

HP0056 Betty Bachelor - Transcript.

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SIDE 1, TAPE 1

Sid Cole: Could we talk about you, you've been at Glebelands for 11 years.

Betty Bachelor: Yes, I had 3 years in a cottage and I've been up here 10 years last August, August 16th.

Sid Cole: When were you born and where.

Betty Bachelor: I was born the Ronda, 1908.

Sid Cole: Same year as me. When did you come to London?

Betty Bachelor: I came to London November 11, 1908, and I met Bert in Hyde Park in August 1929.

Sid Cole: Was that at a demonstration?

Betty Bachelor: He was sitting there reading the Daily Worker, I was waiting for my brother to turn up and he didn't and Bert came to speak to me and asked me to go to Lyon's Corner House and have tea with him which I did. We met a week later and we got married 3 weeks later.

Sid Cole: You didn't have anything to do with the film business although Bert was in then?

Betty Bachelor: No, I was working in a doctor's house in North London, New Southgate.

Sid Cole: And where was Bert at that time?

Betty Bachelor: He was working for the Matesco Iron Bridge, Southall, when I met him. He was a trainee electrician.

Sid Cole: When did he go into films.

Betty Bachelor: He went into films in 1939 and he worked for Alexander Korda, Denham Studios, and he was an electrician then.

Sid Cole: He had a lot to do with the running of the union at Denham.

Betty Bachelor: He was a convenor there. He became a convenor about three years later, he worked on a lot of productions but when he went to work for Alexander Korda, as they made a film, so there was no payment between films.

Sid Cole: You mean at the end of each film you were laid off.

Betty Bachelor: Bert altered that, he got the men together and they decided they would not have this condition, and he got them to pay the men between films.

Sid Cole: That was in the war years, the early war years.

Betty Bachelor: Yes, I remember that.

Sid Cole: Bert used to work very hard at his convenor job. That must have affected you.

Betty Bachelor: It affected me an awful lot. I had to take on the bringing up of the children on my own and putting up with very late hours for Bert, getting very late meals, but of course I became a socialist the same as he was so I used to be there to look after him.

Sid Cole: How many children did you have?

Betty Bachelor: Six. I had Michael in 1930, Su was born in 1932 and Peter was born in 1934, then I went 8 years and had David, he was born on March 7th in Wales, then I had Helen in Hillingdon Hospital and then I had Robert and he was born in Hillingdon Hospital.

Sid Cole: The amazing thing you were telling me is that so many of them now have connections with the film business.

Betty Bachelor: Michael was film editor at Pinewood and he worked on No Hiding Place and Carry on Films for Gerald Thomas, then he met his ex-wife Joyce and he went to work for different little firms because the film became very dodgy but then he went to work for Rediffusion, that was about 1952 or 53 and he worked for Commander Everitt and then he was approached by, I can't remember his name but this person asked him if he'd work for ITN. And he's worked for ITN ever since and he was general manager.

Sid Cole: Is he still there?

Betty Bachelor: Yes, and he's now executive general manager.

Sid Cole: What about the others?

Betty Bachelor: Peter is engineer for the electricity board, he

has no connection with films at all. My daughter Susannah was two years older than Peter she is a teacher at Northampton. Then there is Helen, she started at Rediffusion when she was 18 and then Rediffusion split up, some went to Thames and she went to London Weekend, she went as a researcher, and then she became head of the research department two years later on.

She's been on two managerial courses and she doesn't know the outcome yet. David is sound recordist and he's gone freelance. He worked for ATV, no Anglia, and then he went freelance. Robert, he worked for the Observer, he started his trade for the Observer as a cameraman. He was assistant cameraman. And then he heard of an opening at London Weekend and went for an interview and got a job as a cameraman. He worked himself from 5th cameraman to the first. But then he went freelance. But he was cameraman on the two royal weddings. He's still working freelance.

Sid Cole: Tell me about Bert. He moved on from Denham.

Betty Bachelor: Yes, he was made head electrician or engineer as they called it, but they decided he wasn't doing enough work at Denham so they had arbitration with Tom O' Brien and one man from Denham Studios, Bert Hinds and they give evidence that he wasn't doing enough time for Denham Studios so they would dispense with his services, and he was put in line for Studios at Shepherd's Bush, then the ETU asked him if he would stand as national officer which he did and he got the job.

Sid Cole: Can you remember any of the dates.

Betty Bachelor: No. They should have been in those notes with Helen. He became national officer, and he got more nominations than has ever been recorded.

Sid Cole: Because those officers are elected.

Betty Bachelor: Yes. He was there 22 years and retired. He was approached by Thames Television to help out as labour relations.

And EMI took over and he was asked to resign. And that was the end. Then we met Sidney Bernstein and he asked us if we'd like a cottage in Glebelands. So that's how we came to be here.

Sid Cole: Have you any special memories of those early years at Denham?

Betty Bachelor: I know that he worked with Robert Donat and Lawrence Olivier and Valerie Hobson, there's a picture there where they did Our Film and Valerie Hobson supported it, and the picture is of them presenting a cheque to the Soviet representative of the Red Cross and I think you'll see Arthur

Rank in the picture. He was asked if he'd go to Russia on a delegation, Jimmy Edwards, Frank Chapple, George Elvin.

Sid Cole: And I think Tom O'Brien. Did you ever meet Tom?

Betty Bachelor: No, he used to send me chocolates, I didn't have a lot to do with them, because I wanted to look after the children. To see they were well educated, because I left school when I was 13 and I wanted them to have something I didn't have.

Sid Cole: And you got good education for all of them.

Betty Bachelor: Yes, I did. We went to East Germany.

Sid Cole: Through the union?

Betty Bachelor: Yes. And we went when he retired. Also we went to Bulgaria quite a lot.

Sid Cole: To one of those seaside resorts?

Betty Bachelor: Yes, we stayed in a little place called Druzbha, which was very nice because we met a lot of people there and we stayed friends.

Sid Cole: Did so many of your children go into film or television because of the association of your father?

Betty Bachelor: Michael did. Michael started his apprenticeship with Ted, he was at Beaconsfield and he was apprenticed there.

Sid Cole: Did he never work with Bert?

Betty Bachelor: The only time was on opposite sides. Michael was for the company and Bert for the trades union.

Sid Cole: Over the negotiating table. Who won?

Betty Bachelor: Bert as usual.

Sid Cole: Bert made a considerable contribution to the development of trade unionism within the industry.

Betty Bachelor: He did. Because when he worked at Denham first of all, conditions were very bad and he did a lot about that.

Sid Cole: I would know a lot about those years because I was there, he organised a joints works committee which was all the unions there.

Betty Bachelor: We had a visitor here a little while back and she said she worked in Denham. And when Bert came onto the platform you could drop a pin because they all wanted to listen to what he said. And he was very considerate and he explained things to them and they liked him very much. I've also met the head of ATV, Lew Grade and he was very fond of Bert and offered him employment, he said he was very considerate and any agreement he made with Lew Grade was always honoured.

Sid Cole: Lew had that reputation that his word was his bible. The problem was if Lew happened to die you didn't have it on paper, but Lew had that reputation.

Betty Bachelor: Sidney Bernstein was very fond of Bert and he said the same thing.

Sid Cole: What do you think kept Bert going so strongly, was it the fact that he was a socialist and Marxist.

Betty Bachelor: He was a socialist. That was the thing which kept him going. And of course in these years they wanted to get rid of all communists, I took his card over and became very involved with our local party.

Sid Cole: Anything else you remember from these years?

Betty Bachelor: No, because as I said my work was with the children, but Helen has developed some of his ways, because she will not stand any nonsense from London Weekend, she goes about and gets things done.

Sid Cole: Does she have any union position?

Betty Bachelor: No, they wanted her to become shop steward, but she got married and said she couldn't take the responsibility.

Sid Cole: Going back to the Denham years, how did he get that job with Korda?

Betty Bachelor: It was because his brother in law was construction manager to Alexander Korda, Frank Gibson, who's died, but his wife lives in Bexhill on Sea, that's how he got the work. And then he went to work for MGM Frank, and then Frank died when he was at MGM.

Sid Cole: Did he have any reminiscences of Korda?

Betty Bachelor: I don't think he was that keen on Korda.

Sid Cole: Do you know why?

Betty Bachelor: Alexander Korda didn't want to change very much, manning wise, and Bert said no we're not having this break between films and no money, this is when Bert started his activities there.

Sid Cole: This was quite a stroke on Bert's part, and this was during the war years too. Did Bert ever talk to you about any industrial action. Was there any strikes or anything?

Betty Bachelor: He had one strike only, I can't remember what it was about it was settled very quickly.

Sid Cole: Did he tell you about his problems at work?

Betty Bachelor: I think the problem was they had so many people putting in such a lot of hours overtime which Bert sorted out, but I can remember the strike because we had a local cameraman down every day, taking pictures of Bert. And they had a thing, a campaign against him because he was doing ETU work and he'd been given a car and they found out we were using the car for weekends and these people had a big campaign against him.

Sid Cole: This was inside the union.

Betty Bachelor: Yes. And Frank Chappel was one of the instigators.

Sid Cole: What happened, did they take the car away.

Betty Bachelor: No, they didn't Bert won as usual.

Sid Cole: I'm surprised about that, I would have thought if they gave him a car as a national officer, they wouldn't mind him using it occasionally.

RF: Did his political activities affect his work, because he was asked to leave.

Betty Bachelor: He was asked by the gentlemen of the press whether he was in the ETU as communist, and Bert's reply was no, he said we have a rule book and we go by the rules, I go by the book.

Sid Cole: Because he had a lot to do with getting the agreement and rules there. Bert life seems to have been a consistent whole both in terms of his work and political opinions.

Betty Bachelor: I think there was a thing in the ETU rulebook, rule 49, I can remember him saying about rule 49, I can get the information on that from Dick Scott who lives at Hayes, there was a big thing about that. I do know that. I know Bert sat up half the night working on the agreement and he was very appreciated at Thames Television and more by NATKE members than ETU members.

Sid Cole: Because it was Tom O ' Brien who was secretary of NATKE and Sir Tom as he became didn't have a very good reputation as someone who looked after his members and I think ETU shop stewards and ACTT shop stewards did more for NATKE members than Tom did himself.

Betty Bachelor: Yes Bert helped a lot of NATKE members in Thames Television, and while he worked at Thames he was a very happy man, he loved working there. They gave him a very good retirement which is more than the ETU did, and unfortunately I couldn't go because I was in hospital at the time.

Sid Cole: Your feelings about ACT. You thought Bert did more than not only O' Brien but George Elvin.

Betty Bachelor: George Elvin and Bert were at very cross purposes, they didn't get on at all, because George Elvin was not a very good worker for ACTT, you can take it from me. Bert did all the agreements and they all relied on Bert doing these agreements. And the reason he was taken on at Thames is because

he could sort the agreements out, he was good at looking at them and solving them.

Sid Cole: These were the TV agreements, not the film agreements so much.

Betty Bachelor: And he organised a sports association where the members could go fishing down on the river. Michael might be able to tell you more. Michael says he meets now people who knew Bert and they all speak highly of him.

Sid Cole: He was an important actual contact for ordinary girls and boys who worked in the industry and looked after them. He was renowned for that.

Betty Bachelor: If you want to know why he got the sack from Matesco as an electrician, because he was found reading the Daily Worker, this was 1929, and he opened a little radio and television shop at Hayes Ends.

Sid Cole: After that.

Betty Bachelor: very sympathetic

RF: Do you know?

Betty Bachelor: of agreements, Yes. Which didn't pay very well because he was to people who couldn't pay.

why he was at odds with George Elvin.

I don't know, but they couldn't agree on a lot

Sid Cole: Thank you Betty, it's been very interesting and very nice to talk to you.

