British Entertainment History Project

Interview no. 709 - Michael Darlow - Transcript

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| 0:00 | Born Wolverhampton 1934. Father Deputy Town Clerk. Outbreak of war, 'middle class volunteer evacuees' to Marlow, Bucks, near grandparents. Uncle serving in Singapore, daring escape. |
| 2:30 | Attended village school. Mother & aunt worked for WVS. MD smitten by favourite teacher in local panto / 'Wizard of Oz' at pictures. Unaware of family theatrical connection - scandalous aunt who ran off to be in the theatre. Also great-aunt, first female professional musician at Drury Lane. Dressing up, charades. Grandfather had Galanty Show … |
| 5:00 | … Victorian shadow-puppet theatre. Boarding school. 1945 Bishop Stortford School, wonderful masters enthusiastic about theatre. Also keen on conjuring. Did double act with another boy, Brian Hough, ventriloquist (who carried on as adult). Tied brother in a sack, had to escape. Put on theatrical acts: first act of Macbeth with lots of effects… |
| 7:30 | … over-ambitious with flare powder – sheet of flame, curtains caught fire. 1947, school trip to Old Vic, 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' and 'She Stoops to Conquer'. Magic, never seen Falstaff played better. Man selling bananas, spent all my money on them, then let them go bad. 'By then I was hooked'. Considered doctor, barrister, but mother spotted that I really wanted to be actor. Mother very involved in improving women's role in public life, travelled around country speaking etc. … |
| 10:00 | … mother met Esmé Church, who with Lena Ashwell in 1920s set up theatres in Bow, helped by Clement Attlee. Taking classic theatre out to people: 'What's best in the arts should be for everybody, that sort of committed socialism'. Esmé then went to Old Vic. During War Old Vic was based in Burnley, touring shows in north-west & Wales. Company split after War between those who returned to London, and those (including Esmé) who stayed in north. Esmé also believed in theatre school for young people from north & working class. |
| 12:30 | She took over Bradford Civic Theatre & based school there. Rudolf Laban taught there. Attached to Leeds University, broad cultural education, history of western culture. Frank Mumby, brilliant musician. Jo Hodgkinson, married to later Director of Drama at Arts Council.<br>Mother met Esmé, told her about MD, Esmé said 'Send him to me for |

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| | audition'. But father said 'Do it properly, go to RADA'. MD went to Bradford, did audition, liked Esmé, who told mother he would do. Also went to RADA with father, saw Sir Kenneth Barnes … |
| 15:00 | … the Principal, spent entire time talking to father, then said of me 'Too small and his ears stick out, but he can come for audition'. Did RADA audition, got in, with great delight told them to ef off. Never regretted it. Did three year course at Bradford. With my public school background it opened my eyes. People from different backgrounds – mines, war, mill workers. Early 1950s, strong socialist feeling. Brian Mosley, later in 'Coronation St' – lived in Leeds slum with his widowed Grannie, damp, bread grew mildew, outside loo, tin bath. Angry: this woman had given so much … |
| 17:30 | … and this was her reward. I did my three years. Esmé ran a children's theatre, we'd take shows around, kids played token amount, very educational. Taught us to do all the jobs in theatre. Then I had to do National Service, square bashing, being messed about. I couldn't fly because they lost my papers so I became Radar Officer. Then did a course for a commission, suddenly I was back with public schoolboys – bastards. Didn't understand about solidarity. Exercise on Isle of Man, thrown out of truck at night, had to find way back without getting caught. I was with two ex-NCOs, we spent time in pub then hired a cab, while public schoolboys were torturing each other for information. |
| 20:00 | RAF taught me good electronics, useful in TV career. Last posting was near Nottingham, fighter control centre, looking for Russians. I applied to repertory theatres. Arts Council had its own companies, midlands company based in Coventry. I wrote to Anthony John who was running it, he was ex-RAF too, decided to see me, took me on as ASM Small Parts as soon as I got out. Touring company, we had to do everything, 84 hour weeks. 3-weekly rep: Coventry, Loughborough, Cheltenham/Nuneaton. Rehearse, sort props, act parts. Paul Bailey, Stephen Macdonald, interesting group. Closed down when they built the Belgrade Theatre. |
| 22:30 | Offered a job at Oldham Rep, weekly rep, a real surprise. First play was traditional north country comedy, a form that's disappeared completely. I was playing gauche young man, didn't see how it would work. Dress rehearsal, others in flat caps/heavy make-up, I was lost. In third play I was playing head boy at school, gets drunk in Act 1, sleeps through Act 2, wakes up in Act 3. Landlady thought I'd really fallen asleep on stage. I wasn't really right for it, after few months I was quietly told I was going to leave, cast down, never been out of work before. |
| 25:00 | I knew other rep managers, one was David Stewart in Perth, he invited me up, but had forgotten who I was, because I was playing middle aged |

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| | American divorcee making love to Bessy Love, one of Chaplin's leading ladies. But they kept me on, lovely time in Perth for 6 months. Then got a job with Ray Westwell at Dundee, a good company, to do an Agatha Christie. I got cast in touring production hopefully coming to West End, while waiting for that, Stephen Macdonald was by then in Canterbury and asked me to go down there. So work came pretty continuously. My first job in television: the late great Desmond Davies, he of the award, cast me in a TV play to go out – only one TV service - on BBC TV on New Year's Day 1959. Once again playing the head boy of the school although by then I was 24. I was in scene with elderly actress playing the matron. Desmond Davies wrote 'ABC of Television Production' when it was all multi-camera and live, important to write shooting script accurately. He told us where camera would be, what the shot … |
| 27:30 | … would be. Some actors didn't want to know, it was a mixed blessing. I knew that in my first scene camera would be on my hand, then pan up to close up of my face, and matron would say something out of shot, and I would reply. So there we are, going out live, 8 o'clock in the evening, BBC, lot of people with hangovers watching, I'm aware that I'm getting into shot, and the elderly actress dried. So my first line on TV, live, was rapidly invented to get us back on the plot. Quite a baptism of fire. I did a lot of TV, regularly in work because I looked young. I met a guy called Nicholas Light, we were playing two Boy Scouts in a series called 'The Buds of Paragon Row' at Line Grove, we were bullying a younger boy. He and I got chatting. We were both interested in what was then pretty revolutionary theatre, some of the same things that Joan Littlewood was doing, not that we were very aware of Joan Littlewood. Influenced by what was happening on Continent, France & Germany. We also tried to write a script together. Later that year I got into West End, play called 'The World of Suzy Wong', I was playing naïve young Lance Corporal posted to Hong Kong … |
| 30:00 | … and it was set in a brothel. I had four lines, on a good night I could get six laughs and an exit round if I got it right. The play ran for two years, 826 performances. Could get very boring. We started – Nick was involved – a company that did plays on Sunday nights, important British plays, modern & classic. Did a deal with British Council. They had a hostel for overseas students next to Harrods, a nice space, good for theatre. I started directing again as I had at school. 1959 was World Refugee Year. My mother persuaded J. Arthur Rank to agree that main fundraising event would be midnight matinee of a feature film. Then film industry had one of its crises and J. Arthur Rank said 'Sorry it's off'. She was very angry, and told journalists 'I'll make my own bloody film'. They reported it so she was stuck with it, and said to me 'Michael you'll have to make it'. I said 'I don't know how to direct a film'. Then it turned ot that the son of another lady on committee was an Assistant Editor at Shepperton … |
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| 32:30 | … chap called Tony Searle. We were dragooned into making a film, half-hour jokey film on history of Reading. Peter Thorpe, friend of Tony, became sound man, later Head of Sound at EMI. We made the film, and on my Mum's committee was wife of well-known critic, saw the film, called 'All These People', recommended it to be shown at Edinburgh Film Festival. There the late wonderful John Grierson saw it.<br>By now I was interested in film, visiting National Film Theatre, reading up history of film and documentary. John Grierson had a show on ITV network, showing extracts from interesting new films, mainly documentaries, and he showed a bit of this. Contemporary Films got interested, offered to distribute it.<br>We were frightfully over-encouraged, decided to make another. I was living in Islington, and we decided to make film called 'Holloway Road', following 24 hours in life of Holloway Road. This was before light-weight cameras and recorders. Reading film not so difficult, did it with wind-up 16 mm Bolex, and some cheap battery-operated huge recording device … |
| 35:00 | … or an old fashioned deck plugged into the mains, reel-to-reel.<br>'Holloway Road' we had to shoot pretty much the same. We did lots of interviews, separately, couldn't do them in sync so we did voice-over. Not consciously but subliminally influenced by the work of Dennis Mitchell and those people, as well as by the Grierson school of documentary. This film was also picked up by Edinburgh Film Festival, and by Contemporary Films, and by John Grierson on TV. We then got grant from BFI Experimental Film Fund.<br>Meantime I was in another play which ran for a year, through an Equity strike which was about the only good thing to be said for the play. I had said I wouldn't under-study, but this terrible play La Bonne Soup' had unknown director, only claim to fame was some teaching at RADA, he was terrible. But Coral Browne was playing the lead and she was a well-known dragon. She sat on side of stage as Grande Dame, the play was about her love life and affairs, played out by her younger self as she makes witty comments. You can imagine, it was terrible. I was hopelessly mis-cast as a dirty postcard seller in Cairo. Coral would sit there, and when this chap came up she would sit there … |
| 37:30 | … saying – audible enough to be heard but not confrontational ' 'Go away you silly little man'. When we opened in Oxford we were called in after first night, different director, Eleanor Fazan, 'Fiz' as we knew her. She shook the whole thing up, and people started to get fired. We went off on tour before coming into town, and you'd be met at Waterloo by the Stage Manager, given a letter, 'That's your cards'. Secretly they'd been rehearsing up other people, and the day came when Peter Sallis was fired. He'd given the best performance by far, and we thought 'Blimey, if they fire Peter Sallis none of us is safe'. I'm afraid when I was asked to understudy one of the parts that was being replaced I capitulated. In the end I was doing my own part at the beginning and under-studying four of her lovers, if it had ever happened I'd have been the best quadruple act |

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| | on the London stage.<br>One night I was off on Coral Browne. I'd done my part, it was a matinee, I always had an arrangement on matinee days, because I was still making these films, I needed to eat because I'd go off to edit in the evening. I said to the stage door keeper, we were at Wyndhams, 'I'll be in the café just up Charing Cross Road, are all my principals in?'. 'Yes sir'. So I'm sitting there about 20 minutes, half an hour later … |
| 40:00 | … and this old boy, stage door keeper, is hurtling over tables, 'You're off, you're off'. I rushed down, and the last of the lovers, the real romantic one, hasn't turned up. By the time I got back, no time to change, the Stage Manager had gone on with the book, and he was, with due respect, as camp as a row of tents. Lovely man, a good friend, but not exactly the lover that Coral Browne's character would have chosen. And Coral was playing the lines as if to poison him, the audience, and whoever had screwed it up. I had to apologise to Coral Browne, one of the more frightening experiences of my life. I went up to her dressing room, knocked timidly, 'Come in!'. I wasn't going to make an excuse, that wouldn't do any good, I said 'I'm terribly sorry, entirely my fault'. And she looked at me and I thought the floor would open. And she said 'Don't do it again!', and I withered and backed out. I didn't work for Donald Albery again after that, perhaps understandably.<br>As chance would have it, Tony Searle who I'd been making the films with, he had an ACTT ticket and had applied for a job at Southern TV, where a chap called Brian Lewis was Head of Documentaries, and he was a mate of John Boorman, running (BBC) regional documentaries in Bristol. Tony went to see Brian and took our 'Holloway Road' film. Brian asked if it was OK to show it to John, and John asked 'Who's that chap Darlow you made it with? Tell him to give me a ring'. So I did, and John said 'Do you want to come and make a film for me in the BBC in Bristol?'. So that's how I got to start in TV. |
| 42:30 | That's the theatrical bit, takes us to TV. I did do other stuff, I was the straight feed to Vic Oliver briefly, but that might not be the right sort of story to tell.<br>Question: You've taken us through a lot of material. We've arrived in TV. You did this film with the BBC, and there was also an early relationship with ATV.<br>Yes there was. Basically I made this little film in Winchester. The city fathers in Winchester said 'Why aren't we on TV?' and in those days BBC west region stretched into southern region, so John said 'Go and try to make a film in Winchester'. I made a film which upset the city fathers because it was about a bunch of students on an archaeological dig around Winchester Cathedral, and old men in the House of St John, retirement home, they wear a uniform. I contrasted these. I used 'Twist & Shout', I wanted something for the youngsters, irreverent. I went into the typing pool in BBC Bristol and said 'What's the latest thing?' and they said, 'There's this group called The Beatles'. The city fathers were very angry about this film, not respectful. |

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| | Nick Light and I had been asked by the Arts Council to take a tour to Northern Ireland, 'She Stoops to Conquer'. So I had gone off from John to do that for 3 months, which was a peculiar experience. And then John asked me to come back to do another one.<br>When I got back I was technically a Production Assistant. |
| 45:00 | Because of the row with the city fathers which I knew nothing about, they decided not to entrust me with another documentary. But they were starting a quiz/game show thing, answering questions and silly sports, and I was the right grade and found myself landed on this, talking to Rotary Clubs across the west of England. (I was actually offered a job as a redcoat at Butlins: my wife always said to me 'But you could have been a redcoat!'). But this wasn't what I wanted, I had a 3 month contract, so said 'I'm off' at the end of it.<br>Because Nick and I had set up this theatre company … my father knew Sir John Wolfenden of the Wolfenden Committee – current just now because of the anniversary – Vice Chancellor of Reading University. We persuaded Sir John to become Chairman of our Theatre Trust which the Arts Council supported. And we got C.P. Snow and all sorts of interesting people. Don't know how we talked them all into it. I was talking to Sir John and told him about BBC and he said 'I know somebody at ATV. Give him a ring and tell him I told you to'. I rang the number and the chap had moved on, but the person who took his job was very remarkable, much too little known, called Robert Heller. Robert had worked on 'March of Time' in the USA in the 1930s … |
| 47:30 | … then with the McCarthy Unamerican Activities, those people were a target, that left wing stuff. I think Bob refused to testify. He was in trouble, couldn't work, and Sidney Bernstein was just starting Granada. Sidney had left wing connections: Eisenstein, London Film Society, Ivor Montague. He gave Bob a job to start off their documentary department, but Bob and Sidney fell out, so Lew Grade hired him. After the chap who Wolfenden knew had left, he hired Bob. So I met Bob, and he said 'I'll give you a job'. They were making – it seems incredible now – a history of the trade union movement, with Lord Francis Williams, Postmaster General in Attlee's Government. I hadn't got a ticket so I couldn't direct it, but a job you could do without an ACTT ticket was Researcher. So they took me on as Researcher. I knew nothing about the trade union movement, I had to learn quick, a great education. Lord Francis Williams was very interesting, editor of the Daily Herald and in Attlee's Government. He was very kind, took me to the Reform Club, and as we wet in he said 'The only thing 'reformed' about this place is the name'. I did that job with Bob, then Dennis Mitchell … There was a 'Day of Peace', 20th anniversary of end of World War II in Europe … |
| 50:00 | … most countries in Europe were making a film to mark this, a documentary. Bob had hired Dennis Mitchell to make theirs, he said would I do research, so I got to know Dennis Mitchell. One of the people I |

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| | admired though I wasn't conscious of his name. When we'd finished doing that, I ran into the whole difficulty of union practices at that time. When I did that first film with the BBC – this wasn't a union practice per se - I had two weeks shooting. They gave me a cameraman who I won't name, who'd worked at MGM in Elstree. There was a shot of kids doing excavations, sitting at long table, cleaning & identifying what they'd dug out. I said to George the cameraman – it was cameraman and assistant, sound recordist and assistant, lighting, grip – 'I want a pan right across their faces'. And he said 'Oh no you can't do that. I haven't got a dolly and rails'. I said 'You don't need a dolly and rails'. He'd got a 16 mm Arriflex. I said 'Just hold the thing and go along like that'. He said 'I can't do that'. I said – ex-RAF officer – 'George, if I have to order you, I will'. He gets the camera body – he had taken the lenses off – and he throws it to his assistant camera, poor sod. He says 'Here, you do it'. And he turns to the PA and says 'Write on the sheet, Shot Under Protest'. |
| 52:30 | That was my first example. When I was with Dennis Mitchell doing 'The Day of Peace' we managed to get permission to do the Horse Guards changing the guard at Buckingham Palace, going down the Mall. On this particular morning I turned up but Dennis didn't turn up, and Linda his PA and wife said 'Dennis is ill, he can't do it, he says will you direct it, you know what shots we need'. There wasn't much alternative. When I got back to the office there was a massive row, 'Someone who was not the correct grade was directing!'. Luckily it blew over but it was quite an object lesson because it's quite difficult to get permission to put a film camera in among the Horse Guards. That was an eye opener, it made me slightly aware. Anyway I worked with Dennis, and he was going up to Granada with Norman Swallow to do 'This England' and he said 'Will you come too as our researcher?', so that's how I got to Granada. I did that for a year, working with the Young Turks, Mike Apted, Mike Newell, Dick Fontaine, doing their research.<br>Sidney Bernstein had done a deal – 1967 was the 50th anniversary of the Russian Revolution. Rather timely this year, it seems odd now. It was to do a big co-production with them, the first time a British TV company had done a co-production officially with the Russians. The Russian partner was ATN Novosti, the official press agency, widely regarded as a nest of their secret service, the KGB. Sidney had done this deal through Grigori Aleksandrov who co-directed 'October' … |
| 55:00 | … with Eisenstein. He brought them over to the London Film Society in the 1920s. Grisha we all called him, he was head of Mosfilm, the main film company and studios in Russia. And he was married to Lyubov Orlova, wonderful woman, equivalent to Ginger Rogers in the Soviet Union. If you walked into a restaurant with Lyuba the orchestra would immediately play her hit numbers. She was Stalin's favourite film star. So this was all set up to go. Norman was due to direct the British end of it. They'd sent out another chap first and he got nowhere with the Russians, came back and had a mini nervous breakdown. Norman was a hugely experienced editor of Panorama, had the misfortune to direct |

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| | Eden's Suez broadcast to the nation. He said 'I need someone to go with me, I can't be there all the time, need someone to look after things when I'm not there. Can Michael come?'. So I was deputed to go to Moscow with Norman. It was all arranged at a very high level. We were going to be picked up in a car and taken to the National Hotel on Red Square looking towards the Kremlin. Grand traditional hotel. We got there and of course there was bugger all. In those days they sold five-packs of whiskey at London Airport, and Norman, while we were waiting at London Airport, said 'I believe the Russians are rather fond of drink. We'd better buy one of these five-packs, might be useful as presents'. It was all supposed to be very high powered, but we got to Moscow, no car turned up, and the next morning we were in the hotel, expected someone to contact us, absolutely zilch. We get a number for Novosti, ring up, gets nowhere. This goes on for three … |
| 57:30 | … whole days. We reckon that the odds are that someone's bugging us. So we had a conversation in his room in which we said 'We'll give them another 48 hours and if nothing happens by then we're going home and we'lll tell Sidney this production is off, because that will be twice and that's enough. For the rest of the time we'll have a good time'. And we did, we went to all the galleries, we went to the Bolshoi, 'Because we'll never be in Russia again'. Anyway, the next day the phone does ring. They said, 'Someone will come to see you'. Nobody came. Then we get a phone call saying someone will come down at 6.30, dinner time. Sure enough two chaps did turn up at 6.30. We hadn't drunk much of the five-pack of whiskey, it was October-November time, quite chilly, and out of their coat pocket these two guys pulled a bottle of vodka, stuck it on the table. We had rather grand rooms in the National Hotel. So Norman, he'd got the five-pack beside an arm chair, pulled out two bottles of whiskey, sticks them on the table. In Russia everything is toss it down in one, toast to this, toast to that, we start to drink and it's all quite jolly. And then they said, 'I think we've got to go now', so they piss off into the night and we're left there. 'Somebody will ring you in the morning'. So we go down to get something to eat in the restaurant which was always full, fashionable restaurant, orchestra, cut glass. We managed to get something to eat. Next morning, nobody comes, so off we go, out to a museum … |
| 1:00:00 | … and we're sitting in the room that evening: *three* people walk in. It's pretty clear that one is more important than the other two. Three bottles of vodka come out. So our remaining bottles of whiskey came out. So we then start to go pretty fast. We then go down to the restaurant, we have more vodka and caviar, then they piss off and I'm left paying the bill. And they sad there would be somebody in the morning, and sure enough in the morning somebody rings up, 'There's a car laid on for you, bring you up to the office'. We're taken to the office, perfectly pleasant coffee and airy persiflage but no content. We get back to the hotel, 'Somebody will be down at dinner time'. We immediately went up and found one of the duty-free shops that were in Moscow in those days for hard currency, and |

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| | we get some more whiskey. Three of them walked in, three more bottles of vodka, etc. etc., and it was really getting fast now. Then we go downstairs and there's not a table. Georgi Bolshikov - who I later discovered was Robert Kennedy's go-between at the time of the Cuba Missile Crisis, in the Washington Embassy – he was the boss man. We're really going flat out. First of all there's no table, and Georgi looks at the Head Waiter and (clicks finger) 'We need a table'. One is produced out of a side room, laid up. Aha, we're with somebody very important. The meal starts and we're going at it. By that time I'm putting my hand over the glass because I'm not able to take this. But Norman is going punch for punch with these guys and suddenly – |
| 1:02:30 | toast to friendship, toasts to this and that – suddenly Norman looks at Georgi Bolshikov and says 'Georgi, you're a crook'. And Georgi Bolshikov, who was all merry chat, says 'What did you say?'. And through my drunken haze I realised that this was the moment of truth, that he wasn't drunk at all. That's what this had been about. So I said 'It's a joke, English joke, isn't it Norman? Yes, yes'. And we go into a routine: Pattacake pattacake baker's man, Queen Victoria very good man. So they looked surprised and said 'Ah, we drink to British joke'. We all drink, it all seems to relax, but Norman also relaxes, and starts to slide out of his chair onto the floor. And I thought 'Christ, this is a total disaster'. But two of the Russians get up, and very gently walk round behind him, without causing any disturbance, lift him up by the elbows, and support him through this cut glass restaurant, out, up in the lift. Apparently what they then did, because I was left with the bill as always, they took him to his room, got the key from the old lady in the corridor with the samovar, got him into bed. When I got upstairs they were just saying to the old lady 'Our friend is not to be disturbed at all until 8 o clock tomorrow morning when you're to bring him warm sweet tea. He's our friend'. From then on Russia was open to us because Norman had been prepared to get drunk. Obviously we weren't some bunch of finks from the Secret Service. The British Embassy couldn't believe it.<br>[Question. So it wasn't just about taking the drink, it was succumbing to the drink].<br>It was succumbing to the drink, that was the important thing. The guard wasn't there. And it was amazing, we had the most extraordinary time … |
| 1:05:00 | Lyuba – we were taken out, they had a flat in Moscow but they also had a dacha next to Gromyko's, the Foreign Minister at that time, in a protected area outside Moscow not far from the airport. This area, we went a number of times, we'd just hire a cab and drive out, but the British Embassy said 'Nobody's been there since 1917'. And there were real Piccasso's on the wall, it was extraordinary. Lyuba would sometimes get very drunk, and when she got very drunk she would start to tell stories about the 1930s. Her first husband had died in the Gulag, and she was invited to private dinners with Stalin and she had terrifying stories about these evenings alone with Stalin. One night she enquired about her husband, 'Was he still alive?'. And he said 'Yes'. And she said 'I |

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| | would so like to see him'. And he said 'Yes you can see him. You can go and join him'. A clear threat, done very politely. Terrifying stories. She used to come over here, Sidney would invite them, Sophie used to have to take her shopping to Harrods if she wanted new curtains for the flat. She was very much a film star. They were lovely and we had lovely times. Norman went home in the middle of that first trip and left me behind, and obviously a lot of it had happened in St. Petersburg/Leningrad, we'd had no chance to go to Leningrad, so one of the first things I had to do was go to Leningrad. So it was laid on that I'd go on the night train. We'd been introduced to a girl called Tamara who was our assistant and researcher and general factotum, very beautiful girl. She'd arranged for this train, the midnight overnight train to Leningrad. I went up … |
| 1:07:30 | … to the Leningrad station in the car. I get there, check in, and I'm clearly in the sleeping car with this very beautiful girl for the night. I thought 'Aye aye, this is the honey trap'. And just as the train was pulling out, another bloke got in. He was a business man, he produced a bottle, so we had a very jolly night. When we got to Leningrad a hotel had been laid on for me, the Astoria looking out at St. Isaac's Cathedral, and I discovered they hadn't got Tamara a room at all. And I was absolutely furious. She was supposed to tramp round the city and find herself somewhere to live. We did find her somewhere to live. I couldn't very well invite her into the room. Although with my Russian cameraman later they did the same thing to him, and I said 'We're not having that Yuri', and he said 'There's nothing for it', and I said 'Yes there is, I'll check in, you hang about in the lobby'. So I checked in, went up to the room, put my cases in, then rang down 'Could you send Mr. Spunli up to the room?' and I said 'There's a sofa there, you sleep on that'. I mean, there was that way of treating their people. But while I was in Leningrad they had a Leningrad woman who … I was interested in Leningrad because when I became a trainee director at Granada, Dennis said 'We'd better put you on the training course to do studio direction so you get a ticket', one of the things I'd done was 'All Our Yesterdays' which was a programme which showed the newsreels of 25 years ago, introduced by Brian Inglis, a half-hour thing. One of the weeks I'd done was the start of the siege of Leningrad, 900 days, so I knew about it. I asked the young woman in Leningrad, our assistant and helper and everything … |
| 1:10:00 | … I said 'Were you here during the siege?'. She said 'Yes'. I said 'I'm very interested because we don't know enough about it in England'. And she said a little, and then on the Sunday my phone rang and she said I want to take you somewhere'. She took me – sorry I get rather emotional about this – she took me, without explaining, to the place where all the people are buried. Because about a million people died in Leningrad. There is a mass grave. It's like a memorial but there aren't stones because they couldn't, there are too many and they couldn't be identified, so there are mounds which have got two or three hundred people underneath, and there's a statue at the end. And there are two very plain little entrance rooms, and on the walls are displays, |

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| | photographs of the siege, including Tanya Tsavich, a little girl who was writing a diary, I think she was 6 or 7. And in this childish writing, she says in Russian, 'I am Tanya. Today Auntie died'. And the next day it says 'Today Mummy died'. And so on, and there are six or seven of these entries, and the last one is 'Now I'm all alone'. And when they found her, she was too weak to survive and she died. What I remember is that it was a Sunday, and there were lots of people there, Leningraders, and they were all crying …<br><br>[Question: Do you want to take a break?]<br><br>… No. There was this slight smell of vodka seeing it was a Sunday afternoon, and complete silence. They just walked round the room, and walked up. I was very moved by this, indeed, and when I got back to Granada I said to Dennis 'Look, people do not know about the siege … |
| 1:12:30 | … we've got to make a film about this, a proper film. And he said 'Yes, OK, fine'. I said 'It shouldn't be just one film. We should make other films, somewhere else'. So we hatched up a plot that we would do the three different regimes if you like: London, Berlin, Leningrad. And my point was, as I started to do more research, that it didn't matter what the regime was; the more you oppress and fuck around the ordinary people, the more resistant they get. Because in each case the other side was going to win the war by smashing up civilian morale and smashing the cities to bits and so on. You know, Goering and Hitler were going to do it by blitzing London and England into the floor, it didn't produce that result. Yes it did produce panic and all sorts, but in the end it just produced that resistant spirit which just said 'Fuck you, we're not having it'. The same was true in Berlin. Berlin had been the least Nazi city in Germany, it never really supported the Nazis in the majority, it had been the most resistant. And again in Leningrad, where you have an oppressive regime, but again: 'We're not giving in to you bastards'. It actually strengthened resistance. That was the idea. I wanted to do Rome as well, on the basis that that was the sensible city, they surrendered to everybody straight away, but Dennis thought it wasn't a good idea. He was probably right.<br>[Question. We were talking about Cities At War].<br>I did these. I worked with Russian cameramen again, same team. We used to get up some nonsense. Yuri my cameraman - he's now a successful children's story-writer and producer in Hollywood – Yuri, he was a lovely man. Always full of stuff to get what we wanted. I badly needed a shot of the city from a high vantage point so that you could see the low hills around where the German guns were, see just how easy it was to lob shells smack into the city, and how close they were. And we looked around and I said 'Is there any chance we can get up into … |
| 1:15:00 | … the top of the dome of St Isaac's Cathedral?'. He said 'I suppose we can try'. So we went along and he explained that he was from Novosti and that was ok. Just before we went in Yuri said 'Now remember, you're |

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| | Russian'. 'Oh' I said, 'I see'. 'Because you're not allowed to come up here'. The reason was that there were missile defences which you could see from up there.<br>[Question. It wasn't a Church thing?]<br>No certainly not. Not in those days, no. So we went up, and there was another Russian crew up there, shooting. That wasn't too difficult, we just kept out of their way. Then we went downstairs, spiral staircase, and when we get to the bottom the Russian crew is there, the caretaker has gone away and locked the door, and we're locked in. So we're standing around in this confined space and they each started telling jokes, and my Russian was never very good, but I could sort of understand what was going on – and of course I was Russian, wasn't I? I realised it was going to come to my turn to tell a joke and I desperately tried to remember any routine that I could do silently like Vic Oliver or something. Just as it was inevitable that I was going to have to say something, I would have to open my mouth apart from laughing from time to time – the caretaker came back and opened the door. (Laughs).<br>Yuri turned up one day in London, except I knew that because I got a call for the only time in my life from the Foreign Office: 'There is a Russian gentleman at London Airport, we're not letting him in, he's asking for you'. And I had to go down to the pen at London Airport. Yuri had managed to get out of Russia … |
| 1:17:30 | … but they weren't going to let him in because he worked for Novosti and they probably thought he was a secret agent. So they were going to send him back to Russia so he would be completely in the shit. Luckily he managed to get off the plane in Vienna and managed to talk his way – he was a great talker – onto a plane to Israel and settled in Israel. He didn't enjoy that very much, I met him in Israel when I was doing 'The World At War'. And he then got to Hollywood. So we had quite a lot of adventures in Russia. And luckily the films went down well. In those days it wasn't called BAFTA, it was the Guild of Television Producers, something like that? It was the same thing as BAFTA, it became BAFTA.<br>[Question: Was it the British Film Academy?]<br>No that was the film people you see. They joined together.<br>In those days you knew if you'd won in advance because the press interviews had to be done and all that, some time before the awards. The awards ceremony was in the Park Lane hotel so we went along, and we knew that we'd won. Mike Wooler had been my producer and been jolly good and very nice and we became great friends. So we were sat there and Kenneth Horne was giving out the awards, and they just got to the bit where they were reading out 'Single Documentary, the nominees are … ' - and they read out the nominees – ' … and the winner is …'. And Kenneth Horne was giving out the prizes, at which moment he collapsed smack onto the floor. And he actually died, poor sod, a few minutes later. I mean that rather put the kibosh on the evening. There was an awful hiatus, and eventually someone comes to our table carrying this great hefty statuette, great hefty stone base, puts it on the table and says … |

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| 1:20:00 | … 'Sorry about all that, here's your award. Anyway, Sidney Bernstein wasn't there but had bought champagne, a very rare occasion. And when we turned the award round, it said 'For the Best Outside Sports Broadcast'. We didn't quite know what to do about that. A few minutes later Jeremy Isaacs turns up, he'd apparently been one of the awards jury. He's carrying one of these statuettes. He says 'They can't get any fucking thing right' and slams it down on the table so all the champagne glasses jumped. That was my first introduction to Jeremy Isaacs, who was mates with Mike Wooler anyway, because they'd been at Granada together. So that was my first introduction to them. And then after I'd shot 'Cities at War' but while we were waiting, I'd said to Dennis 'I really want to do some proper drama studio direction' because of my background in the theatre. He said 'You don't want to do that'. I said ' Yes I do, I'd like to do 'Corrie' or something'. So they put me on 'Corrie' and I did that a bit, which was a very interesting test actually, all these old experienced people. My showdown with them was – there were actually very good people writing the scripts at that point, people who went on to become well known. And there was this long scene between Pat Phoenix and Peter Adams who used to play Len Fairclough. It was actually a very well written scene, quite a long sequence, about 10 minutes. And in those days we did two: you'd start rehearsal on the Monday, record them on Friday night, and they'd go out pretty quickly. So they had to be shot like live. And there was a three week turnaround with script-writing and all that stuff. And on this particular afternoon – the normal pattern was 10 o clock in the morning start rehearsal, pack up at 2 o clock in the afternoon … |
| 1:22:30 | … so they can go home and learn their lines. On this particular lunchtime I said 'OK you can all go home, but could Peter & Pat stay behind and we'll do a bit of work on those scenes'. Pat Phoenix said 'What? Why me? No!'. This was about the third set I'd done, it was obviously the moment, you have your test with the cast with one of these things. So I remember Vi Carson stopped knitting, and there was that silence as they all looked, so I did a very dirty trick, having been an actor. I said 'Miss Phoenix, I know that you'd want to do this because you're a very fine actress and this is a very good scene, and I know that you'd want the chance to do it justice. So I think if we just spend a little time together … '. 'I can't do that! I've got a hair appointment!'. I said, 'That's fine, we'll reorganise that', turned to the PA and said 'Would you please go to the phone, find out from Miss Phoenix the name of her hairdresser, and just say she will be an hour late. OK?'. Of course it's very difficult for an actress to turn down that thing about 'You're a very good actress', so she had to accede. From then on I was fine with them. Indeed they asked me to go back when they ran out of shows because there had been some strike, a technicians' strike for a couple of weeks, so they had to do fast turnaround. So they said 'Would Michael come back and do it?'. So that was quite good blooding really. Then after 'Cities at War', while I was doing that Dennis had also said … They used to have these dinners in the upstairs flat where Sidney and Dennis stayed, the Granada aeroplane, |

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| | the Dove, used to fly them up from London. You didn't want to get invited to go on the Dove with Sidney, you frequently got told you were getting your cards or your job was changed. Anyway, I'd been at one of these little dinners, and what usually happened was all the Young Turks up there … |
| 1:25:00 | … half a dozen of us with Sidney & Dennis & Cecil, one or other or all of them, by the end of the evening when a few had been had we were demanding workers' revolution, workers' control of Granada, and Sidney would go to bed. On one of these evenings Dennis had introduced it by saying 'OK, we need to be doing some different sorts of programmes. I want to get to the point where we can dance the 10 o clock news'. And I made the mistake of saying 'I think that's a really good idea, that's a great idea'. So next morning I'm summoned and I'm told that I am now the Head of Arts & Documentaries, Music and Experimental Programmes – not documentaries per se but experimental programmes. We got up to some pretty lunatic things, but one of the things that people came up with, there was this singer called Johnny Cash. He'd just released that year a record called 'Folsom Prison' because he'd done a concert in Folsom Prison. Shouldn't we try to do a concert with him? I didn't know who the hell Johnny Cash was. I said 'That sounds like quite an interesting idea, I've listened to Folsom and it sounds a pretty good idea'. So I went upstairs and said 'Hey this has been put up', because all those jobs at Granada, you could say 'No' to things but you couldn't say 'Yes', you had to get permission to say 'Yes'. So I went upstairs for permission to say 'Yes' to that one. And Cecil Bernstein, Sidney's brother, very much the light entertainment side of it, he said he'd never heard of Johnny Cash, and what the hell was all that? So they were pretty doubtful about it. I said 'He's pretty popular, records and this that and the other'. And it would be interesting to try to do it in a prison. So they said 'Yeah, alright, but Joe Durden-Smith who put the idea up, he doesn't have enough experience to direct it. The condition is you direct it, Joe can produce it'. So that was the deal. I then got on to Johnny Cash's agent and said 'Is there any chance of getting back into Folsom Prison?' and they said 'I don't think there is'. I said 'Well can we get into another prison?'. So they said 'How would you think about … |
| 1:27:30 | … San Quentin?'. I said 'Yeah, that would be great'. So the idea came up, I was going to have to direct. Joe and I go out there a few days before, the first thing we have to do is get permission from the Governor to let us do it. I flew out first to talk to the Governor, and I did a deal with the Governor, basically we could do it if I bought him the latest hi-fi sound set because he was very keen on music, so we bought him a hi-fi set. And the other thing was, word got around that we were doing this programme so then a record company wanted to be able to release a record. So they said 'What do you guys want?'. I wasn't sure, but there was a guy downstairs called John Terry who'd worked in the record industry so I said 'What's all this?' and he said 'Well, you should get 4% of gross for Granada and a quarter of 1% of gross for you'. I said 'I see'. I |

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| | then went back to Cecil and Dennis and said 'They're saying what do we want. I'm told that we can get 4% of gross'. Cecil said 'No, we've never heard of this man Johnny Cash. Ask them for £700'. I rang the bloke back and he couldn't get off the phone fast enough. He said 'What about you?' but I was working for Granada so I didn't feel I could take anything. Worst decision of my life, or of Granada's I should think. A quarter of 1% of gross of that would be worth an absolute bloody fortune. Anyway Joe and I go out to do the show, were there a few days beforehand. What is very clear … well the first thing that happened we went out to the prison and visited that. The chap who was the head guard and also the executioner, he said he would look after us, but he did explain to me that he couldn't really keep us safe. The only way we'd actually achieve that was to do a deal with the gang leaders in the prison because it was a very segmented place. There were three walls in the recreation yard, on one wall all the white guys, on one … |
| 1:30:00 | … wall all the black guys, and on the third wall all Hispanics, and they never talk to each other. All this stuff. And I remember Johnny was doing a concert down in San Diego and, I don't know if you remember but during the Vietnam War, at the height of the Vietnam War, early 1969, the year before a small American gunboat, the 'Pueblo', had surrendered to the North Koreans with its code books intact …<br><br>[Question: North Vietnamese]<br><br>… what did I say, North Koreans? Shows what's going on in the world today. North Vietnamese, yes. And the commander of the 'Pueblo' … the American sailors had been returned to America .. was being court martialled, his trial was going on in San Diego naval base. And Johnny was giving this concert in San Diego. So Joe and I go down to meet Johnny, see the concert. When we get there … as you know it's right down in the south of California, right on the border almost … there wasn't a face that wasn't pure white in the whole thing. And just before the concert starts the commander of the 'Pueblo' walks in with his wife in her furs and the audience .. you can feel them wanting to rise to them. And he sat in the front row. Then Johnny came on and gave this concert, and the whole thing began to feel like a neo-Nazi racist rally. And at the high point of the concert Johnny looked down at the commander of the 'Pueblo' and he said 'And now I'm going to sing a song about a great American hero' looking at the captain, and launched into the 'Battle of the Alamo'. And Joe and I just shrank, Christ this is terrible … |
| 1:32:30 | … And then after the concert we went round to meet Johnny. We were a bit … you know, I'm a polite Englishman, Joe was a bit more worldly than me … so we meet Johnny and June his wife, June Carter, and after the pleasantries I rather timidly say 'I wonder Mr Cash if there's any chance that you would be able to write a song, a special song, for San Quentin, a little bit like Folsom Prison Blues or something'. 'Go fuck yourself' he says, and walked off the stage. June Carter comes over to me and |

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| | whispers in my ear 'That means he'll do it' and goes off to join him. So anyway we go to the prison, we do a deal with the gang leaders, if you look at the DVD of it the guys along the front row, they're all the leaders of the gangs in the prison, that was the deal: they got front row seats for the concert and we got protected. I remember one day we were filming in the mess hall and they used to have, a bit like airline trays when they serve you meals, except these things didn't have plates or anything on them, they'd just go down the line and they'd slop hash into one thing and some veg into another or whatever and sit down at the table. So we were filming away quite happily amongst the prisoners because we had lots of shots of the prison, prisoners talking, a guy on Death Row talking, waiting to be executed, and things cut in with the songs. And suddenly the head guard was with us, he was executioner and all that but boy, if you had to go to Vietnam he's the one you'd have wanted as your sergeant, a real tough guy, pulled my arm and said 'Get out of here! Get out of here!'. I said 'But we're getting some good shots'. 'Get out of here!'. So I grabbed the cameraman and said 'Come on, we ought to get out' and he said, 'No, no we're getting some good shots' and I said 'Get out!' so we pile out. And I turn to this guy and say 'What the hell's wrong, we were getting good stuff'. And he said 'Didn't you see? There was a guy over at a table and he was objecting to being filmed, he was about to throw his tray … |
| 1:35:00 | … at you. If he'd thrown his tray, a thousand prisoners would have thrown their trays at you and you'd have been killed under a barrage of steel trays. Do you wanna die?'. I mean it was that sort of a place. When it came to the concert I was sort of down on the floor and Joe was with the camera up where he could get the wide shots and things, we had four cameras. We'd got a decent recording machine with a deal with the record company, they'd run a 12-track cable in. Although they'd had trouble, they couldn't get the sync pulse on because the cable was so long the sync pulse wasn't registering properly, so getting it back into sync was a nightmare. And when we get to a certain point in the concert Johnny turns to the audience and he says 'These guys, these British guys here, they wanted me to write some special song but I'm not doing that, I'm singing for you guys'. And I could see he was checking that the camera was running, and then he launches into 'San Quentin', the song he'd written. He was a great showman, Johnny. He was actually very kind to me later, because he offered to come and do a concert for me when I was running a festival up in Glasgow a few years later. That film got me into big trouble of course with Granada, because there was a lot of publicity about this. Mike and I had won the award for 'Cities at War' just before, I mean it was three months before it was due to go out, it would go out around Easter, I think the award had been given December or January, I forget. Anyway there was a lot of publicity. But then there was a Granada series called 'The Big Breadwinner Hog' which opened with someone having acid thrown in their face, and there had been a terrific outcry about violence on the screen, and ours was the next high profile Granada programme. And I'd got an interview with this guy on Death Row – in fact he'd been reprieved at the last minute, literally when he |

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| | was in the chair - in which he describes exactly what it's like to be taken … |
| 1:37:30 | … to your execution, strapped into the chair and so on. And I'd had a description from the guy who did the execution so I put those together, and I just cut as he described, not to somebody in the chair but to each of the levers and things that are there that they describe, you push this one and you put that strap on that wrist and so on. And I cut all this lot and Sidney – because this film became high profile before it went out – Sidney demanded to see it. And he said 'You can't show that, I saw that guy die'. And I said 'You didn't see that guy die Sidney, you see nothing'. He said 'I did!'. I said 'No, the imagination is more powerful than the visual'. And he said 'No, you can't show it'. This was the third big row I'd had in a row with Sidney because when we did the 'Revolution' film, first of all he told the Russians we were going to get Arthur Miller to write the script and we ended up with Terry Grainger writing it, and nice through Terry Grainger is, it wasn't quite the same. And we'd had to agree every single last dot and comma with the Russians, you know, how many times you could mention Trotsky, how many times you could mention Lenin, or Stalin etc. etc. And then he'd insisted on getting it re-written by these people. So that had been the first row which I'd had to handle because Norman wasn't around at that point. And then when 'Cities at War' had been done he'd asked to see those and in the Berlin film I'd found a woman, she was Jewish, she'd been hidden throughout the War in a laundry by Berliners, and when the Russians came, when the liberation came, she came out onto the street for the first time for three years and a platoon of Russians jumped on her, took her down into a basement and serially raped her. And that story was very central to what I was trying to say, basically, you know, that not only is war vile, but it's the people who are most vulnerable who get the worst treatment, in nearly every system they get the worst. And she epitomised something about this for me … |
| 1:40:00 | … And I remember after I'd done the interview she'd said suddenly at the end 'I've never told anybody about that, I've never even told my husband, you can't use it'. To me this was very central to the film, so I was in a bit of a difficult position, so I said 'Alright, it's your interview, I respect you, but will you go home and think about it beforehand. And if you want to come back and see it again, or bring your husband, please do'. So she came back with her husband a week or so later, and she saw it and she said 'Yes, it can go out, it's important that it's there'. And then after all that had happened Sidney, who didn't know anything about it, he demanded to see the film, and it gets to that point in the film and he said 'That woman's lying, the Russians never raped anybody'. And I said 'Sidney, it's well known that they did. You might excuse it, it might be understandable after what had been done to the Russians, but yes of course they did'. 'No you can't use it'. And I had this terrific row with him, he was insisting it came out, I absolutely refused to cut it, Dennis tried to sort things out and so on. I remember David Plowright rang me up and |

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| | said 'You've got to take this out' and I said 'Sod off', and he said 'Nobody talks to me like that', and I said 'Well I just have'. And because there had been this stand-off the programme had been postponed, so it got more headlines, what was going on. And then when we get to Johnny Cash he says 'You can't show this, the gas chamber, I see it'. And I said 'Absolutely I'm going to show it'. And he said 'You can't'. And there was another huge row, Dennis again tried to intervene, but I'd had enough by that time. Three times in a bloody row. So I said … the press were now asking 'Why has this show been postponed?'. And I announced that I was leaving Granada. That was all over the press too. And the … |
| 1:42:30 | … result was that I did leave Granada but Martin Smith was editing it for me, Martin said he was leaving too and would take his name off. In the end they insisted on cutting a bit but they didn't cut the sequence which was what they'd threatened to do, they cut about 10 seconds inside the sequence, which didn't help but didn't actually damage the sequence. But I left Granada in a rather public spat so that was sort of the end … I did go back to Granada to do some things later, I certainly worked with Dennis later, a number of things with Dennis, I even employed him once later on, I sort of employed him. We had some old schemes that we'd dreamt up in the past which we did together many years later. But … so that was the end of my time with Granada.<br><br>[Question: Did you have anything else lined up?]<br><br>No, but Jeremy had heard you see, because of the awards and all this stuff, and he rang up – No I didn't – and said 'It's going to be the centenary of Dickens's death, 1970, next year, will you make a programme about Charles Dickens for me?'. Because he was Head of Factual Programmes at that stage. And I got another job as well, made a little programme about Dennis Mitchell for LWT. So that was how I got started. And at the same time I'd also been asked, through the theatre stuff we'd done for the British Council, I'd been asked to direct a production of 'Look Back In Anger' at Derby Playhouse, because I was living up in Manchester at that stage. So that was quite handy, I went and did that. And then the director at the Playhouse, the management, said they wanted to move it on from where it was, get a new theatre built and this sort of thing: 'Would I come and be Director of Productions?'. And I said 'Yes, sure', so I took it on. And I said 'The first thing we've got to do, it's got to stop being weekly rep, it's got to be at least fortnightly, we've got to do more new plays, we've got to change the nature of this thing'. The Board were very resistant so basically what happened was that I did … I went up to … |
| 1:45:00 | … Derby, did 'Look Back', then I came back and did 'Dickens' which we did half documentary, half dramatization, working with Bruce Norman who'd worked with me on 'Cities at War'. So it was all part of the same stuff. He went on to become Head of the Science Unit at the BBC. So things were fitting together. Then after I'd done 'Dickens' Jeremy had got |

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| | permission to do 'The World at War'. I went up to Derby to do the things at Derby, but it was clear that the management wasn't going to accede to what we'd agreed in anything like time, so I left. By that time I can't remember who it was who rang me up, I'm not sure it wasn't Dennis Foreman: 'You keep walking up of jobs like this, you'll become unemployable, Michael'. Because I'd done it rather frequently at that point. And I had also agreed … Nick by that time had started an arts festival, Nick Light who I'd worked with, he'd managed to persuade some people to put together an arts festival – I think their aim was to try to rival Edinburgh – in Glasgow. He said would I come up and run the drama and entertainment there, which was going to be in 1972. So I was doing 'The World at War' for Jeremy, I was going off to do that, and then after 'Dickens' Jeremy said would I do a programme about Turner, the painter. Jeremy had originally been going to do the programme about the Holocaust himself, he'd asked me to do the film about the occupation of Europe. We chose always one country to do these things, rather than doing a general survey, and I'd obviously wanted to do Yugoslavia where my wife came from, but he said 'That's too complicated', and I think he was right. We agreed that Holland, Holland was the most like England in many ways, it was perhaps what occupation would have been like if it had happened here, so we did Holland. That was what led me to … |
| 1:47:30 | … the most interesting of the senior Nazis that I think I met. One of the most evil. While I was in Holland I wanted to interview the people who were pro-Nazi – pretty difficult to own up to after the War. The widow of the Dutch SS leader was still alive, her husband had been executed after the War. Charles Bloomberg, who was my researcher, who was an amazing wonderful man, he'd been thrown out of South Africa because he was a journalist in South Africa and he kept writing articles that upset the Government, taking the mickey out of them, interviewing Government ministers and taking the mickey out of them for apartheid. He'd managed to charm this ghastly woman, and he said 'We're doing this programme about the Holocaust as well, about genocide', and she said 'You should meet my friend General Karl Wolff' – Hitler's Chief of Staff. We didn't realise he was alive. So that would lead us in the end, it wasn't as simple as that. So I was doing the first part of 'The World at War', doing Derby, and then the Glasgow thing, and doing the Turner film, they really kept me sane. Jeremey, after I'd done the occupation of Holland, he'd been going to do the Holocaust, and he said 'I don't think I can, I'm too close to it', because some of his family had died in the Holocaust. 'Will you do it?'. And I must say I was pretty doubtful, but I decided I should.<br><br>[Question: As a sort of moral challenge?]<br><br>Yes, it needed doing and I felt, I wanted to do it. I remember the first thing I did was to read everything I could, all the … of those days, highly regarded histories. And I wrote a long essay, 50, 60 pages, about it, in which I basically argued that what we had to do … |

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| 1:50:00 | … was to face the facts without sentimentality. We had to face them square on, to actually not flinch, not to have substitutes, but to really confront what had happened. I also said I'm not really interested in the individuals who beat up, the thugs, because every dictator has a thug who'll do his command. What I'm interested in is the real evil people, the people who were behind this, if we can get to them. Now Karl Wolff was certainly one of them. There was another little man we found, and he was still strangely proud of it, he said 'One day, you know, Adolf Eichmann said to me 'You really invented the Final Solution''. Because he was the bureaucrat who'd come up with a stream-lined plan for getting the Jews to register and be processed and clocked onto the trains. First of all it was supposedly to go and get out of the country before the War, and then … Those were the people I was primarily interested in. And obviously the survivors, appalling stories, very difficult very often. So those were keeping me sane and it took a long time. We'd been given a tip off that Karl Wolff was alive, but we tried to contact him and got nothing back, then we got various false leads and we'd turn up at little villages in the middle of nowhere and knock on the door of the right address and someone with a blank face, too blank, would come to the door. We had the help of the Frankfurt Prosecutor's Office, various of the Prosecutor's Office, Simon Wiesenthal, Yad Vashem in Israel, all of that. And I knew everything about Karl Wolff, of course, I'd read and read and read, but Sue McConachie who was my researcher … |
| 1:52:30 | … in Germany, she spoke wonderful German, she was English obviously, she studied German at university and did a lot of work for Munich Radio, one of the Bavarian radio stations in Munich. We were in our hotel room discussing something late one afternoon in Berlin, and the phone rang, this was two years after our tip-off in Holland: 'There's a gentleman downstairs who wants to see you. He won't give his name'. So we go downstairs and they indicate this gentleman, an old man, straight military bearing, so we went over, and he said 'I am General Karl Wolff, I believe you want to speak to me'. So we sort of said 'Yes'. But there were still drives in darkened cars with guys whose shoulders were a little too wide, if you know what I mean. He was actually living in a little, very remote spot in the woods in the Rhineland, because he'd been arrested after the War, tried at Nuremburg, given four years. He'd then been re-arrested after the Eichmann trial and got another twelve years. We just assumed he'd vanished to South America or died, but he was alive. It took us a long time, we slowly got his confidence. We used to go … Sue would cook his super for him in the evening once we knew how to get to the place and didn't have to go with men with wide shoulders. He would talk a lot about the wonders of Nazism and the ideals of Nazism but not the Holocaust, and it was a case of inducing him. And this particular evening Sue was cooking his supper and she was going to make him scrambled eggs with a tin of those little button mushrooms in. He suddenly … I heard, my German's not wonderful, I heard him say something about 'My friend, Count Bach-Zelewsky' and I knew that … |

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| 1:55:00 | … name. I said to Sue, 'Quick, ask him whether he was with his friend Bach-Zelewsky when Himmler visited Minsk', because I knew that Himmler had only once seen an execution, an Einsatzgruppen type execution for himself, and that was on this occasion in Minsk when he'd been with Count Bach-Zelewsky who was his adjutant. And I remember just as he was into the story she tipped the button mushrooms in and he said 'Oh yes, we were in Minsk'. And he tells the story about Himmler wanting to see some people shot for himself, and how he'd walked forward to the open grave to see more closely, and another man had been shot in the head and a splash of brain had gone onto his lapel of his uniform, and as Karl Wolff described it, he said 'He swayed, and went green, and looked as if he was about to fall into the pit, and I had to rush forward and grab him'. And Sue was … you mustn't get too excited if you want people to go on talking, and she was calmly mixing this stuff which looked remarkably like brains. When we later came to do the interview, he talked a huge amount about the ideals of Nazism and we kept on filming and filming, and in those days it was a half hour roll, you know, and bloody expensive, so we went on all morning and we weren't getting to any of the meat of the thing, it was getting very difficult and Sue and I were sitting there. So when we broke for lunch I said to Sue 'OK, one over of soft balls after lunch, and then we bowl him a fast one, ask him about Minsk'. So we go back after lunch and have another game of pat ball on the first reel, and the second reel goes on you see, and I give Sue the nod, and she says 'Now, mein general, about Minsk, you described to us when you went with your friend Count Bach-Zelewsky … |
| 1:57:30 | … to Minsk, could you tell us about …'. 'What? I never told you about that did I? Oh no, I can't … No! I am an officer and a gentleman. I have told you once so I will tell you again'. At that moment the fucking camera jammed. I said to Sue 'Keep talking to him' and I said to the cameraman 'I don't care what you bloody well do, for God's sake get it going'. It was probably about 30 seconds but after what seemed like an age it started again, and Sue asked him the question again, and then actually he told the story far better than he had the first time he told us, far more detail, and he went on and described other things. So I was actually very glad that I'd given him the chance, and it wasn't a trick question, that he'd actually decided himself to tell that story. There was a sort of converse side of that. There was an amazing woman called Rita Yasalevska, and I'd heard about her through Yad Vashem, she was quite famous at the time of the Eichmann trial. She had been rounded up by the Einsatzgruppen and she had a baby in her arms, and a daughter, and she'd been called forward to be shot, and the child had been shot, and the baby had been shot, and she had been shot, shot into the grave, and as it happened the bullet had very seriously injured her but hadn't actually penetrated her skull but bounced off. And she came to under a pile of bodies that evening, and they hadn't filled the pit in, probably because they were going to shoot more the next day I suppose, and she managed during the night to crawl out … |

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| 2:00:00 | … and she was found by some partisans and hidden for the rest of the war and survived. She testified at the Eichmann trial. She had a heart attack, nearly died, because she had a very hard time from the defence, cross examined her, given her a very hard time indeed, and she'd been very close to dying. Yad Vashem pointed her to us and I met her, and she said Yes she would, but her family were very worried about it, because they were terrified she'd have another heart attack. And when we got there, she'd brought her son: after the war she'd got to Israel, remarried, and had children and so on. And she brought her son, and it seemed her son had never heard this story, so I sat the son down with somebody at the back of the room, out of his mother's eye line as far as possible, and …<br><br>[Question: How old was he?]<br><br>I think he was probably about 15. And, she'd insisted on coming to be interviewed, she said to her family 'I have a duty to tell this story, it has to go on the record'. She had a very strong sense of that. And as she told the story, and she got to the point of the shooting and so on, the son started to become very agitated and I was terrified that he'd interrupt and maybe make matters worse, and I indicated to the person beside him to keep him calm. And you could see, you can see it if you look at the whole thing, the blood drains out of her face as she gets to the point where the baby is snatched out of her arms and shot and she pleads with the SS man not to shoot her daughter, and the daughter is snatched and thrown in and so on … |
| 2:02:30 | … You see it all go and I was terrified she was going to have a heart attack and I thought if the son interrupts she'll almost certainly have a heart attack. And I knew that somehow we had to let her go on, and she describes falling into the pit, coming round, crawling out, being hidden by the partisans, and I didn't want any more than that of course, but I knew that somehow she had to get to the end of it. And she told us about coming to Israel, and all the blood came back into her face, and at the end of it she was OK, and she didn't have a heart attack and she was fine. But it was a hugely emotional interview to conduct as some of the others were, with people. But we met some very remarkable … the great thing was, we had time. Jeremy gave us the time, so we had nearly three years to make that film, and at the end we had so much the editor and I decided we would put together that material, it should be kept for the record. So there was the 51 minute (or whatever it is) film 'Genocide'. But we then put together – we never thought it would be shown as a film per se - I think there was about 6 hours of this stuff, archive stuff and interviews that we'd got, and we wanted it just kept on the record, and I wrote a rough narration. And then when the series became a success, Thames wanted everything they could get, so they said would we cut that into a film? So that became a 3.25 or 3.5 hour version of the film, 'Auschwitz, the Final Solution', where we were able to use more of that |

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| | stuff. And also I did the interview with Hitler's secretary. The reason for that Sue, my assistant: we were down in Munich researching something or other, and she met up with a friend from her days in Munich Radio who asked her what she was doing … |
| 2:05:00 | … and Sue said 'Well I'm doing this film about the Second World War', and her friend said 'That's interesting, there's a woman upstairs in my block of flats who they say was Hitler's secretary. Would you like to meet her?'. 'Yeah! Sure!'. That was Traudl Junge. Basically Sue and I had dinner with Traudl who actually was a very nice woman, by then very much a committed Social Democrat. She'd been very young during the war, like rock star fans going out to cheer Hitler, sort of thing in the 1930s. During the war she was in a ministry as a typist, there was a typing competition, she won it, but what she didn't know was that the winners in each department, Hitler was looking for another secretary. So she was told to go off to the bunker in East Prussia where he would dictate to her. When she got there she was shown into the room, her turn came, she was extremely frightened of course, and it was quite cold, and she made a complete, she was all butter fingers all over the place, and Hitler apparently could be very charming, said 'My dear, are you cold?'. 'Yes my Fuhrer, I think so'. 'Oh, all right'. And he brought over a little oil stove and put it down beside her, and in that time she got her breath back and calmed her nerves down and started typing again and she was fine and got the job. When we did the interview, once we'd got to know her and she'd agreed, we wanted to interview her, she said she'd like to come over to London to do it. I think at that stage she wasn't being too public in Germany. She'd been in Australia for a bit after the war. So she came over to London to do it, she wanted to see London, and I remember Philip Whitehead who was working on the series, he took her round the House of Commons, she was very interested in that. And then when we came to do the … |
| 2:07:30 | … interview we were sitting in Thames at Euston Road doing the interview, Sue and I sitting beside her, and somebody came and whispered in my ear about half way through 'We've just had a phone call, apparently they say there's a bomb in the building. Do you want to carry on sir?'. (Laughs). Luckily I made the right call which is why I'm here to tell you the story. Presumably somebody had heard that Hitler's secretary was there and (it was) either a prank or showing their disapproval, I don't know. But we were jolly lucky. It was just that time when TV companies were, you know, in the 'printing money' business a bit. They had to get brownie points to get their licences renewed so Thames gave us the space. After that Jeremy – it was Jeremy's idea, it wasn't mine – would I like to do a version of Hazlitt's 'Liber Amoris', you know, dramatized thing with Kenny Hague, the original Jimmy Poulter, and Lynne Frederick.<br><br>(Question: Can I just ask, you've been talking about a number of factual documentary programmes you worked on, when you were talking to |

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| | people who had been through extraordinary experiences – the German officer, the woman who was shot. These programmes were at the cutting edge of what is morally permissible in terms of programme-making. Have there been cases where, knowing someone's story, you made the moral judgment 'I can't ask them to talk on camera about this'? Or would you say, 'No, if they're up for it, and they've got a story to tell, it's my job to help them tell it?')<br><br>I've never been faced with that one precisely. When we were doing The World At War I was offered a number of … thugs. People who were I suppose the usual deprived racist idiots you find anywhere. I wouldn't do any of them because I don't think they're interesting. I don't think they actually have anything to say that's actually going to be enlightening. I think the point is; What might be enlightening? Perhaps my judgment is wrong, but … |
| 2:10:00 | … Yes of course there's a moral line to be drawn. But I'm afraid I'm a believer in not exploiting. There's a boundary between exploitation and the truth, a sometimes quite hazy boundary, but there is a boundary in my view. In none of these cases for instance do I show the gore. Yes I use archive film which does have a lot of dead bodies in it, but you don't see somebody with close up of brains and stuff. Yes there is archive film, there's the one famous piece of archive film which they're always using of those people in Poland, after the Germans started rounding up people where the chaps are told to get out of the lorry and they've all got target things planted on them, and they're shot into the pit. Of course we used that because it's about the only piece of footage like that there is to give you an idea. And we also used a shot of some people being hung in public. But it's quite a wide shot; yes it's horrid but I think in the circumstances it's not exploitative, I hope it isn't, because I think you're actually talking about something that's actually very serious. Because sentimentality is an equally bad sin in my view. So I get a bit fed up with stuff that I feel is exploitative, either violence all over the screen or everybody fucking everybody else to be blunt. I mean come on, I actually know that. I don't actually … Perhaps one of the reasons I admire Terence Rattigan is that things are implicit rather than explicit (laughs).<br><br>(Question: OK thank you. It just seemed an apposite point at this moment. So we're sort of in the late 70s I think in terms of your career).<br><br>Yes. Also that's a point at which you know Bob Heller and people were helping people. I'd get phone calls when I was in trouble with Granada, Bob would ring up and say 'D'you need a job?' and come up with some excuse to go off on some ludicrous jaunt, or see … |
| 2:12:30 | … if he could get the rights to something and give me some money and make me a decent dry martini. And he did that for all sorts of people, John Pilger, Ken Loach, all sorts of people got jobs from him. And it was that period when, you know, people were being … We'd been through the |

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| | swinging 60s and there was, we've got to make progress, all these old farts have been in charge for too long. There might be a bit of that feeling now, perhaps, I don't know.<br><br>(Question. So you were at Thames until … )<br><br>I was never on staff. I would go back and do various things for the BBC so that when for instance, I think it was because of the long version of the Holocaust film, 'Auschwitz, the Final Solution', I've always believed that's why, I've never dared ask him, I was up at Granada, I'd gone up to do a film about a theatrical landlady, absolutely terrible film, one of the ones I'm ashamed of, I wanted the money at that point, also I wanted to get back into Granada, it was a way in. But I remember it was Christmas Eve or the day before, phone rang n the office, a producer from the BBC who I'd never heard of, Graham Benson, it was his first production job, said he was from the Drama Department and the Drama Department had been asked to take over doing the obituaries of people who were connected with the theatre and cinema. Would I be interested in doing the obituary of Terence Rattigan who was well known to be dying of cancer at that time. I was amazed. I later discovered that probably why he'd rung me up was that he'd gone out to the Jerusalem Festival to pick up a prize for the BBC and they hadn't won it because our long film about the Holocaust had won a prize, and he'd had to carry it back to London and it was little thing on a whacking great lump of Jerusalem rock, so I think this was probably his vengeance to me. Anyway I was very surprised when I got the phone call and I said 'I think you've got the wrong chap … |
| 2:15:00 | … I'm on the other side, I'm with the Royal Court and Joan Littlewood and all those people'. I knew Joan, I'd tried to get her to come up to Glasgow, we used to have lunch with Joan because she was very interested in what Safie was doing in the East End. And he said 'No it's you I want'. So I said 'Well'. I was keen to get into the Drama Department at the BBC of course, my interest in the theatre and all of that. It wasn't the same doing dramatized documentaries for Jeremy because that was the Documentaries Department, it was fun but it wasn't, you know … So I said 'OK then, but can I be critical?'. And he said 'Yes, say what you like'. So I said 'OK fine'. I set off thinking 'Right, Terence Rattigan, that'll be a pretty bloody rude obituary'. So I went into the BBC Library early the next year after the break, and said 'Give me all the books on Terence Rattigan' because in those days you could go into the BBC Library and just do that. And they looked on the shelves and said 'There aren't any'. So I said, 'Well get the press stuff will you?'. And they came back, and there was nothing much recent, and except for some very damning stuff it was all much earlier in his career. So then I was reduced to sitting down and re-reading the plays. I mean I'd been in one or two of them rep, obviously, I'd even been in one at school. And re-reading them I thought, 'We've done this man a terrible injustice, these are bloody good'. And as it happened I was having lunch with Naima Tuller who … amongst these jobs I'd been doing working for Thames and |

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| | things I'd been through … I've never really found out the background to this but something to do with David Frost and all sorts of stuff round the back … |
| 2:17:30 | … I'd been asked to go out to Oman, not Amman in Jordan, Oman, the south-eastern quarter of the Arabian peninsula, to make a film for the Sultan about Oman under what were still regarded as suspect circumstances. His father had been overthrown and he'd been replaced almost certainly with the aid of the British Government and SAS and various other people. It was a very backward country, there was the Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Gulf which had taken over a lot of Yemen, remember we'd had a lot of trouble in Aden too, and was threatening to take that over. Now Oman, amongst the things it controls is the Cape of Musandam which is the bit that sticks right out into the Persian Gulf – what was called the Persian Gulf. I mean basically you could lob a brick down the funnel of every tanker going through, the world's oil supplies, so it was strategically very important if that fell to the Communists. The old ruler had refused any modernisation so there were no schools for women, there wasn't a proper hospital, there were only two miles of made up road, it was extremely backward. I knew very little about it and I didn't make that sort of film, some bloody dodgy ruler. I remember I asked Jeremy 'Shall I do it?' and he said 'Yeah, take the money and run'. They offered rather good pay. So I was supposed to go for three weeks, and it took months, it was fascinating. In the end they paid me so much I didn't want more money, I asked them to bring my wife out. The kids used to come up and rub her hands to see if the white came off, she was the first white woman they'd ever seen. There was a civil war going on, we had some adventures. Obviously I'd been in Israel and I'd lived in East Jerusalem because my Israeli researcher had said 'No, you don't want to live in … it's much nicer'. She'd also taken me … |
| 2:20:00 | … to Gaza, 'If you want to understand this place', and I'd been very shocked by what she'd shown me, terribly shocked. It was like the films of ghettos that I was working on, even then. So I'd started to get that love of … I had a relation, an uncle who'd been the Director of Education in the last years of Palestine, so there was that connection. I loved Oman, I got a love for Arabia really. I met the most wonderful man who'd lived there most of his life who spoke perfect Arabic and who introduced me to lots of things … Sultan Qaboos was trying to modernise it, women coming into the police force and appearing on television and all sorts of things. He wanted to record it before it changed. So when I'd finished the film there was then some stuff about them wanting to fiddle about with the editing and I got … 'My condition for doing this was that I got a free hand. I'm not changing it, that was my condition'. We were at deadlock. Then I got a phone call from this chap Nayim Mutallo who I'd never heard of, he said 'Will you come and see me?'. And I'd been very resistant, I thought 'I'm not falling for this', you know. But eventually I said OK, I'd go and have a cup of tea with him. We'd had a discussion |

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| | and we'd come to an agreement, to sort this problem out. And then we'd more or less finished the film, and I got a phone call from him, and he said 'Where's the book?'. And I said 'What book?'. And he said 'Didn't you read your contract? There's a clause there that says you will write a book about your experiences'. 'What?'. (Laughs). Richard Fawkes who I'd taken out with me to be my Production Manager, he was starting off as a serious writer by that time, so … |
| 2:22:30 | … indeed the contract was there. 'I need it in a fortnight'. So I sat down with Richard and we just divided it up, I'd write the first chapter, he'd write the second, and so on you see. We agreed what the chapters would be about. And Peter Middleton who'd been our cameraman and others had taken lots of lovely photographs, amazing photos. And I was by then, I think … Was I working for Graham, doing … No I can't have been, I was in the BBC and I dictated my chapters to my PA who typed them up. And we got this book in and it came out and was beautifully published, and Nayim was by then my publisher. I mean it sold all of 3 copies in England, 1 or probably 2 of them to my Mum, but we kept getting royalties. I didn't know why. And it kept, you know, it kept being reprinted. And years later when I was in Saudi Arabia, doing some research for something, I was in a hurry, and I remember I managed to get myself attached to write a report for Dar Ahram (?) University which was the big oil centre in Saudi Arabia. And I thought in Saudi Arabia in the short time I've got, I need to latch onto somebody, an ex-pat. The Brits are good but they take time, and the Yanks can be terrible or they can be good. This American professor had approached me and he seemed a nice chap, he'd invited me to tea, and he said to me 'Darlow, that's an unusual name, are you a writer?'. 'No'. He said 'Are you sure?'. I said 'No'. Then I said 'I did write a book about five years ago about Oman, but it wasn't very serious'. 'You're a star around here, come with me'. So he takes me down to the local bookshop and there is this bloody book piled up on the counter. 'All us ex-pats read that because it's the only thing that's even half honest about what it's like to work here" and ours was the most expurgated version of what it's like to work in that part of the world. So Nayim was my publisher you see. So when I came to do the Terence Rattigan … |
| 2:25:00 | … thing I was having lunch with Nayim one day about something or other and he said 'What are you doing?' and I said 'I'm doing this obituary of Terence Rattigan, and do you know we've done him a terrible injustice … ' and I ranted on for ages. And when I drew breath he said 'Well you'd better write his biography then hadn't you?'. I was a bit surprised. Sir Terence very kindly agreed, because various people had tried to write his biography, and he'd once sat down and tried to write an autobiography but he was clearly dying and wasn't going to get round to it. So that's how come I came to do the first edition of the Rattigan biography. But also in the same process Graham had asked me to do this and that was the Drama Department. From that came the chance to do … the first one was a Play for Today, I can't remember, it wasn't a very good play but |

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| | never mind. 'Come the Revolution', a send-up of revolutionary groups and theatre groups. And then one thing led to another so I then started doing more drama than documentary. I can remember back a few years before Nicholas Light and I had been starting this theatre company together, we'd had a conversation and I said 'Nick I think I'm going to concentrate on television, there's more interesting work to be done in television than we're probably going to be able to do in the theatre'. And so I did concentrate on television for those years. I remember many years later when I first came down here, we were at a party at our next door neighbour's, at lunchtime, he was the Chairman of Bath Football Club at that time, Ken Loach was mixed up with Bath Football Club, and I saw Ken across the room. And many years before when Nick and I had been doing things, Nick and I and Ken and Bill Hayes who he'd been working with, they'd been trying to set up a theatre group too … We'd been taken out to lunch at Scott's which was a very posh restaurant in those days … |
| 2:27:30 | … by the Arts Council, and we'd been told 'You chaps are going to be running British theatre in the decades to come' you see. And I saw Ken across the room and I went over and he said 'We were supposed to be revolutionising British theatre, what happened to that?'. And I said 'Well you revolutionised the British film industry so that will do'. Whether I'd make the same decisions now is another matter. So that's how I got into drama, yes …<br><br>(Question: OK so just picking up on your programme making, your production, you were moving into a state in the late 70s, early 80s, when you were doing more drama work, so do you want to talk about … }<br><br>Once I'd started to do drama with the BBC it started to be accepted. It sort of started with Thames, and I'd done things like the 'Street' at Granada and so on, but then yeah, it started to get accepted that that's what I did. And I was just very lucky. I kept getting offered interesting things. And also making a drama, if it's not a proper movie, is a much quicker thing than making a full-sized documentary. So if you were trying to fit other things into your life, because by then we had got a foster child and things, and I wanted to be at home, and also because other things were happening in my life in small-p politics, then that fitted very well. But the chance to do Ibsen and Marivaux … I'd never done a Marivaux play in my life, I didn't know any of them, and I was offered this, with Charlotte Rampling, come on! (Laughs). I didn't do a very good production I'm bound to say but, you know, you're not going to turn it down. And where did I come in: the theatre.<br><br>(Question: And how long did this go on for?)<br><br>It sort of slowly ran out. I did a lot between 1979 when I did 'Crime & Punishment' with John Hurt and Tim West and all that, and then 'Suez' which was a very high-profile thing because it was banned and various people had tried to do it, and then the BBC Director General and people |

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| | interfered in casting. Because I'd originally I think managed to get – it sounded as if I had – possibly … |
| 2:30:00 | … get Peter O'Toole to play Eden, which I thought would be wonderful … faded glamour boy, which is what Eden was … Peter O'Toole. And I got a message saying 'Absolutely not', you know, 'Lady Eden won't approve'. In fact I happened to know that she would approve because they got on quite well. But I happened to know that by a back route, again connected to the 'World At War' because I'd interviewed Eden for the 'World At War', with David Elstein. And I remember Shaun Sutton who was the Head of Drama, and my producer and I, all put in a note saying 'In that case, if the Director General wants to cast the play, he can bloody well direct it'. By which time we'd lost Peter O'Toole. However, you know, it gave me that freedom and that worked out very well. I still did some documentaries, and I did music programmes, made two programmes about Beethoven for Granada, and I'd go off and do the odd documentary as well. And our production company did, yes.<br><br>(Question: Can I pick up on some of the small-p stuff that I'm guessing you were referring to. The whole campaign around the establishment of Channel 4. You've written what is the go-to book, the account, of that whole process. I think a lot of the founding thinkers in the campaign that you became involved in were coming from the political and cultural left)<br><br>I think the cultural left every bit as much as the political left. There was a general feeling that too much of the … that the establishment was too much in charge and that the same old farts had been in charge for ever. There was that feeling about a lot of it. And then the BBC was very, very bureaucratic. It was modelled on the civil service and it frequently felt exactly like the civil service. And although there were very creative people inside it, people who got off 'Play for Today' and all those things … |
| 2:32:30 | … they were sort of working a little bit like people producing *Samizdat* behind the Iron Curtain and then sneaking it onto the air, so to speak. So there was that bit of flexibility but it was still too monolithic in feel. In ITV it was the commercial people who were monolithic. Granada ran motorway service stations. How appropriate they should take it on, having been a cinema chain before that, and so on. Lew Grade and all that, they were the people who ran variety. We'd had the struggle against H.M. Tennent in the theatre, Binkie Beaumont and H.M. Tennent controlling the whole of the West End. There was much more a feeling that the other voices must get out, that the same people shouldn't be in control. Anyway it wasn't democratic, you needed all political, social, creative views there to break the medium up. Television had been limited by the technical issues that there were in old fashioned studio camera television, but that was beginning to free up. The big impetus for things like 'Play for Today' was that suddenly you could do it on a light-weight film camera and you would have flexibility, so it didn't have to be |

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| | in a studio set and things. So that was very much the feeling. Also in the early '60s we were at the end of the thirteen wasted years, you know, where the Conservatives got in after Attlee's Government, and that spirit of the '60s very much was that feeling, and yet Harold Wilson was a disappointment wasn't he? (I think he would seem pretty progressive against Mr Blair's Labour Party but be that as it may). So there was that general feeling of artistic, creative, political discontent. And it was there behind the Iron Curtain too. You know, why was I in touch with Czech dissidents and talking to Poles and things? |
| 2:35:00 | Because we were all of the same mind. They had a much greater problem than I did. I remember once we had the Allende business, we had two people in the house who we were looking after, the police wanted tothrow them out after that revolution down there … all of that.<br><br>(Question: And we're talking about the early or mid 70s?)<br><br>Yes. It started in the 60s, the Free Communication Group started in the 60s. The BFI revolt which was in the 1960s, led by Maurice Hatton, which was basically, the BFI should be more freed up, not just the Experimental Film Fund but the whole business, the Governors and everything else. It should be more progressively run. I mean, the BFI is a pretty good institution, a very good institution in many ways, but there was that feeling, it's got to be freed up, it's got to be under workers' control, the creative people need to be more in charge. All creative people feel that anyway, always.<br><br>(Question: But when historically, when did the proposal for a fourth TV channel first come into public view and then spark the debate … ?)<br><br>Well basically it was the thing about there being more wavelength available so it was very much led from the technical possibility that we reached that point. It was known in the late '60s that we were reaching that point, and by the early '70s: What was going to happen to the vacant, soon-to-be-vacant fourth television wavelength channel? Who was going to go onto it? The BBC had been given a second channel and ITV said 'Well we should have two'.<br>We said 'What we want is more voices, more choice. The BBC may seem too monolithic, but if you have two channels competing directly against each other the choice will get narrowed because the result of commercial, number-of-eyes-in-front-of-the-set competition is to head for the most popular. So it tends to drive down-market. It needs to be a totally different thing, and also it needs to be getting its programmes not commissioned from the centre by a central organization even if you have got various dukes and people around who can control a bit of land, and maybe you've got control of a documentary … |
| 2:37:30 | … shot here, up to a point, but it needs to be much more open-minded and free-spirited'. |

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| | That thinking came from a range of people: Anthony Smith very importantly, who'd been on the 'Tonight' programme with the BBC, wrote this thing saying there has to be a totally different way of doing television. We were very fired up by that. I was certainly, after my experience with Granada, which was a wonderful company compared to some of them, you know, and Bob Heller running the refugee camp at ATV. And going back to my first experience with the BBC, when I go back and suddenly find that because I'm a PA I'm on a game show, you know, like a soldier in the line being told where to go and shoot at the Germans. That didn't accord with what we were thinking. If you look at what was going on in … Joan Littlewood's the obvious example, working in a totally different and exciting sort of theatre. What was going on at the Royal Court, where new voices were turning up. And the Free Cinema movement had been, though that had got a bit more squashed by that point … And anyway, the British film industry was supposedly alive and well in television, wasn't it? But we just wanted more freedom, more space, so it had to be done in a different way.<br><br>(QUESTION: So how did you go about challenging this ITV2 model, this assumption?)<br><br>We had to start getting extremely political about it. The first thing to do was to show up the limitations of an ITV2. That would not produce the broadening of choice … 'This will give us more choice', that's what the ITV companies said, 'If we have two channels we can …'. No, no. They're not going to do that. Unless you have it from a totally different source, all they will do is consolidate around the things that are most popular and set about grabbing audience if they can off the BBC. It has to be something totally left field from that. So that's where that thought came from: the question was how to do it. The notion of a publisher-broadcaster, when you thought about it, it actually worked quite well. But who was going to be … |
| 2:40:00 | … the publisher? What were going to be their standards? And anyway could you structurally make that work when you've got to keep the show on the road for 8, 10 hours a day, every day, and you've got to have a source of programmes, even though by then a lot of the programmes you could go out and pre-record and shoot, they weren't being done live to the same extent. So it has to be a big organisation. It's not like a publisher, say … if a book launch gets delayed by a few weeks, it's not the end of the world. If a programme doesn't turn up on the evening, it is.<br><br>(QUESTION. And who were the institutions that were backing ITV2?<br><br>The ITV companies, the IBA, and to a considerable extent, particularly the Conservative Government. You know, ITV was the child of a Conservative Government. The other thing you have to remember is that in the press there was also this … Rupert Murdoch had just started to move in, and then he threatened to take over LWT. I mean after the franchise round, they'd made all these promises, but the promises they'd made were kept |

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| | secret when they'd won their licences, their franchises. LWT was spectacularly not living up to what had been said in its secret bid and it wasn't being made to. And the thought of Rupert Murdoch coming in and taking it over did not inspire confidence that it would.<br><br>(QUESTION. And the union as well I think … ?<br><br>Yes, because they were worried about job protection, they were frightened that if all the other people came in they'd probably be cowboys, you know, they'd start not employing people properly. And how are you going to get union agreements that cover all of that. You've got a publisher that wasn't actually centrally controlled, you couldn't get a centralised agreement and people were frightened that they were going to lose their jobs. On the other hand people who because of the restrictive practices, particularly the ACTT at that time … the film shop in particular and the television shop had started to become the same, were very restrictive about who could work and what the rules were and so on. Here was this new equipment, these new ideas, and they were being hampered by all of this. And the thought for them, presumably would be, don't know, it'll be just a free for all … |
| 2:42:30 | … a bunch of cowboy builders will come in here, and God knows what will happen. Safety standards will go out the window, fees and wages will go out the window, lots of people will be thrown out of work because if instead of working with a four man crew you can do it with one bloke, probably taking pretty dodgy shots, that's three jobs gone. It's an understandable reaction and there had to be a meeting there. As it happened a lot of us were actually strongly pro-union, I was very much a member of the union and I'd been a London Equity deputy when I was working in the West End. From my early experience at theatre school I had always been not on the hard left, but on what I would regard as the progressive left. And a lot of us were the same. I can remember I was on the ACT Freelance Committee for some time and I remember David Edgar and I on the same side, trying to argue with these people …<br><br>(Question: You did actually persuade them didn't you? You turned the union around in terms of its view of Channel 4).<br><br>Yes, eventually. It took quite a lot of time and also … Also some of the union officials changed so that you got more progressive people who saw that the world was changing, you couldn't take the line of the newspaper printers. In the end the technology would overtake you, you'd better actually come to terms with the technology and find a way of making it work that was equitable for everybody. You had to move with the times otherwise you'd get left behind. The Luddites in the end didn't win, regrettable though it may be in some ways. The steam loom came.<br><br>(Question. And you mentioned the Conservative Party. They came to power in 1979 committed to the ITV2 model … ) |

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| | Yes they did but … We'd spotted it before but we rather lost sight of it because we were so depressed by the election result. A bit of the Thatcherite thing was about small business and encouraging entrepreneurs, so that a more multiple form of entry might actually fit with that. And then there was one night … |
| 2:45:00 | … as well as there being things like the Association of Independent Producers (AIP) where the producers who were trying to get in to make films on different terms, not through the big monolithic studios, to be able to crack the problem of distribution where again there was a sort of cartel between the big producers and the distributors, and indeed the distributors did a lot of funding for the producers, and so on. There had to be another way of making films, the BFI Experimental Film Fund and things had been a help to that, hence the trouble in the BFI, because people wanted to be able to move on into proper (…) where more people would see your work. So these two interests began to see a familiarity in their ideas between each other, they started to talk to each other. A lot of it was … There were various meetings at various times, we went through the various reports on the future of television where we tried to make interventions. And then there was the other broadcasting authority which was a sort of pre-publisher model at the time of the Annan Committee, where Tony Smith was very influential and indeed Philip Whitehead. Philip was certainly hugely important in this. Of course he worked at Thames, became a Labour MP, was MP for Derby. And we'd had all these thoughts, and when Mrs Thatcher got in we were all extremely depressed. A group of us, what we called Sophie's Group, Sophie Balhatchet. When AIP decided that it needed an organiser we got two young women. Sophie was straight out of Oxford - she got a First at Oxford - and Clare Downes. And they made the Evening Standard because these two pretty young women had been hired by AIP in our little office to run the campaign. So those of us who were like-minded, there was a group of us who used to meet informally … |
| 2:47:30 | … all sitting there one night after the Conservatives had got in saying, you know, 'We've risked our bloody careers standing up to the ITV companies saying there ought to be a fourth separate channel, and what for?' and so on. And then one of us, and I cannot remember who it was, said 'Wait a minute. Wasn't there something in the Conservative Manifesto about small businesses and entrepreneurs and all of that? If we set up as small independent producers we'd be small businessmen wouldn't we? That's interesting'. Somebody went and got a copy of the Manifesto and sure enough, so we thought 'Hey. That's worth a go'. Suddenly we'd all become entrepreneurs, not creative producers. Businessmen, we'd sell ourselves that way. So that was the tack. Then we had to find various contacts within the Conservative Party who we thought would be sympathetic. And what we realised was that if we could find a way of getting to Mrs Thatcher she might be sympathetic, because she'd been very much taking that line. She didn't like the big monopolies, she regarded them as the centre of the trade union |

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| | militancy of which she most disapproved. She saw a conspiracy between management and unions and all that stuff, and restrictive practices. So this was quite attractive, and we managed to find that connection through various people, you find that you know somebody who knows somebody in the end, because you've got interesting journalists … And there were one or two people who were actually left wing members of the Conservative Party, or sympathetic to it, amongst this group of people. We weren't all of the same political mind in the party political sense. So that was in the end how we managed to swing it, to convince them that that was likely to be much more interesting. I think that she thought it would be an effective union-busting move, and those of us who were in the ACTT – BECTU [correction: BETA] wasn't involved because it was only in the BBC at that stage … |
| 2:50:00 | … I'm still a member of Equity, there were people with good contacts in Equity particularly people who had done a lot of drama. One way or another we managed to persuade … there were some violent arguments inside the union, I mean in the Freelance Shop, the Annual Conference, on various of the committees. And then there was a faction that was Trotskyite as well which was difficult to handle a lot of the time. It was quite a battle, but that was a period when there were those sorts of battles going on inside unions and the Labour Party and so on.<br><br>[Question. Was there a key Conservative politician who, once they were persuaded, that was the tipping?]<br><br>It is a very curious thing, because he's kind of a demon in my mythology, but strangely it was Keith Joseph at that stage, who actually was for the small businessman, extremely unpleasant in lots of other ways. I can't remember which person it was who had a connection to him, and you had to bypass … Julian Critchley was the one you had to avoid, he was in the ITV pocket and he was broadcasting minister in the Government. So you had to avoid him, but Keith Joseph and Margaret Thatcher had set up the movement in the Conservative Party that had brought her to power originally, so if you could get to him, which someone did manage to do, that really I suspect is what triggered it. You managed to start that one running to the point where she thought, 'Yeah, that's interesting, that might upset the apple cart'. What she hadn't reckoned on was getting Jeremy Isaacs as Controller, as the first boss.<br><br>[Question. Well let's come to that. Was the structure of the new Channel Four in 1982, was it exactly what you'd campaigned for, or most of what you'd campaigned for …?]<br><br>It was most of what we'd campaigned for. We weren't at all happy at that stage about the ITV companies selling its advertising, we thought that they'd use that … |
| 2:52:30 | … as a lever and indeed they had the opportunity and they made a huge |

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| | tactical mistake in that they believed … We sort of suspected they might do that actually because we used to do battle plan games with each other, to work out what move they would make if we did this and so on, all that stuff. We thought to get control of the Channel one of their moves might be to play hard to get over getting enough programmes. Jeremy actually wanted to turn to outside suppliers, but he didn't believe they could supply either, because everybody said there's three or four independent filmmakers, otherwise they're just freelancers. And we hadn't realised we could make programmes that flexibly, that cheap, actually, either. Because we all made mistakes, guessed wrong. So the ITV companies said 'OK, we'll get control of it by cutting off the programmes, they won't get a supply'. Jeremy then had to turn to the independents, and the independents … he was amazed, suddenly, because he'd always said 'Well there's just very few of them', he also believed that because when he'd been looking at it while he was in the big companies that was true. And he'd also been an independent at one time and had a difficult time, and one or two other people like Alasdair Milne and Donald Banstock had set up companies and they'd had a pretty hard time too, had to go crawling back to their bosses. They were surprised when suddenly, out of the woodwork, all this talent turned up, and it produced the programmes, and a lot cheaper than anybody forecast, including the people making them in most cases. I mean the first 'Film on Four' that we got which was certainly the happiest film that I ever did, we'd set up a sort of collective company, so we had cameramen and editors and designers, musicians, directors, producers, writers, and we worked … It wasn't quite a collective, but it was a partnership, worked in rather that way. I mean, we all were working on … We put in a budget of, I think, £250 or £300,000. And Otto Plaschkes … |
| 2:55:00 | … you know, who was a very experienced movie producer, who was our producer, he'd worked with David Lean and all those sorts of people, and had made good independent films himself for the cinema … we came in at less than half the budget, we were so embarrassed, we handed the money back to Channel 4 because the idea was that if you had an under-spend you split it 50:50, but we were so embarrassed we just gave the whole lot back. Mind you we thought it would stand us in good stead for the future. I mean, you know, we just didn't know either. But it was such a happy film to do because we all had a stake in it, you know. The actors weren't part of the company, and the writer wasn't because the script came via a New Writers competition at the Royal Court, signalled through David Rose's department that it might be a good idea to look at that one … But you know, we shot in a way that would have been very difficult for television, because it was on a farm, and it was about two lads growing up on a farm going through adolescence, and a widowed mother, and we followed the farm through the tribulations of their first year when they start off with mixed dairy herd and hill sheep, in the Borders, and we follow right through the year, as things go right and wrong … Lambing, we made the boys, two young actors, we put them on the farm with the farmer that we were using, so they really could lamb, and so on. You know, the cattle had to be slaughtered, we went into the |

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| | slaughterhouse and filmed it, and all that, for a year, but we were all in it together and it was lovely.<br><br>[Question: How long did that last? It sounds like a golden period, there was that freedom, you were discovering how to do things within this new regime].<br><br>Well we began to learn, also there were various things coming up within a big collective company, some things worked better than others, some of the relationships worked better than others, and so on. After about three years Rod Taylor who was Light Entertainment, he'd done things like 'Sunday Night at the London Palladium', he'd actually been Head of Light Entertainment at Granada, he was there with me, my sort of generation … |
| 2:57:30 | … he got a series where we used to do … with Paul Gambaccini who was then a radio chap at that stage, we used to do three months of the year after Christmas, up to Easter so to speak, a rock magazine on Saturdays, on Channel 4 in the early evening, the latest thing, going around with whatever musicians were doing interesting things around the world, we'd done that for three years. And we made a couple of other special things, and so on. But by then, rather than three or four other people in the company, we were doing all the work, because we were all freelances at the same time, they were spending the whole time doing other things, and in the end it didn't seem to be really working after a bit, the euphoria had gone to some extent, so Rod and I said perhaps it's time to pack this up and start our own company. We sat outside on Charlotte Street on a nice day in one of those cafes, near Channel 4, and by the end of the lunch we'd agreed that that's what we'd do, and I said to Rod 'The only problem is what are we going to call it?'. Rod said ''Try Again' of course', so started a company which still exists called Try Again Ltd.<br><br>[Question: There's a reference in your book to a phone conversation you had with Paul Fox round about the year 2000, and he rang you up, and he said 'OK Michael, in this whole debate, you won'. And your response was 'No Paul, we both lost'].<br><br>I think that was about television.<br><br>[Question. Yes, television in general including Channel 4].<br><br>Well the next battle after Channel 4 was getting independent production into the BBC and ITV. And that was … you can't have a whole lot of producers producing stuff if you've only got one buyer, which in effect we had. We clearly had to widen that. Also Channel 4 was getting a bit more savvy and getting a bit tougher on the budgets. And also there were a lot … now the market of people wanting to supply to Channel 4 had grown a huge amount so that you needed other outlets, and although you could do a certain amount overseas and so on it wasn't enough, we needed a home market. So the battles to get … |

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| 3:00:00 | … the next battle was to get 25%. And again, the group around Sophie Balhatchet and all of that, we met up, and we decided that yeah we should go for it.<br>Because not all of the IPPA Council, I-P-P-A, independent programme producers association as it was then … which we'd set up because we had to agree terms with the union, with the broadcasters, with Channel 4, we had to have trade terms and union agreements and so on.<br>Actually, getting a union agreement, you might have thought it would be difficult but actually it turned out to be very easy. By then there were slightly different people in the union and we were wanting to have a perfectly sensible agreement and that wasn't actually difficult. Our relations with ACTT and certainly with Equity and the talent unions were fine actually, we never really had any difficulty with that. We had an industrial relations department set up and all of that.<br>So getting into the other broadcasters was vital by then. That was the next thing we had to win. They were pretty resistant and in the end we were going to need Government help to do this. It transpired that one of the people who worked in the IPPA office, her family knew Professor Brian Griffiths who'd recently been appointed as Head of No. 10 Downing Street's Policy Unit, Mrs Thatcher's Policy Unit. So we asked her if she could get us invited to tea by him. And she managed to get us an invitation to go round and have tea at No. 10 with Brian Griffiths. And we had a perfectly pleasant tea. We'd agreed how we were going to play it, we weren't going to push our luck at an unofficial occasion, that's what we said. But just as we were leaving, I said to Brian Griffiths quietly … |
| 3:02:30 | … 'Would it be alright if I wrote to you from time to time about what's going on in broadcasting, because as you know there's some quite interesting stuff'. And he said 'Yes I would welcome that'. I didn't use it straight away. I knew that you shouldn't … not … He's a very busy man, my political views and his were miles apart, but there you are.<br>That turned out to be an extremely useful contact, because basically when we tried to get to the 25% we weren't really getting anywhere. The BBC and ITV had more or less ganged up, they weren't going to let us have it, and we knew we were going to have to prise them apart, and we were getting nowhere, and again the same group of us met. We said: 'I think we're going to have to use the nuclear option. We're going to have to break off negotiations with either BBC or ITV in such a way that it forces the other lot to come to an agreement with us because they'll want some brownie points with the Government who are also being difficult about what's going to happen in broadcasting. We have to do this ploy now'. Once I'd started … These negotiations were getting nowhere and ITV was simply stone-walling completely, and the BBC was more or less following suit. We used to go into the meetings with the ITCA, the ITV companies' association, in their headquarters, and they would sit along one side, and the companies didn't agree, and they would start to argue amongst themselves for a little while … |

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| | [Question: In front of you?]<br><br>Oh yes! And we could see that this was potentially … We used to have bets with each other because Paul Fox used to go off the deep end particularly, he would get very ratty, he was fed up because Yorkshire wasn't getting its fair share of access, he felt, from the other network companies. We got some interesting people and some interesting stuff and you know, Paul's a fighter. And we used to have bets between ourselves: 'The first person to say something to get Fox to go off the deep end and get them to fight each other, they get a free round of drinks after the meeting'. We used to have these bets as to who could do it first … |
| 3:05:00 | … and wait to see who could cause the explosion. And I got into the habit of reporting fairly regularly to Brian Griffiths and I'd ring him up, I had his direct line phone number by that time, he'd called me in to see him once or twice. I would tell him, now they've done this, now they've done that, you know, not getting anywhere. And the legislation was getting nearer, and we knew we had to get this through. So when the time came that we decided it's now that we'll break off with ITV, which should force the BBC because they were worried about the licence fee, to come back to the table, get brownie points with Mrs Thatcher for the licence fee they wanted … And so we plotted that this was going to happen. I was directing a John Galsworthy play called 'Strife' which is about a strike in a company where the boss and the union leader are so intransigent that in the end they destroy both. A 1920s play, very much of that period, Galsworthy. I was directing it partly in the studio at the BBC and partly up at Ironbridge because it's a period play. And I was in rehearsals for this, and we agreed that we'd do the break-off, so we planned it out. I had to go into the studio on the Tuesday morning, I'd got last technical rehearsal, this that and the other, in the rehearsal room on the Monday. We agreed that we'd do this on the Thursday before, so we gave ourselves different jobs, and one of my jobs was to write to Brian Griffiths a letter that would get delivered to him the night before we made it public. Because we were going to make a public statement at 9 o clock in the morning to catch them off guard, but Brian had to know so that he could be alerted … |
| 3:07:30 | … so that he could get it the night before. And I came back from rehearsal, Brian rang me up and said 'What is going on?', so I told him, so they had been warned. And then I went into the studio, the announcement was made, all the others had planned it, I came out of the studio at 10 o clock at night, got home and said 'What's happened?', they told me so we then waited to see. The next morning I went into the studio, went down onto the floor at 10 o clock, and just as I was about to start a message came down from the gallery 'Come up to the gallery at once'. Alan Charlesworth, he was my Floor Manager, the only time he thinks it was ever written in a BBC Drama log: 'Director off the floor for the first eight minutes taking a call from No. 10 Downing Street'. I |

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| | wanted to know what was going on, what papers it was going to be in, where else we were going with this, and so on.<br>As soon as I'd finished the four days' studio we had to go up to Ironbridge to shoot there. The BBC, by the end of I think the first day, had summoned us back into talks and by the time I got … I think I'd been I Ironbridge for one day, the BBC … An agreement had been reached. I hadn't been there, I'd been away shooting, the others had made the agreement. I remember I drove down from Ironbridge to the Television Centre to join the others for a drink with the BBC Director General and so on, and then drove back up to Ironbridge at 4 o clock the next morning to carry on with it.<br>And then of course ITV fell into line, of course. Because they were otherwise in the firing line.<br>There was a degree of plotting in that way. But by the end of it I'm not sure that we really improved things. The reason that I say that is that then you started to get more and more bigger companies coming in, who were not coming in necessarily … |
| 3:10:00 | … for creative reasons, or if they had, had become much more business oriented because of the investment that they'd got from outside … They became more and more interested in getting more and more popular stuff, made stuff that would sell. That isn't where we'd come from, about that. And there were huge arguments about these things. There was a big row about one of the first direct broadcasting channels where some of the independent people on the council of IPPA were involved in a bid. Now we believed absolutely there should be no cross-ownership between an independent and a broadcaster of any sort, that actually starts to drive you back to the old system. And now if you look at it it's pretty hard to distinguish a lot of the so-called independents from broadcasters if you look at where their broadcasting interests are. And yeah, it's more complicated because we've got cable and we've got online and we've got all sorts of other stuff … The nature of the game changed at that point, the end of the '80s, early '90s, it really changed.<br><br>[Question: So what we're looking at now is not … the broadcasting world we have now is not what you were campaigning for … ]<br><br>It's totally different, an entirely different ecology now and it works entirely differently. I'm out of it, I don't understand it. They don't want old farts like me anyway, and I wouldn't know, but it seems to me to be entirely different. It's probably my age, but some people say that television now is better than it's ever been: all I can say is there seems to be very little of it that I want to watch. I regret that there are very few, for instance, single documentaries, they all have to be long series, too many of them have to be lifestyle series. And drama is for ever series: where is the single play? It doesn't have to be a series. Series are built on cliff-hangers and this that and the other, that is a form which may be inimical to a whole lot of things that you might want to explore.<br>Probably it's my age … |

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| 3:12:30 | … but I tend to get very irritated by some of the technical things too. Why can't I hear the dialogue? I used to be taught when I first went into the theatre: If they can't hear the line don't bother to say it. The writer needn't have bothered to write it. And I actually, you know, even 'The Handmaid's Tale' which is in many ways very good … too much of the … one of the leading actors – I'm being careful to de-gender that word – I think 20% of that person's lines I probably don't hear and they may for all I know be rather important ones. What was the sound recordist doing? Were they not listening to it, how it is on a domestic set? We were always made to. We had to play it back not through a proper sound system but at some stage had to play it back at the dubbing stage through an ordinary set of domestic speakers with a certain amount of background noise so that you got an idea of how people were really going to listen to it.<br><br>[Question. So do you think this is about different creative decisions being made, or just a technical laziness that has crept in … ?]<br><br>I think probably if everybody is going round with little tiny screens doing this and earpieces in and everything, I think it's all to do with that. I don't know, I'm just an old fart. (Laughs). You know, on the one hand they have … I remember I went to an RTS Conference a few years ago and this was all about how wonderful High Definition is, this that and the other, they'd got all the latest whatever, this massive screen … I remember at some point, they were showing a bit of some film, some documentary film, and all these chaps were going on about how wonderful it was, and I made the mistake of sticking my hand up and saying 'Yes, but the content was crap, doesn't that matter?'. By God I was nearly crucified by that lot. That didn't seem to … That gets up my nostrils … (Laughs). Yeah. (Laughs).<br><br>[Question. Well, focusing on that, and on the work you've done … You started in theatre, you moved into television and established yourself as a very successful documentary and factual programme maker, and were delighted then when opportunities came up to … |
| 3:15:00 | … make TV drama … Is there a great difference between drama programme making and factual programme making or are they actually … ]<br><br>Well there are some pretty obvious differences, because you know the plot before you begin.<br><br>{Question. … It's storytelling I have in mind. Is there something they share … ?]<br><br>Oh the storytelling principles are the same. You actually … I believe that you do have to tell a good story. Some observational documentary isn't very obviously telling a story but actually it is. Because one of the things |

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| | that people watch very closely if you're careful … Somebody very early in my career said to me 'What is the most powerful thing on television?'. Answer? It's Richard Nixon lying to the nation. It's you looking in his eyes and seeing if he's lying. Remember the famous Richard Nixon when he was in trouble, when he was Governor of California? And saying 'I have this hard-luck story' he told, and it's that you're watching.<br><br>During the 'World at War' we're looking in Karl Wolff's eyes, you are looking at Rita Yovaleska, the woman who was shot into the trench, into her face, and living with her that experience. When Sidney Bernstein says 'I see that man die' in the gas chamber, *he* sees him die. You don't actually see him die. You're with him because he's in close-up and the other things are in close-up. You're supplying it, your imagination, your emotion is going with them, and those things are the same.<br><br>If you look at the best observational documentaries, Dennis Mitchell or Paul Watson's best work, again it's the same. Now you can take that too far and turn it into exploitative, silly games, you know … Spy television. That is not the same. Although that's why it probably holds people, but that's exploitative in my view … |
| 3:17:30 | … I don't think it is particularly informative, because you tend to put freaks, or put them in freak situations if you know what I mean.<br><br>[Question. Are you generally hopeful or not, about the future of television?]<br><br>I don't know. Broadcast television, it has every opportunity to be OK I think, it's just whether it will, whether it has the will to do it, the people in charge. There is all that other stuff, and there will be some good stuff there.<br><br>I think I told you that there was a point at which I made a decision, you know, to go into television. I think if I was a young person looking at it now, I'm not sure that I might not make the opposite decision and go into the theatre again. Because I think there's some really interesting new writing going on in the theatre. Yes there are difficulties, Arts Council funding and so on because of the cuts, but there is some really interesting writing in the last few years in the theatre. The whole thing has become much more flexible in form too. When I went into it, it was very much, you know, three-wall sets, you know, straightforward proscenium arch theatre. Now it's any mixture of things, and that's interesting I think.<br><br>Sort of … well … all those people, sort of Brecht and Joan Littlewood and people, I mean, some of that at that time was so exciting … I went to a production of 'The Quare Fellow' at Joan's theatre and I was sitting behind Brendan Behan, and when they got to the bit where the chap was being executed Brendan, who'd had a lot to drink of course, started standing up and shouting 'They crucified my brother! They killed him, |

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| | they killed him!'. And in the end the cast had to stop and turn round and say 'Brendan, either you do the show or we do it'. And his brother had come, taken him out of the theatre, taken him to the bar, and then at the end all the audience shouted for Brendan, 'Author! Author!'. They tipped him onto the stage, and that stage had a terrific rake and didn't have any footlights, so you drop straight into the orchestra pit. |
| 3:20:00 | And every time … he stood there, and he was like those little doll things and started to go down the hill, and the cast had to run and pull him back … It was one of the best nights in the theatre ever. Theatre has that, you know. Television has a problem with that.<br><br>But live television, you know, Norman Swallow's story about doing the Eden interview … He told me this in the back of a taxi once, in Moscow. He's summoned and told to go and do the Eden interview, speech to the nation from Downing Street, and Norman's view on what's happening in Suez was pretty much … Luckily I didn't have to go to Suez because I just got out of the Air Force in time … Norman was horrified, and when he got to Downing Street he was very nervous, and Anthony Eden was very nervous: 'Please, would you read this and see if it's alright'. And Norman said 'I don't think, you know, I have to stay strictly neutral'. Eden was: 'Please, will you please do so'. So Norman thought 'I'd better', so 'OK, yes I will'. He read it with absolute horror you see, and thought 'God, what am I going to say?'. And Eden said 'What do you think? What do you think?'. And Norman said 'Well sir, if I may make one suggestion, you've always been known as a man of honour, could I suggest that you take your glasses off because they might shine in the lights and people will want to see your face'. I just think there's something in that because that's what people do want. It destroyed his career of course, Suez, and that broadcast a large part of it.<br><br>[Question: We've covered the ground that I wanted to cover. Is there anything that … ?]<br><br>I think I've said more than enough.<br><br>[Question: I think it's been pretty good].<br><br>I think I've said more than enough. I have to some extent gone back to the theatre now, because I started writing books which was nice …<br><br>[Question: And in fact what you said about the theatre, and the decision that you might make if you were a young person today, is exactly what we were talking about in the car, coming over to see you. About what would you advise. And that's interesting].<br><br>Of course there's all sorts of things you can do with film now which you couldn't do when I started, with modern cameras and editing and everything, it makes it much more accessible. People can and do do interesting work, I'm just not sure that television is going to do it. There's |

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| | always been a lot of dross, there is in the theatre, come on, tons of it, there is everywhere, but I don't know, it's quite difficult to find the decent … but I do watch quite a lot of television I suppose, although probably mainly the news actually … Although you know, there are good things, like the series 'Hospital', which is very good, observational documentary. You know, it's honest and it's not made up and it's not exploitative I think, and it certainly shows what the problem is.<br><br>[Question: Thank you very much indeed. Thank you]. |