Erica Masters (production manager and assistant director) b.1917

by admin — last modified Jul 29, 2008 05:36 PM

BIOGRAPHY: Erica Masters was born in Guatemala in 1917, and educated variously in Jamaica, France and Germany. Originally she hoped to be a dancer and actress, and she enrolled in the Max Reinhardt school in Vienna, but decided not to attend in the light of the Anschluss. Coming to England she studied film under William Hunter at Dartington College in Devon, before going into documentary production. She worked for Paul Rotha for a brief period, and later for Greenpark and various other documentary producers during the late 1940s. In 1953, Masters was employed by Harry Kratz to work on The Titfield Thunderbolt (1953) at Ealing Studios. She worked on the surprise success Genevieve (1953) with Henry Cornelius, and was involved in all of Cornelius's later films, including I Am A Camera (1955), and Next To No Time (1959). Masters worked on a variety of film and television productions in the 1950s, including the Robin Hood (1955) series with Richard Greene, The Man Who Never Was (1956), with Clifton Webb, and Bonjour Tristesse (1958) for Otto Preminger. Later in her career she worked with Ronnie Spencer, producing documentary films at Shepperton under the title 'Littleton Park Film Productions'. SUMMARY: In this interview, conducted in 1995, Erica masters discusses her career with Sydney Samuelson. She gives an interesting account of her early years, and of her experience travelling to Vienna. She discusses the atmosphere at Ealing Studios during the 1950s in some detail, observing its peculiarly rigid class structure. Masters gives detailed accounts of the production of both Genevieve and Bonjour Tristesse. She remembers particularly the economic difficulties of Genevieve and it's precarious position as an independent production at Pinewood. She discusses many of the difficulties of Anglo-French co-production she experienced while working on Bonjour Tristesse. Masters also touches on the problems of being a woman in control of a largely male dominated crew. Master's was unlucky enough to be one of the foreign nationals stranded in Kuwait when it was invaded by Iraq in 1990. The final part of this interview is devoted to her detailed account of this experience. (Lawrence Napper, BCHRP)

BECTU History Project - Interview No. 362

Transcription Date: 2002-08-16
Interview Date: 1995-08-02

Interviewer: Sydney Samuelson
Interviewee: Erica Masters

Tape 1, Side 1

Sydney Samuelson: Well we're sitting here on the 2nd August 1995. We're in the meeting room of the British Film Commission, at 70, Baker Street in London, and the interviewee is no less than Miss Erica Masters, a legendary production person in our industry, sadly not living in this country any longer. I have the pleasure of doing the interview, my name is Sydney Samuelson and I am the British Film Commissioner. And my first question is, if I remember correctly, you have an exotic birthplace, am I right or have I got that...?

Erica Masters: Absolutely right, I was born in Guatemala. In fact I am a Guatemalan-Hamburger, because at some point in my childhood I went to school in Hamburg. So yes indeed, you are quite right, Guatemala is my birthplace and my suckle mother was an Aztec Indian. I'm very proud of that!

Sydney Samuelson: I'm sorry, your what mother?

Erica Masters: My suckle mother.

Sydney Samuelson: Your suckle mother, my goodness! And why were you born in Guatemala?

Erica Masters: Because my parents lived there!

Sydney Samuelson: I see.

Erica Masters: Grandfather was in business there and I guess I was conceived there and I was born there.

Sydney Samuelson: And what nationality were your parents?

Erica Masters: My father was from Lithuania and I think my mother was a mixture of German or Norwegian or something. She died when I was very small.

Sydney Samuelson: And at what age did you find yourself back in Europe?

Erica Masters: I left Guatemala when I was four years old because there were a lot of revolutions going on and my father sent me and the governor's son out of the country in a plane so that we should be saved from the opposing parties. And I guess revolutions have gone on ever since, so I have been back to Guatemala to see it and to take my son, Tony there, but I didn't live there.

Sydney Samuelson: And where did you come to from Guatemala?

Erica Masters: I came for a time to Hamburg and then I was put into a sort of institute for girls in Switzerland, where I spent about ten years going to school and living there.

Sydney Samuelson: And from school time in Switzerland you then went back to Hamburg?

Erica Masters: Yes for a time and I also went to school in Jamaica - that was an interesting experiment. Because when I got to the school there I had to share a dormitory with a lot of little black girls and I said to the headmistress, "Do you think I could sleep in the balcony because I don't like the smell of the black girls." And she said to me, "Let me tell you something, they don't like your smell either!" Which I thought was fair enough, but she was good enough to put me on the balcony.

Sydney Samuelson: When we talk about you were born in Guatemala, am I allowed to ask when that was?

Erica Masters: Well you are allowed to ask! [Chuckles]

Sydney Samuelson: You don't have to answer if it would - but I know you well enough I think...

Erica Masters: Well I was born in 1917, how about that!

Sydney Samuelson: And so you left there in the early twenties?

Erica Masters: Yes.

Sydney Samuelson: And you eventually finished up as a young woman in Hamburg, is that right?

Erica Masters: No, I finished up all over the place really, I'm an internationalist. You know, I did France, in Belgium, in - yeah, all over the place...not necessarily in Hamburg

Sydney Samuelson: Well then here's the question, what is your mother tongue, in your own mind?

Erica Masters: Well my first mother tongue was Spanish, but I have forgotten most of it. And then my second mother tongue I guess was German, even Switzer-Deutch German, which was a big joke because they couldn't understand me and I couldn't understand them! And then, very soon after, English. I mean, really English is my thinking language.

Sydney Samuelson: Right, when you count mentally, do you count in English?

Erica Masters: Oh yes!

Sydney Samuelson: Right! That is supposed to be the test!

Erica Masters: Oh is it?

Sydney Samuelson: ...as to what is the language you are most comfortable with is how do you count when you are adding up in your mind.

Erica Masters: Well I count in English.

Sydney Samuelson: Fine. So how did you come to learn English then, when did that happen?

Erica Masters: I guess I learned English when I went to Jamaica, I went to school in Jamaica.

Sydney Samuelson: At what age approximately?

Erica Masters: I must have been about fifteen.

Sydney Samuelson: Right.

Erica Masters: And I guess I had learned English at school, in the various schools I had learnt English, for sure. But it really settled down in Jamaica, but I never got the Jamaican accent, I am pleased to say.

Sydney Samuelson: Now we are in Jamaica and you are in your late teens when you left there?

Erica Masters: Yes.

Sydney Samuelson: What happened then?

Erica Masters: After Jamaica I went back to Hamburg and I wanted to be a dancer, and I went to Hamburg. And the family situation was very bad, my father had married again, my mother had died when I was five years old, and I had the proverbial stepmother, who hated my guts! She was jealous of me, she didn't want me in the house, so it was a very difficult childhood and I hated her, without a shadow of a doubt! And she had another child, my half-sister, but we didn't really have very much to do with each other because she simply wouldn't stand me around. So I then decided I wanted to be a dancer and my father put me into a room and I got a little training as a secretary and I did this. But every evening for about four hours I would go and study dancing with a very fine, now ninety-four years old, German-Jewish dancer called Erica Millie - who I'm going to visit shortly, that's another story later on - and I studied dancing. But then there came a certain point at which I didn't want to be a dancer, because I could see there was nothing really in it, I wanted to be an actress. And of course I never had any money, so where would I learn to be an actress? There was only one place, the Max Reinhardt School in Vienna.

So I hitchhiked to Vienna - this of course was now all in the Nazi period, but I was protected because, (a) I didn't look Jewish, and (b) because I had a Guatemalan passport. So I hitchhiked to Austria and went to the YWCA and stayed there, and I had an audition and they said, "Yes, you are talented, we're going to give you a scholarship." And it happened to be the weekend, and there was a girl there at the YWCA and she said to me, "Would you like to see something of the countryside?" And I said, "Yeah, I'd love that." So she said, "Well, we'll get on a train and I'll show you." We got on the train, we then walked for a little while and we came to the rise of a hill and as I looked down there were about a hundred-thousand 'Hitler Youths', Austrian 'Hitler Youths', and one bloke saying, "Any day now, the great thing is going to happen! Hitler is going to come and we're going to be happy ever after!" So I saw this and I thought to myself, "Christ, I've got to get out of here!" So I said to the girl, "Look, I'm terribly sorry but I've got a terrible headache." And she said, "Isn't this wonderful?" "Yes indeed," I said, "it is wonderful, but I must

go home." So she said, "Well you know how." Off I went! I went back, I packed my little bag and I got straight the hell out of there! Forgot about the scholarship and said to myself - and sure enough, three or four days later, Hitler marched into Austria. So then I got myself to England and...

Sydney Samuelson: Well let me interrupt you there...

Erica Masters: Yeah?

Sydney Samuelson: You mentioned that you didn't look Jewish and therefore you could travel and get the passport you needed. And yet with this cosmopolitan upbringing, all over the place, and your mother dies when you were only five years old, and you father remarried - but you still always felt that you were Jewish?

Erica Masters: Yes and no. There was very little contact I had with Jewish people, yes I had some family, but they weren't orthodox. I really felt - yes and no - I think, yes, I did feel Jewish but I didn't feel Jewish, except at Passover time, you know!

Sydney Samuelson: Right, but you felt enough to be nervous when you saw those Hitler youths?

Erica Masters: Oh yes, oh yes. Because all my friends - you see at a certain point, and this comes into the story later - at a certain point I joined a German-Jewish youth movement called 'Camaraden' - Comrades. And they had a great influence on me because suddenly I was with my peers and they opened my horizon and I became a socialist of course - I was very ignorant before. And they said, "What books are you reading? You must read Pushkin, you must read Dostoyevsky, you must do all these kind of things," and they were a wonderful influence on me. And later on I think - perhaps I can jump a little - I worked at Ealing studios and having finished Titfield Thunderbolt, Vivienne (I can't remember her second name) said to me, "You must go and see a very nice man who is doing a film called Genevieve. His name is Henry Cornelius and here's his 'phone number and you must make a date," which I did. As I opened the door he looked at me, and he started to laugh! And [chuckles] I felt a bit embarrassed, I said, "Why are you laughing?" He said, "I can see a comrade a mile away!" Because he had been one and, of course, I got the job! Back to wanting to become an actress and therefore I then thought, well, what does an actress do? She does what the producer tells her. What has the producer got? He's only got the stage. It has got to be films! I mean, really, the sky's the limit, it's got to be films, and from that moment onwards I did everything I could to make films.

Sydney Samuelson: Before we get specifically onto your film career, I just want to, because I think it's very important for it to be known, how it came about. Now you arrived as, in effect, a refugee. You were already a refugee because you were getting out of - which country? In other words, what passport were you holding then?

Erica Masters: Well I was always holding a Guatemalan passport.

Sydney Samuelson: Right, so that you had enough 'saichel' - common sense - to realise that the Guatemalan passport may not have been enough and the thing to do was to get out of what was

obviously coming, and that you did. Why did you pick Britain? Why didn't you say France would seem to be a good place to go?

Erica Masters: I had a great love affair with books about English boarding schools, I don't know why! It just, first of all, although I'd been at a boarding school in Jamaica, I wasn't that impressed by it, but somehow I felt that I wanted to further my education and I felt this sort of strong feeling for England, I had to go there. And I arrived in England with literally about three pounds in my pocket, and I went to the Jewish Committee and I said, "I want to be a dancer." They said, "Oh yeah?" [Chuckles] "Nothing good doing," you know, "you've got to be a secretary." And at one point in fact, there was a small chance that I might have been sent up to the school where Prince Philip was.

Sydney Samuelson: Gordonstoun?

Erica Masters: Gordonstoun, but then they considered that it was too far away, so that didn't materialise. But I lived in Golder's Green, in a room for a pound, or thirty shillings. And they gave me a little bit of money and I used to eat at Lyons for twenty-five pence, you know, soup or spaghetti and so on. And I didn't want to be a secretary, I just didn't want to be... And then a very strange thing happened, a girl I knew said to me, "You know, there is a friend of mine and she works at a nature cure home and she is looking for an assistant, a masseuse. Why don't you go and see her? She lives in a beautiful place and maybe it might work out." So I made a date with this girl and I arrived in this very - near somewhere in Surrey, near Kingswood. Kingswood, yes. And I arrived at this place and I hadn't met her, and the matron met me and she said, "Oh that's great, I've just got time, you can give me a trial massage." And I'd never done a massage in my life but having been a dancer I knew all about the body! [chuckles] And so she said, "And there is Ellen," so I met this girl I was supposed to, and we went in, she said, "Give her a white overall," and I went into that room with her and we both burst out laughing, hysterically laughing!

And anyway, so she gave me this white overall and I went and I gave this lady matron a massage and after half-an-hour she said, "This is the best massage I've ever had in my life, you've got the job!" So I said, "Thank you very much," and I went back to Ellen and again, hysterical laughter took place and I said, "Well now you teach me," which she did very well. And there I worked and I got two pounds a week plus tips - and they were very important! The only trouble was, they were always giving us chocolate, you see! And I just wanted the money, to save up the money and not spend a penny, to go to Dartington Hall and take a training in filmmaking - that was going to cost forty pounds. So I worked there for a year, I put all the money aside, didn't spend anything, and then finally got to Dartington, where I made, photographed, cut, a film called The Upland Farm and the Lowland Farm. And the unit was run by a very nice man called William Hunter who unfortunately died during the war, not from any war wounds, simply because of some small operation. And people like Tom Stobart were there, and also the men who to the Galapagos Islands and made films there - Phil Leacock. Not at the same time...and Peter Ibbert[?], yes Peter Ibbert[?] and Tom, the three of us were there in the film unit. I didn't really learn anything, but I decided that films were going to be my future. But I did meet Robert Masters who I later married and...

Sydney Samuelson: Was he there as a student?

Erica Masters: No, no. Robert was taken on as a violinist to form a quartet.

Sydney Samuelson: I think I'm going to get onto your direct start in the film industry, but I want to ask one question - was your English fluent when you arrived in England?

Erica Masters: Oh yes, absolutely.

Sydney Samuelson: And that was, you think, through being in Jamaica?

Erica Masters: Yes, yes.

Sydney Samuelson: Right, now what happened between Dartingdon Hall, ambitions to be a dancer, making a film but learning nothing and actually getting your first start in a film company? I think you had another job in between, didn't you?

Erica Masters: Yes.

Sydney Samuelson: Was in the civil service?

Erica Masters: No, it was working for the OSS at the Victoria & Albert Museum, doing and checking microphotography.

Sydney Samuelson: And when was this, what date?

Erica Masters: This was at the beginning of the war.

Sydney Samuelson: Right.

Erica Masters: But all the time I kept writing letters to everybody saying, you know, please take me on. And I did - the great decision was, between 16mm and 35mm. Because I had offers from some companies, including the - I can't remember - for 16mm and I didn't want to do that, I felt that 16mm was substandard, it had to be 35mm. So I finally finished up with Paul Rotha, and that was a very unhappy time. And then I went on to Greenpark and that was a much happier time. With Paul Rotha I was in the cutting room and I had some very peculiar people above me, who shall be nameless. And then at Greenpark I was on production.

Sydney Samuelson: Who were the characters at Greenpark in those days?

Erica Masters: Er, Humphrey Swingler, Ralph Caine[?] and Laurie Lee, and...

Sydney Samuelson: These were great documentary names.

Erica Masters: Yeah, absolutely.

Sydney Samuelson: Yes.

Erica Masters: And it was a very - I mean the difference between Paul Rotha and Greenpark was just wonderful, you know, to be with them.

Sydney Samuelson: Are we just - I don't want to go into it, but are we saying that the people who shall be nameless, their behaviour on a personal level was what upset you or was it their...?

Erica Masters: Yes on a personal level but also particularly, for instance - all right, the man is dead and one shouldn't speak ill of them - but I remember Paul Rotha had some very outstanding and very talented young directors and writers working for him, and they'd have a script and he'd say, "You've spelt that wrong! You didn't make a comma there" and so on. Which is unbelievable but that's the way he operated.

Sydney Samuelson: You mean unbelievable because it didn't matter or the way he kind of humiliated younger people?

Erica Masters: Well I mean, the way he did it. Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

Sydney Samuelson: OK, so we're back at Greenpark, you're happy there. Are you getting anywhere?

Erica Masters: Well I'm learning about documentary films, yes, but I'm really - I really want to get into features, and I write more and more letters. And I kept writing to Ealing and saying, "Please, please give me a job, you are my spiritual home, I will do anything to work for you." And then I got a call. I think I was out of work at that particular moment, I'd put my name on the list, and I got a call, would I come down for four days. And that was with Harry Kratz.

Sydney Samuelson: Now before we go into that four days which of course led to so much...

Erica Masters: Yeah.

Sydney Samuelson: I want to ask you if you were already in ACT at that time?

Erica Masters: Yes I was in ACT at that time but if you were to ask me how did I get in, the answer would be, with great difficulty. It was during the time when I was doing microphotography and checking and I saw that very nice organiser, whose name I can't remember but all of you will remember [pause] anyway...

Sydney Samuelson: None of us can remember!

Erica Masters: None of you can.

Gloria Sachs: Not Percy Bond was it?

Erica Masters: No, no, no.

Manny Yospa: Bert Craig?

Erica Masters: Bert Craig!

Sydney Samuelson: Oh yes.

Erica Masters: And I went to see him and I said, "Look, here is a unit, and I really think they ought to all come under the ACT." [Chuckles] And he said, "Yeah that's a good idea, go and see them." So I got him to see the unit, about ten people and I had said to them, "Look, this is a good thing, if we all get into the ACT it will - you know - it will broaden your work horizon." And they agreed, and so he came down and suddenly the whole lot of us were in the ACT!

Sydney Samuelson: So that was, as far as you were concerned, a means to an end?

Erica Masters: Yes.

Sydney Samuelson: And would you remember how much the subs were at that time? Would anybody say, "I don't need to be the ACT, whatever that is, and furthermore I have to pay the money each week or month."

Erica Masters: No...

Sydney Samuelson: Was it so small that it would not make any difference?

Erica Masters: No, but you see it was a tremendous protection. I mean, I got very little money and suddenly there was Bessie Bond and she said, "My God, you ought to have more money, we ought to get your salary up to twelve pounds a week, and we will do so!" [Chuckles] And suddenly I was given twelve pounds a week and I was - and I always felt there was tremendous protection from the union to me and er, well, the subscription I don't think was very much. I was very grateful to belong, I can tell you, because suddenly I was on registers for employment and so on.

Sydney Samuelson: So you now have four days work for a Mr Kratz at Ealing Studios.

Erica Masters: Yes, Ealing Studios.

Sydney Samuelson: What was it the tail end of a movie or...?

Erica Masters: No, it was really in the office. I was doing - what was I doing? I think hotel reservations, stuff like that, and then he said, "Well, I think we'll keep you, we'll put you as assistant director on Titfield Thunderbolt."

Sydney Samuelson: And what year would this be then? That was after the war, Titfield Thunderbolt, wasn't it?

Erica Masters: Yeah, yeah.

Sydney Samuelson: Would it be late forties?

Erica Masters: Something like that, yes.

Sydney Samuelson: So did you work on your analysing of microphotography right through the war?

Erica Masters: Yes, up to the point when I started working in documentary films, yeah.

Sydney Samuelson: And at any time in your career, during the war or during your documentary times - which were your earliest days in the film industry, and later you went back to documentaries - were your languages, the fact that you could speak, I assume, fluent German, were they ever of any help to you?

Erica Masters: Oh absolutely.

Sydney Samuelson: Why?

Erica Masters: Well particularly on Bonjour Tristesse, when Preminger heard that I was the only one who could speak French fluently and I was sitting in London doing the London end, he blew his top and said, "What's going on? There she is in London and I'm surrounded by people who can't speak the language!" And so that's how I became PM on Bonjour Tristesse, because of my French.

Sydney Samuelson: And how - you haven't told us anything until now, which caused you to have learned French, where did that come from?

Erica Masters: At some point during my childhood, I think before we went to Jamaica, or afterwards, we lived in Paris, my father and I, in Paris and in Brussels, yes.

Sydney Samuelson: I see, so you have three fluent languages?

Erica Masters: Yes.

Sydney Samuelson: Because your Spanish has gone altogether?

Erica Masters: No my - yes, I would say - yes, German, French and English.

Sydney Samuelson: Right, OK, well we'll come back to Bonjour Tristesse. At the moment you've completed four days and they've asked you, presumably because you created a good impression during four short days...

Erica Masters: Yes, yes...

Sydney Samuelson: They've asked you to stay on and you meet Henry Cornelius and - was your next film Genevieve, then?

Erica Masters: My next film after - yes, after Titfield Thunderbolt was Genevieve and I did every single film with Corney after that.

Sydney Samuelson: And you went on Titfield Thunderbolt as an assistant director, what would that be, third assistant?

Erica Masters: Third assistant, yes, third and - yes and then second.

Sydney Samuelson: And then when you went from Titfield to Genevieve were you still a third?

Erica Masters: I was a third for a time but then I finished the film with Corney - in other words...

Sydney Samuelson: As a third?

Erica Masters: No, no, no, finishing the whole, you know...

Sydney Samuelson: Oh, post production?

Erica Masters: Post production, yes.

Sydney Samuelson: OK, now when you were a young woman, because we're talking about now when you were about thirty, correct?

Erica Masters: Something like that.

Sydney Samuelson: 1947? If you were born 1917. You were a young woman of foreign origin. What were the second and first assistants like to work for in those days? Were they just ordinary people or did they try to exert their power? Was it something - were there those who were really - you might be scared of because they were so tough to work with? I mean, I remember when I was in the camera department, the power of the first assistant and I remember particularly a chap called Jimmy Shingfield, who was a great guy but his junior used to cower in his presence, he was so tough! Tell me whether it affected your life at all?

Erica Masters: Well on the whole the second assistants and the first assistants, on the whole were very nice people, and it was the production managers who in the first instance wouldn't take me on. And that was really a tough period because I would go to them and I would say, "Please, may I work on your film?" And they would look me up and down and say, "Well, you know, you're a woman. I think, if you don't mind, I'd rather not because labour wouldn't like you." And so I would say, "Oh well, thank you very much, goodbye."!

Sydney Samuelson: And it was nothing to do with your track record or your ability, it was because you were a woman and it was felt that you would not be able to cope with the labour?

Erica Masters: Yeah.

Sydney Samuelson: Arguing about their timesheets and their no lunch breaks, is that what they mean?

Erica Masters: I think yes, and also telling your labour force what to do, "Would you please go and do this, or that," and so on and they felt the labour wouldn't listen to me. And of course they were quite wrong because they liked me. And, you know, I think my career as a woman in films has always been, I tried to be better than the best man, and I tried never to be a bitch and do it all on a friendly basis, and that worked. I was not into the woman's movement, you know, we've got to be the tough guys. I felt that if one could do it the nice way, one would succeed. And I think, as far as the labour force went, I mean we got on famously, they did precisely - sometimes I overdid it. I did something, they said, "Come on Erica, don't you move that carpet, that's our job!" You know, stuff like that, but on the whole, no, I was very popular. I mean at some point in my being a second assistant or a first assistant, I used to go around and watch everything and go "Shhh... shhh... shhh!" And so when they saw me coming they'd go, "Shhh!" You know, even if there was no need for 'shhh'!

Sydney Samuelson: But did you work with anybody who throughout the picture, you woke up in the morning when your alarm went off and you said, "Oh God, another day with him!" Did you ever have bette noirs, those who...?

Erica Masters: Well, there were some. No, it's not the assistant directors, it's the [chuckles] it's the production managers! I mean there was one, again who shall be nameless, he's dead now, he was so mean! I remember working on the Robin Hood series and there was one stunt man who had to jump off a bridge into the cold water. It was winter, and his wig came off, he was dressed as a woman, and this PM wanted to take the price of the wig off his salary! You know, and that made me absolutely furious! And whenever I pleaded for somebody and he'd say, "No, no, no!" I mean, he was just so short sighted. And that kind of thing used to...but...

Sydney Samuelson: Personal antagonism against you?

Erica Masters: No, not on the whole. I can't remember - you know, one always wants to forget the bad things so I think that has been taken out of my memory bank.

Sydney Samuelson: Do you think anybody ever made you cry?

Erica Masters: Um?

Sydney Samuelson: When I was fourteen, as the rewind boy in a cinema, I had a chief who didn't think he'd done his job unless he made me cry!

Erica Masters: It was in the cutting room that there was a very unpleasant woman who was above me, who was the editor. She made me cry because she would come in at about eleven o'clock in the morning - I had been there since eight thirty, and then she would go to lunch at twelve until three, and then expect me to do overtime in the evening, you know. And that sort of thing, that was very unpleasant.

Sydney Samuelson: Right, let's get onto happier things. You're now well entrenched in Ealing.

Erica Masters: Yeah.

Sydney Samuelson: Did you and your colleagues who worked with you - did you realise that you were working within an atmosphere that was going to become legendary?

Erica Masters: Oh yes, oh yes!

Sydney Samuelson: And was it because of Mickey Balcon or was it just, that's the Ealing thing? Tell us about working at Ealing.

Erica Masters: Well it was - of course the bad side of Ealing was that they were a very, very class conscious, so to speak. If you know what I mean. For instance, there was the dining room for the directors and the producers and then there was a sort of middle management, you know, and then there were the sort of technicians. So that was - I found that very off-putting, and there was...

Sydney Samuelson: But don't you think - I just want to develop that because I think it's really important. There's two canteens at Pinewood, to this day, and the guys who mould the plaster and saw the wood and knock nails in, don't eat in the same dining room at lunchtime as the camera crew and the directors and the producers and so on. So why are you picking that out as being a class structure in Ealing?

Erica Masters: Because there was a very strong class structure. The directors bunched together and didn't want to know about anybody else. It was very class conscious.

Sydney Samuelson: And as an assistant director who would you have your lunch with, in which room?

Erica Masters: Probably in the cafeteria, yeah.

Sydney Samuelson: And did that annoy you?

Erica Masters: No, no, it was just - look, there were so many wonderful things about Ealing, and my appreciation that I was allowed to work there, you know, this was terrific. All this didn't matter, it didn't matter.

Sydney Samuelson: Right. And just a note then about Mickey Balcon, would you bump into him in the passage?

Erica Masters: No.

Sydney Samuelson: Was he always in his top office?

Erica Masters: Yes.

Sydney Samuelson: And only talking to his producers and directors?

Erica Masters: Yes, yes, yes.

Sydney Samuelson: Would he have known who you were even?

Erica Masters: No, no idea.

Sydney Samuelson: And there were a lot of you assistant directors?

Erica Masters: Yes, yes.

Sydney Samuelson: And so he wasn't the kind of chief who came round and said, "How are you today, Erica?"

Erica Masters: Not at all, not at all!

Sydney Samuelson: Did anybody feel that he was aloof do you think?

Erica Masters: Um, I don't know the answer to that. It - one was so wrapped up in ones' film, you know, and we went on location with it you know. But I mean, he never came on location. This was the film at Titfield with Charles Crichton and Michael Truman was producing, so we only saw that little lot. But Vivienne who married Michael Truman and then later became Lady somebody or other - you know, that famous writer who stuttered, er...

Sydney Samuelson: My goodness, I've no idea who you're talking about!

Erica Masters: Never mind, forget it. Anyway I was really very lucky because there were two films going at the same time, The Cruel Sea and Titfield Thunderbolt and I think I was very lucky to have been put into the Titfield Thunderbolt part, because the other one had a lot of...

Sydney Samuelson: Aggravation?

Erica Masters: Aggravation, yes...

Sydney Samuelson: Because things were going wrong, because the crew were inept?

Erica Masters: No, because...

Sydney Samuelson: Script not ready?

Erica Masters: I don't know quite, but there was always fighting going on and unhappiness and I think I was very lucky not to have had anything to do with them! But I did have Vivienne as my sponsor, so to speak. She kept sort of saying you know, "You help me" and so on, and then - and she was interested in me and really with this interruption I never looked back.

Sydney Samuelson: You worked on a string of classic British films.

Erica Masters: Yes.

Sydney Samuelson: Do you want to just tell us what they were, those that you can remember? I may be able to help you...

Erica Masters: Yes. I worked on, from I Am A Camera, Next to No Time, Genevieve, The Man Who Never Was, which was a very interesting film for me. And a lot of 'B' pictures with Monty Berman.

Sydney Samuelson: At Ealing?

Erica Masters: No not at Ealing, no, this was after Ealing.

Sydney Samuelson: That was at Elstree?

Erica Masters: No, no, at Twickenham. Yes.

Sydney Samuelson: Oh, I'm thinking of his television series at Elstree, OK...

Erica Masters: And on the Robin Hood series.

Sydney Samuelson: The Richard Greene Robin Hood?

Erica Masters: Yes the Richard Greene one.

Sydney Samuelson: With Hannah Weinstein?

Erica Masters: Yes, yes, all those.

Sydney Samuelson: Right.

Erica Masters: And then um, Next to No Time with Corney and then finally finishing up with Bonjour Tristesse.

Sydney Samuelson: Let's just ask you about Genevieve because it's one of the most famous films certainly to ever come out of Britain and whenever anybody talks about old motor cars it is the film that everybody says, "Oh yes, do you remember Genevieve?" And yet, if I understand it correctly, it was a low budget. If you analyse what you see, Chris Challis who was the cameraman had to work regardless of whether it was pouring with rain or blazing sunshine.

Erica Masters: Yeah.

Sydney Samuelson: Tell us about that film as far as the aspect of the production being accomplished with very little money.

Erica Masters: Well first of all I must tell you that Corney - it was the script by Bill Rose and Corney [NB. Henry Cornelius] hawked that script all over the place, nobody wanted to do it. But finally Pinewood said, Rank said, "Yes we will do it." And now we come into the Pinewood - er, how can I put it? Where they said to Corney, "Oh you can't use the people you want, we will give you people." And at that point, Corney said, "Look, I'm putting up 'X' amount of money and I am going to have the people I want." And so that is how certainly I came into it. Pinewood didn't want me, they said, "Oh we've got people," you know. And Corney said, "No, I'm going to have the people I want and that's all!" And we made the film and it was a very happy relationship between everybody. For me, it was the first time I've ever seen a veteran car. Corney took me around and he said, "I'm going to show you, now here are the stars," and they had just come in and I never saw anything that pretty and I was delighted. And I had - John Arnold was the 'First' [assistant director] and I had a very happy time on it. We had - I can't remember the name of - a very old and very knowledgeable producer on it. Anyway, the point is that we made the film in rain, shine, what have you. Corney said in regard to Chris Challis, whom he loved, he said, "I'll tell him that we can still do another shot, even it he says that the light's gone, what have you. I know, and I'm going to insist on it." And he did, and it turned out all right, you know. So Genevieve was a very happy experience.

Sydney Samuelson: Did you know there was greatness being produced at the time?

Erica Masters: No, but I'll tell you exactly when I knew. I knew it because there came a point at which we showed the film to Mr J. Arthur Rank. We all sat there and during the whole of the making of Genevieve I must say the studio couldn't have been more unhelpful, you know? They just thought, "These small people, they haven't got much money, what kind of a film are they doing?" They had their own people; they don't really want to know. Now we sit at the - was it the fine cut, or showing to Mr Rank. We all sat one side and he sat by himself on the other side, and he saw the film and he laughed. And the lights came up and he went to Corney, he turned to Corney and he said, "Thank you very much, it's a wonderful film, goodbye." He walked out, we all looked at each other, and the moment we got out of the door, the whole lot of us, the whole atmosphere of the studio had changed. They couldn't do more than enough for us! They had heard from Rank that he liked the film, that he believed in it, that he thought it was marvellous, and that changed everybody's attitude. And we had a good laugh about it! [Break in recording] You know what I really ought to ask for, is a copy of this tape.

MY: I'm sure that can be arranged.

Sydney Samuelson: That can be arranged.

Erica Masters: Can it? Oh that's great.

Sydney Samuelson: Now Erica, we were talking about Genevieve and we don't want to - we can't spend too much time - I suspect you could talk for an hour just on that film?

Erica Masters: Yes!

Sydney Samuelson: It was obviously a very happy experience.

Erica Masters: Yes.

Sydney Samuelson: Did you see that through to post production?

Erica Masters: Yes, yes.

Sydney Samuelson: Tell me what you can remember about how the music came about, because I think it's an interesting story.

Erica Masters: Yes. Corney had more ideas in one minute than most people have in about two years. So he thought that Larry Adler ought to go and do the music and so he approached him and Larry said, "Yes I'll do it." And came the time and we showed him the film and then Corney and I went to Larry's house. [Chuckles] And I remember that Larry had maybe one piece of music in the attic and another piece of music in a bedroom and then a third piece of music he couldn't find and then the fourth piece of music in the dining room. So we went all over the house to collect this music that he had written and got it all together with him and then the recording and the rest is history.

Sydney Samuelson: Do you remember what happened when it was Oscar nominated - the music? If not, I'm going to tell you, just for the record, they would not use Larry Adler's name, can you continue on that?

Erica Masters: I remember it, because Larry Adler was one of the ten who would not er...

Sydney Samuelson: Testify.

Erica Masters: Denounce and testify and his name was dirt and therefore his name was not, I think, on the American copy?

Sydney Samuelson: Correct.

Erica Masters: Yeah, yeah.

Sydney Samuelson: And it was Oscar nominated and they did it in the name of Muir Mathieson.

Erica Masters: That's right.

Sydney Samuelson: Who was the one who conducted the orchestra.

Erica Masters: That's right, yes, you're quite right.

Sydney Samuelson: And...

Erica Masters: Good for you!

Sydney Samuelson: ...Larry has never got over that. Anyway...

Unidentified speaker - "GS": Can I ask a question - wasn't the film put on the shelf for a year or two?

Erica Masters: No.

Unidentified speaker - "GS": Which one am I thinking of?

Sydney Samuelson: I shouldn't think it could have been because when Arthur Rank said, "It's a wonderful film," I should think that was enough.

Erica Masters: Yeah.

Unidentified speaker - "GS": Yes, hmm.

Sydney Samuelson: But I want to ask one more question. These are the - what you told us about - Pinewood were disdainful of these 'cheapos' who had come here to make this film and who had refused to use their staff people...

Erica Masters: No, Corney's staff people. No, no, they wanted...

Sydney Samuelson: Yes, I meant of that unit.

Erica Masters: Yeah.

Sydney Samuelson: That unit had refused to use the people that Pinewood - Rank - wanted to deliver, had insisted on using their own people.

Erica Masters: Yeah, yeah.

Sydney Samuelson: Was there a relationship at that time between one of the female stars and the managing director of the Rank Organisation, and did that have any effect? Was it a wife, an ex-wife, a wife to be - you know what I'm talking about?

Erica Masters: I do know, I do know.

Sydney Samuelson: So tell us...

Erica Masters: Well it was, it had no - their disastrous relationship, which turned into a disaster...

Sydney Samuelson: Should you say who we're talking about, because I've not.

Erica Masters: Well yeah, but that has to be er...non...non...

Unidentified speaker - "GS": It's all right, I mean this is the sort of thing to use proper names rather than...

Manny Yospha: Yeah, I mean everybody knows, there's no...

Erica Masters: Yeah, I mean it was Dinah Sheridan and Davis - what's his name?

Sydney Samuelson: John Davis.

Erica Masters: And John Davis, yes.

Sydney Samuelson: Just repeat that again, because I was talking over you.

Erica Masters: The lady in question was Dinah Sheridan and the gentleman in question was John Davis and they had a very short marriage, at which, she once told me what happened, and which was a terrible thing. But that had no - no, it had absolutely no relationship with the Pinewood Studios. They were really outside it.

Sydney Samuelson: So it didn't effect your film at all?

Erica Masters: Not at all, not at all.

Sydney Samuelson: Oh well then that's, I thought that would be...

Erica Masters: Except that she had a bad time, you know.

Sydney Samuelson: But it was afterwards?

Erica Masters: Yes.

Sydney Samuelson: And she was... OK.

Erica Masters: Yes.

Sydney Samuelson: Now lets come to the end of your Ealing time, because Bonjour Tristesse was not an Ealing film.

Erica Masters: No, no.

Sydney Samuelson: So what caused you to leave Ealing whenever you did and go onto something else, Bonjour Tristesse or anything in between?

Erica Masters: No, when Titfield Thunderbolt was finished the whole crew was finished, so to speak, you know, and therefore I went straight onto Genevieve. And then when Genevieve was finished I went onto another film and another film and another film. So it was really - I was a freelance who hoped to get a film as quickly as possible, and sometimes I was lucky and sometimes I was very unlucky and I had periods of unemployment.

Sydney Samuelson: So you were not on staff?

Erica Masters: No, no.

Sydney Samuelson: Ever?

Erica Masters: No, only for the one film, for the four days plus the one film, yes.

Sydney Samuelson: And - I think then that that's interesting, that all those years ago was it the general rule that Ealing did not have people on staff like Gainsborough at Lime Grove had people on staff and Pinewood had people on staff.

Erica Masters: I think that they had production managers on staff, I mean Harry Kratz was a PM, but they didn't - assistant directors or continuity, they took on as and when.

Sydney Samuelson: I had always thought that people like Doug Slocombe and Paul Beeson were on staff at Ealing?

Erica Masters: I think that's possible, yes, the camera side probably were, yeah.

Sydney Samuelson: But the production side, you went from job to job?

Erica Masters: Yes.

Sydney Samuelson: So you would have times in between?

Erica Masters: Yes.

Sydney Samuelson: OK. And therefore, what happened? What was the last film you did at Ealing, can you remember - or under the Ealing banner?

Erica Masters: Well it was The Titfield Thunderbolt it was the only film!

Sydney Samuelson: OK. And so then that finished and you were looking for another job?

Erica Masters: Oh yes, except that it fell into my lap through Vivienne - whose name I can't remember, she was the head of public relations.

Sydney Samuelson: Right.

Erica Masters: She said, "Now you go and see Corney and that's your next film."

Sydney Samuelson: And that was Genevieve?

Erica Masters: That was Genevieve.

Sydney Samuelson: And Genevieve finished and what happened then?

Erica Masters: Genevieve finished and then I had another film, I can't remember quite which one but I've - yeah, I went onto another film.

Sydney Samuelson: What I'm getting to is that Bonjour Tristesse was a big step for you, wasn't it?

Erica Masters: Yes it was, yes.

Sydney Samuelson: What happened there? How did you get that job?

Erica Masters: How did I get that job? Preminger was shooting Saint Joan at Shepperton and I used to go over there sometimes to watch it and somehow I got an introduction or I got to meet Jean Seberg and we became very friendly. And then I was on Next to No Time for Corney again and I was asked whether - John Palmer asked me if I would do the London end of Bonjour Tristesse and I said, "Well if I can get out of Next to No Time...I can or I can't." But I could, and so there I was doing the London end, and then when Preminger heard that I was the only one who spoke French and I was sitting in London, he was furious and he said, "Get her down here!" And so down I went to the South of France. They had already been working in Paris for about three weeks, and I joined them in the South of France. And the whole of Bonjour Tristesse is - I could go on for about three hours, but I'll just put it in a nutshell. We were sixty British and sixty French working in close disharmony. It was a co-production, it was American money and we were paired all the way through. I was paired with a French production manager, but Preminger said that I was above the French production manager, so whatever I said was to be done. So the French production manager, Philippe somebody or other [NB Philippe Senne], didn't like that, but that was that. And I must say that the whole thing worked very badly, because the French are great people to go on holiday with and they make great films by themselves, but they cannot do a co-production. They have different ideas and of course their experience during the war also comes into it, they were very proud of doing the black market. Every Frenchman is a sort of unit within himself and as a team it just doesn't work and it sure didn't work with the British. And um, the whole thing - I can only relate one story, which I shall never, ever forget, because it really shows the French for what they are. It was a scene that we were doing one evening, a dinner scene outside a restaurant, with a Dockers yacht in the background and the women, Jean Seberg and Deborah Kerr and Mylene Demongeot wore jewellery about quarter of a million worth.

Now Preminger had arranged with Cartier, in Paris, that this would be borrowed for this scene and he said to me, "Just go to Cannes and just work out the details," and I did. And they said, "Oh that's fine, sure, we've got it all ready. The only thing I would ask of you is send a car, no doubt about that, and have the man who is bringing the jewellery just outside of camera range." And I said, "Don't worry about that, I will do all that." So the time comes for this to happen and the women look absolutely gorgeous. And the little man arrives from Cartier in a car that I've laid on, and he brings the jewellery and he puts it around them and he's just by the side of the camera and he watches everything. And we finish about three o'clock in the morning, and the women look great. He then packed everything together and put it back in his case and I gave him a huge tip and, of course, he'd had meals with us, and I thanked him greatly and I put him in a car and off he went. A week later I am in Cannes and I happen to meet him. "Ah, comment allez vouz? Did you have a good journey?" And he told me the following, that the car had stopped at

the next bus stop where he had been let out, where he waited for a bus for about an hour. Where he got on the bus and he went to Cannes, where he then, at that time in the morning, he had to walk about half an hour to get to Cartier and put it back. And I said to him, "I don't believe this! I put you in the car and the car stopped and let you out?" "That's right," he said. So I went back and I got Philip, and I said, "Philip, I have just met with Hugh so-and-so and this is what he told me. Is that true?" And he said, "Yes of course, why should he have a car all the way? After all, he was only a small employee of Cartier's!" Well I get very cross about once every seven years and that was that particular moment! I gave him such hell! The only thing I didn't do was to tell Mr Preminger, because he would have had him out! I was so shattered that he had this view that he was just a little man who didn't matter, that really got my goat! So that is about the crux of the nastiness of French co-production.

Sydney Samuelson: After that experience with Preminger, did he ever ask you to work with him again?

Erica Masters: Preminger made films only in America after that, yeah.

Sydney Samuelson: Would you have worked with him again?

Erica Masters: Oh yes, oh sure! I mean, he was always very - I mean sometimes he shouted at me, but he had very likeable sides to him.

Sydney Samuelson: Yes.

Erica Masters: One side, he was going out to dinner and I forgot to send flowers to the people - did he give me hell! And then one day he called me and he said, "Erica, do you think I am a terrible Jew?" [Chuckles] And I said, "Mr Preminger, of course you're not, you're fine. I mean, really, what's all this about?" So he had a feeling of guilt, but I also got on very well with his wife to be, Hope, who was a costume designer. And well, the only thing was the French, who were very tricky.

Sydney Samuelson: Yeah.

Erica Masters: But I'll tell you a little story - the difference between the French and the British. We laid on, from about seven o'clock in the morning, a continuous buffet, but at lunchtime we laid on, under a marquee, the most wonderful meal by the best caterers. People sat down and had this wonderful meal, and then this went on until eight o'clock at night and then the people got money for the evening meal. So one day I'm walking along and one of the French electricians runs out to me and he says, "Miss Erica, I'll tell you something, the food today at lunch wasn't very good." I said, "What do you mean, it wasn't very good? I thought it was absolutely wonderful!" "Ah" said this little Frenchman, "You see, what they should have done was to put the gravy of the chicken into the peas." [Chuckles] Well there isn't anybody in the English, an electrician who would have worried about that, you know!

Sydney Samuelson: [Chuckles] OK, now from Bonjour Tristesse what happened next?

Erica Masters: Oh in between was, of course, I Am a Camera which was [chuckles] a very difficult, in a way, but also a wonderful experience. Any experience with Corney was great for me, and I Am A Camera - Corney had gone with the art director to Berlin to see if they could get a long shot - but they couldn't - of buildings that weren't bombed. So they decided to build on the - although we were shooting at Walton-on-Thames, they decided to use the silent stage at Shepperton and build a part of Berlin, and so we went over there to shoot it. Now, we needed a huge amount of European looking crowd, and [chuckles] I went around all the agencies, including up the stairs. Up the stairs to Mr Lew Grade, who listened to me, who opened his little drawer, [chuckles] and took out some little things and said to me, "Oh, you get my people in." And in it was some little perfume bottles, and I said, "No, no, no." Anyway when I told Jimmy Ware this, he said, "Don't be so stupid, just accept it, bring it all in!" And it was a big joke. Anyway, so there we had all these European looking people. Now Corney had done a very smart thing. You know about the artist George Grosz, a very famous Jewish caricaturist, a very famous painter, yeah. And so he had commissioned him to draw a series of characters, and so we were really looking for these characters. And some of the characters one got from The Ugly Agency, and some of the characters didn't speak English very well. And so there I was, second assistant, and they would come up to me and they would say, "Can I have my shit, please?" [Laughs][Break in recording]

Sydney Samuelson: Somewhere in the middle of all this remarkable film career you got married. When was that?

Erica Masters: I got married in 1941 to Robert Masters, who had - with whom I'd lived for a year before we got married. We lived at Dartington, and then we left Dartington and we had two children, Tony Masters, who is now forty eight and a very talented and able and successful designer in Sydney, and Juliet who was mentally handicapped and died by a car when she was twenty seven. But she had a wonderful life. I put her through the Rudolph Steiner schooling and she finished up being a very good weaver in a Rudolph Steiner community near Gloucester. And that is where she is buried, and I put up a memorial to her at the Academy, because that was her greatest joy in life, to see a film with me there and have dinner, and maybe recognise some important personalities she'd seen on TV. And whenever I come to England I go and see her grave first of all.

Sydney Samuelson: And what did Robert do for a living?

Erica Masters: Robert created the Robert Masters Piano Quartet at Dartington and then when he left he made a lot of - they acted as a chamber music group and played all over the world. And then he became a teacher at the Yehudi Menuhin School and a director of the Yehudi Menuhin Academy in Gstaad and now he is adjudicator and the head of a foundation of young violinists competitions. And he has married again, and he has a very good relationship with Tony, and now, of course, since Kuwait with me too.

Sydney Samuelson: We're going to come onto Kuwait in a moment. I want to go back to your career, because I think you've now finished in feature films, is that right?

Erica Masters: Yes.

Sydney Samuelson: Why did you finish in feature films?

Erica Masters: Well it was my great - I got such a kick out of being with a team of people. I never really had a family when I was a child and here suddenly there was a team of people and we were all out for the best, and that was so exciting, you know. It was a very different thing of a relationship of a secretary to her boss, it was something that a group of people worked together to create something and that really was just joy for me.

Sydney Samuelson: But the question I'm asking is why did you change direction and come out of features into documentaries?

Erica Masters: Well I had an offer I couldn't refuse. I was then left to look after my two children and with hardly any money coming in after the divorce. I had an offer from Ronnie Spencer to join him in his documentary company who were a subsidiary of Shepperton Studios, and since I had got on so well with him I was delighted. And I first of all went to my solicitor and I said, "Do you think I should take this offer?" And he said, "Well you're never going to get any more money out of Robert, so I think you should." And having cleared that I then worked with Ronnie Spencer for over twenty years.

Sydney Samuelson: What was the name of his company?

Erica Masters: Littleton Park Film Productions, Shepperton Studios, and then when that S.O.B. Mr John Bailey [?Possibly Bentley?] came into the picture and chucked us out and bought Shepperton, we then gave up the name and became Pacesetter Film Productions and went to Wardour Street and continued there.

Sydney Samuelson: What year would you say it was when you joined Ronnie? [Slight pause] Can you work it out, vis-�-vis the age of your children?

Erica Masters: Well I should think it was in the sixties because we made a - We were very lucky, well we were a very good team, I mean Ronnie is a wonderful director and then Robert Angel joined us as well, but we were very lucky to get the Ford films to do. And of course, once a year we did the one film that Ronnie and I absolutely adored doing, although we made very little money out of it, which was for the Children's Film Foundation. And those were all films that we made in four weeks and they were really the love of our lives, since we couldn't work in features, or were happy to work in documentaries. But then we had our chance!

Sydney Samuelson: So for the record, the films for the Children's Film Foundation were made really to show at Saturday morning cinema matinees?

Erica Masters: Yes.

Sydney Samuelson: This is before television had got such a hold and took over completely entertainment for all ages.

Erica Masters: Yes, yes.

Sydney Samuelson: It's something that I think we all regret. Because the atmosphere on a Saturday morning in the cinema with the kids cheering on the heroes and hissing and booing the villains was something that's never been repeated and doesn't happen in your own home, even if you show the same film.

Erica Masters: Yeah, yeah.

Sydney Samuelson: And so this company, Littleton Park and then Pacesetter - and was it Lion Pacesetter?

Erica Masters: Yes it was Lion Pacesetter, you are quite right.

Sydney Samuelson: They once a year took a contract to make what was, in effect, a feature film.

Erica Masters: Yes, yes.

Sydney Samuelson: But it was written for and designed for children, but it was made as a feature film but with very little money?

Erica Masters: Very little money and the crew with the agreement of the ACT, it is set that they are much less money and so it always worked, and I was in charge of the budget and arranging the whole thing and we just had wonderful people working with us.

Sydney Samuelson: When I worked on them, first as an operator and then a cameraman, I didn't get less money, because I was already on less money![EM chuckles] So I stayed at the same, I was working for that kind of company! [Chuckles] Now, how long were you with Ronnie?

Erica Masters: Just about twenty-two years.

Sydney Samuelson: So where did Film Partnership come into it?

Erica Masters: Well Robert Angel joined us from Film Partnership.

Sydney Samuelson: But then, but you were working for Film Partnership which was...

Erica Masters: Oh yes, at one point I was working for Film Partnership. It was during the days that I was working in documentaries, when I couldn't get a feature and I was taking on...

Sydney Samuelson: So you were filling in, in effect?

Erica Masters: Yes, yeah.

Sydney Samuelson: And they must have said to you, "We've got a tough director coming for a picture in Brittany and he needs controlling," is that what happened?

Erica Masters: Well he was very nice, the only time that he - I was a little bit in awe of David Dimbleby, because he was such a great personality of course, and I remember that I felt that he ought to be fed in the manner that he was accustomed to! [Chuckles] And this was over lunch, and you came to me and you said, "I'm going to pull rank on you but I don't think we ought to have a full course meal, I think you should buy a few picnic things and we'll have it on the lawn." And I was amazed, but of course I did as the director said and...

Sydney Samuelson: Was that our only dispute?

Erica Masters: Absolutely! We always worked in harmony!

Sydney Samuelson: OK. So what happened then? You went to Ronnie; you were with him for many years, why did you leave that? Did the Film Firm close?

Erica Masters: No, the company more-or-less - they couldn't afford me any more, yeah.

Sydney Samuelson: And was John Brabourne involved?

Erica Masters: Yes he was our - he was on the board.

Sydney Samuelson: And then what happened?

Erica Masters: Well, I think, yes, I did a lot of commercials.

Sydney Samuelson: For different companies?

Erica Masters: For different companies, yes. I did a lot of commercials and I also worked for companies who were arranging conferences. I remember distinctly having to arrange a ground-breaking ceremony for the Honda people in Swindon, and that was really an interesting experiment for me, because I'd never worked with Japanese before and they are committee people, and nobody wants to take a decision, and there were a lot of decisions to be made! And so I finally said, "Look, I'll make the decision!" And they bowed gracefully to me, and so I made some decisions and did it very successfully and it was a very expensive operation. At one point they had done something - this was for an assembly plant - they had bought some land near Swindon, an airfield, and they were going to erect an assembly plant there. And so now this is the groundbreaking ceremony and they said to me, "Why can't we have it inside a tent?" And I said, "No you can't because a ground-breaking ceremony takes place outside." They said, "What happens if it rains?" I said, "Never mind, so it rains!" And they said, "But supposing we do it in a tent, what would people say?" And I said, "They would say, this is a very Japanese thing to do." And I never heard any more about it, we did it outside! [Chuckles] And they were very pleased with it and I was congratulated by the head of Honda, who came over and I was presented with a little wooden thing out of which you drink Saki with his signature on it, and that was an amusing...interval!

Sydney Samuelson: I think we're getting close to when you retired, but there's a credit of yours in your feature days, which is a very famous film called The Man Who Never Was, tell us about that.

Erica Masters: Directed by Ronnie Neame, the star of the film was Clifton Webb. Now Clifton Webb got a great big kick out of imitating my accent and he liked me very much. And I was second assistant on the film, except for a period when the first assistant went somewhere else - or I don't know, was ill - and then I was for about six weeks the only female first assistant director in the British Film Industry! So there were several second assistant directors but they decided to take me to Spain, (a) because of my language, which was very great - so off to Spain we went, and we had Ben Ahmed as our production manager. So we went to Seville and we shot in a little place for when the - I don't know whether you remember the story?

Sydney Samuelson: I do.

Erica Masters: You do? The briefcase with the false information has been found on this dead body which was brought up on the beach and now this briefcase is being fought over by the Germans and the British Counsel. He says, "This is British and I want it!" And the German said, "No!" And so this all took place in this little township. And there was an enormous amount of crowd and the police kept hitting people to get out of the way and they hurt one person very badly with their guns, and we said, "Get the police out of here! We will do the crowd control ourselves," and suddenly it all came back to me and I kept shouting, "La outr&#65533; cord...corta de la cordala [cuerda?]," and so on and we got it all quiet and my Spanish had come back, so that was one of the things. But an amusing story I must tell you, we were to dress this body, a plaster figure had been made, and Clifton went and had a look at it and there it was, undressed, lying there. And he said, "Hmm...there is a certain part of this gentleman which is too big!" I don't have to spell out what it was! [chuckles] So the plasterer came and he came with a little chisel and he chiselled and he chiselled and he chiselled [laughs] and finally the whole part was taken out, you see! Now this body had to be dressed, and we had a morgue and we shot in that morgue with dry ice and the sound of the blitz and the sirens all the time. And it was really absolute - and this figure [laughs] that had to be dressed without any genital parts! And I can only say to you, after a fortnight all of us were absolutely nervous wrecks, we just wanted to get out of this scene you know! And we finally did. And then - we are now in Spain, and I shall never forget myself because we had the Unknown Soldier who had been buried in this graveyard, so the real grave was there, I mean the whole story is based on fact. But we created another new grave so as to re-do the interment ceremony, and with all this going on I never put flowers on the real grave, you know, I remember this well. But everybody was very nice on this film and I remember one evening, the moment we got to Seville, all the boys said, "Now come on Erica, you've got to go with us to the red light district." Am I allowed to tell this story?

Sydney Samuelson: You are!

Erica Masters: And so into this red light district we went and no sooner had we settled down around a large table, the young ladies came and they sat on the laps of the gentlemen and I was translating here and there and what have you. And at about two o'clock in the morning I thought they could get on very well without me, so I said, "Well I think I'll go home." And with that, all

these ladies lifted themselves off the gentlemen and they escorted me out of the red light district, so that it was only a little way to the hotel, and I thought that was absolutely wonderful, it was sort of the great union of women!

Sydney Samuelson: [Chuckling] Yeah...

Erica Masters: You know, they didn't want me to be plagued in any way and so... Then they went back!

Sydney Samuelson: Well now Erica, when did you decide, "I'm going to retire and I'm going to Australia" - did you decide to retire?

Erica Masters: I never decided to retire, I'm not retired yet! [Laughs] No, after the death of Juliet I was very - I felt that I wanted to be in the same country as Tony and that really - and since he had settled there from Italy and that was really the factor. And I thought, "Well maybe I can get some work in Australia." But I didn't succeed, since they make very few films. And I tried very hard, but when I said to Tony, "How about me moving to Australia?" Which I knew very well because I had been there three times and I once hitchhiked around the whole country and wrote it up every week for the newspaper for five weeks running. And so Tony said, "No problem, I will sponsor you," and within five weeks I had permission to emigrate there. And I think that was probably a very good idea, because I can live much better over there on the pension than I can in this country.

Sydney Samuelson: For a person like you, Erica, who's virtually been a freelance all your life in this industry, if it's not too personal a question, the pension that you're living on now - you must have a UK state pension I take it?

Erica Masters: Yes, yes.

Sydney Samuelson: But everything else you've had to make your own arrangements, I take it?

Erica Masters: Yes.

Sydney Samuelson: You have no company pension, put it that way.

Erica Masters: Well yes I do. Ronnie Spencer did put into a private pension, so I get a little bit of money out of that.

Sydney Samuelson: So for the years that you were with Ronnie.

Erica Masters: Yeah, yeah.

Sydney Samuelson: And of course that was a staff job.

Erica Masters: Yeah.

Sydney Samuelson: One of the few staff jobs that you've ever had.

Erica Masters: Yes, yes.

Sydney Samuelson: And it's something that, I think, is entirely relevant to our industry, because we're a freelance industry, probably more now than we ever have been, because at least all the television technicians used to be on staff, but even that is virtually over.

Erica Masters: Yeah, yeah.

Sydney Samuelson: Have you got any regrets about what you did in this industry? Would you sort of say...?

Erica Masters: No. I miss it terribly. I mean, you know, being in films and working with a team, I mean it's your life blood, it's what makes you - and I guess that's what keeps me young, you know, because I put so much into it, and I still do put so much into things.

Sydney Samuelson: I had noticed that.

Erica Masters: Yeah, and so, therefore - I mean people talk about the biological age, which is ridiculous, because the biological age is the age you are biologically! But I mean, you know, I am in spirit and everything about twenty years younger!

Sydney Samuelson: Good on you!

Unidentified speaker - "GS": At least!

Sydney Samuelson: When you were married and had children and you were "a single parent" how did you cope with locations?

Erica Masters: Well I had a very good French nanny who was a surrogate mother to Juliet. I had au pair girls, you know, and sometimes it worked very well and sometimes it didn't. Yeah, it was very difficult you know. And Tony, because of the sadness of the whole household, I decided to send him to a boarding school. And I'm happy to say that when I explained the whole situation to a cousin of mine in Guatemala, she immediately said, "Don't you worry, we will get the family to put the money together, you find the school and we will pay for it." And that's what they did, so that was a great. You know, I wanted to him to have a really good education in a co-educational school, and then I sent him to Israel to a kibbutz and I think Tony has done very well, yeah, I'm proud of him, as I was proud of Juliet. Because, as somebody said to me, if I never did anything else in my life but what I had done for Juliet, which was really to pull her over the dividing line of an IQ of sixty, you know. I mean the social workers used to say, "The conversations we had with her about Vietnam," and stuff like that. I mean, she knew tennis, cricket, football - she knew it all, it was just, you know certain brain damage that happened, yeah.

Sydney Samuelson: Do you wish, secretly, that you'd become a dancer?

Erica Masters: Well I still dance, of course!

Sydney Samuelson: I'm sure you do!

Erica Masters: Yeah, and I'm happy to say I go once a year to a summer school, which is the Arts of the WEA over there, and I take a course, whatever course is of interest to me, either drama or this and that and the other. And then we have a performance evening and I dance, which they say gets better and better. But I will tell you one wonderful remark. [chuckling] There was an elderly couple there and I think he had a bit of Alzheimer's, and the wife said to me the next day, "You know he can't take on everything, but he took in your dance and he said afterwards, 'She's just like Ginger Rogers'!" [Laughs]

Sydney Samuelson: And I'm sure you were - I think you should explain.

Erica Masters: Oh no, oh no, I mean I am not at all like Ginger Rogers. I'm like Martha Graham type of dancer - that doesn't mean anything to you, does it? [Chuckling]

Sydney Samuelson: Of course Martha Graham means something to me!

Erica Masters: Good! [Laughs]

Sydney Samuelson: What does WEA mean, that I don't know?

Erica Masters: WEA - Worker's Educational Association...yeah.

Unidentified speaker - "GS": Sydney wouldn't know about that! [Chuckles]

Sydney Samuelson: Right Erica - Erica Masters, Production Manager extraordinaire. Speaker, dancer, traveller and generally good person, thank you for this interview, it's been enlightening for us all.

Unidentified speaker - "GS": What about the aeroplane hijack?

Sydney Samuelson: Oh my goodness! There was one other incident - it was nothing much! [Laughter]

Manny Yospha: I'm afraid we'll have to re-load! [Break in recording]

Sydney Samuelson: Here is the most important question in a way, of the whole evening. Erica, you were on a routine flight back to Australia?

Erica Masters: Yes.

Sydney Samuelson: And tell us what happened.

Erica Masters: I was on my way to Kuala Lumpur, where I was going to spend a couple of days, and we were two hours late in leaving Heathrow, and it was those two hours that really made all the difference. I saw on the flight plan that we were going to stop in Kuwait and Madras on the way to Kuala Lumpur and I thought, "That's funny! Kuwait..." Here I have the Evening Standard, and I picked a newspaper whenever I come to London, and it said, "One hundred thousand troops are massing at the border of Kuwait." However, here I was, and I got on the plane and we got to Kuwait and we had half-an-hour's stopover to re-fuel and let off fifty people. I decided to take my camera, as I'd had a bad experience on another flight when a camera had got stolen, and I got off and I walked around, and I had my boarding pass, and suddenly bombs were dropping, aeroplanes were circling above us. They warned us to get away from the windows, the plane was nose-to right by the airport building, and we didn't know what hit us! Except that the captain then said, "The Iraqis have invaded and a new government has taken place and we can't get out. The plane has been commandeered and we are now hostages." He didn't say 'hostages' actually, he said, "We are now their guests." So for six hours we waited and finally we were told that we would be taken to the airport hotel. Now there were three hundred and sixty-five of us - multi-national - children, babies, grown-ups, and we went to this airport hotel and a number of people had to sleep on the... [pause, problems with the recording] So we were taken to the airport hotel and a great number of the people had to sleep on the ground, or on couches in the foyer.

And the food, at first, was fine and then it became less and less because they couldn't get any food in. In the meantime we were all trying to make contact with the outside world and it was impossible. And at that point, as I shared a room with a Malaysian girl and I looked down from the fourth floor, there were four or five planes, as if they were dead birds from various countries, and some soldiers with jeeps were driving around. And it was all so new and strange, and fear had not really invaded me at that point. But it did when, on the third day, we were all asked to go to the foyer, and we waited and waited, and we stood there, and suddenly I got very panic-stricken - not panic-stricken but very, very anxious. And then the captain, whom I had interviewed for hours and hours, how it had come about that, in fact, we were going to be landing in Kuwait, when surely they could have dropped these people off in Dubai and refuelled there. And he said to me, "Mrs Masters, let me tell you I also have a family and children, and I don't want to be here." We were monitored minute by minute by the Foreign Office and that is why I refuse to sue British Airways because I know this is absolutely true, it is the Foreign Office who did this terrible thing to all of us by instructing the captain to land there. Anyway, back to this long period of waiting, and finally it was announced that all the people who had not had a room would get on a bus and sixty other people... Now, I must go back to having been a production manager, I always gave the best to everybody else and kept the worst of things to myself. But there was a wise old Malaysian who said to this Malaysian girl and me, "Now you very quietly go and get your things and then get on that bus, all right?" And we did just that, without pushing or shoving, got on the bus, and the bus went through the whole of Kuwait City and there were many points at which it had to stop and was interviewed and we got to this big hotel, The Palace Regency Hotel. And there, lined up were sixty or eighty British Airways crews who had all been caught. The planes had taken off but that was their rest place, and they had all been caught, and, therefore - and they were so pleased to see us and shook hands.

And then we were given a cold drink and gave up our passports and registered and I had a room of my own, and I overlooked the swimming pool down below, and I asked, "Could I go out and

have a swim?" And they said, "No, no, no, absolutely not! You are not to leave the hotel!" And then I realised that a group of Iraqi soldiers had put their machine guns there and were, in fact, sleeping there and washing and pissing into the swimming pool and that was their area. The manager of the hotel was absolutely wonderful, he was a Palestinian, and he said to us, "Always have the chain in front of the door inside, always have the curtains drawn and don't go anywhere." But the saving grace was that attached to the hotel was a sports centre, to which at certain hours of the day we could go and there were squash courts and tennis courts, indoor, and a track around them, and I would walk this very fast several times a day, footing mileage, you know. And we were in this hotel and there was the thought that we might be taken to Baghdad, but none of us wanted to go because we felt that if we were taken to Baghdad and anything happened, that would be the first thing that would be bombed. So the idea of going to Baghdad fell through. We were continuously surrounded by Iraqi soldiers in the foyer and we women would sort of, you know, keep well away from them. We were about, I should think about a hundred and fifty people. Now a number of people were also in the hotel who had not been on the plane, who were working in Kuwait - particularly an American pair who were consultants to the bank of Kuwait, with whom I became quite friendly. And when I went down from my room I would pass the telephone exchange and I would go with my thumb up and they would go with their thumbs down and then we would both go like that, shaking our hands, because there was absolutely no contact whatsoever with the rest of the world, Kuwait was entirely isolated. The only thing we did have was this terrible channel CNN and that channel, I think, did more to upset my wellbeing than anything else ever! [Chuckles] Because they gave our terrible news all hyped up and particularly what they did. And one evening the American ambassador came to see my friends and they asked if I could stay in the room and he said, "Of course." And he said that they had given out the secret route that people were taking to get into Saudi Arabia, you know, sort of, "Twenty miles down the road and then there was a tree and you go to the right," and so on and so on. They had given out the secret road and of course all these people got caught and brought back by the Iraqis. We had - one evening we were asked to stay in the dining room, should I cut this story down a bit?

Manny Yospha: We've got plenty of tape.

Erica Masters: It's not that, but I mean...

Sydney Samuelson: Well, no, it's...

Erica Masters: Continue?

Sydney Samuelson: Go on.

Erica Masters: One evening we had a terrible, terrible evening. We were asked to stay in the dining room and they didn't know why and the foyer was full of Iraqi soldiers. And then they came and we were all very anxious, we didn't know what was happening. And the Iraqi commander came and said, "Sorry about this but all your rooms are going to be searched." So we sat there thinking, "Bloody hell, what's happening?" And after about two hours they came back and they said, "You can go back to your rooms." Well during the whole period all the British Airway crews were absolutely marvellous. And so about three of them - oh yes, yes, three of

them took me back to the room where, in fact, only an apple had been half eaten and some nuts had been strewn on the floor and a banana had been half eaten. But a couple of people lost their cameras. They got them back and we believe that the soldiers were shot. Anyway that was that evening and that was pretty frightful! We had several evenings where we were given a room in which we did some disco dancing and people used the sport facilities to keep fit. And finally, one night at about three o'clock in the morning, I had a 'phone call and it was the office and they said, "You have to come down with your things." So we went down, I looked over the balustrade and the whole foyer was full of soldiers. I could see buses outside and personnel carriers and I took my stuff and I went down and we were told, "All the single people to one side and all the families to the other." And it was at that moment that Charlene, the wife of the American, took my hand and took me in front of the Iraqi commander and said, "This is my aunt" and then took me into the bus of the families. We then got into this bus and we did a twelve-hour journey. We stopped at a pound, the city pound. We thought we'd all be shot, but we carried on.

We drove and drove and drove, to finally finish up fifteen miles from Kuwait City, right next to the biggest oil refinery of Kuwait. The commander said, "Get out of the bus, pick yourselves a house and be calm." Now this was the British liaison camp that had been - all the people there had become hostages and been taken away, the wives and children were left and then were given, a week later, fifteen minutes to get out. And then the Iraqi soldiers came in and vandalised these houses and you've never seen anything like it. If you take your own home and imagine that twenty-five soldiers go in there and throw everything about and steal all the valuables, including the VDU screens, which they thought were television sets, and piss on them and - it was quite, quite unbelievable. And we went into one house and Charlene and I started a little bit of work, but we had passed the kitchen and we passed the bathroom and we thought, "Christ!" And then Stewart came back and he said, "I think I've found a better house, it's in the same condition but it doesn't smell, it's cleaner." And so I said to Charlene, "Go and check with him."

And she did and came back and said, "Yes it's better." And so off we went to that house and then we cleaned and we worked and we cleaned the whole camp, there were only forty-eight people, but Stewart was a very astute man, he could do anything. And there was an old Arab who was in charge of the camp and his car didn't work, so Stewart said, "All right, I'll fix your car, you get us a gas thing for the stove so we can use it," and so all this happened. The Iraqi's were on the other side of the camp, the camp was locked up, the front gate was locked, but because their camp was next to us, we had electricity and we had clean water and we had air conditioning. And in fact Stewart got some more air conditioning and so we were well catered for, the three of us. And our routine used to be, at five o'clock in the morning, we would get up and we would listen to 'The Voice of America' on his little radio and then we would listen to the news from Britain, the BBC news, so that was our source of information. And then 'till about nine o'clock we would walk around the camp and then it was a hundred and fifteen, you know, so after that we didn't do much walking around, I can tell you! We had a meeting of the whole group and the one thing that the British always do, the British army always does, is they go anywhere and they immediately make wine and beer! So there was an enormous amount of wine and beer stored away!

Well now in our house nobody drank, so we were clean. So we had this meeting and I got up and I said, "Now I think that this camp ought to be dry," thinking in terms of, people get drunk and

they have a fight with an Iraqi soldier and the whole thing goes up the cute! And as I stand there, I am surrounded by a wall of hatred, right around me, and this huge wall came nearer and nearer. And I looked around and all these people are hating my guts! I suggest that it should be dry, with all this liquor around, and I sort of said, "Well it was only a suggestion!" [Chuckling] And then they organised themselves, in fact, in the clubhouse, once they had cleaned it, they had at sort of four o'clock in the afternoon people could go and have a drink or a cup of tea or whatever. Um - that was that.

So there we lived in this camp, we gathered little - I arranged all the things in this house, all her things in a cupboard beautifully folded up, all his things, you see, until somebody said to me, "You must be crazy! The Iraqis are going to get in here they're going to take everything. You have nothing, we have nothing, we must wear these things." So we did that and we gathered a little food from wherever we could, and we had very little, they would bring one orange for three people or a little bit of this flat bread, Nan. And so we - a very old chicken! And I remembered the story of Sholomash[?] whose mother, or the family, they were very poor and she had a big cook pot that was never cleaned and she would only pour water into it and the most marvellous aroma would come out of it and they would have some soup. So I told them the story, and so we were a bit like that, you see.

And so we lived there in this camp. Now, since we knew that nobody knew where we were - we would walk around this camp, by the way, always with a stick because there were some wild dogs there. We would walk around this camp in women's clothes with skirts so that satellite should pick us up that there were people in this camp, because we got lost. Tony kept ringing up the ambassador in Canberra every day and would say, "Where's my mother?" And the ambassador would say, "Oh she's fine, she's fine, she's very well." "Yeah, where is she?" "Oh she's fine." He knew nothing. Nobody knew anything.

And so this went on, and then suddenly - this was about thirteen days, altogether I was in Kuwait for thirty-two days and suddenly there was the news that Saddam Hussein said women and children could leave. But the Brits and the Americans said, "Don't you believe it, just take your time, he may change his mind, don't be too sure about this." Next morning buses and military detail came into the camp and Charlene and I sent out Stewart to find out - because we never went near these soldiers - to find out what was happening. And they said, "We're going to take you to Kuwait in air conditioned buses and then to Baghdad, and then the next day back to England."

Sydney Samuelson: And that's what happened?

Erica Masters: And that is what happened.

Sydney Samuelson: And you came back on Iraqi aeroplanes didn't you?

Erica Masters: On an Iraqi aeroplane yes. We got to Baghdad - I must just describe the scene that I shall never, ever forget. All the men were separated from their wives, fathers from their daughters, except the women who would stay with their husbands, which is what Charlene did. She would stay with her husband. And there was one composer, who asked me to take care of his

little boy because he thought that at the last minute he would be allowed to leave, but he wasn't, and so I said, "Of course I will." And so I took care of him on the journey to Baghdad. And so here I am, embracing Charlene and Stewart, because we had become very close and we were in tears - would we ever see each other again? And of course it turned out that they were there for a hundred and thirty-two days, whereas I was only there for thirty-two days, and they had a terrible time. And so we then picked up a lot of the singles on the way in Kuwait and everybody said, "Let's get going, let's get going to Baghdad!" And I said, "No, no, no, this is fine, because going through the desert towards the end of the day, this is a terribly bad idea." So anyway we picked up these single girls who had had a very bad time, they had slept on the floor in palaces, they had very little to eat. The little bundle of food that was given to me I gave to two girls who hadn't eaten for twenty-four hours. And so we watered the children and kept them fed all the way to Baghdad and in our minds was the second CNN bloody announcement that had upset us, they said, "There are thirty-thousand people on the streets, waiting in front of each embassy." Well we went through the whole of Iraq, which is a miserable place if ever you saw one - you know, one light there, one little Arab there, selling - I mean it is just awful! And we travelled and we travelled and we travelled, and we got to Baghdad and we stopped in front of a very beautiful hotel and they said, "Get out!" We got into this hotel and they gave us rooms, we gave them our passports, and they gave us breakfast, and there we were in Baghdad.

And I said, "Can I go for a swim?" They said, "Yes." I went for a swim, beautiful pool. I came back and somebody said, "Oh there are the Australians." And so I went to this table with people around and I said, "Who's the Australian ambassador?" And a beautiful woman got up and said, "I am." And I said, "And I'm Erica Masters." And she put her arms around me and she said, "My God, we've been looking for you everywhere," she said, "you are world famous because of your discotheque dancing and your aerobics!" So I said, "What about a message to Tony?" She said, "No problem, give me the message, I'll send it over through Canberra immediately," - which was that 'I was well, I was in Baghdad' - and she said, "and we will confirm tomorrow whether you are on the plane." And then I got a message back from Tony saying, "Thank God they've found you," and so on.

So then there we were in this hotel, and now comes the next day in which we are supposed to leave. The plane was supposed to leave at five-thirty. The Brits said, "Oh you're not going to leave because there are people who came before you who came from Kuwait." The Iraqis said, "Oh yes, you're going to leave." And so it was a frightful day. The British people were preparing our exit permits, and I had filled in my exit permit, the form, and it said, "What religion are you?" And I thought, "What am I going to say?" So I put 'C of E'! And when I told Tony he said, "Absolutely right - Church of Egypt!" [Chuckles] I wasn't at this moment going to get into any trouble!

So, there we are, we don't know whether we are going. And now there's a meeting of everybody in one room, we go there - no - another room, no - the dining room - and now everybody is in the dining room. And the Iraqis come with their plastic bags in which they have our passports, and they sit down and they say, "Well we're now going to call up groups and all the groups will leave the room and get on a bus - all the people we call up." And so the first people they called up were the Japanese. Two hundred lovely little children went out, because Japan had sent a plane for them. And then, slowly, they worked through the various countries and then my name was called

out. I was one of the first of the five to be called out, and that was entirely due to the prime minister and Tony, because the prime minister, Bob Hawke rang him up and said, "I'll do everything I can to get her out." So later on in my lectures I always used to say, "Thank you Tony, thank you Mr Hawke!"

Anyway, so then we got on the bus, I had my little case with nothing really in it, and got to the airport, and as I sat in this bus I said, "What is happening? Is it a lottery? What about all the other people?" And again, males had been divided from females, and were not allowed to go. So now we were at the airport, it was five thirty, there's the plane... Six-thirty, seven-thirty, eight-thirty, nine-thirty - nothing! But with us were all the ambassadors from all the different countries, but no food! So I did a little recce and I found that in the chocolate, where you buy chocolate, they had a lot of Smarties, so I went to the British ambassador, I said, "Have you got any money?" He said, "Why?" I said, "Because if you haven't I can lend you some."

So I told him what I wanted it for and he came with me and we bought fifty English pound's worth of Smarties, and I took these - he said, "You better give them out." And I could hardly carry them! So I carried in all these boxes of Smarties and asked for a little bit of food to be brought out on the plane and some soft drinks, and then everybody was fed and so on. In the meantime we heard why we weren't leaving - because Jesse Jackson was in Kuwait getting out ten elderly and sick Americans. Well the moment I heard that I was very pleased, I mean what the hell, you know. They were bringing out Americans, who were hated - the best hated of all the nations, you see! And finally at eleven o'clock, in came the Kuwaiti plane with Jesse Jackson these Americans and they were put into the plane and now the Australians are called out. And by that time I had become a character and Libby said, "Get up there, get up! Get on the plane!"

So I get on the plane and I walk along and I say, "Well I'm really British, but I live in Australia, well I'm really British but I live in Australia." And I sit down in a seat and an Iraqi comes to me and he says, "You are British?" I said, "Yes, but I live in Australia" [chuckles] So, by the time - I couldn't decide whether to go and hide in the lavatory, but I didn't, I just sat there and finally the Brits came and everybody. Now amongst the passengers, all female and children, was one man. So I thought, "What's this man doing here?" So I went up to him and I said, "What are you doing here?" He said, "Well you know that little boy Saddam Hussein patted on the head on television?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well that's my little son and when Saddam Hussein heard that it was his birthday, he said 'I'll get you a big present, I'll let your father go too'." Do you know what he then said? "I think Saddam Hussein is a marvellous man, I think everything he's done is right!"

I nearly killed him! I just looked at him and I turned away, I wouldn't talk to him and I wouldn't talk to CNN either when they came on, later on. Anyway, so now we're in the plane and the Iraqis had been on duty since nine o'clock in the morning and they were going to go to Paris and then to England and then to Washington, so I said, "I bet you've never had that much publicity?" "No," they said, and they served us a meal and then we arrived in Paris, and there they had really done it wonderfully well. I could see the banks of television cameras and lights coming towards the plane and the long red carpet and the people waiting for their relatives to get off the plane, and Jesse Jackson went down and Mitterrand was there to receive them. And he made a little

speech and he came back and then when we took off people started clapping and I thought to myself "A-ha! We're still in Iraqi soil."

Sydney Samuelson: In an Iraqi plane.

Erica Masters: In an Iraqi plane - not for me that clapping, you know. Anyway, so then the next stop was London and I walked down and I didn't kiss the earth like the Pope, but I did a big sigh of relief - I thought, "Well now I am free!" Imagine it, after thirty-two days! And I walked into the room that was reserved and I went to the British Airways desk and I said, "Tonight you can book me into the airport hotel but tomorrow, first flight out to London," and I get patted on the shoulder by the British Commissioner, Sir Sydney Samuelson! And my ex-husband and his wife, and er...I was home!

Sydney Samuelson: Well there's a story! [EM chuckles] There's a story to end the interview and I think it must be one of the best tapes that BECTU will have, because of the life of this amazing person! So thank you Erica.

Erica Masters: It's a pleasure! [chuckles]

[End of interview]