiots, we fire." It just came out and I thought this was really quite funny.

*Int: So he knew English quite well then?*

JH: He knew English quite well and then I thought, well, that was worth writing down. We got to the airport and we got his ticket, I left him in the booking office. He got a phone call and he said "Problem. Chinaman baggage." I said, "Excuse me?" "Chinaman baggage, customs." I thought, okay, you've got another Chinaman in the baggage hall, he's having a problem with customs. "Yes, you sort, you fix." So I went into



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the baggage hall and there, surrounded by 26 customs officials and police, is a tiny weeny Chinaman like this dressed in a little orange suit, looking very, very Chinese with a huge box, maybe that long, taped up. He'd arrived from Angola. Nobody told me about this but there he was and he was part of the team. His big box had gone through the x-ray machine and customs didn't like what they saw.

*Int: What was it?*

JH: Well, this is what they wanted me to find out.

*Int: So they didn't like the look of it, they didn't know what it was?*

JH: Well, they had a good idea what they thought it was.

*Int: And Mr Chinaman refused to open the box?*

JH: No, he didn't refuse at all. But when I got in there to help him there were all saying 'open' and it was that sticky sellotape that you can't tear with your teeth, that really sticky stuff. They were all going, 'open, open, open' and there was no way they could open it. People were trying to open it, saying 'open'. The Chinaman said, "Okay", got out of his pocket the biggest Leatherman I've ever seen in my life with a blade about that long, out of his pocket. He'd just travelled halfway across Africa with this thing in his pocket. Nobody batted an eyelid, they just said "Open the box." So with this great big blade he opens the box, and it was a pair of Ankole cattle horns, cow horns. They thought it was elephant. You see they thought it was ivory on the x-ray, same shape. So we all had a good laugh and said, "No, no, not elephant it's cow, ha ha, yes, you go."

*Int: And so what did he want these for, aphrodisiac or something?*

JH: They were given to him as a gift. Why I don't know, I didn't enquire. So I ended up taking them back to the town with these two cow horns in the back of the car as well as two Chinamen. It just went on like that, it was just ridiculous but it was quite amusing, it was quite funny. But they did pay in the end which I was surprised about and they came back.

*Int: Well they obviously liked you then?*

JH: Yes.

*Int: Well that's good. You have a lot of repeat customers.*

JH: Well, I do, yes, not too many from China.

*Int: What was the biggest crew you've ever handled?*

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JH: The biggest crew I've ever handled I gave away, I didn't handle it at all. I was offered Survivor Africa (8) and on the exploratory phone call they said, "We need a very small island where we can hide 12 people for three months." So I said, "Yes, okay, yes, I can find you somewhere like that, you can hide 12 people." They said, "By the way, yes, and the crew of course, we've got to find somewhere for the crew," and I said "how big's the crew" and he said, "300."

*Int: 300? Why? What did they all do?*

JH: I don't know. I said I think actually this is a little bit out of my league.

*Int: So who did you give it to because I thought you were the only person doing this sort of thing?*

JH: I gave it to Jenny Pont who does features. No, I gave it to Jenny Pont who does feature films and she had them for three months, 300 people.

*Int: So what's the biggest crew you have handled? What were they doing?*

JH: Probably 50 people, not very often.

*Int: What were they doing?*

JH: Well, we had three that size actually this year altogether.

*Int: This year?*

JH: Yes. Big Cat Diary (9) was 40 people.

*Int: Of course, Big Cat Diary and that's something you do every year.*

JH: We've done 10 now so that's quite a well oiled machine, it just happens.

*Int: Yes, but they come up with an enormous amount of equipment, don't they?*

JH: Three tons.

*Int: Which you have to get through customs and you have to get down to the location.*

JH: Yes, and then I have to get it down to the Mara.

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*Int: Exactly, and you have to help them set up the camp and stuff.*

JH: Yes.

*Int: So a lot of work.*

JH: That's quite a lot of work but we've done it all before and it's not quite as time consuming as it was the first time. No, we've got a system going.

*Int: Sure, no, I understand that, yes. It's much easier as you repeat. So what happens if somebody gets sick in the middle of somewhere remote?*

JH: The Flying Doctor.

*Int: You've had to organise that a few times?*

JH: Yes, just last month.

*Int: Right. What happened there?*

JH: Presenter fell off a lorry, a Land Rover.

*Int: I've heard that before.*

JH: Yes, funny isn't it? These things keep happening, don't they?

*Int: So what happened?*

JH: No, this was a presenter not a cameraman. We had to get him out on the Flying Doctor into Nairobi and ambulance from Wilson Airport.

*Int: Did he break his back?*

JH: No, he broke his shoulder. Well, he didn't break it actually, he dislocated it very, very badly and took him to the hospital, and it was all x-rayed and poked and prodded and stuff. I thought he should have had it sorted out in Nairobi but the powers that be decided that London was better. So he came to London, had a major operation, a five hour operation I think, on a Saturday morning.





*Int: Really. Gosh, he must have been pretty bad then?*

JH: Yes, they had to pin all the ligaments back in place because they were all shredded and they had to cut a bit of collarbone off because it wouldn't go back in again. So he was in a mess. Operation Saturday morning, he was back on the set in Northern Kenya on Thursday.

*Int: That's amazing.*

JH: Yes, he's mad but some people are in this business.

#### **4. Disaster stories**

*Int: Have there been any other disasters like plane crashes or car accidents? Any nasty encounters with animals?*

JH: Not major.

*Int: No one's been bitten by leopards or snakes?*

JH: No one's been bitten by leopards or snakes that I can remember, not when they were under my umbrella. I mean it does happen.

*Int: It always amazes me that in the wildlife film industry that more people don't suffer accidents like that because we all get very close to animals.*

JH: Yes, but most of the people who make wildlife films actually know something about animals.

*Int: That's true.*

JH: And they know how far they can go, especially with big animals. A tourist was mushed by an elephant two weeks ago in the Mara, wasn't listening, didn't understand, didn't know how dangerous it all was. It doesn't normally happen with film crews actually.

*Int: Well I remember shortly after I joined the BBC late 70s, BBC Bristol that is, a chap called John Percival [John Pearson, Survival Anglia Ltd.] who was filming cheetahs in Ngorongoro [Hunters of the Plains (10)]. They had a camp there, he got up in the middle of the night, went out for a pee and his night watchman shot him thinking that he was an intruder. So there is always that sort of accident, it's not always animals but can be --*



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JH: Wild people, yes.

*Int: Exactly.*

JH: Goodness, I don't remember that story, no.

*Int: I remember camping in a place, actually it was in Namibia, it was an organised camp. There was an intruder in the middle of the night who started firing off wildly and bullets were coming through the straw of the walls of the little houses that we were sleeping in. Lucky we were lying down.*

JH: Absolutely, yes, very.

*Int: So night watchmen can be quite dangerous.*

JH: I don't have one, I have a dog.

*Int: But you had an intruder quite recently, didn't you?*

JH: I did.

*Int: And didn't they come to the gate armed with guns?*

JH: They came to the front door.

*Int: The front door and you opened the door and you said, oh, go away. You closed the door and they ran away or something. Tells us about that. What happened?*

JH: The dogs were barking and I was trying to watch a programme, and I went to the door to call the dogs in, and there was a man with a gun on my doormat and he said open the door. I don't think so. So I said go away or the equivalent.

*Int: Equivalent more like four letters, yes.*

JH: That's right, four letters followed by three and he did.

*Int: And he ran away?*

JH: I was very lucky or very stupid.



*Int: Well, a bit of everything I think. You were very lucky certainly.*

JH: Well, yes, because that day I had actually locked the metal grill. The door was open so the dogs could come and go because they're only little dogs. But I'd actually locked the metal grill which I'd never done. In 15 years I'd never done it. I don't know what made me do that, somebody's watching out for me.

*Int: Yes, because I mean it can be really dangerous living in Nairobi. There are a lot of gun related murders.*

JH: There are gun related murders, yes.

*Int: Rob's father[Rob O'Meara].*

JH: Rob my son-in-law, his father [Terry] was shot.

*Int: At lunchtime?*

JH: Middle of the day.

*Int: He was having lunch outside his house and what happened there?*

JH: His dog started barking and he went out and saw two guys walking down the driveway, and they said "Are you Mr —?" And he said "No." The dog [growled], the big dog, and he bent down to pull the dog back and as he bent down they shot him through the top of the head. It was mistaken identity, they didn't actually mean to.

*Int: That's unbelievable. So that was a contract killing that went wrong.*

JH: Yes.

*Int: Unbelievable.*

JH: They've never got anybody for it.

*Int: And of course Joan Root in the last few months.*

JH: Yes, that was another thing. That was another hired killer if you like, I think that was organised. Yes, those things I'm afraid do happen.



# WILDFILMHISTORY

100 YEARS OF WILDLIFE FILMMAKING

*Int: So you were incredibly brave that night?*

JH: Stupid I think is a better word, just bloody minded. Actually six months after that I had another visitation. I wasn't there, I was away for the night and my driver chap was in charge and a gang of six came in. He locked himself inside the house and started pushing alarm buttons which didn't go off, and he shouted at them. They shouted at him and said, "Open the door or we shoot you." He said, "Okay, shoot me then I can't open the bloody door, don't be so stupid." They ran away in the end when help came but there were six of them.

*Int: Scary stuff.*

JH: Well, you can't get paranoid. If it's going to happen it's going to happen.

*Int: I think you suffered a flood at some point a few years back.*

JH: That was nasty, yes.

*Int: What happened there?*

JH: It was the middle of a drought. We had heavy rain, two nights running we had heavy rain and I woke up and my wall had gone. I have a perimeter wall right round the house. One wall had gone and there was mud everywhere. I thought, well, that was odd, didn't realise the rain was quite so heavy. Cleaned it all up, then the next day it happened again and it wasn't actually just heavy rain. There was a dam at the top of the valley that had broken and the second night the whole damned dam went, and I'm at the bottom of the valley so I got the lot. It was four and half feet deep in my office.

*Int: In the office because you've got your office in the house.*

JH: Well, the house was only two feet deep.

*Int: Lovely.*

JH: It was fun.

*Int: Fun. Were you handling crews at the time?*

JH: Yes, I had six, seven crews I think, it was early December. But all the computers were floating, carpets were trashed, drains, wiring, everything was trashed.

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*Int: A terrible mess.*

JH: A complete mess, yes.

*Int: So that put a halt on things for a while?*

JH: Well it didn't put a halt on things because the world of filmmaking goes on. I had to move. I had to move office and house and dogs and cats and staff and everything out of there for seven months. I lived in my vet's servants' quarters and ran the business from there, in a place about 10 feet square, very small. But we put it altogether again and moved back and the crews still got looked after. It was not easy, it really wasn't at all easy.

*Int: Well somehow we get through these disasters, don't we?*

JH: Yes, one does.

### **5. How does a "fixer" work?**

*Int: Jean, your job is sort of unseen to most people coming on a film project to Kenya. Nobody really thinks about or realises the intricacies of the job. So tell us what happens from the beginning. Somebody comes to you with a project, say, we'd like to do this. You have to organise permits, organise logistics in advance. You have to remain flexible and then from the moment the crew arrives you have to shepherd them around. Sometimes they maybe haven't been to Africa before. So tell us exactly what your job entails from the very beginning. To talk us through a project what do you have to do?*

JH: Okay. A project usually these days starts with an email saying "We're thinking of coming to Kenya to film, what do you need from us? We've been told you can help us." Often they don't know what needs to be done so I have to know their requirements for filming and all the other stuff they want to do. So the first thing is to get all the details like their equipment list and copies of passports, flight details, what's the film about, film licence.

*Int: Which sometimes can't be easy.*

JH: It's easier than it used to be, I've never had one refused.

*Int: So you pay your money and you get your licence?*

JH: You pay your money and you get your licence. Because of the volume of licences that I get, I probably get licences without being questioned. Whereas some other people might find it a little harder but they're generally very helpful, and I do get the pieces of paper that I need. It's very difficult sometimes to get all the information that I need because these little PAs and PCs and people in other countries don't understand why I'm asking questions. I say, "Look, I need to know what time your flight is arriving because if you arrive at 6



o'clock in your morning, I can get you to your location straightaway. But if you don't arrive until 9 o'clock at night then I have to get you a hotel and get you to the location the next day", and they don't think. They think why does it matter?

There's other permits once you've got your basic licence, everybody's got their hand out. If you go to a national park there's a filming fee. If you go to a national reserve there's a filming fee, museum, any museum. Railways - you want to film on a train you have to have a special permit, you have to pay. I try and get everything done before it's needed so that there's no last minute scrabbling for bits of paper that are not always easy to get. But if people don't give me the information then I can't stay one jump ahead of them. But a lot of people say, "Well, we couldn't do that because this happened. So therefore we want to change, we want to move from this place to that place." I think, "Oh oh, that means I've got to get the licence changed, get another location and I've got to change the hotel bookings or the camp bookings, or whatever. The car they've got isn't suitable for that terrain where it was fine for there."

So then I've got to change things and that's what takes time, and if you've got eight people in a hotel and they don't want to be there, they want to be somewhere else. I try and pin them down and not change things as they go along but sometimes they have to. But, yes, I do boats and trains and planes and 4 wheel drives or minibuses or microlights or helicopters, whatever is the best way to get them around. Hot air balloons, piki pikis, little motorbike, whatever they want really. They usually don't know how far it is from A to B and they say, "Well, we'll climb Mount Kenya and then we'll come down and we'll go and have a sunset drink on Lake Victoria, watch the sun go down." You think, "Hello, this is several hundred miles, you're not going to do that."

So I'm supposed to be able to advise on how long it takes to get from A to B, and they can look at a map and say, "Oh gee, it's not very far but they don't understand the condition of the roads."

*Int: And the logistics of getting from A to B, yes?*

JH: And the logistics of getting from A to B. It's just not traffic and road works like you get over here, and then there's a lot of other things that are involved. There sometimes aren't any roads or there's been a flood, or there's been an earthquake. The whole of Nakuru high street has a gash through it that wide last year because there was an earth tremor. So that kind of thing --

*Int: Can trip you up. What about getting all the equipment in? Do you have problems with customs at all?*

JH: Well, we don't normally have problems with customs, there is a system.

*Int: Because film crews traditionally have a lot of shiny metal cases with them.*

JH: Yes, they do. There is a system and it works.

*Int: Is it a carnet, or?*

JH: No, it's not a carnet country.



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*Int: Still no carnet, so it's a list of equipment.*

JH: It's a list of equipment.

*Int: You have to promise faithfully to take it all out.*

JH: That's right, yes.

*Int: Okay. So it's all signed off then. But I guess you know all the customs officers now?*

JH: Well, I do but I've also got a very, very good clearing agent who does some pretty fancy footwork sometimes and we don't normally have a problem.

*Int: But I bet it wasn't like that at the beginning, you must have had some?*

JH: At the beginning it was a nightmare. It was very difficult but it's got easier. As I say, with the volume they suddenly realise, whoops, here's this momma, this lady's got another film crew. This will be the same as it was last week, and it's taken time but everybody in the airport knows me and they know my clearing agent. When I walk in through all the security and they say, "You've got another film crew arriving. Can I see a copy of the film?" And I say, "Well, I'll try and get you one."

*Int: Well, that's great for the film crews. This is why they all love you because you make it seem so easy.*

JH: Well I always meet them airside. I think it's important for people to be met, just to have someone with you through the visa queue, through the baggage hall, to know where to report a missing bag if it is missing and that kind of thing, and to know there's someone with you that can drive you to your hotel.

*Int: When you're tired.*

JH: When you're tired, yes. I think it creates a good impression. People say, "Oh yes, go to Kenya, they meet you."

*Int: Then you finally get everybody on location and it doesn't finish there because you're responsible for them, and you've got to sort out any disasters that they come up with.*

JH: Yes, that happens. Mobile phone coverage is pretty much all over Kenya so the phone rings. It used to be a radio or something, now it's a mobile phone. We've broken our HD [High Definition] camera can you get me another one. The **matte box** doesn't fit the camera. We need some kind of cable to fix this to that because we've brought the wrong one. We need more film stock, we need more sound tapes, we need more tape stock. We need a bowl to fit on the top of this tripod because the cameraman brought the wrong one or

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something like that. We're constantly moving equipment across the country up and down. Usually things like aerals are last minute. Somebody says, "Oh, we've just decided, we've done everything on the ground, tomorrow morning we want to do aerals." Again, sometimes you need permission if you're filming over a park or a reserve, or even over the city there's a height restriction. Pilots should get permission, that takes time, and maybe the plane's busy, maybe the timing isn't right. But anyway we take all these things as they come really.

And then you get Big Cat Diary (9) or somebody ringing up saying we've run out of wine, can you send 10 more cases.

*Int: So that's what they do.*

JH: That's what they do, yes. Or you sent the ping pong table but the balls didn't come. It varies, everything that they want they get. "We've run out of Dijon mustard" was one. "Can we have more peanut butter?"

## **6. People Jean has worked with**

*Int: Jean, tell us about some of the characters that you've met? Some of the perhaps well-known people that have turned up on your doorstep.*

JH: There've been some wonderful people that I've met. Most of them are quite nice. The wildlife people generally are quite nice. Some of the ordinary documentary scientific sort of charity related people are not quite so likeable.

*Int: For example, you've entertained David in your house haven't you, David Attenborough?*

JH: David Attenborough's been to my house many times. He's one of the people that I'm really glad to have met, I love him to pieces, and he's just one of the greatest storytellers I think I've ever known. You get him going, sit him on my patio with a glass of wine and he's just fall about funny, lovely stories. He's been many, many times. We don't normally go in for actors and film stars and people but we've had a few. But David Attenborough is probably top of the list of all the favourite people. But I've also met people like David Suzuki from the Canadian Nature of Things (11), equally interesting character to have met. Another lovely storyteller and a lovely, lovely person.

Who else have I met? Old timers, Des and Jen Bartlett. I'm really glad that I've met them again after 50 years. Alan Root, I didn't meet him through film I knew him already but I've seen more of him through film, and that's another charismatic person.

*Int: I must say all these people are legends in their own lifetime.*

JH: Absolutely, yes. And Joan [Root] it was one of my closest friends, that's a very sad loss earlier this year. Some of the presenters I've also met like Charlotte Uhlenbroek who I like enormously. I think she's great. In fact, I introduced her to David Attenborough at my house, they'd never met, and that was kind of nice to be able to introduce people at the same level. Then people like Simon King and Jonathan Scott, regulars.



*Int: For Big Cat Diary (9).*

JH: Well, Big Cat Diary (9), Elephant Diary (12), all sorts of other programmes that Jonathan's done. Michaela Strachan, fabulous person, lovely person. She's just finished filming the second series of Elephants, Elephant Diaries (12), she allergic to elephants. It's really quite hard for her, she comes up in a rash but she's a lovely person and I'm really glad to have met people like that. Some of the people you've brought me, your cameramen, Hugh Maynard is a real friend. A lot of really nice people.

*Int: Mike Richards.*

JH: Mike Richards, him with the gentle laugh, yes. Mike is a regular, him and Geoff Bell, yes. Mike and Penny [Mike Richards' wife] used to come and stay in my house way back 20 years ago, absolutely. Who else? It's difficult to remember all these names without any names. Help me out here. Who else have you brought me? Neil and Kim [Hayes]. Neil Rettig who was your cameraman on Gorillas (7). We've also worked with him on chimpanzees and things like that too, a lovely person, and Kim and Kath [Kath Liptrott, IMAX line producer] and always those other IMAX people.

IMAX is a completely different ballgame. We've now done 14, I think. The last one was Kilimanjaro [Kilimanjaro: To the Roof of Africa] (13) - and Chimpanzees [Jane Goodall's Wild Chimpanzees] (14), we've did those both at the same time.

*Int: Yes, IMAX is very different.*

JH: Yes. Getting the chimpanzee (14) crew out of Gombe, I had six aeroplanes in the air on one day.

*Int: Huge boxes.*

JH: They brought weights for their crane, stupid. We did Elephants [Africa's Elephant Kingdom] (15) of course, that was a good one. I like IMAX and they give you a credit even if it's tiny print, it's big on a big screen, that's kind of nice.

## **7. Jean writing a book**

*Int: But, Jean, if you hadn't been you who would you liked to have been? A difficult question.*

JH: A very difficult question.

*Int: Any ideas? I suppose you could look at it in another way. Who do you admire so much? I mean who's your sort of hero/heroine?*

JH: Well, there wasn't anybody for me to follow, I was the first.

*Int: But I'm not even thinking about your job necessarily. Just as alike, as a personality.*

JH: As a personality.

*Int: Yes. If you weren't you who would you like to have been? Anyone you've met or anyone who you haven't met?*

JH: Well frankly I'm very happy being me, I don't want to be anybody else.

*Int: That's good to know.*

JH: No, I'm me. I do 'me' quite well. I don't think I want to be anybody else. I don't think so, no. I wouldn't like to be a presenter, I really wouldn't. I'd like to try writing.

*Int: Well you do write.*

JH: Well I do but I'd like to write film scripts.

*Int: You've written your book on Kenya which is now being reprinted yet again.*

JH: Second time, yes, I think it has but that wasn't really something I wanted to write, that was something I was told to write or asked to write. There's another book in there.

*Int: So are you able to tell us what that might be because you mentioned during a book about your business and your experiences. Would that be it?*

JH: That would be it going back to when I was a kid and met Armand and Michaela, and going back possibly to the first television programme that I ever remember watching. I wasn't aware at the time that they would play a part in my life but they kind of have done. We didn't have television in Kenya for years. I mean my parents never had television.

*Int: So when did that come into your life?*

JH: It came into my life in the early 50s when dad used to bring the whole family over to England for leave. He got leave every three years or every two years, and the place where we stayed they had a television and it was fascinating to me.

*Int: When was this?*

JH: In the early 50s. I remember the first programme that I ever watched that was a wildlife programme was David with his Komodo dragons (16) [Zoo Quest for a Dragon], I think.

*Int: Right, yes. Zoo Quest for Dragons (16).*

JH: Zoo Quest (16) and that was what, '55, '56?

*Int: No, that would have been more like '58 I think because '56 he did [Zoo Quest] Guyana (17) that was his first one, and then dragon was next. So it might have been '57, '58, that sort of period.*

JH: All right. I think there was another one before that.

*Int: It was Guyana.*

JH: Was it?

*Int: That was the first one he did.*

JH: Okay, and Armand and Michaela Denis. They were airing On Safari (18) and I watched those avidly because they'd been made in Kenya, a lot of them. So I got hooked on that.

*Int: And what about Hans Hass?*

JH: Hans and Lotte Hass.

*Int: Did they ever go to Kenya?*

JH: I don't ever remember them going to Kenya, they did a lot in the Red Sea.

*Int: They did, yes.*

JH: I have his books, Journey under the Red Sea (19) or whatever. That could possibly have been why I wanted to start diving in the back of my subconscious somewhere. But I used to watch Hans and Lotte Hass, yes. I used to like that very much. I didn't go for the studio based ones. Let's bring this poor little animal into the studio and put him under lights. I didn't like that, the old Look (20) and programmes of that sort. I didn't enjoy that at all with captive animals, I wanted something for real and for free.



*Int: That's why Armand and Michaela Denis were so exciting.*

JH: Yes, I suppose it was.

*Int: Because a lot of it might have been shot out of the back of the hotel but it always seemed so real.*

JH: Well, it did. A real con man, Armand, he never filmed at all. He had an empty camera and he was winding away like this and look what I see through it. It was Des [Bartlett] filming everything. Armand actually shot two minutes of film in his entire life, only two minutes, and that was a bird's nest on a veranda, that's all he ever did. Des did all the rest of it and it was made to look as if Armand was actually doing the filming which he wasn't.

But I remember the hunt for Gertie, the Search for Gertie (21), the rhino in Amboseli with a very, very long horn and I saw that programme. When I was still quite small, quite young, we went to Amboseli and I got charged by Gertie. I recently looked at an old copy of that film and remember being charged by that, she was a bad tempered rhino. But Des has made her famous.

## **8. Value of wildlife filmmaking to African economies**

*Int: I think there's a question here that I need to ask and I haven't done it yet. Can I ask about the government of Kenya and whether they have appreciated the work you've done? Have they said anything?*

JH: It's not what they say. The level of co-operation has certainly gone up. I think only a very few realise the value of documentary films to the country as a country. I mean whether it's Big Cat Diary (9) or whether it's an IMAX film, it doesn't really matter what it is. It's publicity for the country, it's free publicity, and they do see the value of that. Kenyan Wildlife Service once did a survey with a whole bunch of tourists and said, "What made you come to Kenya? Why did you choose Kenya?" And they said, "We saw a wildlife film on TV." 75% said they saw a wildlife film on TV. So I think they do realise the benefit of what I do and I think they do understand. I've never come unstuck and had a crew put in jail, nothing major has upset them and embarrassed them. I think they do understand now that after 20 years I do know what I'm doing, and I'm not going to let my crews get into any trouble and I'm not going to let them film anything that's going to embarrass the country. Sometimes people say, "We want to film this angle of whatever —." And I say, "No, sorry, not with me."

*Int: That's good.*

JH: They say, "But we have to do this." And I say, "No you don't." "But we want to do this —." And I say "No. A, there's no point and, B, it's my name on the licence and if you don't listen to me and do what I say I'm going to pull the licence, so just don't do it." So I've not had any unpleasant instances that are going to get me into trouble with authority. Also in Kenya there's a great reverence for age and all the government officials are far younger than I am. In fact, I used to be working in government myself in the 60s, the late 60s I worked in government, before many of these officials were even born. So if they start getting difficult I can gently throw my weight around and they tend to say, oh oh, yes we remember, yes, all right momma. They sort of say, "Okay, you win that one, yes, you're right."



But I do have to be a little bit determined sometimes because it's very, very frustrating with their attitude to red tape and they're very bureaucratic. I blame the Brits for doing this, it's the British government and the colonials left behind bureaucracy and red tape and it's breeding. It's not going away, it's getting worse, and you're dealing with a government that is not known for making decisions. I get irritated because I want a decision and I want something now, I don't want to come back next week I want it now. I usually get it now but it's sometimes hard, it's sometimes quite difficult.

## **9. Film Collection and wildlife filmmaking history**

*Int: There's one other thing that I want to ask you because famously you've got a collection in your house of almost every wildlife film that's ever been made on video.*

JH: Well, fairly large.

*Int: You must have probably seen more wildlife films than any other individual because you've got this collection, and you make sure that you're adding to the collection all the time. Everything that's ever transmitted on TV you make sure you get a copy and you watch I think. I mean first of all I don't know how you find the time but you must have immense knowledge of everything that's been made.*

JH: Well I only started collecting when I started the business really.

*Int: But that's 20 years, that's a long time.*

JH: Okay, that's 20 years.

*Int: You must have hundreds and hundreds of tapes (I think about 12,000 hrs).*

JH: Over the years I've had a series of friends including yourself who have taped stuff off British television for me, and that has all gone into the collection. It's all computerised and numbered and I know where it all is. It's not just sitting on a shelf being watched. I use it as an archive thing for visiting filmmakers. Sometimes somebody will come and say we're making a film on hippos. Now we've seen a film that was made by Alan Root in the 60s and we've seen another one but we don't remember who made it, but we think it might have been the BBC.

*Int: So you said, "Oh, you mean this one?"*

JH: And I say, "Do you mean this one made by Martha [Holmes] or this one made by the Italians or this or this". They say, "Italians, we didn't know there was an Italian hippo film [Hippo Talk, Paneikon Srl (22)]." I say, "Well, this is it." And very often I'm doing their research for them because I've got a copy of the film that they want. If they say, "We're looking for a hippo film." I can give them 10. I can remember, or I can look it up, who made them and when roughly and where it was shown, and this goes for almost any species. I don't just have African wildlife because I'm interested in other stuff. I'm interested in bears and Australian wildlife.



*Int: So actually over the 20 years you've seen quite a lot of changes in the way wildlife films are made?*

JH: Very definitely.

*Int: Good thing, bad thing? How do you feel about that?*

JH: Mixed thing. I'm old fashioned and like the blue chip, old fashioned, Natural World (23) kind of film. But I'm also concerned that the world isn't as perfect as those films make it look. So I'm interested in environmental things, so I like to watch a balance. I don't want to sit down and watch an hour and half of doom and gloom, and somebody telling me that it's all over and we're going to run out of water or we're going to run out of this, and we're going to run out of everything else. I don't want all that, I don't find that entertaining but it's important that people know. I think since I started the major change is the switch to presenter led programmes.

*Int: Except that we always had presenter led programmes but are you talking about the bias towards more screen time per presenter?*

JH: Yes, I think it's all to do with budget.

*Int: Because when we used to film David, David [Attenborough] was actually a very, very small proportion of an entire film. He was there but there was short pieces and there were links to solid, blue chip natural history sections.*

JH: But that's the way it should be.

*Int: But now presenters are more like 70% of the whole show or even more.*

JH: Yes, because there isn't the budget to get the wildlife stuff that they wanted maybe. It annoys me, I don't want to see a presenter doing this [flicks hair] for 70% of a film, I don't want to see that. I want to find out whether they know what they're talking about and what it is. I think what has happened is that there's a lot of new presenters who see this as being an ego trip, and they're on the telly and therefore they think they're wonderful. To me a presenter should be very subtle, should be just linking the shots maybe with a little bit of information but not hogging the screen for themselves.

*Int: Like David always did.*

JH: David is very modest in keeping away. Charlotte is the same, Charlotte Uhlenbroek, I think she's a very, very good presenter. Michaela [Strachan] is the same. Other ones that seem only to want to be facing the camera themselves I think is a sham, and they don't always know what they're talking about. If I'm watching something with a presenter, if it's David, a, I know I'm going to learn something and, b, I know that what he's telling me is true. The same with the other ones that I've mentioned but there are some that talk a lot of hogwash. They obviously don't know what they're talking about and they're bluffing, and they're saying something that is painfully not true and it annoys me. They get such hype.

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*Int: How do you see the industry going over the next few years then? There seems to have been this trend towards cheaper film making, more presenter led.*

JH: I don't know. There's more people making films and yet there's less money. I don't fully understand this.

*Int: Do you think we're going to lose the solid sort of blue chip style of programme?*

JH: I don't think we're going to lose it altogether but I don't think we're going to get as much as we have. I mean in the last, what, year we've lost Wildlife on One (24), it's gone. We've lost The Really Wild Show (25), it's gone.

### **10. The future for wildlife filmmaking**

*Int: So how do you see in sort of 10 years time, any idea?*

JH: In 10 years time, technology is going to answer part of that. People aren't going to be sitting watching television the way they do now, are they? They're going to be picking things up off their computer.

*Int: I would think.*

JH: I would say.

*Int: Hopefully the films will be a little bit more interactive.*

JH: Well, I'm not a technological expert but it seems to me that technology is changing things as well as budget and what have you. I don't think you're ever going to get over the great divide which is the Atlantic. I don't think you're ever going to get the Americans and the British making the same kind of programmes.

*Int: No, well there's always been a big cultural divide there, the way films are edited and written.*

JH: The way they dumb them down that will continue, I suppose. I would like to hope that there are still wonderful blue chip films being made but I don't think there will be nearly as many because they take money. They take huge money. Your [Mark] Deeble and [Victoria] Stones are not going to make a film in less than a three year period, sometimes more but normally three years. Most people now are trying to make a 50 minute film in six days, it's nonsense.

*Int: Yes, that's right. I mean it's more difficult now to get behaviour that's never been seen before and yet they give themselves less time, so it's just impossible. You can't go and make an hour film that's innovatory in six days.*

JH: But an awful lot of people try and do it. I think they're over- using the archive as well. They go back and back and back and you think, hang on, I've seen this shot before. I've seen this shot many times before. One is Mike's lion, Mike Richards' lion. You know the one with the big mane. I mean he's a tame lion, not many people know that. But he seems to come up in every lion film that's been made in the last four years and it's the same shot. Sometimes they flip it but it's the same shot and I think, no, not that lion again. Surely they could have got a proper one, a real one.

*Int: I mean the big danger is that the filmmakers, the camera people, whether they be girls or boys, they're going to lose their skills. Time was when natural history camera people were naturalists and they were used to spending months in the field.*

JH: Well I think the good ones still are.

### **11. Advice to potential wildlife filmmakers**

*Int: What do you tell somebody who wants to get into the industry now, somebody who wants to be a camera person? There's so little chance of success. What do you say to them?*

JH: Well very few people are using film, tape is getting out of fashion now.

*Int: I mean everybody wants to go and watch animals in the wild, not just spend six days filming a presenter. So how do you or what do you say to somebody who has this fantasy in their mind about making wildlife films? They want to get into the business, what do you say?*

JH: I don't know. Maybe there's other more sneaky ways of getting into the business without going that way. I think you've got to be a lot more flexible, go back to the days when everybody does everything maybe. I don't know about that. But people like Hugh [Maynard], he's gone from film to video and is finding it really quite hard. I don't know what the answer is, I don't know but I'd like to see them still working and still finding some wonderful stuff because filmmakers often see behaviour that scientists don't. In the old days filmmakers used to spend more time in the field than the scientists themselves.

*Int: That's right. A lot of discoveries have been made through the camera.*

JH: Yes, a lot and they're still doing it. The future, I don't know. I think that the viewing public are still interested in watching wildlife but whether they are going to get what they want I don't know.

*Int: Yes, because there's a good audience out of there for real wildlife. The audience out there is increasingly fed up with the style of presenting reality on TV, I think.*

JH: It's not just the audience, yes, I'm fed up with it.





*Int: Everyone I speak to says the same thing.*

JH: I don't want to watch two people living up a tree and pretending to be an ape for a month or whatever it was, lasted two days I think. That is nonsense to me. But where it's going to go, I don't think any of us can tell. I think it'll still be there, the business isn't going to grind to a halt. I think it'll change and I think technology will have a lot to do with it. But I hope that the personalities and the characters and the people with passion, I hope that they will still be there.

*Int: Yes. I like to think that people with real passion will always win through.*

JH: That's what I'd like to think.

*Int: Because they'll find a way.*

JH: Yes, that's the way I see it.

*Int: Because I think there are a lot of people who think they want to get into the business but they don't really know what it takes.*

JH: No, they don't.

*Int: Because you've got to have passion, you've got to be grimly determined to get through I think.*

JH: Yes, I think you have.

*Int: The school of hard knocks.*

JH: Absolutely. Especially if you're a filmmaker. I'm not a filmmaker yet.

## **12. Films Jean would like to make**

*Int: You say yet. Actually you have mentioned to me over the years that there are films that you'd like to make. I mean you're actually filming your tortoise right now who's laid eggs.*

JH: With help, yes. Nobody's ever filmed that. There is no footage of an African leopard tortoise giving birth at length.

*Int: You're onto it. You've got the egg laying and now you've just got to get the hatching.*

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JH: Well my old girl has done five nests now, 74 eggs in my rose bed.

*Int: There you go.*

JH: I'm going to film them when they hatch, march of the tortoises, absolutely. Penguins finished, last year's story. No, tortoises is next. Yes, I've filmed all that and I will hopefully get them hatching, and I will make a story of it.

*Int: That would be great.*

JH: Which would be nice. If they hatch I'll probably end up giving them to a national park or something but I can't have 74 tortoises in my little half acre but we'll see. No, really what I would like to do is make a **fixer** film.

*Int: Make a?*

JH: A **fixer** film.

*Int: A fixer film, right.*

JH: There has to be a **fixer** film and I tried. Some years ago I was asked to do a **fixer** workshop at Wildscreen and I didn't see myself talking for three hours about, gosh, I'm great and Viewfinders is wonderful. I can't do that for three hours. So I made little short clips of some of the problems that we've had to deal with, word for word the way they happened, and I ruthlessly stole footage from many people making all kind of footage, to prove the point that I was trying to make in my talk. I mean it wasn't for broadcast but getting four stuffed lions into the Serengeti for Brian Leith, life-size. I mean that was quite funny, quite a challenge and it made good footage and people laughed a lot, Ultimate Guide to Big Cats (26), you can see it in there.

Other phone calls and things we overrode the soundtrack. We had both ends of a telephone conversation and we actually relived everything that ever actually happened word for word, with leopard cubs coming through customs and the hippos don't like the colour of the boat and we've got to paint it another colour, and those kind of things. Everybody loved it, everybody thought it was very funny, and a lot of people agreed that it would make a good film. There's room out there for a **fixer** film. I think the viewing public are fascinated by what goes on behind the scenes.

*Int: They are.*

JH: The making of films always go down well and Planet Earth (27) are putting one at the end of each programme, aren't they, how we did it which I've been saying for 20 years the public want to know.

*Int: So have you talked to anyone about this idea?*

JH: Well I did at the time which was, I think, '98 and everyone said, "Oh gee, yes, that's a wonderful idea, oh yes. But the bottom line was we can't find a slot for it, it doesn't fit with this or that or that."

*Int: It would now surely?*

JH: Well now I think it might, we'll see, but that's a long time ago now. Instead of me doing it myself people are now saying, "Well, who are we going to get to play you - Meryl Streep maybe?" Am I that old? Do I really want this? So I don't know whether we'll ever do it but I would like to see one made, I really would, yes.

*Int: Well, let's hope that happens, I think it would be very entertaining.*

JH: Yes, I think it could be quite amusing, could run for years as a series.

JH: I hope it gets made.

*Int: Because nobody really knows behind the scenes what all these things that you get up to and if you can evolve some of the funny anecdotes.*

JH: Well, they'll come in the book as well.

*Int: Like getting stuffed lions into Kenya it would be great.*

JH: Yes, I hope it'll happen.

*Int: I hope it will happen too, I really do.*

JH: I think it has to otherwise I haven't played my part. I've got to do that before I hang up my airport pass.

*Int: Not yet please, not yet. Jean, it's been lovely talking to you again, I've really enjoyed it. Thank you so much.*

JH: Good to see you too.

*Int: So it's just on the tail end. Jean, can you give your full name, nationality, current job title and today's date.*

JH: 25 October. Right, I'm Jean Hartley from Viewfinders in Nairobi. Apparently I'm the first legitimate **fixer**, wildlife filmmaking **fixer**. I'm a Kenyan citizen, British origin, and it's 25 October 2006.



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*Int: Many thanks. Thank you very much indeed. There's a lot of interesting anecdotes and things there. The idea is that what happens is next the whole interview gets transcribed into written text and then the cross references are found, ie., the films, people that you've mentioned.*

JH: I didn't mention too many things.

*Int: Anyway, you mentioned a few, it doesn't really matter.*

**END**

## Glossary

**Fixer:** An individual or organisation that arranges in advance legal and other matters ready for filming to take place within a country or area.

**Emmy:** Annual awards presented by the Academy of Arts and Sciences.

**Carnet:** An official pass or permit, especially one for crossing international boundaries. Takes the form of an official list of all camera or other equipment.

**Matte box:** A kind of lens hood to help shield the lens from unwanted light spillage.

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