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Interviewer: John Legard

Interviewee: Rodney Giesler

**John Legard:** Rodney, tell us who your parents were, and how you started, and how you got interested in cinema and so on.

**Rodney Giesler:** I was born on the 2nd of February 193I in Manston in Kent, right on the edge of the big aerodrome. My father was German originally and became naturalised after my birth, having married an English lady in 1929 and settled in England. He had a champagne business that had come down to him through the family, which he managed mainly from England. He went over about twice a month on the boat and that really was the family background. To begin with from the age of about 5 or 6, I had an absolute fascination with the navy. I always wanted to go to sea, and I still love ships and the sight of them, and so on. And I can remember very vividly in about 1936 being taken to the Navy Days at Chatham, and seeing those huge great steel ships alongside. The magic colours of navy blue and gold of the uniforms, and I can remember the huge George III crest above the gateway into the dockyard. Anyhow, from there and right the way through the war, I was fascinated by the navy, and eventually I went to a naval college at Pangbourne with the idea of going on from there. By the way, during my first term there I saw a film that had been made by a pupil who had left the previous term called Ken Russell. So I just missed being a contemporary of his. I was a contemporary also for good or ill of Jeffrey Bernard. He was a year after me.

**John Legard:** How did you get into Pangbourne in those days?

**Rodney Giesler:** You had to do the Common Entrance. We were living in Somerset at the time, having been evacuated from Kent when the army requisitioned our house at the time of Dunkirk. We moved down to Somerset and I went to school in Taunton, and then took the common entrance exam for Pangbourne.

**John Legard:** It was like a prep school was it in Taunton?

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. It was the junior part of Kings College which was one of the minor public schools, and I took the entrance exam for Pangbourne and got in from there. If I can move on a bit. I was still gung-ho for the navy, and it taught a conventional syllabus for, as it then was, School Certificate and Higher School Certificate. It was mainly a Merchant Navy College, but there was a Royal Navy stream and one took a special naval entrance exam. But at about the age of 16 as a precaution, they gave us all a medical and an eye test, and I found that I was red-green blind, and slightly short sighted in one eye. I went up to the Admiralty for an eye test, and unfortunately they confirmed it. And I was so miserable. I remember wandering dejectedly across St. James's Park. It was still early in the day and I didn't have to be back at school until the evening. Then I found myself in Leicester Square. I had a few bob on me, so I popped into the Odeon, and the film showing there was *Odd Man Out*. And that was a total milestone. I had been depressed for not more than an hour and a half, and I came out of that cinema and I knew what I wanted to do.

**John Legard:** How old were you then?

**Rodney Giesler:** I was about 16. Suddenly I was so moved by that film and so absorbed by it: the acting, everything that went into it. I wanted to know why it had had that effect on me. it just converted me.

**John Legard:** It was a brilliant film. I used to think of it as one of the six best films ever made. It still stands up I think.

**Rodney Giesler:** I've got it on tape and I still look even at sections of it from time to time. This marvellous ensemble playing that they had. Most of the supporting cast were from the Abbey Theatre. That was the day I was launched in the direction of making films.. It was March 1947 that that happened. I completed my school course, and did Higher School Certificate, and then left to become a civilian. But in the meantime I did an awful lot of reading. I remember buying *Picturegoer*.

**John Legard:** *Picturegoer* and *Picture Show*. They were very good magazines. They always gave the credits
of all the films. It used to cost threepence in those days.

**Rodney Giesler:** Also it wasn't a total film fan magazine. What I liked about it were the stories from behind the camera. They always gave you a list of films in production, and I thought I'd love to get round a studio and see what's happening. So I looked at the films "Upcoming" and I saw that Cineguild had a production on the floor at Pinewood. (*Oliver Twist*). And rather than write to Lean whom I thought must be a very busy man directing, I thought I'll talk to the producer who doesn't go out of the office, and has plenty of time! So I wrote to Ronnie Neame instead, I said I'm keen on getting into films and can I visit Pinewood? He wrote back and said yes, so I made my way to Iver Heath, to be met by his secretary at the gate, a lady called Josephine, who eventually married the cameraman Guy Green. She was charming and had been detailed to be my guide that day. We spent an hour on the set of *Oliver Twist*. Then she took me to lunch, and I spotted one or two big names. She went over to chat to an assistant with Powell & Pressburger to arrange a visit to the *Red Shoes* set. First we went back to the *Oliver Twist* set where they were filming a scene in

Fagin's kitchen with the young John Howard Davies as Oliver. Of course he is now a famed producer and director. I watched the shooting of *Oliver Twist* until about 3 and then we went over to *The Red Shoes* set. I saw Micky Powell running around. And I was introduced to Anton Walbrook and Moira Shearer. They were sitting on these canvas chairs with their names on them. I was in heaven. I wasn't that star-struck, but I was fascinated by the activity, lights being set, the huge Technicolor three strip cameras. I walked on air.

**John Legard:** I wonder if your visit was a one-off.

**Rodney Giesler:** I don't know. I never met him (Neame) although I wrote and thanked him profusely. Also I only finally met David Lean at BAFTA about 6 months before he died. But that day at Pinewood was the next step towards movie-making.

**John Legard:** Your day out at Pinewood was a very important stage. So who was your next contact?

**Rodney Giesler:** I left Pangbourne when I was 17 and a half. Of course one had National Service coming up then. I tried to get in the Navy, but they weren't taking anyone except as stokers. I waited for my call-up to come. In the meantime I was reading like mad.

**John Legard:** Your family, were they interested in theatre or films at all?

**Rodney Giesler:** No. I had a younger brother, and a half brother and half sister, who had been in the war. My parents took it very well. They were disappointed that I wasn't going into the Navy. My father would've been very proud. Being a naturalised Englishman he was much more English than the English. I had an aunt who'd been on the stage in rep who said "How are you going about it?" She suggested I had a go at acting and production. At that time it was discovered I had unsteady legs and my doctor thought I wouldn't be-called up. So my aunt suggested I had a go at RADA. If you got a place you know roughly where you want to go. She coached me in the set pieces one had to do for an audition and I went up like a trembling jelly. One of the judges was Sybil Thorndike. I did a chorus from *Henry V*. Then a piece of Coward from *Fumed Oak*. And I did a Gilbert Murray translation from an Aeschylus play. Lovely words. Once I started speaking I was riding along on their flow. And to my surprise I was offered a place. Unfortunately at that time, the Army decided it did need me. In spite of my legs they needed me as a technician. I was sent to the Royal Signals at Catterick with this lovely status of "Excused Boots". It was a marvellous skive. I did no infantry training. Only technical training. I became a radio mechanic. Then another thing happened there. I was reading voraciously. I used to buy the Penguin Film Review.

**John Legard:** A nice magazine that. Roger Manvell and Rod Baxter.

**Rodney Giesler:** Indeed. In one of them at that time I was reading an article by Anthony Asquith called "The Tenth Muse Climbs Parnassus", which to me is a classic introduction to the cinema. It was quite a long essay. And blow me, that weekend it was Battle of Britain week, and I went over to the local RAF aerodrome. There was an Auster there giving short flights. We were queueing up for it, and in the queue in front of me was Anthony Asquith.

**John Legard:** How incredible.

**Rodney Giesler:** Extraordinary coincidence. So I tapped him on the shoulder and told him how much I enjoyed this essay, and asked him one or two questions on it and we started chatting. And he said when you come out of the Army, give me a ring and I'll see what I can do to help. I did give him a ring, but he had forgotten me. I met him through union business later on. The cinema was still following me, because I was then posted to London District Signal Squadron. It was my first qualified posting. And that was on an old anti-aircraft site on Hampstead Heath. I was excused boots and did no guard duties at all. My job was mainly overhauling radio sets at London District. And in the evening when I knocked off I was on the Northern Line down to the West End.

**John Legard:** Catching up with your movies.

**Rodney Giesler:** I didn't even have to go that far. There was the Ionic in Golders Green, and of course the Everyman in Hampstead I used to go to. I joined the BFI. I used to go to their screenings. They had a tiny cinema at their place in Great Russell Street on the top floor.

**John Legard:** What year are we talking about now?

**Rodney Giesler:** This would be 1950. And we had big screenings in the French Institute cinema in South Kensington. I was really catching up on my cinematic education, reading and viewing, and getting thoroughly excited on the whole business of movies. I bought Pudovkin's "Film Acting" and "Film Technique" at the time. They are classic handbooks. There was the definition of the cinema, because I'd seen all the great Soviet epics by that time. Both the Eisenstein and the Pudovkin books are such fundamental books even now. I wonder if they read them at film school. There were beautiful descriptions like Pudovkin's definition of slow motion as a close-up in time. And then one went on to the "A level" of film appreciation, Eisenstein's "Film Form" and "Film Sense".

**John Legard:** And there was another book that I've got called "Film as a Graphic Art", by Vladimir Nielsen.

**Rodney Giesler:** I never came across that one. Another thing, I always used to buy "The News Chronicle ". Richard Winnington I used to like.

**John Legard:** Yes we all read "The News Chronicle" in those days. And Richard Winnington. I've got his book.

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes, "Drawn & Quartered". I was reading him up this week. Remembering to talk about it.

**John Legard:** And at the same time there was Caroline Lejeune's "Chestnuts in her Lap". A very interesting period to be starting off.

**Rodney Giesler:** Anyhow I came out of the Army in the summer of 195I and said "right, I'm getting into the film industry now".

**John Legard:** It wasn't so easy then. There was some time when some branches closed their books.

**Rodney Giesler:** I wrote to Anthony Asquith and it didn't do any good. I wrote to Ronnie Neame. Nothing. As usual there was the periodic crisis. High unemployment and the union wasn't willing to open up anything. Anyway I was living in our house in Ashford. My father was travelling abroad a lot on business. Fortunately he gave me an allowance to look after the house and run things there. The next 4 years I now call "My University". To pinch the title from Gorki. I found myself totally free. I not only read film books and joined the local film society. And there was also a film club. We made movies as well. One of the members had a 16mm Bolex. I found myself reading books I knew I'd never have time to read. I read "War & Peace" for the first time. I read philosophy. I suddenly realised how lacking my education was. I became aware of a conspiracy theory. Going through a naval school where they were training people to obey orders, rather than think for themselves the syllabus was rather rigged in favour of the politically correct history of the day. I started reading Bertrand Russell and I thought "Wow, people think differently". I read Russell, Tom Paine, Schopenhauer. I taught myself a bit of Russian. I improved my German, because although my father was German, he never encouraged any kind of German speech during the war. And my mother being English , you learn to speak mainly from your mother, and she spoke no German. My father was a very disappointed man. During the war he had been looked on as an enemy alien. He wasn't even allowed to join the Home Guard. Anyway all this time I was trying to find a way to get into the business. We had lecturers down to the film society on film appreciation, and one of the lecturers was Anthony Simmons. I still see him around. He made privately-financed features. And "Sunday by the Sea", a short. He wasn't one of the trio of Anderson, Reitz and Richardson. Anthony Simmons said to me "You've got a film group here. Make a little movie to show you know how to tell a story." So I did. My then girl friend starred in it. It was a sort of love story. I knew a place off Trafalgar Square that sold outdated stock. I could pick up a 100ft roll of black and white for less than £I in those days, including processing.

**John Legard:** Black and white reversal. Jolly good stock, Marvellous quality.

**Rodney Giesler:** That's right. I didn't go mad on it. I rehearsed my actors very well first. I then went up to the BFI Summer Film School in the summer of 54 in Glasgow and we finished up in the Edinburgh Festival. I met there John Huntley and Stanley Reed and I mentioned what I was doing, and they said when you've got it together show it to us, and perhaps help you. So I did.

**John Legard:** That was shot silent?

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. It was a credential to show that I knew a bit about film making. They looked at it and then I started pushing it around: my showreel. We'd had a lot of Shell Films at the Film Society, and I sent if off to Arthur Elton. I eventually got to see him after a lot of delay. He wouldn't reply and wouldn't reply. I'd seen a marvellous film of the *Mille Miglia* shot by Bill Mason so I wrote to him.

**John Legard:** I remember *Mille Miglia* very well. A good film.

**Rodney Giesler:** With a lovely jazz track which I think Ed (Williams) worked on. So I asked Bill to have a word with Arthur to find out what's happened to it. Arthur phoned me up and I went to see him at Shell Mex House. We talked on the trot along the corridors a bit like Sir Lancelot Spratt in *Doctor in the House*. We ended up in the theatre looking at some rushes of the Schlieren Process. And I met a very young blonde-headed kid there: Peter de Normanville. And Arthur said there was nothing at the moment and keep in touch. But nothing happened.

**John Legard:** You said you talked to Bill Mason. He was very helpful.

**Rodney Giesler:** He was. Very helpful. And subsequently I got to know them both very well. Nothing much happened. Except that Arthur got hold of Peter Brinson who was editing "Films & Filming[w] at the time. And Peter wrote to me and said "Would you like to write?" Incidentally during my "university days" I was doing a lot of writing. I actually sold a number of short stories to various magazines, and did a bit of freelance work on the local paper. I saw him and he commissioned two articles. And then that died a death. He never paid for them, and they were never published.

**John Legard:** I used to take Films & Filming. It was a very good magazine. Ken Gay used to do articles
in it on documentaries.

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. But the thing that came off on this one is that I said to Peter "I don't want to come into the business to write articles, whether I get paid or not. I want to get into production." So he said "I've heard that Donald Alexander at the Coal Board is looking for a trainee. Why don't you write to him?" I sent him the film, and Donald had me up for an interview and said "Of course the film you've shown me is nothing like the films we make here at the Coal Board" (and I said I appreciate that), "but you obviously can tell a story with films so I'll pay you 10 quid a week as a trainee." I was in. At that time the Union situation became easier. It was 1955 and ITV was starting, and they were recruiting an awful lot of people. So I was given a provisional ticket under Rule 10c, and I joined the Coal Board unit in September 1955 as Kitty Marshall's assistant.

**John Legard:** As a trainee, what was your grade? Were you a trainee or assistant?

**Rodney Giesler:** I think I was assistant editor. I remember the first job I did was logging rushes, which was terribly tedious. It was all 35mm black and white which was reduced to 16mm for release printing.

**John Legard:** They shot everything on 35mm, as we did at British Transport Except the colour travel films. Those were shot on Kodachrome, and blown up to Technicolor Dye transfers. Which was quite satisfactory. That was before Eastmancolor got going.

**Rodney Giesler:** I didn't see 16mm film for years and years. There I was logging. Taught to ignore flash frames. We didn't number. We logged solely on edge numbers. We had a cutting room over in Endell Street rented from Cardin's Film Services. Quite a number of people were there. Joe Mendoza I met for the first time cutting a film he'd made for Transport..

**John Legard:** Called "The Land of Robert Burns".

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. I interviewed him the other day. Paul Czinner was there doing some opera film.

**John Legard:** They had a company called Harmony Films. They used to shoot with three cameras on the stage. He did a lot of work for Moral Rearmament And there was an editor there also called Slash Hudsmith.

**Rodney Giesler:** I remember him. Philip Hudsmith. He went out to Canada eventually. And then there was Charles Frank there doing a film on the July Plot against Hitler. Anyhow that was the crowd there. It had just become a smoking area, the cutting room. Nitrate had gone out, and I remember Ralph Elton who was working there as a director. He felt it was a bit like smoking in church. There was another editor: Francis Bieber, a lovely man. Very gentle. A Jewish refugee. Very nervous, very dapper. Smoked a cigarette out of a long holder. Terrified of Donald. Whenever he had a showing I'd hold the shots for him as he sat at the moviola, and his shaking hand would grab them. Studio Film labs did all our work, and they were in Dean Street next door to Royalty House.

**John Legard:** There were some very nice people there at Studio Film labs. Oily Oliver was the man in charge.

**Rodney Giesler:** Alf Dossett I remember.

**John Legard:** And the marvellous man who did the optical work: Gus Holness.

**Rodney Giesler:** And Don Ramsey the grader. And a neg cutter lady called Wardy. I don't remember her full name. She was a lovely lady. Very flirtatious. I knew the route from Endell Street to Dean Street very well.

**John Legard:** Did the Coal Board have all their processing done by Studio Film labs?

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. And all our screenings were there too. We used to record and dub up at Kays in Carlton Hill.

**John Legard:** Where were your headquarters?

**Rodney Giesler:** In 2, Grosvenor Place.

**John Legard:** I knew them in Dorset Square.

**Rodney Giesler:** That was later. More names. Sarah Erulkar came to edit. Geoffrey Bell was there as a director. Ezra Dealing. Jack Ellitt, he was a buddy of Donald's.

**John Legard:** Jack Ellitt was with us at Transport Films for a time because he edited a film that John Krish made called *The Elephant will never Forget*. He was an editor for years and years.

**Rodney Giesler:** I think he was also a writer because he wasn't in the cutting room.

**John Legard:** We're talking about late 50's?

**Rodney Giesler:** 55, 56. Also I mustn't forget. Cardin's was run by a gentleman called Hilary Long. Wore a smart trilby hat. And June MacDonagh who was a cockney lady. Her set piece every morning was "Ullo Rod, are you gettin' enough?" In those days, up from the provinces I was a bit horrified. Always flirtatious. Voluptuous. Great voluptuous lips, I remember also being shocked when Kitty said "fuck". I'd never heard a woman say "fuck" before. A bit different to nowadays. Donald made a very great impression on me. He was an extraordinary intellectual. He was a Greek Classic scholar as you know. He had a tremendous social conscience. He spent time off from university in the mining valleys, helping, making movies. And he had an incredibly wide knowledge of mechanics. Knowledge of mining techniques, of machinery, of sailing ships. He could name all the different sails of a full rigged ship. And he gave me a lot of confidence and trust. I mentioned just now how Francis Bieber was frightened of him. Donald could be an awful bully. But there came a time when I was Kitty's assistant and she went off for a few weeks to look at a job for UNESCO and there was no one in the cutting room except me. John Reid, who was a cameraman/ director had shot all this material on a machine called the Dosco Continuous Miner which I'd sat in on a lot. Reels and reels and reels the assembly ran to. And being a director/cameraman, he was rather loathe to get rid of beautiful shots and Donald said to me "We must get this Dosco film finished. Kitty's not here otherwise she'd do it. Can you get it down a bit?" I thought "ooh, all this material." But at least by that time as a cutting room assistant I knew the material well. You don't need to look up logsheets after a while. You know which take to go to. And I ripped through all this lot and got it down to 2 reels: 20 minutes. I phoned up Donald and said I was ready. Shall I make a booking? So I did. And we met at Studio Film Labs. And before the lights went down Donald asked "what have you got it down to? And I said "2 reels". And he blanched. We went through the 20 minutes and it all worked and Donald said "Don't touch anything." I was shattered. I was in. Everyone said after that that I was Donald's GHB. Golden Haired boy. That was when I was taken out of the cutting room and sent on location as assistant director. In other words he felt I'd learned enough about editing. He said “it was a very specialised job, making movies in coal mines, and you'd better go out and learn how.”

**John Legard:** Otherwise you would have been a little disappointed being an assistant director. You were being creative in the cutting room?

**Rodney Giesler:** I was very much a trainee on that one. I wanted to direct and write. I had written a rough commentary for this Dosco thing too. Because John Reid had written something and that was edited down. And read the commentary to the picture.

**John Legard:** So you distilled the essence very successfully there.

**Rodney Giesler:** I could see the logic. I understood the machine. Donald and I looked at the engineering drawings and the manuals and we saw how it worked, and the essential points to teach. You see, these Coal Board films were very functional. There was nothing airy-fairy about them at all. They were to teach miners how to support roofs, how to look after their safety, operate machines, how to assemble a conveyor, take it to pieces and move it on on a night shift. How to extend gates. The roadways to the face. How to run a shaft efficiently. Endless functional jobs. And as I mentioned in Donald's obituary recently there was one situation where a piece of German mining equipment was installed over a weekend mainly using a film made about it run over and over again in the pit canteen. That was value for money. And it was marvellous training. A marvellous discipline. Donald could be quite ruthless if you started waffling or if you put a shot in the wrong place. He'd write against your remark "Round objects." After my training as an assistant director,...I spent about a year going out on location... I was given my first job to direct.

**John Legard:** Did you think to yourself I'll give myself so many years at this place? I mean it was a far cry from *Odd Man Out* which was your original inspiration. I wouldn't have thought you wanted to make these sort of films forever however much you enjoyed grappling with the technicalities.

**Rodney Giesler:** I didn't cherish going underground, but it was a way of getting a ticket. It was a way of getting started, and of course I'll move out of that into features soon enough, (laughs). But things don't work out that way. I found myself being captivated with making these kind of movies, and of working with the kind of people I worked with. They were a smashing bunch of people in Grosvenor Place in those days. Apart from Kitty, there was a New Zealander called Alun Falconer, and he was my producer for two films. Lovely gentle man, died tragically from heart disease in his forties. There was another young New Zealander called Bob Kingsbury, a young director from the New Zealand Film Unit and very much my contemporary, a very independently-minded Antipodean. Tragically caught in a roof fall injuring his back. There was Ken Gay as unit manager. I can remember that unit from the total friendliness of it. No one was biting anyone else's back. There were no jealousies. It was a marvellous training ground, and a very happy time.

*End of Side 1.*

**John Legard:** Before we go on, could you mention "Mining Review" because that was being made at this time. You say they were a separate unit in the early days at the Coal Board.

**Rodney Giesler:** The full tide of the unit I was with was the National Coal Board Technical Film Unit. And we did all the technical films. "Mining Review" in my time was made by DATA, which was a co-operative founded by Donald years before and Francis Gysin was the producer on "Mining Review" and Peter Pickering was one of the DATA directors. I went on location once as his assistant. And Eric Pask was the editor there. I was loaned out during my assistant director days. After I'd done that re-cutting job for Donald, he wanted to acquaint me with the whole aspect of Coal Board production. I was sent out on location as an assistant director and I was an assistant first to Bob Kingsbury, the young New Zealander. He being a junior director tended to get the

roughest jobs. In other words on coal faces, and often on production coal faces which were the worst. At that time on a production coal face, the Power Loading Agreement was in operation, and the coal face crews were all on Piece Rates. And God help anyone who got in the way of the conveyors. It's quite extraordinary to see a crew working on a coal face with a huge vicious looking power loader on an armoured conveyor. In other words the conveyor being the rail track: the thing it runs on. And the roof support team working. They worked as a rhythmic team, and if you got in their way, you're not popular. Filming underground was a very specialised job. The main problem was safety. You couldn't use anything electrical unless it had been passed by the Inspectorate of Mines. So our lighting consisted of heavy armoured units, strong enough to contain any explosion. If any gas got inside and ignited, the explosion had to be contained. So they were murder to hump around. They were uncontrollable in the sense you couldn't spot them or flood them. You just had a flat light. We used a Newman Sinclair clockwork camera, of course. And amazingly robust they are. Given those restrictions, if we had an underground job to do, a face job, you get some marvellous stuff, high drama. You see them over and over again on the news. You often had to go down on the first man-wind which was 6 o'clock, which meant getting up at about 4.30, because you wind men and coal at different speeds. Coal, because its flowing rapidly from the faces, is wound at about three times the speed as men. They literally drop the empty cages. If you did with men in them, they'd end up on the ceiling. Again you were very unpopular of you wanted to go in or out of the pit during coal winding in the middle of a shift. So we had to ride down with the blokes in the morning. You'd arrive at the pit, go to the battery room, take your tags, put on your batteries and cap lamps. You'd have the camera equipment to hump as well. The lights would be already be down on the face. They would have been taken down on the back shift at night when no coal was being turned. Often you would have a three mile walk in from the pit bottom to the face carrying equipment. You didn't dare leave the camera equipment there overnight. An armoured light buried in a roof fall would be all right, but a Newman, it wasn't encouraged. So you would go in there. If you had covered what you wanted during the shift, you would come out with the next man-wind at the shift change at 2.0 pm. If you missed that you'd often go on till quite late. And we worked horrendous hours. Once you reached the top you were as black as all the other pitmen. So into the pithead baths, and you'd get back to the hotel at about 8.0 pm. And that would be a rough day. And then the next morning, it was up again at 4.30. When I joined the Coal Board, I was paid £10 a week. I think I got a little increment for being an assistant director. But we all clocked up overtime, and this started the problem because poor old Ken Gay was under pressure. "Rodney you worked two weeks this week." "Yes, Ken we have." And then Donald who you'd think would be very sympathetic. You know, left wing as he was, and union minded and the rest. He looked at the Shorts Agreement and started arguing about the working day. The time I was booking was from leaving the hotel to returning to it at night. Donald said it should finish the moment we surfaced, and got to the lamp room to hand in our tags. And likewise we should start our mornings from the lamp room. Alan Falconer was Shop Steward, and he called in Bessie Bond and after lots of discussion it was agreed that we should be paid bathing time etc. Bessie went in to negotiate with Donald and they worked out an Underground Agreement. And we won. We even got a laundry allowance. You weren't given overalls in those days. All you got were crawling pads for your knees, and a safety helmet. The next thing that happened was my election as Shop Steward. Which was enjoyable. It wasn't hard work. I used to go to General Council meetings, and I met Anthony Asquith again. He was President. You remember Sid Cole and Alf Cooper, Charlie Wheeler, Max Anderson, Ivor Montague, Ralph Bond. A phalanx of the Left. But right in the middle of it was the Conservative Films Officer, a redoubtable lady called Winifred Crum-Ewing. She looked every inch a Tory matron, and sounded it. She always turned up at General Council meetings. And everyone was

fond of her because they knew what she was going to say and amidst all this left wing talk of brother this and brother that, she would say "Mr. Anderson and Mr. Elvin..." Having been down the pits and seeing colliers work, I became imbued with trade unionism. I got a bit idealistic. I could see the value of the unions. Being single I could afford to take Sunday off for a General Council meeting which I wouldn't have done later on.

**John Legard:** That was negotiated satisfactorily with Donald?

**Rodney Giesler:** Oh yes. It was all a matter of overtime. That was all accepted very well.

**John Legard:** Did you have time off in lieu instead of paid overtime? We asked people to go away for two or three weeks.

**Rodney Giesler:** I never had that. I became quite wealthy. My original £10 a week was rather meaningless. That was the Union side, and working with Bob Kingsbury on the hard jobs. As an assistant director, I had certain headaches. We had to take pack lunch down with us and tea in thermoses, which added to the load.

**John Legard:** Where were these mines mainly?

**Rodney Giesler:** The easiest were in the Nottingham area. The seams were quite thick, the roofs quite high. But up in Durham and Lancashire they were narrower. I directed my first film in a Yorkshire pit.

**John Legard:** I suppose these areas had their own problems, and you had to make your own type of films for them.

**Rodney Giesler:** Not necessarily. If we made a film about a piece of machinery, we went to the pit where it was operating. Often we were ahead of things. We'd go to the pit where it was being introduced. Because the idea was to tell following pits how to operate it.

**John Legard:** My memories of mining films was rather limited because I was involved in the very first half dozen "Mining Reviews" made by Crown Film Unit in the beginning of 1947. I remember the very first sequence I was involved in: The Meco-Moore cutter loader. It was new at that time. I think Graham Wallace shot those. Max Anderson was certainly with us.

**Rodney Giesler:** The Meco-Moore was around in my day.

**John Legard:** I think the first six were made by Crown, and then they went over to DATA. Kurt Lewenhak was the man we dealt with at the Coal Board. He was previously at the Central Office of Information.

**Rodney Giesler:** Going back to underground working, one of the crosses we had to bear were Mole Richardson sparks. Moles sent us the least popular ones. The ones who were out of favour with the Management. They did not like working underground, humping these lights around. And a lot of my time was spent pacifying them. When we were wrapping at the end of the day, one was

sorely tempted to help them wind their cables, to get out of the pit as quickly as possible. But it was "Don't touch that. You're not ETU". Demarcation was all. I left the Coal Board thinking that film sparks were devils incarnate. They did naughty things like...if we were working on the surface, I made sure the crew had a decent lunch somewhere. But the sparks went off to the pub. They'd come back in 55 minutes and claim a No Lunch Break. Finance was tight. We never stayed at a decent hotel. The Railway Hotel at the back end of town. But that wasn't good enough for the sparks. They would stay at local Trust House. So the there was friction there.

**John Legard:** How were these films budgeted? Were they budgeted individually?

**Rodney Giesler:** I don't know. Ken used to go round asking everyone how much time they'd spent on various films. Time was costed against project.

**John Legard:** I think it was the same at Transport. We had the great advantage of free rail travel.

**Rodney Giesler:** Before I leave the subject of underground shooting. We were just handling film equipment which was pretty light. You could appreciate what it meant to be a face worker. Even with a powerful machine, they weren't using pickaxes any more, you were still working hard physically, and then you had a three mile walk out. I had a tremendous respect for those guys. They had a great team spirit. They helped each other. And they'd often help us. We weren't always in the way. They'd often help carry the camera equipment on the walk out. I think they respected us as well "making fillums".

**John Legard:** It was a bit of diversion for them.

**Rodney Giesler:** It was. Yes. I must mention cameramen. Dear old John Shaw Jones. He was the main one. Towering guy with a beard. Gentle as they come. Lovely man. I went solo as a director with him. Great fun. Fund of stories, most of them obscene. He had been a pacifist and had had four Newman Sinclair cameras requisitioned at the beginning of the war. Which made him furious. We had freelance cameramen from time to time. I went on to be assistant to Geofrey Bell. He directed a film on Roof Bolting shot at Rufford. A very precise pedantic guy. Then there was Ralph Elton, Arthur's brother, who was a great character. A Falstaffian figure with a great beard. Very eccentric. Always mixed his own salad dressing at dinner. I was once invited down to Clevedon Court (the Elton family seat) for a weekend. Arthur was there as well. A more refined figure. A slighter beard.

**John Legard:** Was this after Arthur had inherited the baronetcy then?

**Rodney Giesler:** Oh yes. Well after. Arthur was "Sir" when I first met him. On the Sunday morning I remember meeting Ralph padding through the manorial hall to pick up the papers, and he wore a long nightshirt and a nightcap straight out of Dickens. He was not a well man. He was out in Malaya with John Shaw Jones, got TB, and had only one lung.

**John Legard:** I remember. It was "Voices of Malaya" Crown Film Unit.

**Rodney Giesler:** And I was also assistant to him on a film about pit winding gear. And he had to go off one morning, and I took over directing and thoroughly enjoyed myself. It was very directable. Tubs going here and there. Lots of “Odessa Steps" kind of fun.

**John Legard:** Was Fred Gamage there?

**Rodney Giesler:** I never met him.

**John Legard:** And John Reid.?

**Rodney Giesler:** Reid of England. I think he took over "Mining Review" eventually. I know he went to live in Doncaster. He was the most unlikely person to be making films on coal. Had a plummy voice: "How are you, cock?" We eventually had our own spark, and things became better. When I started directing life was easier. My first was a simple training film called "Operating a Longwall Coal Cutter", which is still in the library. It was late 1957. We shot in a training pit: Whitwood in Yorkshire. You had control of everything, because they weren't producing coal. Sarah Erulkar edited it. Alun Falconer produced it. I did a number of other training films including a frightening one on tunnelling. They were joining two pits together in Manchester. This was production. A tunnelling crew going hell for leather.

**John Legard:** You were covering the actual exercise?

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. It was a model tunnelling team. They had this efficient tunnel going, and the film had to demonstrate how they did it. I learned a lot on tunnel drivage. And explosives. How to carve a hole in a lump of rock by placing charges in the right positions.

**John Legard:** What about all these films now?

**Rodney Giesler:** They've all gone to the National Film Archive. All the old films. As to the library. I don't know. The coal industry's gone. Twenty pits left? Insanity.

**John Legard:** What next?

**Rodney Giesler:** I wrote and directed my first film and I spent my career as a writer/director. I never directed anyone else's script.

**John Legard:** And did you edit?

**Rodney Giesler:** I used to sit in on the editing and did the commentary writing. Things were changing, as you know. They went over from optical to magnetic sound. I don't know if it was easy. I remember optical track laying on the Dosco film, finding it easier to follow the visual modulations on the track.

**John Legard:** That's right. It was a great help being able to read them. But one soon adapted using a magnetic track reader. But it took a bit of time.

**Rodney Giesler:** All sound was optical in those days. And of course dubbing without rock-&-roll was murder.

**John Legard:** I don't know how we ever managed in those days. And of course we joined the film with cement. And they would break all the time.

**Rodney Giesler:** And with cement joins you always lost a frame. You lap-joined everything. But if you changed your mind and wanted to put a shot back it was "Don't forget the build-up". Otherwise the neg cutter phones up and says do you really mean a cut here?

**John Legard:** That's it.

**Rodney Giesler:** And the machines. The moviolas would really chew up film.

**John Legard:** They made a terrible noise.

**Rodney Giesler:** I remember once I was looking at a sequence, and I was so absorbed and at the end I looked on the floor and there was this thin length of film. All the sprockets had been sliced off. You couldn't mend it. The whole damned thing had to be re-printed. The evil tricks. It wasn't even 8mm on the floor. It was 3mm.

**John Legard:** it must have been nice working with Sarah.

**Rodney Giesler:** She was another of the people who made the Coal Board such a nice place to work. Through Sarah I got to know the Shell gang. I directed half a dozen films for the Coal Board. I didn't finish the tunnelling film. I'd moved to another job. And Kitty took it over. They were firing their way ahead one day, and they were passing under old workings. They always drilled upwards before each shot to make sure there was no water there. Apparently one day they forgot. The shot went and down came a wall of water. They had half an hour to get out. Lost their equipment. Lights and everything. I was 4000 miles away by then. (Short digression on setting off explosives). What I love about technical documentaries is that-you're learning something all the time. How clever people are. I'd just directed my first film when Donald went off to Russia. It was just after Kruschev's speech denouncing Stalin. He came back, said he'd made contact with their documentary studio in Kiev, and a young Russian director was very keen to come over and work with the Coal Board. Would I like to go to Kiev? New adventure. New experience. I had no ties. Never been to the Soviet Union. I dug out my old Russian text books that I'd started in my "university" days, and went to intensive classes at night school and got a working knowledge of it. Then Donald said, very sorry, it's all collapsed. After about my third or fourth film I was getting rather tired of coal dust, and felt I wanted to go further afield. I knew Peter (de Normanville) and Sarah, and the Shell crowd: John Armstrong, Alan Pendry, Ramsay Short. We often went to screenings at what is now BAFTA. We used a cinema in Baker Street at that time. Latterly we had screenings at Britannic House (BP). Most units knew each other. The Transport lot knew Shell and World Wide.

**John Legard:** It was quite a big club.

**Rodney Giesler:** Indeed. We used to meet at the Highlander, now called the Nellie Dean. I was telling Sarah and Peter that I was looking further afield. So she said go and see Jim Porter who was production manager at Shell. Jim said he had a full complement of directors. He had seen two of my films at the industrial film festival (preBISFA,) and said I had what they needed. Then at the beginning of '58 Raymond Spottiswoode from Film Centre phoned me up. They were setting up a film unit in Kuwait. Derek Armstrong was the producer, John Sharples the cameraman. But I thought Kuwait: where the hell is that? What about my feature ideas? In those days money was spent by the oil industry that would never be countenanced now. Raymond took me to lunch at Wheelers. And it didn't take much convincing after a few oysters and a good Chablis for me to see what a good idea it was. In my second year at the Coal Board I was on £16 per week. Now I was offered about £70 a week tax free in Kuwait. So I accepted, and gave my notice to Donald. I had a great send off in the Grenadier, and they gave me a lovely silver tankard which I still have. They poured me on to the bus at Victoria, and out to Heathrow, which was still a collection of Nissen Huts on the North side. There I boarded a super Constellation, all first class layout. After stopping in Rome, Beirut and Baghdad, we arrived at Kuwait about 8 o'clock the following morning with a terrible hangover. They forgot to stop the champagne bottle. A bit like the Sorcerer's apprentice. And that was the beginning of a new experience. Derek Armstrong was there to meet me together with one of the Kuwait Oil Company PR people. I'd never been outside Europe before. My impressions are still very vivid. It wasn't the hot time of the year. It was a comfortable *15* degrees. The old City of Kuwait had only just lost its city wall. There were a lot of old mud buildings still there. But the superhighways were being laid. There was a cacophony of noise: car horns. Bright colours of American cars being driven by exotic figures in white kuffiyahs: the headgear. It was a very exciting impression. They drove me into the town to the office of the Political Resident. I was introduced to the Political Resident, a gentleman called Eric Armar Vully de Candole who was a Foreign Office guy. We were brought coffee in a lovely tamarisk-shaded garden. I had time to find my feet. Then back into the car and south to Ahmadi, which was near the principal oil fields. Ahmadi had everything needed to run an oil field. The installations were there: pipelines, tank farm, huge engineering workshops, transport department. Then the residential area, and the film unit office. Film Centre at that time had a big imperial role. As you know it was formed before the war by Edgar Anstey and Arthur Elton and Basil Wright. At that time Arthur was operating as a consultant to Shell. Film Centre was then being run by Raymond Spottiswoode and Stuart Legg. Raymond as you know had an interest in stereo cinema in the Festival of Britain. In addition to the Kuwait unit, there was the Shell Unit in Venezuela run by Lionel Cole. There was the unit in Nigeria with Douglas Gordon, John and Liz Shearman were already in Iraq. The IPC film unit was the first to be run by Film Centre. Then there was us. There was the unit to service the Oil Consortium in Iran, and finally the unit in Singapore with Jack Holmes. John Armstrong was the director there. Alan Pendry the director in Iran. That was the Empire.

**John Legard:** Did Charles Hasse join you?

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes, he was the editor. He was the other bachelor. If I'd been married I wouldn't have gone. There wasn't the accommodation.

**John Legard:** Yes, Derek asked me to go out as editor.

**Rodney Giesler:** The Kuwait Oil Company was 50/50 owned by BP and Gulf. It had come into its own after the nationalisation of the oil in Iran by Mossadeq. They knew that there was

a huge oil find in Kuwait but they hadn't opened it up because mere wasn't a market for it. This field, the Burgan field was discovered before the war, but plugged in case Rommel got there. When the Iran industry shut down, Kuwait opened up. In those days, before Sheikh Yamani and after the Iran dispute, Kuwait Oil Company took half the royalties and the State the other half. Unbelievable if you look at it now. There was a Public Relations exercise there. They built a Display Centre and that was to show to Kuwaitis what the oil industry did, what it meant to them, and how it worked. They had thought about getting film crews out to make movies on a visiting basis. But found it more economic to have a resident unit instead who could do things at short notice. And that's why we were set up.

**John Legard:** So they applied to Film Centre.

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. There was a young chap called Tony Willcocks head of *PR* for Kuwait Oil Company. The British side from BP were experienced in PR, took command of things. There was a power struggle later on when the American interest increased, and they became responsible overall for PR.

*End of Side 2,*

**Rodney Giesler:** Our unit was set up to supplement the work of the Display Centre, and our job was to make films entirely for local audiences. We had offices set aside for us and equipped. We had a viewing theatre, a cutting room with all the equipment. I had an office. I was the director, Derek the producer, Charles Hasse the editor, and John Sharples the cameraman. We subsequently recruited Palestinian assistants. I had a chap called Ibrahim Abu Nab: a considerable poet in his own country. John had an assistant who had worked for UNRRA in the refugee camps (Ahmad Hamadeh), and Charles had a Sudanese assistant called Hussein Zaki, who was also ex Foreign Office and a protege of Eric de Candole, Here again we had the political interface as well.

**John Legard:** Did you have a sound crew?

**Rodney Giesler:** Not to begin with. We had a Goan called Virgilio de Souza, and he doubled as projectionist and sound recordist. We had a clockwork Newman for filming in dangerous areas, gas areas, and we had a 35 blimped Arriflex with Leevers Rich sound equipment which Virgilio operated when we shot synch. The company workshops installed all the cutting benches, and they also made us a teak clapper board, beautifully carpentered. But the first time it was used, the noise was such that it blew half the valves on the Leevers Rich. Because Virgilio was clapper as well. John Sharples was a great boffin as you had to be. There was the company radio station that handled ail the telex channels and so on, so you had some mechanics there. You got to know who in the company could fix things. John was a marvellous technician. I've known him take a Canon 35mm still camera to pieces to replace a spring in side it. He had this tremendous patience, a tremendous analytical mind. A lovely man.

**John Legard:** I knew his father well.

**Rodney Giesler:** Sid. Yes he came out on a visit once, Sid and Sally. John's only drawback was that he was not a cameraman who could shoot from the hip. He was patient, could light well, but he couldn't snatch anything. He'd stay on the tripod, wave his meter around, almost put out a tape measure, and the moment was gone. That was his shortcoming. But he was marvellous to work with and performed miracles out there. Charles didn't really have a lot to do, until we'd finished a film. He would lie by the pool (he was very good looking and slim), in the skimpiest of costumes, which would be OK today. But all the American wives who took tea by the pool, got very upset.

**John Legard:** Charles used to be at Ealing didn't he? He had a great big car.

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. He had a yellow 1923 Rolls Royce which he shipped out and drove it all over the place. The Kuwaitis thought he was quite mad. There was a diesel fitter, Slim Summerfield, and he maintained it for Charles. If there was dust in the carburettor, Slim would be there. Charles and Slim, poles apart. Charles was a bit of a dandy and would say "Oh Slim, how sweet of you!!" and Slim would say "Ee that's OK Charles. Give it a whack 'ere and you're right". I remember once John and I took the micky out of Charles. We actually fried an egg on one of the wings of his Rolls one day. He wasn't too pleased.

**John Legard:** You were talking about the set-up.

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. Now the films we made were all on 35mm reducing to 16mm showprints. We had colour rushes, flown home and processed at Technicolor. There were problems with the climate. The first summer we were there, it was 130 in the shade and we were filming at the Driver Training Centre. By about 10.30 in the morning it got so hot you couldn't bear your hand on the Newman. It just seized. So we knew when and where we couldn't shoot in the summer. And we learned about heat fogging. Stock was shipped out and it would sit in Customs a couple of days, and by the time we used it, it had gone. So we had to import all our stock during the winter months and store it in large refrigerators. We started with a bimonthly newsreel called "Mirror of Oil" which covered various company activities, and was shown in local cinemas. They were also shown in the display centre as well.

**John Legard:** What happened to all these films? They must be very interesting historically now. Did you do two language versions?

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. Arabic and English. My assistant did all the Arabic commentary writing. We had a couple of Bedouin grips. They soon learned the names of all the gear: tripods, legs. "Rijl" is leg in Arabic. "Rijlane" two legs. Although it was a tripod they still called it "Rijlane". "Rijlane tawiil": the tall two legs. Great characters. One in particular, he looked much older than his thirties. Had marvellous hawk-like features. He had limitless curiosity. Always wanted to look through the camera. He was shocked at the size of my watch when viewed through a microscope. The cultural difference was immense. Although they trained them as fitters, straight off the desert. There were these marvellous experienced craftsmen from Britain, who trained them to use lathes and drills. How to strip an engine, take the head off. The company also had an, Arabic school. As part of your contract, you had to learn basic Arabic. Once you'd learned the courtesy Arabic, you could get by. Often you were driving through the desert past a tent, and a boy comes running out to invite you in for coffee and a chat. And you could not rush it. If you were delayed, so be it.

**John Legard:** You became fairly fluent?

**Rodney Giesler:** No. Sufficient. It's patronising to say so, but it was "yokel Arabic". And it gave you a vocabulary sufficient to cover a Beduoin's life. All the words he used, many of which were very different from Mediterranean Arabic. Palestinian Arabic is I suppose "hoch Arabic". I'll describe the geography of the place: Ahmadi lay on a ridge. Further inland was the Burgan field which is still the second richest in the world. The pressure is enough to carry the oil out of the wells and up to Ahmadi, which is the central clearing area, then it goes down to the coast and the big loading jetties. We learned virtually the whole oil operation: geology, drilling, production and marine. One of the films we made were not for local Arabs, because they didn't need to be taught. It was on how to stay alive in the heat. They were having very high casualties among the tanker crews in summer. You were three weeks out from Rotterdam, and straight into a Gulf summer. In those days there was very little air conditioning on the ships. The crews worked on the decks a lot. And they didn't take care of themselves. You had a number of people dying of heat stroke. Dozens per summer. The Marine Superintendent was describing it all to Derek one day, and we thought we ought to make a film about it. The company gave us the go ahead, and we planned to fly down to Aden, get on a tanker and film on the way up. A "dos and don'ts" film. Then BP said "we don't have heat strokes on our ships, and anyway it's not something we want to publicise". We tried everyone: Onassis, Niarchos, Esso, the lot. But they all gave us the big heave-ho. Then I had an idea. We used to have lots of script conferences, and sometimes pee ourselves with laughter. The Goons were everything then. We used to listen on short wave. And we'd talk Goon language, and have Goon ideas. And this was a bit of a Goonish situation. I said "I've got an idea which won't upset the tanker owners or anyone. Let me tell you the story of Charlie". Charlie is a Charlie. A right Charlie. He comes out from London with his rolled umbrella, bowler hat and brief case. And he's a sand quantity surveyor, counting all the sand granules in Kuwait. I suppose I could grandly say I was influenced by Norman MacLaren, and possibly Dali. And the Goon film "The Case of the Mukinese Battlehorn." Pre Monty Python. Have him walk into shot, take his jacket off and start counting. And then I'd seen quarries in the desert, pits about 15 feet deep. Mix to a tilt down, and there he is at the bottom of a hole still counting. Anyhow he overdoes things, gets into trouble, and we show all the things he shouldn't have done. We had a marvellous doctor who played Charlie, and a radiologist who played the straight doctor, and it was all shot in synch. And we called it "Sweat Without Tears" and the tanker companies bought it by the dozen. It was shown on their ships. The Army, which was operating in the Gulf in those days, they bought it. Even the Far East.

**John Legard:** A good example of telling the story simply.

**Rodney Giesler:** I got the idea of Charlie, then like all good comedy writers Derek and I just chucked ideas at each other.

**John Legard:** Are there copies still around?

**Rodney Giesler:** If it's anywhere at all its in the archive.

**John Legard:** It might still be of great interest. It's vintage.

**Rodney Giesler:** Otherwise all our films were about oil. Getting it out of the ground, and shipping it.

**John Legard:** Were they all information films?

**Rodney Giesler:** Ibrahim went on to direct training films, which was a brilliant idea of Derek's. Because there's no point in having a European doing this. He goes out and talks to them as an Arab. Shot synch, on them. It was made for them, and was very effective. The Arabic Centre, the company language school, was again staffed by Palestinians. They had a vital role in the company. They were highly educated and qualified: their knowledge of the language and the politics. There were so many refugees. Since the creation of Israel, mere's been an Arab diaspora. Displaced Palestinians have moved everywhere. A lot of Egyptians too, mainly working in Government departments.

**John Legard:** Are they back there now? They had a very rough time during the Gulf War. Are they drifting
back?

**Rodney Giesler: I've** no idea. We're talking of 35 years ago.

**John Legard:** These films were shown within Kuwait?

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. There were also English versions made. There was a big company film called "Cose-up on Kuwait", and it was shot both for European and Arab use. It was mainly an external film. Interestingly enough just after I left Kuwait, we had our local Saddam Hussein in those days called Abdul Karifm Kassem, and he threatened Kuwait and the British Army came out and faced him down. But while he was in power we couldn't go into Iraq. It wasn't as dramatic as the press back home painted it. The only difference I saw was that the guards on the oil installations weren't asleep. I did two and a half years out there on the trot**,** except for local leave. I got up to Beirut and Iran. In Isfahan I went down with jaundice and spent six weeks in the mission hospital there. And was off booze for a year. We also had sports trips. The oil companies were bountiful in those days. They spent big money on welfare. Kuwait Oil Company had two Twin Pioneer aircraft for flying out to the oil fields, and they also had a Viscount airliner. During the week it was used mainly to fly the Ruler around, but at weekends, i.e. Thursdays and Fridays it was made available to sports clubs. I was in the sailing club out there. We sailed XOD's and Flying Fifteens, all laid on by the company. And we had away matches, and so for instance, if we had a match with the Zellaq Club in Bahrain, a cricket team and a sailing team would fly down, and the plane would come back with visiting teams from Bahrain. So we got around. We were put up by our opposite numbers when we went down. It was a good perk. We went as far as Karachi, Beirut, Bahrain, and Abadan on the Shatt-al-Arab. Sailing was terrific- The water was so warm. I did a bit of SCUBA diving. You could book a launch and go out to a little island called Kubr about 50 yards in diameter with a lighthouse on it. You could spend a day out there picnicking. Lovely diving there. On the edge of a coral reef. No wet suits needed. And we always had one of the company divers with us to supervise. That was fun. Going back to Arabic. You learned courtesy Arabic, you then went on to colloquial Arabic, which was meant longer and more complicated sentences. Then if you wanted to

you went on to classical Arabic, reading and writing it. I did a year of that. Then my contract was up and I came home on leave. I was still a bachelor, and bachelors were very well looked after. Always masses of invitations for Christmas. I thought it was time to settle down. I came to London, and found somewhere to live. On the Monday morning I came into Film Centre, saw Vi (Bebb), and I met the girls. Stuart (Legg)'s secretary was a girl called Pam. *And* I married her before I went back to Kuwait. And we went back together.

**John Legard:** That was something.

**Rodney Giesler:** We came back to Kuwait, after leave, for another year. But it was difficult because the rules stipulated that I still had bachelor status and couldn't have married accommodation. But Tony Willcocks, the PRO, who has remained a friend for all these years, found a house mat was being temporarily vacated by someone who was going on a course to Shemlan, the Arabic school, and so we borrowed it. Pam became Derek's secretary. Then the contract expired, and I'd reached a point where I couldn't bear to see another grain of sand. John and I could almost see where the tripod marks were from the last shot. I had nothing more to say. I was drained. Pam wanted to start family life. You didn't have a proper married life out there. Derek paraphrased Doughty. He called it "Arabia Suburbia". And that's what it was. We built a bit of a social life in the main town among Arab families and so on. Pam knew the wife of the senior geologist, and she was a fluent Arabic speaker. She was very closely involved with families. You couldn't meet Arab women unless you were a woman. And Pam used to go visiting with her. She only worked part time. The first job she was offered when we got back was secretary to Ian Fleming. He'd been commissioned to write a book about Kuwait. But Pam thought she wanted a break from that. Silly girl. Because the book was banned. It didn't say the things the company wanted it to say. If only she'd kept the carbons. We had a very different kind of life. As a bachelor I could afford to buy the car of my dreams: a Triumph TR2, and I loved it. We roared around. I joined the Motor Club and I went on rallies. We had these 24 hour rallies in the desert driving entirely on compass and stop watch. Some of us had Halda Speed Pilots: forerunners of car computers. And they were really accurate. They would even detect wheel spin. We had a superb club with a lovely pool, squash and tennis courts, cinema, library, restaurant, bar, hairdressers. Sailing club. Motor Club both with bars. There were booze restrictions. Muslims weren't allowed to drink, you had a limited allowance for yourself at home, the club bars were unrestricted, and if you had a party, you could get extra on a chitty. Only spirits were rationed. Alcoholism and broken marriages out there were unbelievable. It prefaced the swinging sixties. There was nothing to do if you hadn't internal resources, weren't interested in sports, or weren't a reader. I was often quite happy to stay in and read sometimes.

**John Legard:** You were self-sufficient, but I would imagine there were people totally involved in socialising.

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. Always with the same people. Somerset Maugham situations.

**John Legard:** Two and a half years sounds quite a long time to be able to cope with that.

**Rodney Giesler:** You got into the swing of it. I enjoyed my time out there. The summers were hot but dry up on the ridge. It was very humid on the coast. The worst summer was 1959. There was a continuous sand storm from June to September. That was a summer

feature. They called it the "shimaal" after the north wind. Exterior filming shut down. During these storms we did a lot of work for the medical department. They had a 16mm camera, and the surgeon wanted us to film unusual cases, and there were plenty. Particularly orthopaedic cases where Bedu had broken limbs and then had them badly set. We did stills as well in the theatres. We did a number of main films for the medical department. On the rehabilitation of disabled people for Arab audiences. And there was a lot of TB there among the tribes. And also "Sweat Without Tears" which I mentioned earlier.

**John Legard:** So you were kept pretty busy. You had a full schedule.

**Rodney Giesler:** We did. We had to. We were well looked-after and well paid. And we wanted to give value. There was this power struggle when the Americans were in the ascendancy. They looked on public relations as a total waste of time.

**John Legard:** Different tradition they have.

**Rodney Giesler:** Very different. Derek had a difficult balancing act. Keeping the unit credible. He had very good back-up from Stuart and Raymond (Spottiswoode). He wrote a weekly bulletin to them.

**John Legard:** Did Stuart come out occasionally?

**Rodney Giesler:** They both did. They were entertained. They came to dinner with us, and the evening was getting a bit sticky. But I suddenly started talking about railways, and from then on all went well. Stuart in particular was a total nutter on railways. They'd do the tour of all the Film Centre outposts.

**John Legard:** When the two and a half years was up you all came home on leave?

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. We had some filming to do because "Close-up on Kuwait" opens with a number of Kuwaiti students in this country. Where do they come from? And then' we show their background. We did a week's shooting round London. We went back, and after a year I resigned as I said. Film Centre were desperate to find a replacement: an unmarried director, and in the end they replaced me with Jimmy Davidson. Jimmy I believe worked for Grierson in the very early days. Poor Jimmy took his own life later on as you know. John took over as director, and Jimmy was cameraman. They were only there another year anyway.

**John Legard:** This was about 1962.

**Rodney Giesler:** Pam and I flew out just before Kassem threatened to invade in the summer of 61, and we had a lovely trip home. We had some leave due to us, and flew to Jerusalem and toured the Holy Land and Petra. Then came back via Istanbul to Genoa and drove home from there. The rest of the unit stayed on another year. Tony Willcocks came home to work at BP.

**John Legard:** You didn't train up another unit?

**Rodney Giesler:** No. The Americans had no idea what to do in this area. Anyone who has seen an American sponsored film will know what I mean. You see Film Centre was part of the Grierson tradition. In the days when I started making sponsored films, this tradition was still alive. Grierson was alive. I met everyone who had a name in this movement. Edgar (Anstey), and Roger Manvell I got to know very well. Jack Holmes. Alex Shaw. Jimmy Davidson.

**John Legard:** He goes back to the early 1930's. The early years of British documentary

**Rodney Giesler:** It was the standard of movie making. You really took a lot of time and trouble in making a movie. Even if the subject was some lifeless, tedious machine, you spent a lot of time, not only in the shooting, but in editing it as well, to make it interesting. You took a lot of care, and a lot of pride too. I can still look back on some of the sponsored films I made, most of them are on video now, and it's nice to look at them and remember how we made them.

**John Legard:** The early part of your career was the Coal Board at one extreme and then into the desert. You've yet to fill in the middle.

**Rodney Giesler:** Those films weren't all about the desert: John Ford films. There was the cultural experience as well. A totally new culture. I've been back to the Middle East a number of times since then, and I've read a lot about it. The Koran, and Arab history. It's certainly a culture that makes a tremendous impact on you.

**John Legard:** You must be depressed by things as they are now.

**Rodney Giesler:** There were problems then. Bombs were going off in Beirut even in those days.

**John Legard:** You came back. That was in 1961. And you were back in Film Centre?

**Rodney Giesler:** No. I wasn't back anywhere. We arrived in London, time expired. No work. I had written ahead. I wrote to Edgar, Jimmy Carr. "Oi, I'm going to be free."

**John Legard:** They always say that it is a disadvantage if you spent a lot of time abroad. Nobody knows you when you get back.

**Rodney Giesler:** Exactly. That's just what happened. We did go back to Film Centre and had a drink with Stuart. But the "Empire" was starring to collapse. Jack was coming home. (1962). Film Centre was still going. There was a guy seconded from Shell called Colin Phillips. And George Seager who ran an office in Beirut for Film Centre. He came home. I had had some local leave in Tehran and spent a week with John and Liz Shearman there as I mentioned earlier. Arthur came out when I was there. I still have a picture of us all standing in the Elburz Mountains. John Unwin as a production manager at Film Centre, and John had a lot of contacts. His wife worked at Technicolor. He introduced me to a producer called Charles Smith, CAS productions with an office down in Victoria. I had no work. My savings were starting to dwindle. Anyway Charlie Smith gave me a film to do on Naval recruitment: boy seamen. I did the script and then the film got postponed.

**John Legard:** What was his set-up?

**Rodney Giesler:** He had an office and a director (Marc Broadway) and a secretary. And he was a big chum of Freddie Laker's. Freddie owned his office. Anyway there was this naval film set at HMS Ganges. I went there on the recce, and steeped in naval tradition though I was, I was quite put off the damned place. I was horrified. The Victorian conditions those kids lived under. And the number of absconders. HMS Ganges was built on this spit of land. There was only one road away. No escape. When Charlie said the film was postponed, I was rather relieved. He had another script for the Central Electricity Generating Board, so I did that. And I learned all about the National Grid. It was for a slide presentation in an exhibition. And then I bumped into Derek Stewart. He and his cameraman Harold Case had come out to cover one of our "Mirror of Oil" series in Kuwait. Anyway I contacted Derek and he gave me work. And I did a number of films for him.

**John Legard:** When he was down here in Westbourne Grove Mews?

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. There was Sue Gresham there. And Terry Trench was editing. And Bridget Taylor as she then was in the cutting room. I made a number of movies for him. He kept my head above water even though he didn't pay very well. I managed to screw £35 a week out of him. (James Harpham, composer, said he only got £25). James and Bridget live very close to us now in Grierson's old cottage.

**John Legard:** I see Derek from time to time. He drinks at a pub near here. The Academy. He and Sue once or twice a week. Sue still runs the library. The Argos library.

**Rodney Giesler:** By that time, at the beginning of 1963, I made contact with Jack Holmes. He was now a producer at Realist. He had a number of COI films to do. And he offered me one for the Ministry of Health on cross infection in hospitals.

*End of Side 3.*

**Rodney Giesler:** It was a training film to be shown to student nurses about the dangers of cross infection in hospitals and how it can happen. As a symbol of the infection spreading we used soot. If someone sneezed, we had a shot of the guy in the next bed, and we saw little black spots landing on his forehead. And then he would sneeze too. Charles (Cooper's), great role was standing on a pair of steps and sprinkling the soot to wherever it was directed. I believe he had a little animation rostrum in the basement at Realist but I know he went right back to Basil Wright in the early days. He was another lovely character I knew. Anyhow I thoroughly enjoyed working with Jack (Holmes). He was a producer in the real sense. I found that during my career there were plenty of people calling themselves producers, but very few were. The producer I valued was someone who could say as Jack did : "I'm confused, Rodney. Where am I? Where are the signposts? Where are you taking me? What does this mean? Is it necessary?". And Donald (Alexander) was the same. A director can't do without a producer. In my latter years I was my own producer and I suffered because there was no one to stand back and say "What are you doing there?"

**John Legard:** That was why Edgar (Anstey) was so good because he was always sufficiently detached. He had so many irons in the fire outside the unit he was a very strong producer indeed. Very good. He could look at stuff objectively, and prevent people rushing into basic

mistakes. I suppose people in that period like Jack and Edgar and Stuart. They were all exceptional. And if they'd gone into features, as they might have done, they would have been marvellous feature producers.

**Rodney Giesler:** Would they?

**John Legard:** I think Edgar would.

**Rodney Giesler:** I wonder. Having experienced the feature world in a very minor way as a producer, it depends on the integrity of the set-up. You're in hock to the money men and commercial pressures. And the films we're talking about were not made under commercial pressure. As Ed Williams said to me the other day, it was a service. There was the sense of service that goes back to Grierson, goes back to Reith. And you were dedicated to communicating. You weren't told "Oh we can't say that, the audience won't like it. They won't pay to see the film etc." So I question that one. My introduction to Jack was marvellous. We made this little film and we got quite a good budget for it, and it did its job and the COI were happy. We had certain frustrations. We had a former matron who was with us all the time. And even though we were shooting a close-up of a patient, the fact that a sheet on the twentieth bed down wasn't hanging at the right level meant that everything had to stop while it was adjusted. But that was the COI and those were the irritations you experienced when making sponsored films. Anyhow my first exposure to Jack's guidance was delightful and stimulating and enjoyable. And when I finished that film, and went back on the freelance market, I did all sorts of things. I did a film called "Scots Gold". Now that was for an unlikely guy called Patrick Young. He operated out of a flat in the King's Road. And this was for Distillers. He called me in to write a commentary for it. And it was a doddle. He not only paid me well, but he paid me promptly. "Scots Gold" worked and Patrick phoned me up and said I want another commentary written. And I met him in a cutting room in Soho, where he ran me a film about Rome. Fair enough, but it seemed to consist almost entirely of out-takes and trims. It was an almighty concoction. It was very amusing and enjoyable to do. And quite taxing. You had to keep the story line going through this totally unrelated series of shots. It was a bit like a Pete Smith Special. You know, "And how better to go from the Colosseum to the Appian Way?"

**John Legard:** Like Harold Baim.

**Rodney Giesler:** Harold Baim, exactly. I actually saw this film on circuit release if you can believe it. He obviously made his money on the original Rome film. And said "Let's make another film with the trims."

**John Legard:** What we call nowadays a "spin-off".

**Rodney Giesler:** A spin-off. And he got his Eady Money, and fine, everyone was happy. I then went to do some work at the BBC called "View & Teach" which was a television series to teach English to foreign speakers.

**John Legard:** Did you have an agent?

**Rodney Giesler:** No. It never occurred to me to get on an agent's books. When I tried to get into features I tried, but they didn't want to know. "Make your first feature, kid, then come to me." I'll tell you of my encounter with Peggy Ramsey later on. But I digress. I did a lot of commentaries like this. It was easy money.

**John Legard:** It's a great advantage when you are a writer. So many film makers fall by the wayside because they can't write. Directors do. If you can write there are many opportunities aren't there?

**Rodney Giesler:** Oh yes. I was also writing plays as well. I had written short stories during my "University" time, and sold them. There was a big market then. "John Bull" was a good one. "Argosy" I got a story in there.

**John Legard:** A very good magazine. Quite long short stories.

**Rodney Giesler:** I was also doing a few voice-overs. Often I was reading a commentary to picture, and the producer would say you've got the hang of it, the right intonations, and conviction and the right knowledge that comes through your voice. Record it.

**John Legard:** I can imagine your voice would be good for commentaries.

**Rodney Giesler:** I did one once for Charles Barker. Jean Wadlow. They had an audition. It was for Hoechst, the German chemical company, their English version. They had a huge casting session. They had all the Richard Bakers and Kenneth Kendalls. But they weren't happy with any of them. Aivar Kaulins, who was working there at the time, phoned me and asked me to test. And Jean said "That's the One."

**John Legard:** Jack Holmes had a wonderful commentary voice. He spoke some of the commentary for "Desert Victory".

**Rodney Giesler:** And Stuart on "Night Mail"

**John Legard:** It was Stuart and Grierson and Pat Jackson who spoke the commentary of "Night Mail". Stuart did the Auden, Pat did the early part of it. And Grierson did the very end.

**Rodney Giesler:** That was another way of making money. I never got into the lucrative world of TV Commercials because you had to have an Equity card for that. The money was so big. Often I'd do a combined deal. I'd write the commentary and speak it. Back to Jack Holmes, because I soon did go back to Jack Holmes. Another COI film at Realist to be made in Africa to encourage British teachers to go and work in developing countries. My first job was to go and talk to teachers who had already done the job. I borrowed a little battery recorder from the COI, a Ficord. Very rudimentary machine. And I travelled the country talking to teachers who'd been there and come back. And their enthusiasm and excitement was such that I persuaded Jack to allow me to go back to some of them with a Nagra and get some decent quality tracks when we were editing. And then I went off on a recce. It was my introduction

to Africa. I went to Kampala first. This was just post-independence. It was a pristine, newly-independent African country. Brand new parliament building opened by Iain Macleod, the colonial secretary. It was a shining example of how independence worked. I went round the leading schools there. Secondary schools. I learned a lot about different cultures. About African students, who for instance, didn't know what a padlock was, and were having to train as engineers. A huge gap to leap. Great idealism. I met many of the new senior Ugandan civil servants. People who were training to become managers. There was the East African Common Services then "Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika". They ran airlines and research centres and such like. I was thoroughly inspired.

**John Legard:** What year was this?

**Rodney Giesler:** 1963. Uganda was presented as the showcase. But they thought it was best to get a wider view, so I was also asked to take in Nigeria as well. So when I finished in Uganda, I flew across via Khartoum to Lagos. I spent a long weekend in Khartoum. And speaking a bit of Arabic was useful. I then flew in an old piston-engined DC6 right across the centre of Africa at about 10000 feet. Seeing things I'd never seen before. After docile friendly Uganda, however, arriving in Nigeria was a shock. It was a spivs' paradise. Arriving at the airport, the bus is parked round the corner, and all the touts take you to a taxi. It was a very violent, but very exciting country to go to. Being a COI film, I was looked after by the British High Commission, and I travelled all over Nigeria on this recce talking to teachers. Starting in Lagos, moving up to Ibadan, then to Enugu, which was then Eastern Region and which became Biafra in this terrible war, and finishing up in the North. Three totally different countries. It was called Nigeria by Lady Lugard after the Niger River.

**John Legard:** It had only been independent about three years I suppose.

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. There was Abubakar Tefara Balewa who was the Federal Prime Minister. Azikwe was the Eastern Region's. Awolowo was in Ibadan. You see it was all tribal. There were the Yoruba occupying the Western Region and its capital Ibadan. And the Ibo in the Eastern Region. And in the North the Hausa and Fulani. Trying to unite Nigeria was a nightmare. And of course they failed. Still have. I couldn't help being fascinated by the political side. There were four different British High Commissioners in Nigeria, one for each region: Federal, East, West and North. And each one threw a party for me through which I could meet political leaders, civil servants and so on. And I drunk in impressions both from a national level, and from the expats: the teachers. But these teachers were not happy. To be quite frank, the British Government left them a bit on their own. They were paid by the local governments who were corrupt. My recce finished in Kano right up in the north, which was a wonderful experience. I came back and wrote a long report for Jack, saying where the film should be shot and where it shouldn't be shot, and why. I'd kept copious notes. I still had my little COI recorder. I'd forgotten what I was being paid. I'd gone way over budget. But it didn't matter. I wrote this report straight from the shoulder because I was flabbergasted by the Nigerian situation. In no way could it be recommended.

**John Legard:** It sound like a very exhausting trip. The climate didn't make it a pleasant place to be.

**Rodney Giesler:** Uganda was all right. Nigeria, well you took all the dope. I only got the shits once, in the middle of a lunch with the High Commissioner in Ibadan. I had to make a rapid exit. Very funny that. I shot out to the loo, came back, in the middle of the meal. Everyone behaved as if nothing had happened, and I looked on my side plate, and there were two little tablets. I took them, and apologised for my undignified exit. But it was "My dear fellow, think nothing of it". The upper lip reigned. Anyhow I wrote this report, and Jack looked at it and growled and said "I think the Department of Technical Co-operation (as the Ministry for Overseas Development was then called) ought to see this." And it went straight to the Permanent Secretary, Kenneth Thompson. I was told it gave them a lot of useful information, that wouldn't have otherwise come to them. You see there was no skin off my nose. I could be as rude as hell. I wasn't even Realist staff. I was freelance. It was inspiring, especially in Uganda where teachers talked about their work with great enthusiasm. So we decided to shoot the whole film there. Jeak (Adrian Jeakins) was my cameraman. Mike Hobbs was his assistant. And Tony Hinton was the production manager. And we had two sound men from Anvil because it was nearly all synch. Pat Jeffrey was one and Peter Gray was the other. I was lucky. I always seem to get nice technicians working with me. Because the film was about teachers, it was about dialogue, and therefore synch was going to be very important. I had worked before with a blimped Arri, and it was no portable camera. We had a Nagra, (not Leevers Rich. That was a diabolic mess). Round about that time I'd done a little scripting job for Derrick Knight. He was making a marvellous film for the Coal Board called "A Time to Heal".

**John Legard:** I remember it well.

**Rodney Giesler:** It was in mobile synch. I said to him "How the hell did you do this?" He sent me over to a firm called Bettersound who were in the floor below Cardins in Endell Street. They had built a fibreglass blimp for a 16mm Arri, with a zoom lens and it seemed to work. So I asked Jack's permission to do some tests on this. Anvil sent Jeff and Pete over, and we borrowed the Bettersound blimp and wandered into Covent Garden which was then still a fruit and veg market, and we walked around and shot interviews with the porters and stall holders. And the rushes were so exciting. It all came alive. And this was only a test.

**John Legard:** Early cinema verité.

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. But the sense of liberation. It was synch, on demand. We didn't have the internal synching: the buzzer and flashing light. We were using television technique before television itself discovered it. Before, you had the self-blimped portable cameras. Off we went. Flew to Kampala and shot. Most of our locations were deep in the bush. Alex Shaw was running the Government Film Unit in Kampala, a set-up similar to the one we had had in Kuwait. Alex lent us his Colortrans lighting set. And so armed we went off into the bush. We hadn't got far, I think it was the Technical College in Jinja, just east of Kampala. We were in the middle of shooting and suddenly Jeak, I can see his face today. He went absolutely ashen. He said "all the leaves of the diaphragm in the zoom lens have collapsed. So I phoned up Alex and said "Have you got any lenses?" And he said "well we've got a set of prime focus". "Can we have 'em, PLEASE?" So we drove back and picked them up, and although the

primes were a pain, we had to keep changing them, but we kept to schedule. And in those unbureaucratic days all you had to do was to send a telex back to London, and within an hour there was a new lens on the plane. Replacement zoom. Nowadays it's "where's the carnet, sir?" 48 hours later we were back in action. The lens arrived and it worked. And we had no more trouble after that. We went out to some of these bush schools. I remember going to one right up in the North in a place called Gulu. Acholi country. Rather fearsome people. You soon learn all the tribal geography. The Colortrans were useful. The school generator was usually turned off at daybreak, but they started it up for us. You remember how Colortrans operated. You switched on, then increased the voltage in stages until you got full light level. Well, you could hear the generator pounding away across the compound, and as you gunned up the Colortrans, you heard it getting slower and slower. Somehow we hit a compromise. We got enough foot candles to satisfy Jeak without stalling the generator. The first rushes report from Jack was alarming because "Rodney I can see the teacher, but as soon as he steps in front of the blackboard, all I can see is a pair of eyes and teeth". In Gulu it was allright. They were all Brits. But this was a problem with African teachers. We were once in a remote primary school where there was no electricity for 30 miles. Alex's chippy at the unit knocked together some reflectors and some kids who weren't being filmed were recruited by Jeak as grips. We had about 6 reflectors, there were no glazed windows in the classroom. They were only mud huts. And these kids held the reflectors under Jeak's instructions as a kind of stockade. And the faces we shot came out beautifully, and we shot synch. I still have the film on video. It was shot on 16mm Eastmancolor neg. Much of the film was shot off the cuff. You never knew what to expect. Anything that I thought was relevant I filmed because 16mm was so cheap in comparison to 35mm. You weren't worried about going over stock allowances. It all came out. It was magic stuff that was going in.

**John Legard:** Who was your editor on that?

**Rodney Giesler:** Tony Gardner. We edited at Anvil out at Beaconsfield. Anvil was associated with Realist and we did all our post production with them.

**John Legard:** Were you pleased with the result? Did it come out well?

**Rodney Giesler:** It came out very well. The structuring of it was fun. I mentioned that we got some proper recordings of the voices of the teachers in England. And also at every location we went to in Uganda. The whole point was that this was a film about teachers in Africa talking to teachers back home, who think "Oh I don't want to go out to Africa. Oh yes. I see what you mean. It is exciting. It is interesting." And one of the themes they embarked on was how much more stimulating it was out there because kids were willing to learn. They all had to pay to go to these schools. Often a whole village paid the fees for one boy to go there. So they were dead keen to learn, and dead keen to escape poverty. They wanted to be civil servants and politicians. So we recorded at every location. Pete had a microphone on a boom and I would get the comments of the teachers. And we got top quality. We then came back and we edited the sound. We had a linking commentary. But most of the commentary consisted of the remarks made by teachers. What are now called "sound bites". We also recorded the Katanga Mass. A choir in a technical school. An hour's performance. No orchestra. No accompaniment at all. Pure choral. I thought about using it. Jack loved it. He was a great music-lover. As I said, we edited at Anvil. Ken Cameron ruled the

roost there. Ken said "We're running out of money. I don't know how long we can keep you." And I got so fed up. He was such a mean bugger in that sense. "Ken I wouldn't mind another transfer of this." "How many more do you want?" I'd go down to his office, and in his drawer there would be little rolls of tape. Perhaps 30 feet long with a rubber bands round them and he said "Use that". Well it was bloody useless. By the time you'd run up to speed you'd used it.

**John Legard:** You've got Ken to a T.

**Rodney Giesler:** I didn't get paid for the last three weeks. I thought, bugger this, it's looking so nice. Ken said "You've run out of your fee. We're not paying you any more." And I said "to hell with that, Ken. I'm not worried. I've got to get this finished." And Tony Gardner, the editor... He was another one. You were talking about contributions from editors. He got to know, like all good editors, all that was said on the sound. He not only remembered the shots. He said "Haven't you got someone saying something about that?" I said "God, you're right. Let's go back and listen to it. Who's going downstairs to ask Ken for a transfer? You or me?" So we'd get it transferred and laid. John Stockbridge spoke the commentary.

**John Legard:** Another good voice.

**Rodney Giesler:** Another good voice. It was marvellous. We had a premiere with Princess Alexandra, and Barbara Castle who was then Minister of Overseas Development. And it went down extremely well. It was reviewed in the Times Educational Supplement. I was on cloud nine.

**John Legard:** It must have been very satisfying. Can we see that film? Is it around?

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. I have two 16mm copies, and it's on video as well. And there's a 16mm copy, and a one inch transfer on tape in the National Film Archive. But I have copies.

**John Legard:** What's the title?

**Rodney Giesler:** *And Gladly Would He Learn*. We took a long time to get it. It's always the title that extends the schedule. Derek Mayne of the COI, who was our controller, suggested it. And he was a marvellous controller because we had a committee of fifty people behind this film. Fortunately at that time the Department of Technical Co-operation was not a full-blown Ministry and they couldn't put in their tuppence worth. I was talking about bedsheets getting out of line on a hospital ward. We didn't get any of that nonsense. And we got away with quite a lot. Part of it was due to Sir William Alexander, who died recently. He was high up in the Ministry of Education. I remember sitting round this huge table in Curzon Street before MIS took it over. All these people. Foreign Office. Commonwealth Office, you name it. Someone had tuppence to put in. And he shut them all up. A blunt Scotsman. He said "There's only one man who's going to make this film. That's Mr. Giesler sitting over there in the corner. Make life easy for him. Let him do his job." And I thought "Good man."

**John Legard:** That was great.

**Rodney Giesler:** And of course Derek Mayne who was a much quieter guy. He was ex-GBI (Gaumont British Instructional). Quiet. Short. Unobtrusive. Left all the creative decisions to Jack and me. And kept at bay because we still had a mighty committee of about 30 people at approval shows. The only thing that came up, there was one Foreign Office lady who happened to be a Grade higher than Derek. It wasn't a question of wisdom but of civil service seniority. We had one of the teachers talking about the slave trade in East Africa, which was fair enough. It was African history. And she was offended by it. "We can't mention the slave trade in a film like this." And after a big battle Derek had to give up. And we just dropped the dialogue. Which was a pity because it was a good way of showing the good relationship between the teacher and his class. A European could talk about these things to a class of Africans.

**John Legard:** I suppose she was worried about sensitivities.

**Rodney Giesler:** If you worry about everything, you never get a film made. Anyhow. We made the film. It was shown widely. I hope it encouraged a lot of people to go teaching. We could only afford to go to Africa.

**John Legard:** It was good film-making really because you were able to concentrate on that one area.

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. You would have spent ages going round all the other countries. But what we did, Jack had a brilliant idea. He phoned up Su (Wolfgang Suschitsky) who as you know is a marvellous still photographer. And Su kindly allowed us to go through his collection of photographs of children, taken all over the world. And we selected about six stills which ended the film.

**John Legard:** What a good idea. What a delightful way of winding up.

**Rodney Giesler:** Didn't charge us anything. Funnily enough I was at a Fine Art show in Islington yesterday and I bumped into him there. And we had a long chat.

**John Legard:** I would have thought this film might have won an award or two at BISFA.

**Rodney Giesler:** Well it did. It was put up as best specialised film among four at BAFTA. We all turned up at the Hippodrome for the awards. And Pam and I were sitting at one table in the gods. And sitting at the next table, complete with dinner jacket and kilt. "Hullo Ken fancy seeing you here." Sadly we didn't win the award. But I still consider that film to be the best I ever made. I also had another film up for an award which Mac (R.Q. MacNaughton) directed called "The CircArc Gear". Michael Clark headed the AEI unit then. It was before *And Gladly Would He Learn* came up. In fact I didn't get to direct it because it clashed with "Gladly". I had bumped into Michael in Oxford Street and he said "Oh are you back from Kuwait?" This was about two years after I'd left! And I said "Oh yes. Longtime. Any work going?" And he said he'd let me know. And as good as his word after about a month he phoned me up and said "I've got a lot of meaningless drawings on my desk. So I came in and looked at them. The AEI Film Unit was another part of the Film Centre empire.

**John Legard:** Arthur was involved with that?

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. With Chandos: Oliver Lyttleton who was the chairman. And Shell and AEI were in a suite of offices opposite B&H in Oxford Street. Anyway I looked at Michael's drawings and it was about a new shape of gear tooth which AEI were pioneering. I knew nothing about gear teeth and so I went up to Rugby and had a day's brain storming with their gear designer, and realised I had a good film. Hitherto I hadn't appreciated the seemingly abstract mathematical laws that decide whether you can transmit power from one gear tooth to another efficiently. I learned all about involute gears, and helical gears etc and wrote a report for Michael, because he didn't know if it was possible to make a film. And with my old school geometry set I illustrated it. I had to extend the compasses because some of the curves were of large radius and so I built myself a special large compass with a pencil sellotaped on the end to get the right curves. I took a lot of trouble because I enjoyed it. I showed it to Michael, and said "we can make a movie." And he said, "You know this is the best technical presentation I've seen." You know Michael. He doesn't flatter lightly. He's down to earth. Doesn't suffer fools. So we did some pre-shooting. We then had a lot of gears made for us out of perspex, because they had a system of showing stresses on the screen, using a special kind of light. It's so long ago. I didn't direct it. Peter Griffiths was production manager. And Ron Bicker shot the staff I directed. Ron was a superb technical cameraman. He couldn't shoot from the hip. But he could get technical effects. And I went on to work with him at Shell later. As I said, I wasn't available to direct it. "Mac" (R.Q. MacNaughton) directed it with Ronnie Whitehouse as cameraman. I saw the film. It showed the principle of the Circarc gear and we used lots of analogies about spreading loads. I had a shot of a garden party and the man is wearing broad-soled shoes. He doesn't sink into the grass. But his wife has stiletto heels and she gets stuck. Anyway I didn't direct the main shoot because I was in Uganda at the time. I then went back to the Coal Board. Francis Gysin was running the unit men.

**John Legard:** Had Donald retired?

**Rodney Giesler:** He went up to Dundee and became an academic. The unit was now in Dorset Square. They'd moved from 2, Grosvenor Place. I'd done a film for Donald earlier on post-Kuwait called "Remotely Operated Longwall Faces" which was about fully automated coal faces with Ralph Larrabeiti as cameraman. And that was a disaster because I became injured on the film. It was a nightmare. The machinery didn't work properly. We got absolutely exhausted getting up at 4 o'clock every morning, and it was shot at two collieries in the Nottingham area, Newstead and Ormonde. It was quite a revolutionary idea. As the cutting machinery went by, all the roof supports moved up behind it. Lovely boffinry. Then I was walking out of the pit one day, fully laden, I put my safety boot into a pothole and fell. As I fell, my leg twisted and my kneecap came out. I reset it myself, but I couldn't put any weight on my leg. I pulled my kneecap round and put it in its proper place and straightened my leg and the pit stretcher party immediately turned up, and carried me out of the pit. Ralph finished the film as director/cameraman. And Rex Bloomstein was my assistant.

**John Legard:** I remember him. He did rather well in television.

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. A very good documentary producer. He did the series on Strangeways.

**John Legard:** He's done some controversial stuff. He was with us at BTF for a short time.

**Rodney Giesler:** That was his first job in the film business. At the time he was heavily into CND and was pushing me to join. "You must come on the Aldermaston march." But I said if he'd got Kruschev to come on the march, I'd come too. I've seen him on and off since. Anyway for Francis (Gysin) I did a follow-up to "Longwall Faces". A new automatic colliery at Bevercotes, which of course has now been closed. But that was carrying the whole automatic philosophy further: the shafts, the winding, the roadways, trunk conveyors, everything. So I didn't do much shooting on that. Much of it had already been done. I wrote the commentary and tied it all together.

**John Legard:** We're now up to about 1964.

**Rodney Giesler:** 1964. Circarc Gear was just before I went to Africa: 1963. October 64 was the premiere of "Gladly". And then I bumped into Denis Segaller, and I said "Anything happening at Shell?" And he said "yes". He'd seen the "Circarc Gear", and Michael Clark had told him about me. And I came into the Shell fold for the best part of two years. That's how Shell worked. By that time I was earning about £40 a week. But with Shell you were on salary, virtually. They were still in Oxford Street. Later we moved to Shell Centre. Shell Centre was built shortly after the Festival of Britain. The Dome of Discovery went, and Shell rose in its place. The first big building there.

**John Legard:** I remember they had terrible industrial problems when they were building it.

*End of Side 4.*

**Rodney Giesler:** When I was there "The Underwater Search" was the big *Mm* in production. Even for Shell it was a mammoth production. It had to be. John Armstrong was directing it, and he had a great extravagant talent. I was involved in a series of films called "Refinery Processes". Brian Kaufman took the first film which was about a refinery, and how it was divided up. I was given two films on different processes: "Distillation" and "Cracking & Reforming." I worked to Denis Segaller with Douglas Gordon being executive producer. We had a technical adviser in Shell called Bill Prentice, who was a refinery engineer. Also a technical adviser called Martin Rogers, who was a science teacher at Westminster School, and went on to become a head of some prominent public school. Between the Shell adviser and Martin Rogers I got to know a lot of refinery chemistry very quickly. And in a very interesting way. Martin was a superb teacher and at that time I was spending a lot of time in the Shell Technical library at Shell Centre. I was taking "New Scientist". Although on the face of it, these processes look very simple, they develop an almost philosophical dimension. Distillation is a case in point. Simply told, if you take two different liquids and mix them together, and their boiling points are wide enough apart, you can separate them because they boil at different temperatures. But there is nothing on God's earth that will ever get you back to the original two separate pure liquids, however long you distill them. One will always have a little bit of the other in it. So the technical discussions, and the need to get Shell clarity, I call it Shell clarity because that was one of the Shell attributes and hallmarks of Shell films that they could

communicate very simply through analogy. It took a lot of technical time. I went over to their research centre in Amsterdam quite a lot. I went round Pernis refinery in Rotterdam. And discussed things with Martin Rogers, who in turn devised some bench top experiments for us to do, particularly on catalysts, to illustrate chemical properties. Eventually we shot them. We went to refineries at Ingolstadt near Munich, and at Strasbourg. And that was rather amusing. You tend to think of a big multinational company as having uniformity. We went to Strasbourg first. Although the city is Germanic, the refinery was well and truly in France. Garlic in the canteen lunch. It was always a bit kick bollocks and scramble, an old film industry term, KBS, at the refinery. A leak would develop and a jet of flame would shoot out in a highly dangerous area, just as we were about to shoot. And we'd say to our adviser "Should that flame be there?" "Oh alors, zut," on the phone to the control room. Il y a du feu, de feu!" And they'd come back very casual, shoulder-shrugging and so on. I remember that because we had terrible weather, and sometimes we'd turn up and you just couldn't see one column from another, and we'd go back to the hotel. And there was a carnival on in town and we got absolutely legless one night and bugger me, the next morning was bright and clear. I'd told the hotel to call us whatever the day if the weather looked good. This was Sunday morning at about 8 o'clock, and Ron Bicker was the cameraman. We all turned up. Ron was in better fettle than I was because either he could take his beer, or drank less than I did. Anyway, we shot Strasbourg was a marvellous place because I had the Michelin Guide Rouge and every night we went out to a different place. Shell budgets were fairly generous. We found mainly small family cafes. The crew, towards the end of the location, (some had never eaten garlic before), became great food afficionados. We then drove on to Germany, where they got bureaucratic. We had to seal everything. All the customs put little red seals on the gear, and you had carnets and everything had to be counted off. And we drove to Ingolstadt and we had to turn up at the customs there to have all the equipment got out. Every little tape measure and director's "Tewe" and plug. We had a van load of lights as well. Everything had to be "Ganz in Ordnung", but at least they had a little sense of humour at the end. When it eventually had all been cleared, the customs officer walked over and did the sign of the cross and said "Gott sei Dank". Ingolstadt refinery had no leaking flames, every pipe, every column: silver. They knew we were coming. They had had scaffolding up and had cleaned everything. That was fun because then there was the Munich Bierfest on at the end of shooting. What a performance. We all sang "Ein Prosit, Gemutlichkeit." The sight of Ron Bicker dancing on the table with his stein of beer was something to be savoured. It was a good shoot. Then we spent ages shooting in the basement of the Downstream Building at Shell. And this is where Ron came into his own. He was so meticulous, and got such lovely lighting effects, and really put class into a film.

**John Legard:** It must have been a nice looking picture.

**Rodney Giesler:** I think it is. I've got copies.

**John Legard:** Title?

**Rodney Giesler:** One was *Distillation*, which is still in the catalogue. And the other was *Cracking & Reforming* and they were finished in 1966. We had two BBC Special Effects guys doing the models. They had time off in lieu of overtime from the Beeb. Jack Klein was in charge at Shepherds Bush. They were building Daleks at the time. Bernard Wilkie was one who came and helped us. And Ron Oates the other. They built a marvellous perspex model of a distillation tower which

contained trays. You heated the oil at the bottom, and it evaporates and gradually condenses at it goes up. We wanted to feign bubbles etc, and we used beers. The densest, darkest oil in the bottom was represented by Guinness very well. Then we moved up to Newcastle Brown, then to light ale, and we topped off with a lager, and it looked beautiful. If you see that film now, bear in mind what those bubbling fluids were. It was no good putting dyes in them. The catalyst experiments were fun. You have an apparently calm liquid until you put a lump of metal in it and it goes bezerk. Bubbles everywhere. *Distillation* won a gold at BISFA, and is still being shown. The sense of leisure you had at Shell was marvellous. You weren't paid over the odds, but you were securely paid. I remember once Bill Prentice had to go to the Far East and was away for a month, and nothing could be done. I was so bored that I asked Alan Gourlay, who was the production manager, and explained that I had nothing to do until Bill got back, and could I have some time off? It wasn't as if I was taking a vast amount of money for nothing. Alan was a bit guilty because I'd discovered that John Armstrong was earning £45 a week and I was only on £40. And he couldn't increase mine. Using that little bit of blackmail, he let me go off and do a script for Ronnie Riley. And Shell kept paying me as well.

**John Legard:** RHR Productions.

**Rodney Giesler:** RHR Productions. He was once part of the Film Producers' Guild, but now he had his own set up in Wells Street with Mickie Barden and Mary Harris. This was a film for the Atomic Energy Authority and the films officer there was Bill Ackroyd, formerly Coal Board. And he knew me. Knew my films. It was a safety film for the Culham Laboratories. They were losing people there from electrocution, because they mounted these fearsome experiments and the layout was always changing. Sometimes they couldn't remember which terminal was live and which wasn't. It was very easily done. And so Ronnie and I went to Culham and talked to the boffins there, and they let me see the accident reports. They didn't want any gore of course. This is where safety films are always compromised. I'm always in favour of leading with the shoulder. Anyway I sat down with their chief scientist, and with my electrical training, we devised an experiment that could go wrong. And easily wrong. It only needed a distraction for something to go wrong. I scripted this as a dialogue film and they eventually used actors as well as one good scientist who was very good on camera. We took an experiment that looked like coming right, and it had taken so long, they had a deadline. They were constantly altering the wiring set-up, and as they altered it we had a circuit diagram showing how it was being altered. You could see trouble building up slowly. One of the scientists had gone to the dentist, and he comes back towards the end, and they've altered the circuitry without telling him.

**John Legard:** At that was the end of him.

**Rodney Giesler:** No. You can't have the end of him, see? He exercised his caution. "It may be wrong. Let's test it." And there's a huge explosion. It was called "On the Safe Side". A mnemonic: Switch off, Isolate, Dump and Earth. SIDE. And that won a BISFA award. I never directed it because another Jack Holmes African film came up which I wanted to do. Frank North was the cameraman. He lit it beautifully. Shot on 35mm and reduced. I have a copy. And that went down very well.

**John Legard:** Who directed it?

**Rodney Giesler:** Lawrence Crabb. He did a lovely job on that. I love looking at it. It came together exactly as I'd scripted it.

**John Legard:** Ronnie Riley was a nice man. Rather civilised. I remember meeting him at the Savile Club.

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. Sadly he got very ill. He died of a brain tumour. Terrible. And he lost a lot of his niceness towards the end. I don't blame him for it. He was a very ill man.

**John Legard:** Yes. When I knew him he always was very civilised.

**Rodney Giesler:** The next script I did for him was "The Risk Takers." Another interesting job. A script for the Chartered Insurance Institute.

**John Legard:** Also for Ronnie?

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. He'd done a lot of films for the insurance business. He had Pat Jackson doing a film for him when I was there.

**John Legard:** A fellow Savile member.

**Rodney Giesler:** The CH script was interesting because I covered the whole industry from Lloyds, through to a country agent. A nice subject. That got delayed and I couldn't direct it. I've wandered off Shell. I played hookey and did "On the Safe Side". I came back to Shell. All the time I'd been away the weekly cheque still came through! On "Cracking & Reforming", the biggest catalytic cracker that Shell had, (it takes heavy oil and turns it into petrol), was in Venezuela. So I said to Denis "Let's go there". OK. This is what you could do at Shell in those days. Francis Gysin had finished running their unit in Venezuela by then.

**John Legard:** Did he succeed Lionel Cole?

**Rodney Giesler:** He succeeded Lionel Cole at CSV as they called it.. Compana de Shell de Venezuela. In Caracas. The unit was still there run by Guillermo Carrera, a Venezuelan. And a lovely Italian cameraman called Giuseppi Nisoli. I went out there as director. The local crew took me around. We shot in Caracas, then went up to Lake Maracaibo and Cardon refinery. I remember doing an analogy there. We were stuck right on top of the cat cracker looking down. I stood one of the refinery operators immediately beneath us. And we did a monumental double zoom from a low platform and a high platform. This refinery guy had in his hand a little heap of catalyst, and in order for it to work effectively it had to have a huge working area. Each little granule of catalyst was like a sponge, full of holes. And what I wanted to show was that that little pile of dust in his hand had a total surface area of the whole space round this man. We started with a close-up, and we mixed between zooms. We had in effect a 100 to I zoom. And that was quite a high spot in the film. Because I've sat with an audience when the film was shown, and there was quite a gasp when you zoomed all that way. Do you remember seeing a National Film Board of Canada cartoon called "Cosmic Zoom"? Starts off the same way, from a skin cell to the universe. And then reverses and

ends up in an atom. That was done by animation in about 5 minutes. Lovely. Venezuela was a very easy location. We saw a lot of the country.

**John Legard:** The unit was still there but run by local technicians.

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. People whom Lionel and Francis had trained up.

**John Legard:** What would have happened to that?

**Rodney Giesler:** I don't now. Francis might know.

**John Legard:** He may have told us. Because we did interview him a couple of years ago. So we're still in the sixties?

**Rodney Giesler:** We are. Shell offered me a number of other films to do, but two years at Shell Centre, and the amount of time spent on two ten minute films was a bit depressing.

**John Legard:** I worked at Shell for a short time many years later. It hasn't any apparent unity now. It's a great complex. You don't get a feeling of a unit.

**Rodney Giesler:** I've more to say on that later. The way the world outside flooded in. That last job I ever did was at Shell. It went wrong. They had all become very hard-nosed and Thatcherite. That was the trouble. You had to bid for work. In my day the accountants stayed in the back row. I think now of the marvellous entrepreneurial power that Film Centre and the descendants of Grierson had. Edgar (Anstey) had it. Imagine running the film unit like Edgar did on the biggest loss-making industry in the country. Who could justify making films when trains weren't running on time and costing millions. But you were making functional films. Ed (Williams) and I were talking about "Journey into Spring" the other day. That was made to sell tickets to people on Green Line buses to go and see the country. There's no way you would spend that money nowadays to do it.

**John Legard:** Enlightened sponsorship.

**Rodney Giesler:** Indeed. Shell in those days was an interesting collection of people. Vincent Porter was working there. He went on to be a lecturer at the London Poly. He's quite a film academic now.

**John Legard:** I see him from time to time. I belong to a club that he's a member of.

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. He's a very good writer and definer. Going back to Pudovkin and Eisenstein, I do need definitions. Even if I can't think them up for myself, "why are we doing this? Why are those rules there?" I need someone to tell me. Whether you're consciously aware of these rules or not, there are rules you work by. There are things that tell you that is wrong and that is right. That is nice and that is horrid. Subconsciously you are obeying rules.

**John Legard:** You can learn them by experience, but you can also learn them from the Pudovkins and Eisensteins that are essential reading,

**Rodney Giesler:** And Roger Manvell of course. I haven't talked much about Roger. His book "Film" was the first book I ever read about the cinema.

**John Legard:** Very good book. If you have a first edition I gather it's quite valuable. It's the one with the mistakes in it.

**Rodney Giesler:** I got to know Roger very well. I was on a committee organised by the COI that looked at short films for showing in international festivals. In those days the Arts Council helped you enter a short film in foreign festivals. They paid all expenses. I was part of a jury that looked at these films. Asa Briggs was the chairman. Francis Howard, ex COI, was the secretary. And we had quite team. Roger and Edgar were on it.

**John Legard:** I was Edgar's deputy a couple of years running. I used to go to screenings at the COI.

**Rodney Giesler:** I'm sure we met across the table. Also Thorold Dickinson. He was a nice man. I admired him as a director. I loved his work. *Queen of Spades*. They had it on telly recently. It doesn't creak at all. With Edith Evans. And he did that wartime thriller *Next of Kin*.

**John Legard:** That was a very good film. I think that was one of his best. He also did the original *Gaslight* with Diana Wynyard and Anton Walbrook.

**Rodney Giesler:** Then there was Forsyth Hardy. I was furious with him one day. I had put up a motion to be voted on, and he came charging through as if I hadn't opened my mouth and started talking. And Francis didn't notice, so I cut in "Mr. Chairman, I've just proposed a motion.." And Forsyth Hardy's face looked like thunder.

**John Legard:** Yes I remember him quite well. He used to turn up at Savile Row occasionally with Edgar.

**Rodney Giesler:** Colin Young as well.

**John Legard:** And there was a critic called Margaret Hinxman. Critic of the "Daily Mail". I like her.

**Rodney Giesler:** I've just remembered something. Doing these articles for Peter Brinson for "Films & Filming" that he never paid for? His successor was Peter Baker. Brinson liked these articles and Peter Baker saw them lying on a desk. They were analyses. "Looking at.." series. The first one I wrote was "Looking at Rashomon". The first Kurosawa picture seen in this country. The film that made us aware of the Japanese cinema. The other one was "Looking at "The Dam Busters" which, although it was a blood and guts film, had a lot of interesting technique in it. And I wrote a long essay on that. Anyway Peter Baker saw them, phoned me up, and asked me about them. And I found myself doing reviews for them. So I'd go to evening screenings, mainly for

magazine critics, but a number of daily critics would turn up. There was old Josh Billings from the "Kinematograph Weekly".

**John Legard:** A marvellous man.

**Rodney Giesler:** A big character. Huge man always in a dark suit. You'd hear him coming with this deep sonorous voice. And Margaret Hinxman was a nice lady. I got to know her quite well. When I went to make my feature I held a press show at the British Council theatre, she gave me a lovely write up. And we'd often communicate.

**John Legard:** What was the title of your feature?

**Rodney Giesler:** *The Insomniac*. It went out twice. Hemdale handled it. I'll talk a lot about it later, if you'll let me. That went out with *Triple Echo*. Then it did a second run with *Images*. Robert Altman. But going back to film critics I've know. Another man I liked very much was Richard Wilmington's successor, Paul Dehn.

**John Legard:** Alas he died.

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. The critics I warm to are those who know about movies. And who love movies. And who criticise more in sorrow than anger. That dreadful "New Yorker" woman, Pauline Kael. I can't stand. She's so barbed and destructive. I reviewed during my time at the Coal Board, 1956-58. I must have reviewed about 30 or 40 for "Films & Filming".

**John Legard:** I must have read quite a few. I had it delivered every month.

**Rodney Giesler:** And I did a number of feature articles as well.

**John Legard:** It was the best of the film magazines of that period. There was "Sight & Sound" but much of it was unreadable.

**Rodney Giesler:** You had to be a post graduate to understand it. "The Monthly Film Bulletin" I liked.

**John Legard:** It's a pity that went. It was very useful.

**Rodney Giesler:** The new "Sight & Sound" I just can't get on with at all. There's very little relevant to me. But I'm talking from the standpoint of an old fogey. Spike Lee, the black American director. That was the time of the Coal Board when I was writing. Alun Falconer and his wife Mary, I got to know well. Alun was a writer.

**John Legard:** Yes he did some good films.

**Rodney Giesler:** He wrote "The Man Upstairs" for ACT Films. With Dickie Attenborough.

**John Legard:** Produced by Bob Dunbar.

**Rodney Giesler:** That's right. He and I worked on that. He got himself into some corners occasionally. And I, as **a** short story writer, knew a little bit about structure and conflict and tension. And he was doing a lot of work on *The Man Upstairs* at the Coal Board. We were in the director's office and we'd thrash out one or two ideas. He went on to be a very successful television playwright. He wrote a lot of stuff for television. I was living in Hampstead, Belsize Park at that time, as a bachelor and I was looked after so well. Kitty and Geoff Hermges I knew socially very well. They'd just had their brand new house built up in South Hill Park. Sarah and Peter de NormanvilIe who were living across the way, and Alun and Mary Falconer living in Highgate. The Masons lived in Downshire Hill. I got to know Bob Kingsbury's New Zealand drinking group that included Randal Beanie, who's still around. Ex New Zealand film unit. Quite a number of New Zealanders there. Monica Mead the editor, and her husband Terry Gould. She was NZ he was English, a BBC cameraman.

**John Legard:** What about Margaret Thompson? Did she ever appear? She was a New Zealander.

**Rodney Giesler:** She did from time to time, but I think she was longer term. She'd come to this country a lot sooner.

**John Legard:** She did because I know her very well. The only feature I worked on was directed by
Margaret Thompson. The one we did for Group Three called *Child's Play* 1952.

**Rodney Giesler:** I remember seeing Stella Jonckheer at Group Three. I'd written a feature script during my "University Days" and I travelled to Southall, and dumped my script on her desk. They were shooting *The Brave Don't Cry* with Phil Leacock.

**John Legard:** That's an interesting story, because Southall Studios became a corset factory after it ceased
to be a studio. Now it's just derelict. I went past it not so long ago. Interesting times.

**Rodney Giesler:** I've really drawn a line as far as Shell so far.

**John Legard:** You've finished with Shell now, have you?

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes I have. I hope I've got the impression across that Shell was still achieving technical quality. It gave you time to think, to try out new ideas. It didn't pay remarkably well, but you didn't have to go out looking for new money every week. The salary cheque arrived regularly.

**John Legard:** If you were on semi established staff, it didn't matter quite so much if you weren't getting a vast sum of money. At least you had a continuity of employment, which was terribly important, always has been in our industry. I was very lucky because I was with Edgar at British Transport Films from 195I to 1982, over 3I years. With one or two slight breaks. That was the great thing. A lot of the time we were on minimum ACT rates. But at least we were on the staff.

**Rodney Giesler:** Talking about BTF, the only time I worked for British Transport Films, I phoned up John Shearman one day and said "anything going?" and he said "Well Rodney, I've got these two sheets of paper on my desk, and I don't understand a word that's written on them." So I went in and looked at the pieces of paper and it was all about squirrel cage traction motors for railway locos. Because I'd had some electrical training in the Army at the country's expense I could understand the technology there. It was to explain how this form of traction worked. This motor was being built by Brush for an experimental locomotive in Loughborough. It's now being used in locomotives that pull le Shuttle through the tunnel. I went up there and got a lot of briefing, and again it was fun finding analogies. We had to explain the function of an electrical condenser. You can fill an electrical condenser with an electric charge just as you can fill the cistern of a loo with water. An electrical condenser will discharge at will or discharge manually by pulling the chain. Or you can discharge it by a timer system, as in a gents urinal. John I chortled about this. I was always looking for an analogy to explain clever technology to people who were unscientific. A lot of animation was used, and again I did a lot of drawings showing phase relationships in alternating currents. Rotating vectors. You have a rotating vector and a rotating wheel and multiphases and so on. What we couldn't have done with computer graphics in those days! It never took off as a film because I think the whole project died. I've known John Shearman very well all my film-making life. I've known him through Kitty, and visited him in Tehran. It's my great regret that I never had a bigger chance to work with him.

**John Legard:** You two would have got on very well on these films.

**Rodney Giesler:** Because again I feel that his producership was very similar to Jack's. He has the same clear mind.

**John Legard:** He was so good. He was responsible for a lot of the technical training stuff we did at BTF over the years.

**Rodney Giesler:** Do you remember "MRS 1970"? This was a Shell-Mex campaign for central heating. And Mrs 1970 was the housewife of the future. And in 1970 no one's going to be cold because they'll all be like her and have central heating. At Random Films, Peter Woosnam-Mills was making a film as part of the campaign to be shown to women's institutes, sales courses and so on. It was all about the difference central heating would make. I never directed the film in the end. I was involved with Rank Labs, because I had an idea of mixing from black and white to colour. When the heat came on, the room turned into colour. In those days it was very difficult, because you had to have black and white neg and colour neg. You didn't have the luxury of tape where you had colour control. I remember talking to the guy at Ranks who was very keen on the idea. It was all scripted and that was in mind. I always tried to get away from pedestrian presentation. Try something new in cinematic terms. At about this time I wrote a feature screenplay about a bent accountant. I tried that on Ian Dalrymple. He'd nearly offered me some second unit work earlier. I've a lot to say about Dal because I got quite involved with him. That was one of my attempts to get into features.

**John Legard:** Wessex Productions.

**Rodney Giesler:** With Victor Savile. They had a little office off Hill Street. And Muirne Mathieson was his secretary.

**John Legard:** Do you see anything of her?

**Rodney Giesler:** No. Ed (Williams) wants to get a biography of Muir written. I did some scripts again for Derek Stewart for the building industry.

**John Legard:** So you were pretty busy through the years. You haven't had many gaps.

**Rodney Giesler:** No. But some of these jobs literally took days. Some of these short scripts "I want it by Friday" and you knocked it off quickly.

**John Legard:** Are you working at the moment?

**Rodney Giesler:** No. Only this sort of work. Recording old technicians. I wound up my company in 1990. The way that I made movies was finished as it was everyone. Everyone was going for video. Man and boy videos. £5000 budget. My pension fund was building up nicely, and I did some freelancing for Robin Jackson at Shell. I did a video on marine engine lubrication. Then I did a trip out to Oman. That was my last job. The company I liquidated was solvent, but wouldn't have stayed that way.

**John Legard:** You made quite a few pictures under your own banner?

**Rodney Giesler:** Not many but they were big ones. I made six block busters: documentaries with budgets of £70K plus. Mainly for overseas. European companies.

**John Legard:** And television?

**Rodney Giesler:** Nothing. I did this "View *&* Teach" but that was for BBC Enterprises. I did a script on the Linear Motor for Enterprises. It involved Dr. Eric Laithwaite, as anything on linear motors did. But I never got into television.

*End of Side* 5.

**Rodney Giesler:** Frances Cockburn at the COI came up with a story on the rehabilitation of disabled people. It was to be shown to orthopaedic surgeons to tell them you don't just mend someone's bones. There are facilities for preparing him to rejoin the working world. Unfortunately, such is the bureaucratic nature of the COI, they had to give the film to an approved contracting company, and that time Jack was floating. (He had been at British Films after leaving Realist.) So it had to be given to a production company, but it was understood that Jack would produce it. Unfortunately the production company was World Wide. They took it on as just another job, and although Jack was nominally the producer, and certainly we worked closely together during the script and treatment stages, Jimmy Carr and I did not have the right chemistry.

**John Legard:** Jimmy Carr had been running World Wide for goodness knows how long.

**Rodney Giesler:** He had a different style of working. Jack and I had developed a real life story of a scaffolder who had fallen and broken both his legs. They'd both been pinned. He couldn't bend his legs any more, so he couldn't climb a ladder. This was the classic case of someone who had to be totally re-trained. He had little formal education. He was a worker with has hands and somehow he got interested in television servicing and became a very good television engineer. I thought, this is marvellous. We can build his story round him. He was a natural in front of the camera. Ironically I thought of Paul Dickson's film *The Undefeated*, about the injured glider pilot who came back to life, which Frances Cockburn had edited, and which Jimmy Carr had produced. Frances loved the idea, and we tried it on Jimmy Carr. But I think Jimmy had his calculating machine working that day. He didn't accept the idea, and it became a shambles after that. This character became one of several in the film and 20 minutes is not long enough to get to know a number of characters in such a situation. You can only get to know one. So it became just another COI film. It went through World Wide. I think I made a good job of it.

**John Legard:** What was it called?

**Rodney Giesler:** *The Way Back*. I don't think it was widely shown. I hadn't my heart in it. To be honest, we both know what Jimmy was like after lunch. He deliberately pushed Jack out of the way. That upset me a lot. I found World Wide a very unfriendly place. There was a lot of back biting.

**John Legard:** This was when?

**Rodney Giesler:** 1965. One of the great bonuses of World Wide was dear Jo Jago. He lit it. He made those West London workshops, grimy machine shops, real set pieces. We shot it in black and white. (That was another argument with Jimmy Carr). I thought it suited the subject. Jo would come on to the set, a scruffy machine shop, dressed in his pin stripe suit which he always wore as if he was lighting a feature. And he would weave his magic. He and I worked well. He was a lovely warm Cornishman. In fact I've tried to persuade him to be interviewed because he doesn't I've far from me, but he doesn't want to know.

**John Legard:** What a shame. He was a marvellous man.

**Rodney Giesler:** You know how he was found, don't you. "The Saving of Bill Blewett." He was a young Cornish lad who acted in that film. I have warm memories of Jo. He used to smoke the most revolting Burmese cheroots. They were cranked, not straight like normal cigars. He'd stick them in his mouth and they stank the set out. I had to take him on a recce once and my car stank for weeks afterwards. Micky Boyd edited it. I did the voice over, mainly because Johnny Price said they'd run out of money, and I'd done voice overs before.

**John Legard:** What did they think of it? The people for whom it was made?

**Rodney Giesler:** I never knew. They pushed it out to hospitals. It was all right, but rather cold, and to me didn't engage any feelings. It needed an emotional dimension to it. Having had my full rein on "Gladly", I knew what I could do.

**John Legard:** That of course was not a unique situation. So often we had some good scripts going, and for various reasons, whether it was the producer or sponsor, you had to bring in other elements so that it got flattened. As a film it probably covered all the requirements but never had the impact.

**Rodney Giesler:** *The Way Back* had all the impact of a pamphlet. It gave you information but it didn't engage you. I think that film has this strong emotional side to it. It is designed to engage. If you just want to inform someone, print a pamphlet. If you want to motivate someone, make a movie.

**John Legard:** Jack was at British Films?

**Rodney Giesler:** He was. But at this time I think he'd actually left there. When Jack was at British Films in Shaftesbury Avenue, we all used to meet at The Anger in St. Giles High Street. Pat Jackson, John Shearman, Tony Hinton... it was a good crowd. I don't know where Tony is now. He was at the Admiralty. I ought to just mention a rather amusing ritual we went through on COI Films, and that was The Budget Meeting at the COI. The money man, it might be Johnny Price of World Wide, or George Hodding at RHR, would ask me to come with him to meet the money people at the COI to agree the budget. I think this had a twofold purpose. One was that he wanted my advice to back him up, i.e. we need those lights, we need an extra day there and so on. But the other one was to prove to me that they couldn't afford to pay me a penny more than they were. So we foregathered in the office of Alec Snowdon. He was a producer at Merton Park Studios at one time.

**John Legard:** A distinguished producer. A member of the Savage Club if I remember,

**Rodney Giesler:** He was the money-watcher there, and he'd go through the budget line by line and say "I expect you to shoot at least three minutes screen time a day." That was all very well in studio organised conditions, but certainly not when for instance you had to travel to East Anglia for the day to get up a pick-up shot. Johnny would put some fat in the thing that immediately got cut out. The old bugger didn't tell me that he only negotiated the items that were above the line. The COI gave them huge overhead allowances on top of this for their sound stage in Cursitor Street and their dubbing theatre and so on. Something like 40%, which was never mentioned. That formed a marvellous contingency if they ran out of money. But I suppose it was good training for a young director. The chemistry at World Wide was wrong. We made a workman-like film. My star came across well.

**John Legard:** Shot on 35mm black and white?

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes, as opposed to 16mm colour.

**John Legard:** We were still shooting in black and white at BTF. All our instructionals were in black and white. 35mm. Driver training films.

**Rodney Giesler:** The next thing to come up was another COI film. Frances Cockburn, knew I'd done *And Gladly Would He Learn* to recruit teachers to work in Third World Countries. The Ministry of Overseas Development now had a project to recruit agricultural experts to go to Africa. So they needed something similar. The idea was to show British experts working in research situations in Africa that were totally different to those they would have worked on in this country. New challenges and problems to entice them to go out. New diseases to conquer, new breeds of wheat to grow, this sort of thing. That was lovely. Unfortunately Jack wasn't around, and having done this Atomic Energy film with Ronnie Riley, I naturally suggested him. It was given to RHR. Sadly at this time, although I didn't know it, Ronnie had become desperately ill. He was developing a brain tumour. I went off on a recce. We went to Kenya and Botswana. And... shudders.. Frances Cockburn said she'd like to come with me. Frances, who could be somewhat abrasive, said to me "Be frank. If you'd rather go on your own, say so." I had a word with Jack, who was still hovering in the background, although he wasn't involved in the film, and she had a word with Jack, and the outcome was that we both flew out to Africa together. And we had a marvellous time on the recce. We started at Nairobi where the British High Commission looked after us, and of course Frances being a fairly senior civil servant meant that we were involved in endless cocktail parties there.

**John Legard:** Great. Makes it a bit more interesting.

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes it was fine except it got exhausting. I love Kenya. It was my first view, and we looked over everything. We went up to the Timboroa Summit, which although it's on the Equator is 8000 feet up and is just like Scotland. We went down to the Coast to look at tropical agriculture. We went over to the wheat lands, the tea plantations. It was a fascinating country. Then we went on to Botswana, through Johannesburg, and then on to Gaberones in a DC3 and likewise the High Commission there looked after us. We got off this plane at about 6 p.m. and had to be in our best bib and tuckers an hour later for yet another cocktail party. But Frances was a very good travelling companion. She's always painted by some people as a bit of a harridan. But I found her a sweetie, and we didn't get into each other's hair. If I went down to the bar in the evening, she kept out of the way. She was also recovering from an operation which is why I think she wangled the trip.

**John Legard:** How long was the trip?

**Rodney Giesler:** Six weeks. Botswana was fascinating as well. We went right up into the Okavango in the north west corner. Beautiful country. There was a young VSO chap running the agricultural services there called George Macpherson. He was a character. He had a Landrover with a projector on it for showing movies. Not necessary farm movies. He'd go out into the bonduks in the evening showing Micky Mouse films to the kids. Very clever, because he got to know the families, and when he went back with a film on How to Plant Your seeds, or how to stop the rats eating their crops, the families turned up. And strangely enough now if you turn on the radio first thing in the morning, he's the editor of "Farming Today." And he lives near me. He was a thorn in the side of the Agriculture Department in Botswana. Virtually the whole department was run by South Africans then. And he used to wind them up something horrible. I remember at the airport, you'd see

a clapped-out DC4 and about 200 Africans walking into it. They were all miners going down to work on the Reef. And George would say in a loud voice: "There goes another slave ship". This was still the recce. I came back, wrote the treatment, and that was fine. Off we went to shoot. Ron Bicker was the cameraman again, and he did a fine job. His assistant was Barry Noakes. And my assistant was Willie Kong Hong. Have you heard of Willie?

**John Legard:** Yes, he worked for us at one time.

**Rodney Giesler:** He was a protege of Arthur Elton's. I'd known him at Shell. He was half Surinamese and half Chinese. Surinam being the former Dutch Guiana, he spoke fluent Dutch as well. Which is interesting, because Willie and I went out ahead of the crew. Kenya was fine, we arranged everything. Willie booked the hotels etc. Now Willie is very Chinese-looking, and when we arrived in Johannesburg, which was heavily apartheid, separate doors everywhere, the High Commission in Kenya had got on to the British Embassy in Pretoria and said "this gentleman is working on British Government business." So as soon as we walked into Immigration at Jan Smuts they all knew about it. Willie became an honorary white. We got into town early afternoon, and I said we must get a bus out to the big revolving television tower where you get a marvellous view of the Reef, the mine dumps, as the sun goes down. We got on this bus, whites only, and these old Afrikaners looked at Willie: "What's this man doing..?" We sat down, and before I knew it, jabber, jabber, jabber: Dutch and Afrikaans all around us. And Willie was talking Dutch to all these Afrikaners. Got off the bus and it was "Good knowing you, Willie. All the best." Strange thing. So Willie and I were in Botswana, and the crew joined us there.

**John Legard:** This time you were shooting on what?

**Rodney Giesler:** 16mm colour. Eastmancolor. We had sound and lights from Blake Dalrymple. He had his company in Pretoria, and on my previous recce I did a deal with him. He supplied a sound crew and one spark and the lights we needed. We filmed in lots of interesting situations. Got lots of lovely material on cattle. Botswana was a cattle country. Shot in a slaughter house. To digress, this was the time of sanctions against Rhodesia which had declared UDL I almost thought of making a "Carry On" film called "Carry On Sanctions". Francistown, which was the main town close to the Rhodesian border, had this BBC transmitter pumping out propaganda of the most unsubtle kind into Rhodesia. The transmitter was run on diesel generators, the fuel for which came from Rhodesia. The new High Commission buildings in Gaberones was built by Costain's (Botswana), which was Rhodesian-owned. There was a company of South Wales Borderers guarding the transmitter. A lot of Rhodesians came over to play at the Francistown golf club. It was a total mix up. Sanctions just weren't working. The hotel we stayed at in Lobatsi just near the South African border backed on to the railway line, and in the middle of the night, I counted one tanker train going through with ninety trucks on it. And it wasn't stopping at Francistown. Anyway, we came home with the footage, and put the thing together into a good rough cut. Sheila Wilson was the editor. But the trouble was that since I had made *And Gladly Would He Learn*, the Ministry of Overseas Development had become a full Ministry, with all the bureaucratic trappings. There was a rather ferocious lady called Barbara Hoddinott, who was film controller there, who was the queen bee, whose word counted. She was very efficient and very death-dealing to any original idea.

**John Legard:** History repeating itself?

**Rodney Giesler:** It was. She wore a monocle, and if you suggested any idea she didn't like,the first sign of her disapproval was the monocle dropping out of the eye. Sadly she trod with her muddy boots all over the film: I had a sequence on plant-breeding in a Kenya Research Station. They had a terrible problem with a disease called stem rust on wheat. And they were breeding rust-proof species of wheat. And I went into a little detail on this because I thought it would appeal to the plant breeders in the audience. It was a challenge. But she decided that over the whole of this sequence the commentary should be about salaries, free air passages, trips out for the children, houses to live in. We hadn't shot anything of this nature, and it would have been boring if we had. Who cares about houses? It was the job they wanted to see. So that film hit the dust.

**John Legard:** I suppose you argued that you couldn't put this across on film.

**Rodney Giesler:** I broke into her dinner party on the phone for about 3 hours one evening. But she fought her corner. She wouldn't relent. And Frances couldn't do anything because the COI wasn't paying for the film. They were only advisers. I had got away with almost everything on *Gladly would he Learn*. But not this time.

**John Legard:** It was a continuous battle. Trying to educate people in the use of film. I suppose this was one of the reasons why the documentary movement fizzled out. People were so stubborn.

**Rodney Giesler:** The money was wasted because the film didn't do its job.

**John Legard:** That's right. Perhaps it's a British thing. Maybe in other countries it works better.

**Rodney Giesler:** You have a dog and do your own barking, and you can't bark as well as a dog.

**John Legard:** We had some of these problems at BTF. We were in-house and working for the railways, and Edgar was held in very high regard. Most times it worked out, but there were occasions, particularly with multi-sponsorship, that was the terrible thing. We made a film on loco manufacture and there were different companies involved. It looked nice but as a film it was a mess.

**Rodney Giesler:** It happens all the time. Sponsors spend a lot of money on a film, and then destroy it through their own stubbornness. Over-controlling it. Situations we both know: you mention BTF, I mention Shell, and BP, where the film departments had a lot of clout and certainly Arthur had it at Shell, and Roly Stafford at BP, We had to give the client what he wanted but we controlled the way we did it.

**John Legard:** They never accepted the fact that we were the experts who knew how to put it across. They were all the while concerned about technical facts. Not with their presentation.

**Rodney Giesler:** This is a recurring theme.

**John Legard:** What was this film called?

**Rodney Giesler:** *Harvest for Tomorrow.*

**John Legard:** And it covered quite a lot of territory.

**Rodney Giesler:** It covered a country with a poor agriculture system: Botswana. Terrible climate. They were emerging from a four year drought when I was there. And Kenya which was a highly-sophisticated and extraordinarily different country. Kenyatta's slogan was "Harambe". He was a very popular guy. We saw him visiting a clinic. In spite of being imprisoned as a terrorist by the British, he turned out to be a marvellous transitory ruler. The key point was when he went up to Nakuru and addressed all the white farmers. And he told them: "Stay. We want you." "Harambee" means everyone pulling together. And of course, he never threw the Asians out as Idi Amin did. The Asians remained there. Every level of society had a role to play. And a lot of white farmers stayed. I met a number of them including two or three who'd taken out Kenya citizenship, and who were respected as being the experts on that land. And of course the British aid programme was heavily concentrated on success. On the planting of coffee as a cash crop. Prior to independence Africans were not allowed to grow coffee because it was said they would grow rubbish. In fact District Officers used to go round tearing up coffee bushes that African farmers had planted. But the Government took over huge coffee estates and ran them, sometimes initially with British managers, very successfully. And now Kenya coffee sells well.

**John Legard:** I suppose British officials are still there.

**Rodney Giesler:** Not now. That was in 1967. There was one Brit in the government then: Bruce Mackenzie, the Minister of Agriculture. And he was assassinated later. It's going ugly now. Corruption has set in. My younger son spent three years out there teaching in an African school. I've been out there twice on holiday. I love the country. It's so beautiful and full of contrasts, Nice climate and nice people. Except that Nairobi is a crime-ridden city now. That was Africa. *Harvest for Tomorrow*.

**John Legard:** I must ask Christine Kirby. It may be in the archive.

**Rodney Giesler:** As a spin-off from *Harvest for Tomorrow*, I became very concerned about Third world Poverty. It had started on *And Gladly Would He Learn* when I came across a lot of malnutrition, and high infant mortalities in some of the clinics we visited. I felt that it was something that could be changed. I'd shown in my films that there were answers available using very simple methods. Drilling a well for fresh water for instance, so that you don't have to walk 5 miles for it. I sat down and went through all my notes. I had also met a number of OXFAM people in Africa. I was very impressed with their work and they gave me a lot of help. Anyway, I wrote a syllabus for a new school subject which would be called Social Geography. All the Aid charities: Oxfam, Christian Aid, War on Want., were very supportive. I wrote out this programme and Jack took it up. I'd known Kenneth Thompson who was an ex Colonial Office man, and now a senior civil servant in the Ministry of Overseas Development. I got his support. Jack introduced me to Lord

Ritchie Calder. He was a good ally. And I lobbied Barbara Castle, whom I'd met on "Gladly". It was hard work. A young guy called Bruce Miles phoned me up, and he and his wife managed to get together a huge star cast: Cliff Richard and the Shadows, Georgie Fame, and they put on a concert for nothing at the Royal Festival Hall and we raised some money. Barbara Jefford gave a poetry reading and they all gave their services for nothing. Anyway the proceeds financed this programme for a bit. Bruce and his wife were very active. But the reality was that there were no votes in a such a programme, and I had a sense that there was a conspiracy against spreading this information too widely. The aid programme had insufficient money anyway and they didn't want electoral pressure on them to increase it. I felt that after a while I was wading through treacle. I had been introduced to William Clark who was at one time in Downing Street, and then went on to the World Bank. He was then the head of a quango called the ODA, the Overseas Development Administration, a think tank. There were a lot of very bright people there: I remember Teresa Hayter, who was the daughter of the one time Ambassador to Moscow. Again I got them to give brain power to my project, to build it up even more. But then I think they all met this full stop on aid. The Government didn't want to expose themselves to any more obligations, and a number of people there including Teresa decided to go militant, and they signed a document called the Haslemere Declaration. This was to use Marxist means to advance their ideas. It was a movement that grew out of frustration, and went nowhere. Anything left wing hadn't a chance. They also attacked all the multinationals and banks in developing countries, saying they should hand over all their profits to the State. It didn't wash. Once you take capitalism on you get nowhere. Benign capitalism you can work, but you must make it benign in the first place to help you. Once capitalism feels threatened by what you want them to help you with, they don't want to know. So that was an ongoing thing between jobs. As I said earlier, for every job I did and got paid for, I always had two or three other irons in the fire that really interested me. Fortunately I could afford it. Thanks to Kuwait, I never had a mortgage. That makes a hell of a difference to your standard of living.

**John Legard:** Absolutely.

**Rodney Giesler:** I could afford to take a month off and still support my family in between paid jobs to go and lobby for the things I really wanted to do. This is about 1968. The incident that year that really knocked me flat was Jack Holmes. He died.

**John Legard:** A good man. He was my original boss, I think I told you.

**Rodney Giesler:** And he was John Krish's original boss too at Pinewood. Poor Jack died of a heart attack suddenly.

**John Legard:** He wasn't that old.

**Rodney Giesler:** 67.

**John Legard:** As young as that?

**Rodney Giesler:** He was a great personal friend of our's. Even between films. He and Winifred used to run these marvellous soirees in Redington Road, lots of stimulating people. He was doing a film about Traffic in Towns with Professor Colin Buchanan. James Cameron

was doing the commentary, and Joe Mendoza was directing it. They would be mere. Various Commonwealth High Commissioners, because Winifred was very active with women's organisations all over the place. She was a tireless lady. Various politicians: Irene White. James Cameron was great company. He was Ken's brother, incidentally. He had this lovely snappy voice, and a great gift for conjuring words. He'd turn words into rapiers, the way he chose them. I took a long time to get over Jack's death. We had a marvellous film show that John Krish compered at the National Film Theatre. And that was a marvellous send-off for him.

**John Legard:** The tribute to Jack. I was there. His son's done very well, Andrew. His last tiling I saw was that thing on the RAF.

**Rodney Giesler:** *A Piece of Cake*. And a lot of medical films. I don't see his name around much these days. I knew all the family well. Christy who was married to Jeremy Taylor who was in television. And Henry, the elder daughter who was married to an actor. John Shearman wrote a marvellous obituary on Jack in the ACTT Journal. I always remember Jack's producership. He would growl at you: "Right Rodney. I'm here, now where are you taking me now?" "Oh I though we'd move on to the teacher training college." "Right where's the signpost?" On the few occasions that Jack got intense, he was never malicious or bullying or anything. But he had this marvellous growl.

**John Legard:** When he was directing his own stuff, he was always so clear. He knew exactly what he wanted. It's quite a rare thing. So often we worked from treatments at BTF, and you shot as you went along. When I went through the rushes with Jack, he was the only director I can recall who knew exactly where everything was going to go. And we'd spend a day and a half going through it shot by shot. And he'd say, "Right John, you've got it all. I'm going away for a couple of weeks. Let me see something when I get back." But he'd still let me add my contributions.

**Rodney Giesler:** An editor always has something to contribute. Let him see the material with his own eyes and see what connections he can see that you can't. A director may have one straight line through the story, and he's shot exactly along that line. If he hasn't shot anything that deviates from that straight line, the editor has to fall into step with him. If I was travelling from one location to another and I saw a lovely shot, we'd shoot it. Or we'd run a bit longer on a shot. Nine times out of ten the editor would say "you know such and such a shot?" And I'd say, "it wasn't in the script." And he'd say "Well it's in the film." And it was and it was right.

**John Legard:** Sometimes it works the other way round. A director has his favourite shot which has to be in, and the editor decides it's irrelevant.

**Rodney Giesler:** That was the case in my climb to fame on the "Dosco" film. John Reid had shot these beautiful shots and I got rid of most of them because they were in the way.

**John Legard:** The opposite of Jack Holmes' way of handling a film is the director who says: "Here's all the stuff. I don't know how you're going to cut it together. Good luck." And that's happened to me too.

**Rodney Giesler:** No continuity sheets.

**John Legard:** You have shot descriptions but it was all shot in a hurry. Of course it's a great opportunity for an editor to make something out of nothing. Which I did once in my life. And Grierson said "This is fantastic." And he sacked the director.

**Rodney Giesler:** A chap comes on the scene now called James Archibald. He had been John Davies' sidekick at Pinewood. Frances Cockburn brought him into my life. She mentioned me to him as someone who could work with him. James was a very extravagant person in manner and ideas. He was full of ideas. Outrageous ideas sometimes. He'd left Ranks and set up his own production company. He operated from a flat by Westminster Cathedral: Morpeth Mansions. He was quite a well-off gent. Lots of lovely antiques. And there he would have script conferences and client meetings. He had a production manager in another antique-filled room, although he had cutting rooms in Soho. He'd done a number of films for the COI, and had an entrepreneurial attitude to film-making. And he wouldn't touch films that were liable to be buggered about with. So Frances tended to give him subjects for the Foreign Office, i.e. The Royal Palaces, and the big orchestras supplying the music. He had just made "Opus" for the Music Council of Great Britain. He was very musical. He had Dame Joan Sutherland in it. The Beatles. And Benjamin Britten, whom he knew very well. Anyhow I went to see him and got on well with him. He offered me a film on the story of navigation to be sponsored by Decca. The sponsor's spokesman was a gentleman called Harley Usill, who was one of the founders of Argo Records. Marvellous man. And a marvellous job he did. Argo had been taken over by Decca, and Ian Dalrymple was films consultant to Decca. I had met Dal some years previously as I told you. There was the subject. James said: "we want something original". So off I went on the recce, occasionally with James, sometimes with Dal. I saw the Astronomer Royal. I went to Hurstmonceaux, Greenwich. Talked to Geoffrey Pardoe the missiles man. The Royal Geographic Society. The British Museum. I read and read, and worked and worked and came up with an idea which James accepted totally. We worked it in the form of a Mystery Play. And it was how man discovered where he was in relation to his surroundings.

*End of Side 6.*

**Rodney Giesler:** I had this idea of developing the story of navigation as a kind of Mystery Play. It featured three main characters: the Traveller, the Scientist and the Priest. The Traveller was the central character. We introduced him in this Babylonian valley, and showed how he found his position in relation to his surrounding world, and had the courage to travel. Like the old Phoenician traders for instance, who sailed to Cornwall and picked up tin. The Scientist was giving him advice, teaching him how to navigate. Giving him tools. Teaching him to use his eyes, his senses. And the Priest was someone who was always holding back. A Flat Earther. "You can't go there, you'll fall over the edge. It's heresy." So we got everything in. It was a bit like Virginia Woolf s "Orlando" where the characters metamorphosed. At one point the scientist was Galileo kneeling in the church, watching the chandeliers swaying to the breeze, and timing his pulse against them. And we took it right up to the Space Age, to

teleportation. And the Traveller is the space man in his capsule. He's in touch with the scientist who tells him he can travel to distant galaxies but not in his own form. Finally it was teleportation, by which you can transform a body into a collection of waves, transmit them, and reconstitute them at the other end. Like in "Star Trek." :"Beam me aboard, Scotry". The final thing was this gold lever in the space capsule, and the Scientist says: "Go on, pull it." And the Traveller pauses and we freeze frame it and that's the end of the film. James loved it. We really worked up ideas. I wanted to film in the Octagon Room in the Greenwich Observatory, because that was a lovely room. We could have the Traveller and the Scientist talking to each other there, where it was all done. The original Harrison chronometer, a marvellous ballet of movement it has. James and I got so excited about it. We did a budget. We started to cast it, picked locations in Spain. Then we presented it to Dal, and he was totally gobsmacked, totally flummoxed. "What's this gold lever...? I don't understand.[n] Poor old Dal. He still had this clear documentary mind where A went to B went to C, and referred back to A. Here we hopped around. Then he passed it on to Sir Edward Lewis, who was chairman of the Decca Group. And he was equally flummoxed. Sir Edward Lewis was a marvellous patron of the arts in the sense that anything he understood and liked he'd throw money at. And anything he didn't he didn't. So that died a death, although I did other jobs for James. Biology films which Ronnie Whitehouse photographed. I was well paid, but so disappointed it didn't hit the screen. But in that script I found a form of expression to get scientific ideas across, and to relate them. And I sat down and did another on the subject of "Light". How Man is blind and doesn't exist without light. But then you have all the vagaries and distortions and mysteries of light, and the paradoxes of the quantum theory and relativity. "What's now? That place over there isn't now, it's a million years ago." I did it purely as a private spec. I knew a chap called Tim Vignoles, whom I'd met at a press junket. It's amazing how people connect. It may be a new camera demonstration up at Sammy's or BISFA, and you meet people. You exchange cards, and it dies. Then six months later the guy you met connects. Tim was the UK side of RCA. And RCA at that time were doing a number of educational documentaries in America out of Hollywood. And I showed Tim the "Light" script which he liked. A Canadian guy called David MacDonald ran the Hollywood end. The main office. He came over and we went to lunch and he took the script away, and said "Yes, we gotta make this." The story of my life. Anyway I phoned up Tim about a month later and asked him how things were going and he said: "Oh David's been sacked." Prior to this I had realised that I was about to face a dilemma, because they'd been talking of great things. I'd said I had other projects: on time, on script and language, on movement. David was talking about a two year contract in Hollywood, working entirely on these. But I was in this dilemma. My kids were in school. Pam didn't particularly want to uproot the family. In many ways I'm glad it didn't happen. I'm not ambitious enough to do that to my family. I know people like Alan Parker do, and very happily. He took all his kids to Hollywood. But that wasn't for me. I eventually put "light" up to Channel 4 to their science editor, who wasn't a scientist. "I don't understand a word," she said, returning it to me. That was Channel 4 in the early days when all sorts of people were wasting money left, right and centre. Thankfully they've got their act together now but in those days they were finding their feet. Another thing I did at around that time: I tried to write some television plays. I wrote them fairly quickly, and most of them were pretty terrible. But for one I had an inspiration. Christian Barnard had started to do his heart transplants in South Africa. He'd given Louis Washkanski a new heart. And it gave me an idea. I'd been to South Africa and seen apartheid at first hand, and the confusions they all had. I thought what if Verwoerd had a heart attack, and to save his life they had to give him a heart from a black man, and it turns him black. So I wrote a play called "The Prime Minister is Dead". It was an hour and a half television play and that time the ACTT Writers' Section were running a competition. And

it won. I got a £100 cheque. Kenith Trodd picked it up and was very interested. And we met and he suggested some rewrites. Where to strengthen or ease the irony. I think he promoted it for about 18 months, but it never found a home. Meanwhile Ron Bicker had phoned me up and said he'd been asked by Roly Stafford to go to Dubai to get some coverage. They realised they'd need a director. As I'd got Ron in on the African film, he repaid the favour and suggested me to Roly. So I went out to Dubai and did the recce. Roly was the films officer of BP, and although BP hadn't an interest in Dubai, they were the film experts. The people with the interests were a consortium of American oil companies. The operating company was Continental Oil: Conoco. There was a complete cock-up. I arrived in Dubai in the middle of the night. I got to the hotel where I was told I had a booking. I was then told that one of the Ruler's sons had taken it over for his friends, and thrown everyone out. So about fifty of us slept on the floor of the hotel lounge. And I went over to Conoco the next morning, and made my number, but they didn't really know what was going on. None of them knew what was happening in Dubai outside the oil operation. I wasn't allowed to contact the British Political Resident.

**John Legard:** What year was this?

**Rodney Giesler:** 1968. "The Prime Minister is Dead" was still being touted around. And this was a very necessary money-making exercise. So virtually I was a plenipotentiary on Roly's behalf. I had to talk to the President of Conoco and tell him about the film. It was an offshore oil field they were developing, with offshore loading. And they had a huge storage tank which they were building on the shore line and they were going to tow it out and sink it on the oilfield. And they wanted coverage of it. And in doing so we did coverage of the town as well. It was quite a snazzy place. Gold smuggling. A lot of panache to it. There was no PR in the Conoco office. They had political contact with the Ruler, Sheikh Rashid. I think the President, Hal Nabors, would go and see him every Friday evening. One day the head of the drilling department said "I got a good friend out here called Byron Green. He runs a company here that supplies all the drilling equipment to all the offshore fields in the eastern Gulf. He's been here years. Knows all the local merchants. A big employer." So I was introduced to Mr. Byron Green, who was a nice man. A short man. Great sense of humour. Smiled easily. When he agreed a favour: "Byron, I'd like to hire a dhow and get down the coast. Can you organise it?" "Yup." He was for me. But at Conoco it was "Who are these goddamed limeys?" Thanks to Byron, who gave me all me contacts, I got to know how the place ticked, and I attended an audience with Sheikh Rashid. And my Arabic came back which was useful. I wrote the treatment, Roly loved it. We took it to New York to show the partners because all their head offices were there. Dudley Knott was running the BP New York Office. They were suddenly big there because they'd found oil in Alaska. We had a great week, showing the script and talking. Countless dinners and piss-ups. Dudley I'd always liked. Anyway that was all agreed. We got the crew together: Ron Bicker, Barry Noakes again as assistant, Andrew Holmes who was bored at the time, came out as my assistant. We shot for four weeks, offshore and in the town. And almost the last day of shooting, we were down on the tank site and I had an idea to get into a large bucket on the end of a crane, and let the driver lower us in through the hole in the roof of the tank. The shot began on the desert and that all disappears and suddenly you're enveloped in this great dark chamber.

**John Legard:** How did it work?

**Rodney Giesler:** Once we were inside the tank, the crane driver lost sight of us, and thought we'd arrived. But we had another forty feet to drop, which we did. I broke a leg. Barry had the presence of mind to jump out of the bucket just before it hit the ground. And Ron, who was hand-holding the Arri, gouged the whole of his front with it. We were rushed into hospital. My leg was set. I came home in a cast. Didn't know a thing because I got a First Class seat.

**John Legard:** What a nightmare.

**Rodney Giesler:** It was being shot in stages. Ron went back in June 68 to film progress. And August was the big float-out to the field. By that time I had mended. I'd lived on insurance.

**John Legard:** What about the crane operator? The chap who was responsible for this?

**Rodney Giesler:** That was the Chicago Bridge & Iron Company. I sued them with the help of ACTT. That took about two years. I was given various medicals, and of course Dora Thomas of Shell had offered me a job at that time. It would have fitted in nicely during the summer and it would have paid £3000 so ACTT sued them for that. I got the best treatment. I was examined by Mr. Cronin, an orthopaedic specialist. He was the son of A. J., a committed socialist who did a lot of free work for ACTT. That ended when the lawyers for the other side paid a sum into Court, and ACTT said "if you want more, you'll have to continue on your own. We can't back you." That's how the buggers get out of it. They paid into court far less than I should have had.

**John Legard:** The film was finished?

**Rodney Giesler:** Not quite. We went out again in August. The film was being made through Spectator Films. I had no production company. John Spencer, he was the producer.

**John Legard:** How long were you all out of action?

**Rodney Giesler:** I was out of action for most of that summer. Barry was all right. Ron was in hospital for a few weeks. Then he went out again in June on his own. In the summer, which was going to be the whole big operation: the opening of the oil field, the cutting of the tapes, the sinking of the tank. Lots of ceremonial. We went out with two cameras. Poor Ron missed out, because we needed a diver. Charlie Lagus was such and he and his assistant Jan Morgan, came out with two cameras. And to be quite fair to Charles and a little unfair to Ron, Charles was a much better shooter. He could shoot from the hip, spontaneous stuff hand held without anyone looking at the camera. Whereas poor old Ron would be waving light meters around. He was marvellous in the studio. Different school altogether. This time I took an assistant director called Aivar Kaulins, who had been my assistant on the World Wide COI film. He was absolute mustard. The media organisation was left to the Americans, and was an absolute disaster. I could sense it coming. They'd flown out a special guy called Harve Washington from the States who didn't know his arse from his elbow. I had a discussion with Roly and said "I think we're going to have awful problems," and Roly said "I think Tony would like a nice trip out." Dear old Tony Willcocks from Kuwait days? He was with BP. He came out as my support, and thank God he did. We did need those two cameras. We did all the background stuff

before the ceremony started. Shots in the town. It was better in the summer. More heat and atmosphere. We'd done our week's shooting in the town, and then we went down the coast for the big float-out. Jan was shooting from a helicopter, and Charles and I and Aivar were on a launch to get sea level shots en route. Aivar had fixed up the most fantastic packed lunch. We were chugging out of Dubai's creek towards the open sea, and this air-conditioned launch was full of VlPs: the chairman of Exxon, chairman of Gulf Oil. High powered spectators. Charles and I were set up on the stern to get shots of the Creek, and we heard a couple of American bigwigs standing nearby saying "Do you know there's no goddam food on this boat." And it was a four hour trip out to the Field. It was one of Harve Washington's cock-ups. They were all going to come back on the helicopter. Just at that moment Aivar turned up and said "Gentlemen, lunch is served." These poor Americans turned round and thought it was for them. But it was the unit. We went down to the air conditioned cabin. Aivar had laid a table cloth, all these prawns were there, cold chicken and iced beers. And it was a bit of a "Boule de Suif" situation, the de Maupassant story with the fat whore in the coach who is despised by her fellow passengers until she gets out her hamper. Same thing. Before the float out, before we'd got on the boat, Aivar and Tony between them had got a rostrum built for us to put our cameras on for the ceremony. And, bugger me, as soon as something happened, all the American families climbed this rostrum with their box brownies, and started shaking it, and he had to beat them off. And they got quite threatening. But such was the lack of organisation caused by Harve, that instead of posting some people to stop them, he'd gone off somewhere to take some home movies for himself.

**John Legard:** There must have been a lot of footage.

**Rodney Giesler:** There was. All on 35mm. Looked lovely. A lady called Gita Zadek edited it, and I worked closely with her. Not a marvellous editor. But she worked quickly. We got a very good cut. It was delivered at the end of August in a silver can for its premier in Dubai. And it went on to Chicago to win a Gold Camera Award, and it won a Gold at BISFA and it was called "Dubai". I was very cross with John. Roly had given the production to Spectator, and John had taken me on. It was the usual thing; "There's a fee in this, Rodney". I said "How long does it cover?" "Oh, you'll be all right" So I said "Look, if I start running out of time I'm going to let you know, and I hope you've got a contingency." That float-out for instance: we were on the go for 28 hours. Because the helicopter broke down and we had to wait for a boat to fetch us. Aivar, of course, was on overtime. His invoice was almost twice mine. I said to John: "This isn't good enough. You've got a bloody good movie. We sweated blood for it." Oh and I nearly forgot. The Chicago Bridge & Iron company had a cameraman shooting the float-out on 16mm. And at the crucial moment when the tank sank in a cloud of spray, his Bolex fell over the side and was lost. And on top of that all his rushes up to that point were lost in transit back to the States. So we had to dupe up all our stuff into 16mm for them. I was rather angry about this. Eventually I squeezed about another £400 out of Spencer. He'd made plenty of money on it. The other annoying thing was he went to Chicago for the showing, to collect the award, and at that same ceremony, was given two more films. Neither of which did he offer to me. I had learned a lesson from that. Never work for a film company again. Because I think I told you: almost every little Wardour Street company I worked for, with one or two exceptions, I had to fight for my money. There was always some shyster delaying payment. On one occasion I had to take the cutting copy home until they paid. So I thought I'd had enough of this, and I decided to form my own company and bypass these bent middle men. Now this story has a certain number of connections. At the end of that second shoot in Dubai, we had a mother and father of a piss-up-before we came home. This thrash was at Byron's home. Byron Green. Byron

and Cecilia. We were sitting drinking malts on his verandah, and Byron said "What kind of movies do you want to make, Rodney?" And I said "I wouldn't mind having a go at a feature sometime." He said "How about I put some money up?" And the next day I said to him "How about that money?" And he said "Yeah, I can let you have $20000." I thought, that's some money for a feature but I didn't say no. So as good as his word the 20000 bucks came through. I'd set up my company by that time, and this dosh went into its account. And I thought I could make something out of it. I'd written a short story a few years before based on a guy I knew who was an insomniac. And he was always telling me that when he couldn't sleep, he'd drive around the countryside. In doing so he always attracted suspicion from everyone he met. "Why are you out?" The police kept stopping him. Everything was shut. He was the odd man out. And I thought this is a marvellous story. I thought I didn't want to shoot it day for night because you couldn't see anything. So I thought, suppose this guy is not only an insomniac, but he's an insomniac because his time clock has slipped 12 hours. So it opens with him coming back from work, and his children, whose time clock has also slipped, are very cross, because they're being put to bed just as their day's beginning. And they don't understand it. He reads them a bedtime story, which I wrote specially, which prefaces this whole idea. He goes to bed, can't sleep. Suddenly the curtains blow open and the daylight flashes in on him. He goes to the window. It's not only a time slip, but a geography slip as well. He's living in a tower block in London. But when he draws back the curtains, there's this beautiful garden. And he's joined the children's world. It was a 45 minute feature in the end. I used my house in Leatherhead as a studio and production office. And all the scenery in the surrounding Surrey hills was marvellous. Aivar pushed me into it. I said to him "There's only this money." And he said "You can do it." Most of the people I got, if they wanted money at all it was very modest. Aivar deferred his. Mike Pavett who edited it deferred his. Penny Barbour who was ex-World Wide did the casting for a very modest fee, found me some wonderful affordable artists. It worked out very well. We had a lovely time. They'd come down to Leatherhead every morning. We had one sequence in a council flat in Neasden, for the dark satanic city scenes, but all the rest was the country. And all the cast would turn up, and Pam had their breakfast ready. And we'd either shoot on the stage, which was my living room, or out in the country. We had a spark, Maurice Corcoran, who was marvellous. He said: "I'll only charge you what I take off the van." And in the end he hardly charged me anything. I only really paid his wages. They didn't leave a scratch. Of course the luckiest thing of all was trying to get a cameraman. I'd promised to take the family on holiday for two weeks before we started. And up to a day before we were due to leave, I hadn't got a cameraman. Jimmy Allen was my first choice. We didn't want a documentary man, but a good lighting cameraman. Jo Jago was tied up with World Wide. Jimmy Allen was busy, but he put me on to Alex Thompson. Alex was all set to do it, then his agent phoned up and said a real feature was coming up. I wasn't offering any money. I said "I'll pay your expenses, but it's a nice little idea. Four weeks work." I wasn't being paid. I was deferring. The labs deferred. John Kerley deferred on the equipment. Marvellous deals. People were so nice. When you're genuine and straight, technicians are very generous people. Anyway Alex cried off, almost at the last minute. He said "I can't do it, but I know someone who can." He suggested Tony Richmond. They were the gang who had shot *Far From the Madding Crowd*, and *Fahrenheit 451*. Nic Roeg had been lighting cameraman. Alex operated. Tony was focus puller. Nic then directed *Walkabout*. And then Tony became a lighting cameraman. Tony came down to see me in Leatherhead in his Bentley. Said "Great idea. Just keep the Bentley's tank filled and I'll work for you." So I said "I've ordered the stock." And he said "Oh I can let you have some stock." He had just finished shooting the one feature that Jean Luc Godard had made in England, *Sympathy for the Devil*. Godard in those days was

shooting ten minute takes. So if there was a cock-up say a hundred feet into the take and it was "Cut! Reload!" Nine hundred foot short end, isn't there? Into Tony's sky rocket.

**John Legard:** A long short end.

**Rodney Giesler:** So we had quite a number of these long short ends, which we cut down and recanned into 400 foot lengths for an Arri mag. And we shot it. We dubbed at Anvil which by now was at Denham. Ken Scrivener gave us a super dub. They charged a rates for a documentary.

**John Legard:** How long did it run?

**Rodney Giesler:** 45 minutes, which was a bit of a bastard time. But it was as long as the story allowed.

**John Legard:** A ticklish booking.

**Rodney Giesler:** And we had a nude love scene which was becoming the fashion in those days. In a lake. We found a private lake, with freezing water. Morris Perry was the lead, and Valerie Ost the girl. And to prove it was all right, I jumped in first, starkers. I was absolutely frozen and I thought by God, you're troopers, you two. The scene looked lovely, light glinting on the water. Naked passion. Valerie throwing her head back in ecstasy. But it had to have an X certificate. Anyhow we shot it, and dubbed it. I'd known of John Hogarth. I'd done a little work with Tony Lowes at Rayant Television in 1968 developing some short second feature scripts. Short story scripts that I'd written. We had shown them to John, but he had too many at that time. I think it was Ken Scrivener who said "Who are you going to sell it to?" I hadn't anyone in mind. I was going to tote it around Wardour Street. And Ken said "Give John Hogarth a ring. I know he's looking for supporting material." The cutting copy was in for neg cutting at Rank Labs. John came over to Anvil, and we ran the cutting copy in the dubbing theatre, with the mixed track. And Ken pushed all the buttons at the right moment. And John Hogarth said "I'll have it." He was with London Screen Distributors at that time. This was the distribution arm of Tolly de Grunwald's London Screenplays. And they had a film called *The Virgin and the Gypsy* which Chris Miles had directed. But the schedules were wrong. So our first theatrical screening was in support of a film of Jan Kadar's called *Adrift* at the Cameo Poly in Regent Street. Then not long after that he got a full circuit with *Triple Echo* directed by Michael Apted.

**John Legard:** And what was your film called?

**Rodney Giesler:** *The Insomniac*. At first the censors turned it down. The naked love scene was said to be too strong. John Trevelyan hadn't seen it and I wrote an appeal to him asking for suggestions for cuts. He asked me to see him, and we ran it together. And when the lights went up he said "Nothing wrong with that. An X'll cover it. Don't you worry." Now John Trevelyan was very much like that. He was a quiet chap who used to growl as well. "What's the matter with that," he said to his assistant. "Give it an X". So we were clear. It went out with *Triple Echo*, and of course those were the days of Eady Money. Although I had to strike 50 release prints, John did them on his account which meant that the labs charged the bottom rate. And he took this off the top. But even so we broke even to the point that everyone who deferred got paid. Except me. Tony was quite

happy. He'd gone on to shoot *Don't Look Now* with Nic Roeg. So he didn't need it. That film really established him. But what a cameraman. What ingenuity.

**John Legard:** Did it get a press show?

**Rodney Giesler:** I organised one. We got about five write-ups. Dilys Powell didn't come. Derek Malcolm gave me a few lines. Margaret Hinxman, I'd known her from my "Films & Filming" days. She came along and gave me a lovely write-up: "If only we could make more films like this instead of the usual supporting feature stuff." And then it had a second release with Robert Altman's *Images*. And all in all we had 1800 UK bookings. So we got back all the money we spent. I paid the labs. Paid John Kerley.

**John Legard:** Did you think it could continue?

**Rodney Giesler:** I'll come to that. Byron was delighted. "Some much picture for my 20 grand," he said. You should say that. Mike Pavett and I had started writing a script together during the completion of "The Insomniac", during the editing. It was a horror story., they were very much in vogue at the time... quite well-rooted in present day reality. A bit like *Rosemary's Baby* which starts off very normally, then has witchcraft seeping into it. Mike had this idea that he wanted to develop as a full horror film. Mike's dyslexic. He has great difficulty putting anything on paper, poor chap. But he expressed his ideas very strongly and clearly. I mentioned this idea to Byron, who expressed interest. I mentioned it to John Hogarth, because he had pushed *The Insomniac* well. He was on my side. Byron agreed to put up $75000 seed money. So Mike and I sat down and worked on this script. It was far too Gothic in its original form. I wanted to bring in this reality to enclose the horror. The script was called *Isobel*. We recced Scotland. Tony Richmond and Aivar came up. We'd planned to shoot it all on location in Scottish castles. We had a lot of help from Robin Crichton of Edinburgh Films, who was a friend of Mike's. The script was finished. We'd done some tentative casting. Morris Perry who was the lead in *The Insomniac* was interested in one part. Charles Gray liked it. Robert Powell liked the lead. And there was Lynn Fredricks. And the witch herself, Isobel, was a girl called Zoe Sallis, who was a dark haired beauty, and was John Huston's mistress at the time. I tested her. She was going to be right. She had a mysterious Other World look to her. She dressed for another time. John Hogarth looked at the package we'd put together and said he could get a distribution deal on this one. I couldn't afford to take options on the artists, so we had to move quickly. Meanwhile London Screen Distributors had been taken over by Hemdale: which was John Daly and David Hemmings. They distribute Oliver Stone's films. Anyhow, John Daly didn't like it. John Hogarth left after a row unconnected with my film. And collapse. We were all very demoralised. At this time I'd also tried to sell *The Insomniac* in New York, and that was another soul-destroying thing. Because they're not interested in a 45 minute film in America unless it's the campus circuit. And to talk to some of these hard-nosed distributors in New York. It's a very hard city. You have to be so careful what you do, and what you sign and what you say. Because even if you sign a deal, there's no guarantee you'll get the money. Sean Connery and Michael Caine found that out on *The Man Who Would Be King*. They had to fight through the courts to get paid.

**John Legard:** Back to *The Insomniac*. Where is it now?

**Rodney Giesler:** Gone. I've a 35mm print and a few 16mm's. I found a distributor in Canada who thought he could attack the American market from there. Technicolor were still dye transfer printing so I got 20 16mm dye transfer prints made. They were beautiful. The Canadian Distributor took three. I couldn't keep up. Maybe he sold them. Maybe not. Probably put them on to video and sold them. You can't keep tabs on these people. If you're MGM or Rank, you have an office over there, and there's someone going round the theatres counting ticket stubs. But I'd made the point. If I hadn't made "The Insomniac", I wouldn't have started "Isobel". And "Isobel" didn't start. Howard Pays of CCA was my agent just then, and Val Guest made him an offer for it. But Mike and I agreed we still wanted to do it ourselves. He wasn't paying much anyway.

**John Legard:** I would have thought that "The Insomniac" could have been acquired by Channel Four.

**Rodney Giesler:** They weren't interested then.

**John Legard:** I mean now. It has a story that sounds timeless.

**Rodney Giesler:** Who's running the film side there now?

**John Legard:** I could find out easily for you. Our close colleague, Barry Coward runs the BTF archive has quite a few films with Channel Four.

**Rodney Giesler:** I had an opportunity to put it on French Television, but the Musicians' Union wanted so many repeat fees, all the revenue would have gone to the musicians. So I didn't bother.

**John Legard:** Who did the music?

**Rodney Giesler:** Jimmy Stevens did the score. We had about six musicians for our money.

**John Legard:** Where did you go from there?

**Rodney Giesler:** I still had Auriga Films. But I had no work. Aivar Kaulins had a friend who ran an agency, and through this agency we had a couple of films to do. One for the CEGB, and one for a mail order house. Aivar directed them, and I produced and wrote them. And we split the profits. This was small change from my point of view. Because once I'd formed a production company, and having made so many enemies in Wardour Street by asking to be paid at the end of a job, there was no going back to freelancing. I realised I had to go on producing films of some kind or another for my own company. I went round all the current industrial sponsors, people like the Electricity Council, The Gas Board, British Tourist Board, Wimpey's, all the regulars. But they all had their production companies sewn up. They were quite happy with them. There was a big freeze-out. I had the Dubai film, and the Shell Films. So I started marketing abroad. I went to Holland and Germany, and I ended up in Switzerland and saw people like Alusuisse and Dow Chemicals Europe, and did presentations to them. And got nowhere. So there I was in Zurich, having spent whatever money was left in the company. No prospect of any kind of work. Depressed as hell. I was staying

in the cheap part of Zurich, the red light area. And I thought “I’ll go out this evening and have a decent meal." Walking down the street I could hear guitar music coming from an upstairs window. And I went in and found myself in a Spanish restaurant. Better than dull old Swiss food. So I sat down and ordered. And the place began to fill until there was only one empty seat, and that was at my table. The waiter led a grey-suited business man to my table, and asked me if I minded him sharing. I said of course not. And the grey suited business man sat down. He thanked me in German. We chatted in German for a bit and he asked my advice on what he should choose. So he decided to have what I was having. He asked me what I was doing in Zurich. "Are you from Germany?" (I wasn't speaking Schweizerdeutsch.) I told him I was trying to get film commissions. He asked "Where are you from?" And I said England. So I asked him where he came from and he said "From Norway." So I said "Why are we speaking German?" He asked me what kind of films I made and I told him. And he said "I'm from a big company in Norway. We've been thinking of commissioning some films. So we had a brandy each and he wrote his name on a napkin with the phone number of the London Manager of his company.

*End of Side 7.*

**Rodney Giesler:** Anyway, when I got back I rang the number of the London Manager only to learn that this gentleman not only worked for this company in Norway. He was the chairman. His name was Johan Holte. The company was, is, called Norsk Hydro, which was Norway's equivalent of ICL And soon I had some showreels winging their way to Oslo. But the weeks went by, promises, promises. Eventually I phoned his secretary who said, yes he'd seen the films and thought them interesting and they'd be sending them back soon. By this time money was running low, because I hadn't done a lot of work and I was getting worried. I really had got this terrible sickening depression of unemployment. This is why incidentally I get so angry when I hear of just one person being thrown out of work. I really know what damage it does. You lose confidence in yourself. I can't make features, I can't write television scripts. I can't even make the documentaries I used to do. Pam and I used to go on long walks to wind down. But one morning the phone rang. A voice from Oslo. Chap called Odd Gullberg who worked in the PR department of Norsk Hydro. They liked the films very much, when can I come over? So I went over. This was May ‘74. I managed to find the money to pay the fare. It was £132 return. I met Odd in the head office. He then took me to the chairman's suite to meet Johan Holte, the boss. And he briefed me, and the substance was that although Norsk Hydro was the biggest industrial company in Norway, and exported most of its products, nobody outside Norway had heard of it. Norway had just voted against the Common Market at that rime and they needed to expand and become a multinational. So they were going to have to buy into other companies inside the Common Market. And to do this they had to establish their credentials. It was very important that they had a high profile, and it was my job to help them achieve this. He said he wanted something in the style of my Dubai film. "Something that's good quality, proud of itself because we're proud of our company, and we want to be proud of the films we make.” He asked me what the Dubai film cost, and I told him. It was £35000. That was quite a lot of money, even in those days. I said "if I made a film like that for you it would cost at least that if not more." "All right," he said. And he said to Odd Gullberg, who was a young journalist who had just joined the company, and was almost as new to it as I was, although he was learning fast. "Show Mr. Giesler round the company, round all the factories." We spent the next ten days just going round Norway, looking at their plants. As the name implies, Norsk Hydro started life as a

hydro-electric power generator. The first use they put their electricity to was in fact in furnaces that produced nitric acid. This was the only way you could make fertilisers until ammonia was developed. They also manufactured light metals, which use vast quantities of electricity, which they produced cheaply. And fertilisers. So I travelled from west coast to east. They'd also put their toe into the North Sea, invested in one of the oil fields. I met all their top people. All spoke immaculate English. Chemical engineers, plant managers, and was brain stormed. It was a marvellous impression. At no point was I given to understand that there was any limit. What I wanted I was to be given.

**John Legard:** Good God!

**Rodney Giesler:** This was the judgement of this extraordinary man Holte, who in his own way was another Jack Holmes. He didn't believe in interference. He believed in his gift for sussing out people who could help him, and to use them. And I think, probably from our conversation in that restaurant in Zurich, he could sense enough of me to know that I was the sort of person who could help him. The big block there was the chief press officer, over whose head I'd been brought in. He didn't speak very good English. He wasn't very bright. He knew nothing about films and was really rather hostile. I had to go through him, and be very diplomatic. But everything was done on Holte's say-so. Holte said to Odd, "You have my authority to phone up anybody. Take Rodney anywhere. Introduce him to everyone." Which he did and we had ten fascinating days. We chartered a seaplane most of the time, because Norway's riddled with lakes and fjords. And most of the factories are near water. I left Oslo in the middle of June, my head full of ideas and impressions, and went back to Guildford, where I was living, and spent some weeks in the University of Surrey library, getting to the bottom of their technology. And there were the links, of course. Because it wasn't going to be a catalogue film. I had to narrate it. There was Jack's voice: "Where are you taking me, Rodney?" So I did it on chemical relationships instead of human relationships. Product relationships: how one product naturally led to the development of another. One of then-products was heavy water. They owned the factory that was blown up in the war. I went there. It's now a museum. So I came up with a treatment about the end of July. That was accepted. From that I went to the budget, which I think was £40000. That was an open budget. I presented all the figures: price lists, margins, overheads. If I'm efficient enough I keep the difference. And they agreed. And all subsequent films were budgeted the same way. Everything open. Any extra shooting etc, was immediately costed and they'd give me an immediate decision. So I took the crew over. I had Aivar Kaulins as production manager again. And Nobby Smith as cameraman. He'd done the mail order film with Aivar. What a genius that guy was. Lovely character. And Steve Davis on lights. Davis lighting. We went over. Shot our way through the Hydro empire in four weeks, including three days in the North Sea. The Ekofisk Field in which Hydro had invested. They had no expertise then. They put money in, and Phillips Petroleum were the field operators. Hydro, as part of its investment said, that for every Phillips driller, tool-pusher, geologist, petroleum engineer, they wanted one of their people learning. This was Holte. So we shot the film.

**John Legard:** Were you lucky with the weather?

**Rodney Giesler:** Remarkably so. Although I gave them an option of a weather contingency or they paid per day, we didn't need either. We then spent five days in Qatar, where they operated a fertiliser factory, and came back and did an assembly. Then Odd phoned up and told me they'd just entered a partnership in the States and were drilling in the Rockies. We ought to cover it. The local Hydro manager in Denver found a cameraman from Oklahoma. I told Odd what it would cost. Without a pause he gave the go ahead. I flew to Denver with some stock. Spent three days shooting in the Rockies. November. A lovely time of year. Crisp November light. Skiing time. We shot round the old silver mines. Cripple Creek. Places like that. Shot on a ranch, as well as the drilling rig. Took the rashes on to Hollywood. Processed them at Technicolor there. I spent the day at Universal while they were being processed, and had a great time. Feted. Met Telly Savalas and Paul Newman. Dropped the shots into the film. Took a slash dupe of the cutting copy to Oslo.

**John Legard:** Where did you cut it?

**Rodney Giesler:** In London.

**John Legard:** Who was your editor?

**Rodney Giesler:** Mike Gascoyne. I took the print to Oslo in three 35mm tins in a shopping basket with wheels I borrowed off my mother in law. They had a 35mm theatre in the town, and I read the commentary **to** it. When I first arrived, I was intercepted by Jon Storaekre, the press officer I mentioned. "Oh Rodney I would like to see the film first before Mr. Holte sees it tomorrow." So Jon and Odd and I went down with this black and white slash dupe, which looked awful. I had warned him about it, but he didn't understand. But I could see his face as the screening went through. It was going greyer and greyer. Then the lights went up. "This is not the film we want," he said. "Where is the shot of the chairman arriving at head office in the morning?" So I said "Over to you, Odd." So Odd explained patiently that the film followed the script which had been agreed. "Oh why wasn't I shown this?" Well he was bloody well shown it. He couldn't follow it because it was written as a film script, and anyway his English wasn't good enough. So I said to Odd after Jon had stormed out: "We can't show this tomorrow. Cancel the booking. What are we going to do?" But Odd was calmness itself. "There's nothing you can do. We can't cancel it. The whole board's corning." I had the most restless, sleepless night of my life. The next day, the board, six of them arrived. Storaekre hid at the back shaking in his shoes. I read the commentary with a shaking voice. The lights went up. Holte turned round, gave me a wink and said "Just what we want Rodney. Don't alter a thing." When we walked out into the crisp December air, freezing cold, starring to snow, Storaekre clapped his arm round my shoulder, grinned, and climbed into a cab. I thought: "You bastard." So we recorded the Norwegian commentary, to picture, in Oslo. I went back to London, recorded the music, dubbed it. And the 35mm print was nice. I took it to Oslo, booked a big cinema, had it projected on a widescreen.

**John Legard:** Did you have any sound while you were shooting?

**Rodney Giesler:** I'd bought a portable Tandberg, purely for sound effects. There was some synch: a work's meeting we recorded. The Tandberg had a pulse link. We had an unblimped camera, but the meeting took place in an office with a large internal window, and Nobby had a zoom, and the

camera noise was confined to the corridor. So we got away with it. The show was a great success. I got a file full of cuttings. They all interviewed me. Then an order came through for 100 Norwegian 16mm copies, 100 English 16mm copies, and we had to do a French and a German version. And Technicolor put the first batch out on dye transfer. The first ten went to Oslo, and Odd got on the phone and he said "These prints are awful. They're all white!" So I told him to send them back immediately by courier. And I screened them.

**John Legard:** What had they done?

**Rodney Giesler:** The buggers, Technicolor. They were all over-exposed. The colours were hardly there. They sit in Technicolor. These guys watching the screen at high speed and they're supposed to check them. I'd already checked a 16mm answer print which was perfect. I was horrified. I phoned them and said "Stop the presses. Nothing more goes out." Of course the whole order was stacked in dispatch. And I said "You can forget those." So I showed one of these prints to the boss of Technicolor. "This client is the most important of my life, and you've screwed it up for me." They ran off another answer print straight away and I sent it to Odd. They'd already ordered 16mm projectors. I just sat in that viewing room at Technicolor, with the guy who was being paid to do the job, making sure no crap got through. And fortunately after that they remade the matrices.

**John Legard:** That is disgraceful.

**Rodney Giesler:** My God, I was furious. In those days, the labs didn't care. On my next film I moved in a huff to Ranks at Denham. And they produced crap. The only lab I was finally successful with was Kay's. But otherwise you had to sit on their necks. The hours I spent in lab viewing rooms making sure that the stuff was OK. The tricks they'd get up to. I had one 35mm print with no change-over cues, and track spillage all the way through. I had a small cutting room at Shepperton at the time, and I used their theatre to view the dozen or so 35mm prints we'd ordered. And bugger me, that same rogue print with no change-overs etc, appeared with a new label: "Print No. 6". This was typical of lab behaviour at the time. Look at the first days of Channel 4, the crap that used to come on to the screens then. Nowadays you don't see a bad print on television. Anyway I went to the top at Denham and said "Don't try this on me." Later on Mike Crane, who edited a number of later films, did all my 16mm print checking on a Steenbeck. He used to check them at high speed. A weary job to do. But at least I knew that every print that came from Mike was fine. He slung back the rejects. He charged a fee of course, which was a cost I had to absorb.

**John Legard:** How long did it take them to produce the replacement prints?

**Rodney Giesler:** About a fortnight.

**John Legard:** Did that affect any particular screenings?

**Rodney Giesler:** It didn't because they were forbearing. In the meantime Norsk Hydro had installed a nice comfortable cinema with good 16mm projection at their head office, where they could bring in the press and foreign customers. It's no good making a film if you're not going to show it properly.

So few sponsors in this country seem to think about this. The number of good expensive films I've seen, huge budgets which were shown in dim village halls with candle-lit projection. The gate not even clean. Sound unintelligible. And no one from the sponsors to worry about it.

**John Legard:** That's a very interesting story. Presumably you had a good reception from the people for whom it was intended.

**Rodney Giesler:** Indeed. At that time the political situation in Norway was very important to Norsk Hydro. The oil interests were run by a state-owned oil company called Statoil, (Norsk Hydro was 52% owned by the Norwegian Government). They were the rivals, and because they were a government organisation, they said "We're going to have all the best blocks." But in booking the best patches for themselves, they had no technical expertise. So they brought in American and Dutch experts to do all the drilling for them. Hydro was constantly fighting for oil concessions against Statoil. They shouldn't be. They were fighting for better concessions. They were willing to pay for them, but it was no good if they couldn't get a share of the production. So it was very important to show this film to Ministers and it was shown to the Prime Minister. He was one of the first to see it. Bratteli (the PM) was delighted with it, and it certainly helped Hydro politically. While I was fighting the Battle of Technicolor, Odd phoned up and said "Right, our next film please..." which was about their oil operations. So without pausing for breath I was scripting the next film. I went on to make six major films for them.

**John Legard:** Isn't that extraordinary. And all because of this Spanish Restaurant in Zurich.

**Rodney Giesler:** And as they grew, they expanded all over Europe. Eventually I shot all over the world for them. From the West Coast of America to Thailand, Hong Kong, Africa, wherever they were. I usually picked a local cameraman and came back with the rushes.

**John Legard:** Did you enter any of these films for awards?

**Rodney Giesler:** *The New Vikings*, the first film I did for them, got a Gold in Chicago. BISFA ignored it. It wasn't selected. I never bothered with BISFA after that because I never worked for another British client. I didn't need to. I was fed up working for English clients. They used to bitch about this and that. I took ages to get paid. I just got fed up with them. They showed no appreciation. Whereas I was treasured by Norsk Hydro. I was respected. I had letters of thanks. I was known throughout the company. And building on this, while I was scripting the oil film, I thought if I'd got a longterm future with them, I've got to learn Norwegian. So I bought a set of Linguaphones and got up at 6 every morning and did two hours Norwegian before breakfast. I then got on the train for London or a plane for Oslo. It's a very easy language, because if you speak German and English, it's a bit of a hybrid. And within a year I could take part in a meeting with seven Norwegians, and not a word of English would be spoken. It's not all that clever really, because if you're talking technical terms say ammonia production and catalysts and oil feedstocks and market prices, those words were familiar. Particularly from commentary translations. When we were laying commentary I knew the words used because they fell at the same point as the English words But nevertheless my star shone a little brighter in the sense I could keep up. And even correct their Norwegian translation in later films. So the Norwegians sustained my income. Although I did quite a few minor productions in Europe and the odd job for Shell, Norsk Hydro

was overwhelmingly my main client. Towards the end of my time with Hydro video finally took over. As it had to. But I had helped lay the foundations for them.

**John Legard:** What a good thing they started off with film anyway, because at least they learned the use of film.

**Rodney Giesler:** And of course I had such luck. They didn't interfere. They trusted me. They'd ask me why I was doing something, sure. They might say "that piece of chemical plant was out of date. Wait a fortnight the scaffolding will be off the new one." Those were the helpful remarks.

**John Legard:** Did you use the same crew on all six films?

**Rodney Giesler:** Mostly. The one time I didn't use Nobby, I had to use another cameraman. It wasn't successful. His rapport wasn't there. Nobby had gone off with a penny-pinching company to Australia who, believe it or not, had booked the crew on a package tour. They ran over schedule, missed their flight back, and the production manager had no money to pay full fares. So they were stuck. They had their hotel bills paid, just. I think they had to borrow for other expenses. I won't mention the production company, but the sponsor was Beechams, if you please. And Nobby didn't make it back in time and I had to use someone else. But Nobby was on five of the six. I tamed over well over a million pounds in those twelve years, either for Norsk Hydro or their client companies who wanted something done. There were good profits on the huge print orders. And they paid well and promptly. I had people wanting to come back on the unit, because Hydro always met their stage payments promptly. This meant I could pay the crew from Day One. I wouldn't pay in advance. Nobby would say "Can I have a week's money in advance, I'm still waiting to be paid from the last job." But it was tough shit. Of course I trusted Nobby and knew he wouldn't go off on another job. But I thought "Bugger me, why should I pay my competitors' bank overdrafts?" They were holding on to his money. I wasn't. There was another amusing incident. I was known in the business as having feathered my nest very well with Norsk Hydro, and there were a number of other people sniffing round for some of the action. John Storaekre used to visit London a lot in his journalistic capacity. I'd got to know him better since that early encounter, and we no longer crossed swords. I think my learning Norwegian helped. And he'd invite me to whichever hotel he was staying at for dinner. We often met in the bar at Claridges. One evening, at about 5 o'clock, the bar was totally empty. And the waiters were moving around. There were just Jon Storaekre and me with our whiskies and our peanuts. And in walked a producer I knew and her assistant, and as bold as brass they sat down at the next table. Every other table in this huge room was empty. And Jon and I were talking in English. And they ordered their drinks, and started earwigging, shamelessly. Unbelievable, I ignored them. They were looking at me. They weren't talking. And Jon and I were talking, not important things, so I said to Jon: "Skal vi snakke Norsk sammen na?" Shall we speak Norwegian. And he said "Gjerne." Certainly. So we spoke Norwegian for about a quarter of an hour, until they finished their drinks and left. Industrial espionage exists even in little film companies.

**John Legard:** What about Norsk Hydro now? I suppose they have their inhouse video company.

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. Ironically I worked myself out of a job. They had an excellent stills man: Terje Knudsen, who took to video without any trouble. I did some scripts for them on a consultancy basis. It was far more sensible. In those ten years they'd made their big splash in the World. They wanted internal communication now. Their factories and offices were far flung. And they had video news magazines they circulated in the company. I'd worked my way out of a job, but then I'd worked my way out of film. Because when I came back home, everything was video. I did a few video jobs, mainly scripting. But it wasn't the same thing.

**John Legard:** Where have we got to?

**Rodney Giesler:** 1985. At Hydro I'd made three corporate films. Things changed so rapidly they had to be updated. I made two films of their oil operations. And one for their light metals division. They were done expensively, and they were satisfied with them. They became a bit more hard-nosed towards the end. They had to be. They were being shown to international money people. To analysts on Wall Street for stock market listings. Less emphasis was being put on school visits. They had videos by then. Previously the 16mm prints were sent into schools. They organised their own distribution library with two fulltime people. (Guild Sound & Vision distributed them in this country.) Odd came over and he met the people at GSV in Peterborough, and he spent some time with them getting the hang of things. Then one of the Guild people went out to Oslo to help them set up their Norwegian distribution library. That is what is so satisfying. I had started with one film, and the sponsor ended up with the whole film infrastructure.

**John Legard:** You were doing what Film Centre used to do.

**Rodney Giesler:** Exactly. That's where I'd learned my lesson. And also from the Petroleum Films Bureau of old.

**John Legard:** Do you keep in touch with them at all?

**Rodney Giesler:** They usually send me a CD of Grieg or Sibelius at Christmas time. With a card. Odd is now Vice President Public Affairs. The Chairman is the young lawyer who looked after me in Denver: Egil Myklebuss.

**John Legard:** And the old boy?

**Rodney Giesler:** Holte. He's long since retired. I've lost touch with him. He was a very prominent person in Norwegian circles. An elder statesman. It's a strange country. It's a big and important country, but it's small. Only 4 million people. One day I was in the office and Jon Storaekre said "I'm going down to the Storting (The Parliament building) to see a few friends. Like to come?" I got in his car. Holte always used to drive round in a VW Beetle. Not Jon. He had a chauffeur driven Mercedes. So we parked in the press car park at the Storting. I said "who are we going to see?" And Jon said he wanted to have a word with the Prime Minister. We went into the canteen, and there they were having their afternoon coffee: The Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and the Finance Minister. So we pulled up a couple of chairs. It was before Mrs. Brundtland. It was still Bratteli. Jon introduced me as "My English

friend." So I ended up talking Norwegian to the Prime Minister. Such is the informality of the country. They run their economy so well.

**John Legard:** They're joining the Common Market?

**Rodney Giesler:** Not before time. You see, up to now they had to buy their way into Europe. They bought Fisons Fertilisers in this country. So you now see the blue Viking ship on old fertiliser bags. On building sites, the builders put old rubble into these bags. They bought companies in France and Canada. They've built a huge magnesium smelter in Montreal to supply the American car industry. I enjoyed my work for them. It paid for my pension. And it was very satisfying. Anyhow, the Hydro thing finished and I was still of employable age. I didn't want to fold up and retire. I wanted to do a bit more work. One day I bumped into Robin Jackson at BAFTA. He was running the Shell Film & Video Unit. And they were busy. So I joined him. I shot a video for him in Amsterdam on Marine Lubrication. This worked well, because I had a super cameraman in Richard Day, Peter Day's son. (Peter was the sound recordist on "The Insomniac"). Richard had been brought up on 35mm. We shot it like a film, although we were using High Band video. That worked out well. Then they asked me to go to Oman in Eastern Arabia for them. The local Shell company wanted a film to encourage more Omanis to join the company. So I went out on a recce, I went round the oilfields. And some of the beautiful mountain villages. I asked what age group we were aiming at. "We want to get 'em young," the chairman said. "Get 'em young, out of school. Get 'em thinking about the oil industry." So I said "Take me to some kids." So the press officer, who was an Englishman, knew some isolated villages up in the mountains. Way off the beaten track. We stopped outside a village, and all the kids came streaming out. We sat down and the village elder joined us. And I explained to him what we were doing. And all the kids were crowded round. The boys. (The girls were indoors). And they fired questions at me. And I fired questions back. "Are you learning English at school?" "Yes." "Who else is learning English?" And all the hands shot up. It was electric. A great story. It was half oil and technology, and half *And Gladly Would he Learn* again. And I went home and wrote the script. And it was something I knew would appeal to the kids and their curiosity. I was going to start them from scratch. This is what oil looks like. This is how it's found. Anyhow I got back to London. Max Michie was unit supremo. First thing Max says: "You've been out there far longer than you should have been. We only agreed a certain time." Which was bollocks. And it all went down hill from there. He said "We can't possibly afford a film of this kind. So I offered to do it through my own company. It would be cheaper. But no, it wasn't Shell's policy. Even though the Chairman of Shell Oman had written to Max to say how important the film was, and the script showed it was just what they wanted. Max then said "We've got a different system now. If you want to work here, you'll have to tender for it." So I said "That means a youngster straight out of film school can bid me down. Someone who knows nothing about the oil industry. Doesn't speak a word of Arabic. Fine." I'd been retired about six months, this was about 1991 now, and bugger me, someone phones me. "We're doing a video for Shell in Oman, and Shell gave me your name." "Did they now," I said. "You can tell Shell to stuff it." So that's how I finished in the industry. I wound up my company, paid off my debts. I had a tax refund, and my final fling was the aviation business. I'd done a lot of aviation interviews for a script I'd done for a TV series on the jet age. I'd known Brian Trubshaw for some time, and I had an idea of making specialist videos for aircraft buffs called "A Pilot's Logbook". We'd take a famous pilot and he'd talk about all the planes he flew, intercut with plenty of

clips. We took Brian up to Duxford, and filmed him in Concorde, and a VC10, and a number of other planes he'd flown. Vickers, who were winding down their film unit gave me access to all their footage. And I got them all on to Betacam. And then I started to talk to the big publishers, W.H. Smith etc. But the prices they offered were laughable. So I abandoned the idea. The rest of the money I had was for my old age. No more farting around on speculative ideas. I just wanted to finish this now by saying when I first joined the industry and for most of my time in it I've enjoyed it. And although there were frustrations, they were there for me to fight my way round them in the best way possible. I think that mattered also for so many of the technicians I knew. They would wait for hours to get the right shot. They would perch themselves in the most dangerous position to get an effective angle. They would always go far beyond what they were paid to do to get a nice result on the screen because it was a matter of professional pride. But I found towards the end, going into the video business, these remarks: "Oh that'll do. It's only a video." "We'll get away with that." It makes me sad and angry because it's such a betrayal. The people who made films when I started, who understood them and used them properly had a marvellous movement that's marked in the history of the film business. Nowadays you have video. You have kids coming out of film school who've never heard of Grierson. You have sponsors who neither know or care about video, the accountants rule. "We can't afford this, we'll get someone who'll do it cheaper." The video comes out. It may be a chairman's speech which everyone takes with a pinch of salt, and at the end of the day it's thrown away. Nothing's left. The only place where Grierson's legacy survives is in the BBC and on Channel 4. There are technicians there who are still dedicated to the ways I've described. In spite of this dreadful creed that's now called "Producers Choice". And this farming out of contracts where you must shoot to a fixed budget. It wasn't like before where you were on salary at the Beeb or at Shell and you were given time enough to work out ideas. And I deeply regret it.

**John Legard:** Too much material around.

**Rodney Giesler:** The availability of Channels now. There isn't the material to fill them.

**John Legard:** It needed professionalism in the early days to get stuff on the screen because it was technically more difficult. And anyway it was a rare thing with documentary. And I suppose the big features have just as much loving care lavished on them.

**Rodney Giesler:** Yes. I'm talking about my particular area. The area I know. I'm not knocking the Beeb. There are a lot of original people doing marvellous things with computer graphics for instance. But very few who are using video use it creatively. No one has yet defined the grammar of video in the way that Grierson and Pudovkin and Eisenstein defined the grammar of film. This is the big trouble now. Very few people are using the full potential of video. I did some computer graphics on the Shell video. It's marvellous. Paint box. If you want that style of graphics you have instant animation. Instead of waiting for weeks for the cells to be drawn and shot on a rostrum. And I'm not knocking good television. I wish there was more of it. I just think the film and television schools are not giving the depth of training. They're not giving people time to gestate ideas. At Shell we would sit around for two or three days talking about ideas. We weren't paid marvellously but we were paid regularly. I remember talking to Denis Segaller about new ways of showing the distillation process long before we started building a model or shooting it. Or spending days on tests

in that ghastly basement studio in Shell Centre. Sometimes things didn't work and we'd abandon the idea. But at least we were given a little time and money to try it. And care. No one ever said "That'll have to do." in those days.

**John Legard:** That was the great advantage of the in house unit.

**Rodney Giesler:** And of course that was the great advantage when the BBC was in-house. They're not producing the great comedy shows they used to. Because comedy writing needs to gestate. People used to sit down in an office all day and chuck ideas at each other. That's what happened with "Steptoe" and "Porridge". People were allowed to make mistakes. Not now.

*End of Side 8*

*END OF INTERVIEW*

RODNEY GIESLER

Writer-Director-Producer

Admitted to ACTT 24.12.55. Membership Number 16968.

CREDITS.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| OPERATING A LONGWALL COAL CUTTER | National Coal Board | 1956 |
| WATCH THAT TRAILING CABLE | " | 1957 |
| INTRODUCTION TO RATING | " | 1957 |
| RATING EXERCISES | " | 1957 |
| TUNNELING TECHNIQUES | " | 1958 |
| MINA REFINERY | Film Centre | 1958 |
| ONE HAND | " | 1958 |
| ARAB VILLAGE | " | 1958 |
| MIRROR OF OIL 1. | " | 1959 |
| MIRROR OF OIL 2. | " | 1959 |
| RETURN TO LIFE | " | 1959 |
| SWEAT WITHOUT TEARS | " | 1959 |
| ELIXIR OF LIFE | " | 1959 |
| MILH WA MAAY | " | 1959 |
| FLOW OF OIL | " | 1959 |
| CLOSE UP ON KUWAIT | " | 1960 |
| SEAMAN TECHNICIAN R.N. | C.A.S. Productions | 1961 |
| POWER FOR THE NATION | " | 1962 |
| SUPERMIX | Derek Stewart Prods | 1962 |
| MAN IS A BUILDER | " | 1962 |
| PLANETOID SALVATION | Radio Play | 1962 |
| SOMETHING IN THE CITY | Screenplay | 1962 |
| SCOTS GOLD | Connaught Films | 1962 |
| FREEDOM FROM COLD | Random Films | 1962 |
| BALL & ROLLER BEARINGS<br>Pt 1. Taking the Load.<br>Pt 2. Prevention not Cure | Derek Stewart Prods | 1962 |
| REMOTELY OPERATED LONGWALL FACES | National Coal Board | 1963 |
| ONE FALSE MOVE | Realist Film Unit | 1963 |
| RATING EXERCISE(Revision) | National Coal Board | 1963 |
| THE CIRCARC GEAR | Film Centre | 1963 |
| AND GLADLY WOULD HE LEARN | Realist Film Unit | 1964 |
| REMOTELY CONTROLLED COLLIERY | National Coal Board | 1964 |
| THE HAWK LOCOMOTIVE | British Transport | 1964 |
| VIEW & TEACH | BBC Enterprises | 1965 |
| DISTILLATION | Shell Film Unit | 1965 |
| CRACKING & REFORMING | " | 1965 |
| ONE THE SAFE SIDE | RHR Productions | 1966 |
| THE WAY BACK | World Wide Pics | 1966 |
| THE RISK-TAKERS | RHR Productions | 1967 |
| HARVEST FOR TOMORROW | " | 1967 |
| MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT | N.I.T.O | 1967 |
| THE STORY OF NJOROGE | Derrick Knight Films | 1967 |
| SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY AV PROGRAM | Nexus Films | 1967 |
| VERY SPECIAL CONSTABLE | Children's Film F. | 1967 |

RODNEY GIESLER

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|---|---|---|
| DIAMOND JET | C.F.F. | 1967 |
| HEADS & TAILS | " | 1967 |
| THE PRIME MINISTER IS DEAD | TV Play | 1968 |
| ECHO OF WAR | TV Play | 1968 |
| MCC WEST INDIES TOUR | Rayant Television | 1968 |
| YOUTH CLUB SERIES | C.F.F. | 1968 |
| PISTOLS IN THE PARK | | |
| FIVER'S ODYSSEY (Story Outlines) | Monarch Films | 1968 |
| SQUIRREL IN A CAGE | | |
| NUFFIELD BIOLOGY TEACHING PROG. | James Archibald Prods | 1968 |
| THE STORY OF NAVIGATION | " | 1968 |
| JENNY'S ODYSSEY | Screenplay | 1968 |
| DUBAI | Spectator Films | 1969 |
| THE NATURE OF LIGHT | M.C.A. | 1969 |
| THE ELECTRIC CAR | Derrick Knight Prods | 1969 |
| TRAVELLING MAN | " | 1970 |
| THE GLASS SQUARE | Rolf Orthel Films | 1970 |
| THE INSOMNIAC | Auriga Films | 1970 |
| ISOBEL | " | 1971 |
| BOAC & YOU | Stewart Films | 1971 |
| IF I WERE YOU | | |
| THE MAGIC YEAR (Stories) | Auriga Films | 1972 |
| THE BIG TICKLE | | |
| ROOM TO LET | TV Outlines | 1972 |
| URGE TO LIVE | | |
| PULVERISED FUEL HANDLING | Auriga Films | 1972 |
| EVENING CLASS | TV Play | 1972 |
| TV DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE | Z.D.F. | 1972 |
| SEASON OF MIGRATION TO THE NORTH | Screenplay Treatment | 1973 |
| BOAC AND YOU | BOAC | 1973 |
| THE REUTER MONITOR | Talking Pictures | 1973 |
| KAYS OF WORCESTER | Auriga Films | 1973 |
| SUNJET | " | 1973 |
| RESEARCH FOR LIFE | Charles Barker | 1973 |
| ENGLISH BACKGROUNDS | Fouracre Productions | 1973 |
| EMMERDALE FARM (Outlines) | Yorkshire TV | 1974 |
| LINK 900 | Talking Pictures | 1974 |
| CROWN COURT (Outlines) | Granada TV | 1974 |
| THE NEW VIKINGS | Auriga Films | 1974 |
| THIS IS BRITISH AIRWAYS | British Airways | 1975 |
| OIL AGE NORWAY | Auriga Films | 1975 |
| SEASON TICKET | Radio Play | 1976 |
| FACES | " | 1976 |
| METALS FOR OUR TIME | Auriga Films | 1977 |
| NORWEGIAN SHIP RESEARCH AV Progs. | " | 1978 |
| ELNOR | Sage Films | 1978 |
| RUBEROID CORP. VIDEO | Zoom Television | 1979 |
| THE ENERGY BROKERS | Auriga Films | 1980 |
| OIL:OUR OFFSHORE INHERITANCE | " | 1982 |
| THE AGE OF THE JET | " | 1983 |
| OUR WORLD OF ENERGY | " | 1984 |

RODNEY GIESLER

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|---|---|---|
| GLORIOUS BRITAIN | Auriga Films | 1986 |
| IT'S ONLY PLASTIC | " | 1986 |
| PRINCIPLES OF PROPULSION | " | 1987 |
| THE ENERGY MACHINE | " | 1987 |
| ALEXIA | Shell Film Unit | 1987 |
| A SORT OF GENIUS | Auriga Films | 1988 |
| A PILOT'S LOGBOOK | " | 1988 |
| PATHS OF PROGRESS | British Aerospace | 1988 |
| AL OMAN AL JADIID | Shell Film Unit | 1988 |
| WREN & THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE | Auriga Films | 1989 |

## FESTIVAL AWARDS: RODNEY GIESLER.

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|---|---|---|
| GOLD | Distillation | *BISFA 1966 |
| | On The Safe Side | BISFA 1967 |
| | Dubai | Chicago 1970 |
| | Dubai | BISFA 1970 |
| | The Insomniac | Atlanta 1971 |
| | The New Vikings | Chicago. 1978 |
| SILVER | The Insomniac | New York 1971 |
| | The New Vikings | New York 1975 |
| | Oil Age Norway | New York 1976 |
| | Our Offshore Inheritance | New York 1982 |
| BRONZE | Metals For Our Time | New York 1978 |
| | The Energy Brokers | New York 1981 |

CERTIFICATES OF MERIT

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Remotely-Operated Longwall Faces | Antwerp 1964 |
| | And Gladly Would He Learn | San Francisco 1965 |
| | Metals For Our Time | BISFA 1978 |
| DIPLOMA | The Circarc Gear | BISFA 1964 |
| | The Circarc Gear | Bucharest 1964 |

*BAFTA SHORTLIST FOR BEST DOCUMENTARY 1964.

And Gladly Would He Learn
The Circarc Gear

* BISFA: British Industrial & Scientific Film Association.
BAFTA: British Academy for Film & Television Art.

# RODNEY GIESLER

FILM & VIDEO
PRODUCER

COMMUNICATIONS
CONSULTANT

5 Park Chase, Guildford, Surrey GU1 1ES
ENGLAND. Tel: Guildford (0483) 575532

**RODNEY GIESLER** offers you a distinct personal service as a highly-experienced writer and producer. He has a fluent understanding of industry both at the commercial and technical level.

He has the ability to communicate, clearly and imaginatively, the complexities of a business, a product, a technology or a concept to general non-technical audiences.

He has extensive experience and knowledge of the following industries and activities:

*oil, chemical, shipping, aerospace, electronics, mechanical & electrical engineering, banking, insurance, medicine, metallurgy, agriculture, and education.*

He can work in **French, German, Norwegian** and colloquial **Arabic.**

He works exclusively through his own production company **AURIGA FILMS LTD.**

**AURIGA FILMS LTD** is therefore not just another film & video company, but the sole outlet for the creative activities of **Rodney Giesler.**

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sell a product or a service, be it a piece of hi-tech equipment or a turn-key installation .....

present yourselves to a local community as a valued and responsible neighbour .....

rally support for the acquisition of another business, or the defence of your own .....

*PRINCIPAL WORK AS WRITER AND/OR PRODUCER INCLUDES:*

## CORPORATE PUBLIC RELATIONS

**Close-up on Kuwait**

A portrait of the oil state in the Arabian Gulf, showing the intermingling of traditional life with the operations of the oil companies. Made for the *Kuwait Oil Company.*

**Dubai**

A portrait of Dubai, another oil state in the Gulf, showing how the wealth from the offshore oil field has been used with acumen to build a modern vibrant economy. Made for *British Petroleum/Continental Oil.* **Gold Camera** award at the U.S. Industrial Festival and the British Industrial Film Festival.

**The New Vikings**

A portrait of the Norwegian company *Norsk Hydro,* which produces oil, gas, fertilisers, light metals, industrial gases, plastics, hydro-electric power and heavy water. Filmed in Norway, Qatar, and the United States, it received **Gold** awards at the U.S. Industrial Film Festival and the Chicago Film Festival.

**The Energy Brokers**

An update of "The New Vikings" showing the expansion of the company, with locations in Norway, the United Kingdom, Thailand and Denmark.

**Our World of Energy**

A second update of "The New Vikings", concentrating on the latest international activities of *Norsk Hydro.* Filmed in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, the U.K., Hong Kong and the United States.

## THE OIL INDUSTRY

**Distillation**

A technical explanation of the basic process of an oil refinery. Filmed in France, Germany and Venezuela for the *Shell* film unit, it won a **Gold** award at the British Industrial Film Festival.

**Cracking and Reforming**

A companion film to "Distillation" showing the conversion processes in a refinery. Made for the *Shell* film unit.

**Supermix**

An explanation of the workings of the early mixer pumps, and of how they match the octane numbers of the fuel more exactly to the requirements of different cars. Made for *British Petroleum* for showing to filling station staff.

**Oil Age Norway**

Made for the Norwegian energy company *Norsk Hydro,* it shows the company's early oil activities in the North Sea. Using animation it describes the geological history of the area, and how oil and gas were formed in the rocks beneath the seabed.

**Oil – Our Offshore Inheritance**

An update of "Oil Age Norway", this film follows the story of oil, from exploration off North Cape, through to development of the giant Frigg and Ekofisk fields, to the marketing of oil products in Scandinavia.

## MECHANICAL AND ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING

**Tunnelling Techniques**

A study of high speed tunnel drivage, and of how it is made possible by the skilful integration of the work of each member of the tunnelling team. Made for the *National Coal Board.*

**Remotely-Operated Longwall Faces**

A technical explanation of the workings of the first two remotely-controlled coal faces in Britain. Made for the *National Coal Board.*

**Power for the Nation**

A description of the British national electricity grid, showing how electrical power is distributed throughout the country. Made for the *Central Electricity Generating Board.*

**The Circarc Gear**

An explanation of the theory, the workings, and the benefits of a new shape of helical gear tooth. Made for *Associated Electrical Industries. (Now G.E.C.).*

**The Hawk Locomotive**

Made for non-technical audiences, this film describes the workings of an experimental locomotive driven by A.C. squirrel cage traction motors. Made for *British Rail.*

**Metals for our Time**

A description of the smelting, and the many different uses of aluminium and magnesium, the world's lightest structural metals. Made for the Light Metals Division of *Norsk Hydro.*

## SAFETY AND TRAINING

**Sweat Without Tears**

How to avoid heatstroke and stay healthy in very hot climates. Made for the *Kuwait Oil Company* to show to newly-arrived staff, and the crews of visiting tankers.

**One False Move**

Highlighting the dangers of cross infection in hospitals, and how to avoid them. Made for the *Department of Health.*

**On the Safe Side**

A film showing the dangers facing scientists working in experimental high voltage laboratories. A **Gold** award at the British Industrial Film Festival. Made for the *United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority.*

**Pulverised Fuel Handling**

Made for showing to power station engineers, it demonstrates the correct techniques of feeding fuel to large superheated boilers. Made for the *Central Electricity Generating Board.*

## RECRUITMENT

**And Gladly Would He Learn**

A film made for the *Ministry of Oversees Development* to recruit British teachers to work in Third World Countries. The film was shot in Uganda and was short-listed for the **Best Documentary Award** by the British Film Academy.

**Harvest for Tomorrow**

A companion film to "And Gladly Would He Learn", it was made to recruit agricultural experts for work in Third World Countries as part of the British Government's aid programme. It was shot in Botswana and Kenya.

## EDUCATIONAL

**I Know Where I Am**

The story of how Man learned to find his way around the world he lives in, from Babylonian times to the space age. Script only. Production not proceeded with. Sponsor: *The Decca Navigator Company.*

## AEROSPACE

**The Age of the Jet**

A television series on the history of jet aviation from the thirties to the space age, told by the engineers and pilots who made this story. Script and development complete. Production finance being sought.

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*"To show our simple skill,*
*That is the true beginning of our end."*
*A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM*