A TEI Project

Interview of Edward Lewis

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1.1. Session One (August 29, 2012)

CEPLAIR

It is August 29, 2012. This is Larry Ceplair beginning the first session of an interview with Edward Lewis for the UCLA Oral History Project. So, Mr. Lewis, why don't you just begin by telling us the story of your early life.

LEWIS

All right. You want the vital statistics too?

CEPLAIR

Sure.

LEWIS

I was born on December 16th, 1919, Camden, New Jersey. My father, name was Max; my mother, Florence. Both born in America. My father was one of the sons in a successful Camden, New Jersey business called "S" for Solomon Lewis AND Sons. The sons were two sons and a son-in-law, and they ran a fairly important retail department store kind of place where they sold furniture, jewelry, and everything like that, mostly to the truck farmers in New Jersey that were supplying Campbell's [Soup Company] with all the

tomatoes they needed. And they were an installment-plan house, and they were a successful upper middle-class family, lived well. I think my father was the head of the synagogue and my mother the Hadassah, that kind of stuff. And then one day—my grandfather, my father's father, was an Orthodox Jew and he never came to our house. I rarely saw him, because our house was not kosher. So I had nothing to do with him, except once a year he would give out the coins. I guess it was on Chanukah or something like that. But one day his wife died and he picked up and went to Israel, and when he did, he took all the money out of the business and he used it to build a temple with his name on it somewhere in Israel. The result was the "Sons" part of Solomon Lewis AND Sons all went bankrupt. So my father, from being a well-to-do Jewish merchant, was selling magazine subscriptions door-to-door, and similar to the others. So everything changed in our lives as a result of that. So that's that much of the background.

CEPLAIR

So this was during the 1920s when this happened?

LEWIS

I'm no good at dates. That's why I have you. But I went to college early. I got skipped four times. Partly I was mentally alert, I guess, and mostly the schools were overcrowded, so I was young when I was ready to go to college, sixteen. And he had gone bankrupt before that, because I had to wait on tables when I went to—I went to Bucknell University. I was there three years. I went as a pre-med student. It became increasingly clear, partly because I was Jewish, I was not going to get into medical school, so the family decided I should switch and go to dental school. So that got me off on a year. You only needed to go three years undergrad, so after three years, I left Bucknell. I never graduated. I have no degree. I went to the University of Maryland Dental College and I was there for a year, minus the finals. I went outside the building where we were taking our final exams and I said, "If I walk in, I'm going to be doing something I hate for the rest of my life." I didn't like the idea of

putting my hands in people's mouths and looking down them. I didn't like anything about it. So I turned away and didn't take the exams, and I went home and I had no background and nothing to do, but I looked at ads and there was an ad for a guy who had a small woodworking factory and he was advertising for a partner. I had no money, but I went down and I said, "I have no money, but I'll work for no money and try to build up the business." So I worked on a skill saw, I remember, very dangerous, running wood planks through this mechanical saw. He had a half a dozen pieces of equipment, and I got the idea that we could make novelty items, and formed a little company called Novelty Manufacturing and, in fact, went to shows, you know, the wholesale shows that they have. And put out a catalogue; I still have a page from it. Made no money. But then the war came along and there was a cry for Defense Department help, manufacturing. So I looked at the rules and we were too small, so I went around and found other small woodworking factories and suggested that we pooled our resources together until we had the minimum number of equipment that they required and we could bid on some defense contracts, and I did. One of them was a fairly large furniture manufacturer in Rahway, New Jersey. Anyway, I went to Washington and bid on a few things. I didn't know anything about it, but you bid. And I won two contracts. One was for hospital bedside tables, thousands of them, and the other was with the major munitions maker called Triumph Manufacturing. I think it was in Delaware. And it was to make dummy artillery shells out of very hard white maple. They were using them—instead of firing real shells as they were training the artillery guys to operate the machine, they didn't use real shells; they used wooden dummy shells, which were a lot less expensive. It was a thing that required that we had a government inspector on the premises all the time to be sure that our tolerance was exactly—it was a very accurate kind of thing. Anyway, that's what I did. Then the draft came along. I'm telling you all of this only because it leads to you've asked me how did I come to California and get in this business. So I got drafted in the army at Fort Dix in New Jersey, and my first day there—I've never held a gun, never did anything—I

get called in and said I'm being sent to Lowry Field in Denver, Colorado. Don't know why, but I'm on my way to Lowry Field in Denver, Colorado. That was a training place for air force bombardiers. So I'm now in bombardier school and the reason, apparently they had recently held a test of the graduating class, and one of the students graded much higher than anybody else. They were bombing facilities on the ground. There was a camouflage unit on the ground, and they camouflaged a bunch of targets. And this guy had the highest score anybody had ever had, so they called him in and wanted to know how come. He said, "I'm color-blind, so I can see through the camouflage." So the air force put out an urgent call around the country for high-IQ recruits that were color-blind, and I was color-blind, something I had learned when I was at Bucknell, that I was color-blind. Okay?

So now I'm there training to be a bombardier, a month goes by and we have our first test. And first test, we did lousy. The whole class of all color-blind students did lousy. So now they called this guy back in and, finally, when they grilled him, he said he had a buddy on the ground in the camouflage unit who told him where the targets were, but he said he wasn't going to do that, so he said he was color-blind. So now the air force is stuck. There were about twenty of us that are now on the way to being officers, with no training whatsoever. So they didn't know what to do with us, where to assign us. So they looked on the records and I had gone, as you know, a year to dental school, so they said, "Aha. That's it." So they put me to Medical Administrative Corps and made me a lieutenant, immediately. I ended up coming out of the army as a captain. In the army I became the adjutant for a general hospital, knowing nothing about medicine or any of this, but the commanding officer was a dermatologist, so he knew less than I did about running a hospital. We were sent to England and were the first place where the wounded were sent back from the front. So that's that part of the background. But while I'm there, while we were in training with the unit that was in Texas, I was training a bunch of new doctor recruits that had to go through basic training. I learned, as you know, I read books and I taught them. One day an older man

comes to me and he says we had orders that we were going to ship out. They didn't know where. So he said, "Look. You take care of my son, and when the war is over, you come to Los Angeles. I'm very well connected in the motion picture business. I'll take care of you."

That's how I came to L.A. When the war was over, his son was a doctor, was a nice, pleasant guy. The unit came back safely, but, I got sick over there. It's called Brucellosis. Undulant fever, from drinking unpasteurized milk. So I was sent back to a hospital in the U.S. But in any event, when I got out of the hospital, the first place I headed, since I had nothing in Camden, New Jersey, I headed to L.A. to meet the man who had promised me that he would take care of me. I wanted to give you his name. We don't need names for this?

CEPLAIR

No, we don't.

LEWIS

Okay. When I finally caught up with him, turned out he was in a real estate business. He didn't know anybody. It was all a bunch of bullshit.

CEPLAIR

Just interrupt for a second. So you always were a kind of a hustling person. Was that from your family, or is that just who you were from the beginning?

LEWIS

No, I bear very little resemblance to anybody else in my family. I was always the black sheep, but I always did things that they made me feel like I was special. I can remember when I was two or three, they would bring their friends over and I did something with sheet music. I don't remember. It wasn't musical; it had to do with some visuals. I was able to do things like that. I was able to recite the two-and-twos, you know.

CEPLAIR

The times tables.

LEWIS

Also it helped me very much in college. I was not an academic. I didn't like it. As a matter of fact, at Bucknell they had a no-attendance rule, but the dean once called me and said, "No one in the history of the university has cut as many classes as you did." But I had straight As, because all I did was read the textbooks before the final, and I could score better than most anybody. So that was a talent that I had. And it was evading responsibility, there's no question about it, and I found the easiest way for me to get what I wanted out of things, so I guess you could call it hustling.

CEPLAIR

So you were always kind of a good talker, right? I mean, you could always talk your way into and out of situations?

LEWIS

I'm never a good talker, like you're going to learn here. I never spoke. I was terrified of getting in front of an audience, so I never did interviews or any of that stuff. Not a good talker in that sense, but I was able— [interruption]

CEPLAIR

Okay.

LEWIS

Continue?

CEPLAIR

Yes.

LEWIS

So I'm able to handle people well. All right. That was my skill at producing some—when we get to it, I'm going to read you what John Frankenheimer said about me, and I think that was the key to Kirk [Douglas] too. Number one, I was never competitive with them. I didn't want what was very important to them, which was the limelight and credit. I seemed always to know what was important to them, but I devoted myself to finding a way to—I hate to say ingratiate myself, but I did the job and I did it well. But I guess you would call it hustling. If that means getting by with no background and no skill and no training, that's what I did.

LEWIS

And convincing people that you could get [unclear].

CEPLAIR

Yes. As a matter of fact, at the point where I left this, I brought my family. My father, they were bankrupt and stuff, they had nothing and I had nothing, but I brought them out here, my mother and my father, my sister and her husband. My father took a job. He was this kind of guy. I guess I got it from him. He came out looking in the paper for ads for a job, and there was an ad that said "Nobody over forty apply," and he was already in his sixties. He applied, he got the job, and he stayed with that job selling wholesale plumbing supplies. He worked until he was, like, ninety-six. He was a traveling salesman, he lived until almost a hundred, and he was just a great traveling salesman. The people, they all loved him. That's not a characteristic of mine. [interruption]

LEWIS

So, anyway, I'm wandering, and I shouldn't do that. So my first picture came about. I'll go before the first picture.

CEPLAIR

You're living in the Malibu beach house now?

LEWIS

Okay. Now I'll tell you the Malibu beach house. When I was in the army and got sent back to the hospital somewhere in the Midwest, I met Millie's [Gerchik] brother, who was a private. When I'm here, I'm looking for something to do in California, and there's a shortage of homes. You probably remember. I didn't know much about it, but they were not able to get homes built. Back East my dad was selling wholesale plumbing stuff, little pipes and things like that. Bathtubs and showers were in short supply. So I figured, well, okay, I'm going to try and build some houses. So first you need money, so I went downtown to Coast Federal bank. I figured I'm going to knock on the door of the bank, and on the way there, waiting for a traffic light, I bump into Millie's brother. He invites me to the house for dinner. So I go to the bank, and I talked them into the fact that I had connections for stuff that was so hard to get, bathtubs, showers, that kind of stuff, and I wanted a loan to build, I think, fifty houses, and they gave me a loan. I then went to Millie's house. She was engaged to marry somebody. I'll not go into our personal story, but Paul also had no job, the two of us became partners, and we ended up building there in Culver City. I don't know how many we built, close to thirty or forty houses, $10,000 houses. Now they're probably a million dollars. And we went broke, naturally. I didn't know anything about it. Okay. Now I have to get back on track. What do you want? What were you asking me?

CEPLAIR

No. You're doing fine. We're okay.

LEWIS

This is all right?

CEPLAIR

Yes.

LEWIS

I feel like I'm going far afield.

CEPLAIR

No, you're not.

LEWIS

Millie and I found an apartment somewhere. Anyway, we're going to movies a lot, art house movies, and the manager of this little theater one day says, "I'm having a reading tonight after the screening. There's a German director in town trying to set up his debut American film, and he's going to read the script that he's written. Do you want to come?" So we said, "Yes." So we go and we listen, and he read a script written by [Honoré de] Balzac called Mercadet, M-e-r-c-a-d-e-t.

On the way home, Millie said to me, "We can do better than that." And I said, "Okay. Let's try together." So we went to the library, took out a copy of the screenplay so I could know how to begin in, fade in, fade out, close-up, the major things that you didn't have to know but had to be in the script. We wrote our version of the Balzac play, and it did turn out to be better than the director's, and he recognized that. He went out and cast it with this unbelievable cast of Alan Mowbray, Richard—you don't need me to go through this. But it was as diverse as you could get, Richard Ney, Charlie Ruggles, and Buster Keaton. Buster Keaton I got. He was just let out of a mental institution, and it was his first job after he came out. So the director [Richard Oswald] hustled the package. Nobody would buy it. So, again, I had nothing to lose, so I said, "I'm going to try." So I did end up, again went to a bank, Chase—no. I forget the name of the bank, anyway.

CEPLAIR

Chemical Bank.

LEWIS

Chemical Bank. That's it. I went to Chemical Bank and I signed an $80,000 loan. At that time when you signed the loan, you signed the loan. You owed the money. Now, they changed the law a long time ago, and now a creditor can only look to the underlying asset, the film, but at that time I was on the hook. I paid off that loan over

many years. Millie didn't know that I had this debt. Anyway, I made that movie. It was an embarrassment. Film Classics, the outfit that put up the $80,000, went out of business about a month after the picture was finished. We played the theaters for, I don’t know, a week or something like that. The company was folded, that was the end of the movie, and I owed $80,000.

CEPLAIR

And it was called The Lovable Cheat [1949].

LEWIS

It’s called The Lovable Cheat.

CEPLAIR

Okay.

LEWIS

Okay. End of how did I get started in the business.

CEPLAIR

Okay. So you’re on the hook for $80,000. Your picture has failed. Then what happens?

LEWIS

Well, I’m really very hazy about how the next things occurred. I do know, I do remember I got a job as a writer for Walter Mirisch, and he put me up in an office in Monogram Studios, which was a place where “C” pictures were made. I don’t remember what assignment I was given. Didn’t last long. Then how I came to meet Al Rogell, who was the son-in-law of Jack Warner, I can’t tell you how. I’ve tried, but I absolutely do not have any recollection of how I got in touch with him, except I know they had a son who was a kind of a non-doer, and they wanted me to train him so that he could be a producer. You could see I didn’t have much skills. So I did that, and I produced this picture [The Admiral was a Lady, 1950] that Al Rogell had all set up for himself. I don’t have any recollections about it because I was not involved really, not emotionally in it at

all. Then somehow I came to Kirk, and I can't tell you how that happened. Kirk had a producer then; his name was Jerry Bresler. I think, as I remember then, he was also very busy doing the Vikings. That was going to be a big project with Kirk, so he needed some help on the movie that they had all set up to go. It's called Lizzie [1957]. Again, I'm not involved in creating it or developing it. I know I have a credit of some kind as a producer, but I was kind of doing the dirty work of getting it done while he wasn't there.

But I have one strong recollection of the first time I met Kirk Douglas. Most of the meetings always over the years were at his house, and the first meeting—and the same thing happened many times after that—I would go upstairs to his suite where he had a bedroom and an office, and I'd get seated at a chair, and he's seated opposite me, but he's facing a wall behind me and on that wall is a large mirror. When I would talk to Kirk, he was interviewing me, he wasn't looking at me, he was looking in the mirror to really look at the performance that he was giving. And I could tell if I saw him smile, I knew it was because he liked—he was making the impression that he wanted to make. And I sat in that chair in front of the mirror many times afterwards. Now, maybe Kirk was just honing his skills as an actor, but it was a reflection of an ego that I really learned was enormous.

CEPLAIR

Before you came to Douglas, I know you did some TV work.

LEWIS

Oh, yes, sure.

CEPLAIR

Do you remember anything of that?

LEWIS

I do, yes. I met a writer whose name was Marion Parsonnet, who was the opposite of me, had great social skills, tall, handsome, well connected, and he had the idea for making a pilot. I wrote it and we

produced it. It was a pilot for a half-hour show, and it was submitted to the agency for Pepsi-Cola. One day not too long afterwards, we got a phone call from Pepsi-Cola. They wanted us to come out to New York at their expense, and they offered a lot of money. They wanted us, which ended up being me, to design a film studio. They were going to convert—they had a bottling plant on Long Island, and they wanted to convert it to a film studio. So, again, they went to an expert, me, to design a film studio.

When I made The Lovable Cheat, the day I started shooting that movie was the first time I was ever inside of a movie studio, so I didn't know a hell of a lot about it. But, anyway, the reason they wanted a studio there is they had created a show called The Faye Emerson Show. It was a very big talk show, and they got the idea that if we filmed it, they could syndicate it so that it would be across the country in prime time now as a live show. If they wanted it live in prime time in New York, it was eight o'clock in New York, it would be five o'clock, not prime time in L.A., so they were not able to sell it at prime-time prices. So someone got the idea if we put it on film, we could have it, we syndicate it, we'd have it all over the country prime time. So they wanted a studio of their own. So I built that studio and I ended up producing I don't know how many Faye Emerson shows. It could have been fifty. It could have been a hundred. They were simple talk shows, she would get celebrities, and the show was very popular. We were living high on the hog, had a limo and a chauffeur, and we had a beautiful apartment in the building where [John] Lennon lived, charge accounts in all the—

CEPLAIR

You mean John Lennon.

LEWIS

John Lennon.

CEPLAIR

The Dakota.

LEWIS

Yes. And all the restaurants. I mean, we were living high on the hog. But Millie was pregnant and she missed her family in California. She said, "I want to go home." So we picked up and left, left the best job that I ever had. So that's that. Now from that, I now knew people in television, so I got the idea of the Schlitz Playhouse of Stars. The Schlitz Playhouse of Stars was a half-hour show, a dramatic show. Again, I have to say it was a very, very good idea, and it was the first. Instead of paying for scripts and directors and writers, I put out the word that we will make a pilot for anybody that has a package of a screenplay and a director and a star. "We'll make the pilot for you and give it to you to use as your pilot, and we'll just use it in Schlitz Playhouse for once or twice." It was a very good idea.

I made a deal with many people. There were lots of them. One of them did, in fact, develop into another series. It starred Dan Duryea. Bernie Tabakin was the producer.

CEPLAIR

China Smith.

LEWIS

—called China Smith. That was the only one that did materialize. But, anyway, that was that show. Now, one incident on that show is I hired Joan Bennett to be the hostess. She was going to introduce the shows, a two-minute opening or something like that. Before we started shooting, her agent, Jennings Lang, and she were apparently shacked up, and her husband, Walter Wanger, a very important guy in the film industry, took out a gun and shot him in the balls. So that was the end. I needed a new hostess. So then I got Irene Dunne, and that was the end of Schlitz Playhouse. I did one. I think we did twenty-six shows, but I'm not positive. I have one more incident of that period then. Elissa Landi was a well-known actress. She had a brother, called himself Count, Count Anthony Landi, turned out to be one of the great swindlers, a very elegant caricature of a Hollywood hustler, not my kind. He came to me one day. I had offices at one of the studios, and it was a big

operation, making twenty-six half-hour shows. I had a lot of people working for me and I had an important new job. He came to me and he said, "I have connections that would make the kind of series that you would really love to produce. I could get you Laurence Olivier, Vivien Leigh, Ingrid Bergman, all kinds of people like that that are friends of mine."

And so I said, "Well, okay. I'll come up with an idea for different famous stories, short stories." I hired a man, his name was [William] Kozlenko, who was a guy who put together collections of famous stories and wrote the introductions, you know, an academic, very nice man. I hired him to find stories that would fit people of names like that, and I ended up optioning a dozen or so short stories. It was very easy to do at the time. So now I was armed with these, and I tell the Count, "Okay. I'm ready to go meet a couple of the people. I'll start off with Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh." He said, "Okay. I'll set up the meeting, and I'll tell you where to come and when." At first he said—and I mentioned, I said, "I want to meet Ingrid Bergman," and her husband was the Italian director, [Roberto] Rossellini. I think I started with Ingrid Bergman. He did, in fact, arrange the appointments for me. I went and I stayed at the Bergmans' and Rossellinis' house for a couple of days. I loved it. She had just had twins. Rossellini took me on a wonderful intellectual tour of Rome and gave me the history of Rome. I loved that, the whole thing. Then I go to London to meet with Olivier. And, by the way, while this is going on, I'm in contact with the Count by telephone. Even at one point, he was on a ship. He was taking a ship to go there to meet us, to meet me. Anyway, a date is arranged, and I go to Olivier's house and there's no appointment, and Olivier said, "I know who he is. He's no good. I had no business talks with him."

Oh, and excuse me, I talked with Olivier on the telephone. He arranged for me to talk to him. It turned out I was talking to Count Landi, not Laurence Olivier. It ended up with Scotland Yard involved, and he was a well-known fraud, and it was all a fraud. I had written him lots of checks. He needed expenses. He would go to

London to meet with Olivier, would call me from there, "Here's Larry on the phone, wants to say hello to you." It's all a fraud. When I came back, I had an attorney then whose name was Jerry Rosenthal, and I went and said, "Here's how I've been swindled." For me it was a lot of money. He said, "Eddie, forget it. If you sue him, in five years nobody's going to remember who did what to whom. You've got a good, clean name. Forget it. You took a loss, you took a loss." So that was the last of my television experiences.

CEPLAIR

One thing I'd like to ask you about, you said in those years you met Frank Tarloff, who was a blacklisted writer.

LEWIS

Right.

CEPLAIR

Can you talk a little bit about that?

LEWIS

Sure. I met him because he was a part of the weekly poker game that we had. We had a rotating game every week at somebody else's house, and Frank was one of the players. He was one of my favorite guys of all time, had nothing to do with his being blacklisted, and I'm not even sure I was aware at the time, but I guess I was. But he was a guy we liked. We went out with Frank and Lee [Tarloff]. His wife was a nightclub singer and a nice lady, and they were friends. When the Spartacus thing occurred—I guess we'll get into that separately—there came a time when we were trying to develop Spartacus that I became aware of the fact that there was a competitive project; it was Arthur Koestler's book The Gladiators. And one day I saw on the back page of Variety was a picture of Anthony Quinn in a slave's costume, and there was a big announcement that Marty Ritt is set to direct the movie and Tony Quinn is going to star as Spartacus. So they were way ahead of us.

Lew Wasserman was Kirk's agent then, so I went to see him, and he said, "Eddie, there's only going to be one Spartacus movie made. That'll be the one that gets to the cameras first, period. Your only chance is getting there first." He said, "They obviously have a script. You don't have anything." So Frank was one of the writers that I knew, and I went to him and I said, "Frank, I need—who is the fastest good writer in Hollywood?" He said, "The only guy I could recommend is you've got to go see Dalton Trumbo. I'll give you his number and set it up. But I don't think he's going to do this, because the book is written by Howard Fast, who was a friendly witness, and I don't think Dalton is going to want to do this." So I figured, "Well, I'm going to go anyway," and I made a date to see Dalton. In Highland Park he was living then. I go and bring him—I said, "Did you know the book?" He said, "No." I handed him the book, and I said, "You're probably not going to want to do it," and I told him why not. He said to me, "If I turn this down for that reason, I would be guilty of the same thing that I'm fighting now. So give me the book to read." He looked at it. He did what he always did. He looked, skimmed, the last page first, said, "It's a very thin book. I'm a fast reader. You want to wait? I'll give you my answer."

So I waited outside, and he went in and he read the script. And he came out and he said, "There are problems." There was a big problem. The book was told from the point of view of the Roman characters. It was not told from Spartacus' point of view. There was no central character of Spartacus. It was as other people remembered him. So that whole thing had to be changed around. So he says, "It can be difficult, but it can be done. And it can make a good movie, and I'll write it." He said, "I need someone to front it for me. Will you be the front?" I said, "Yeah," and I became the front for Spartacus.

CEPLAIR

You also fronted for some other blacklisted writers before then.

LEWIS

I did.

CEPLAIR

How did you see yourself? Why did you act as a front? I mean, what was your reason for doing so?

LEWIS

They were asking me.

CEPLAIR

You weren't afraid it was going to hurt your reputation or cause you trouble?

LEWIS

Well, I didn't have much of a reputation to begin with, and I wasn't afraid, because I had never had any involvement in anything politically, nor did I have any sophistication. When I said I told Dalton, "I don't think you're going to want to do this for that reason," that wasn't me; that was what Frank Tarloff told me. So I was very unsophisticated about it. I mean, I knew Frank Tarloff. He was a terrific guy. I really liked him a lot. It just made no sense to me that somebody like this, if they needed some help and say, "Will you do this for me," it didn't cost me anything, I wasn't paying him, so it was just an easy, natural thing to do. Except it turned out with Spartacus not to be easy to do, because now the script had my name on it, and that script with my name as the sole author is the one that was given to Universal, for which they made the deal. Not only that, but then Wasserman. I met with Wasserman again, and I said, "I've got a script coming fast." "Who do you see in it?" So I told him, "I see Olivier, [Charles] Laughton, and [Peter] Ustinov." He said, "Okay. I'll set it up for you. When you get your script, let me know. I'll make an appointment for you." So he sets me up to meet first with Laurence Olivier. So I go to London as the author. This is the first time that ever happened, that I, in person—I mean, before, putting a name for somebody else's name meant nothing. Nobody talked to me about it. I didn't have to be somebody. It was a paper. It's hard to explain, but there was no direct relationship.

Here there was direct, because when Olivier read the script, he called me in and said, "I want you to meet a lot of people, and I'm telling everybody this is the most brilliant screenwriter that Hollywood has ever had." That changed everything. That made it very difficult. Anyway, I came back with commitments from the three actors on it.

CEPLAIR

Olivier, Ustinov, and Laughton?

LEWIS

And Laughton. All of whom believed I was this brilliant writer. So this is the first time I was put into a role-playing piece of business, and I didn't like it. So when I came back, as soon as the deal was finalized where the production was guaranteed, that's when I went to Kirk and I said, "I'm taking my name off." You want to keep going on with Spartacus?

CEPLAIR

Let me go back just a little bit. So what was your exact relationship with Bryna [Productions]? I mean, lots of histories say that you were the executive producer of that company.

LEWIS

Nothing to do with it. Zero to do with the company. The company was run by—they had a lawyer by the name of Sam Norton, and somebody else wrote the checks. I really had no idea. All I did was get a salary, and I don't think it was much of a salary, nothing to do with Bryna.

CEPLAIR

So you would bring them books or projects?

LEWIS

Yes, exactly. You see, I wasn't an employee with a contract. I was a guy with a relationship that as long as I kept bringing projects that could be developed into films for Kirk, I had a job, and I needed the

job. So that's what the relationship was. But if I didn't bring anything, I wasn't getting paid to do anything at all, and I'm not aware of anything else that they did after I was there. This guy Jerry Bresler, who was a much older man, he disappeared, but I don't know where or why. So everything then that I think that Bryna made, they made because I developed them.

CEPLAIR

Because I know probably at the same time you brought them Spartacus, you also brought them The Brave Cowboy [name of the film is Lonely Are the Brave]—

LEWIS

Exactly.

CEPLAIR

—and Sundown at Crazy Horse, which became The Last Sunset. I know for sure those were three that you brought them.

LEWIS

I brought them many more than that.

CEPLAIR

Yes, but at least in this period '59 to '60.

LEWIS

Okay. Well, you know the dates better than I do.

CEPLAIR

All right. So let's get back to Spartacus. So you come back, and you're embarrassed that your name is on a project that people are very complimentary about.

LEWIS

Well, first I have to—if I'm going to go with Spartacus, I have to start with Dalton, because we've skipped too much. He was a major player. Very simply, if anybody broke the blacklist, it was not Kirk

Douglas; it was Dalton. He called the shots. He's a very smart man, and he knew what he wanted, and he wanted one thing, period, and that was he wanted to beat the blacklist. And he knew if he did, he was beating it for him. He never had illusions that if he got credit that would mean that all the blacklist was suddenly gone for everybody else, which was, of course, nonsense. But that's what his life was. So now I'm stuck at Universal and I'm the go-between between the studio, because Kirk was not actively involved in what was going on in the company. It was me. So word gets out to the studio that Dalton is the writer. Ed Muhl was the head of production, very nice guy for a head of production. He was really an accountant. He calls me in one day in this big office, and he said, "You've got to help me out with Trumbo." He says, "You don't understand the problem with Trumbo. With you, it's easy. If something happens, you're an independent producer. You can get any job you want. I'm eligible for only three other jobs in the world, the heads of the other three studios. I really want you to help me. I want you to convince Trumbo just to have a meeting with a lawyer. It can be a very short meeting, ask him just a few questions, and he'll be cleared." So I go back and tell Dalton, so Dalton says, "Fine. I want you to tell him I'm happy. I'll talk to anybody about my politics. I like doing that. I'm very happy to have the meeting." The meeting, by the way, was to be with Martin Gang. He said, "Tell Muhl I just want to know what is the hourly fee, because I want to pay the fee."

Well, they were sophisticated enough, Dalton was anyway, to know that if you get interviewed and you pay an attorney, that interview is privileged, just like a confession to a priest or a visit to a doctor. So that was the end of that. That was the end of his having to have a meeting. Then a little bit later, Muhl calls me in again. Oh, and by the way, Dalton said to me, "By the way, if Muhl wants to know about my politics—." Because all they wanted to hear from Dalton is that he wasn't what he was before, period. So he said, "If he wants to know my politics, give him this to read," and he gave me a booklet called The Time of the Toad [1949. You know that booklet?

Yes.

LEWIS

Okay. And I met with Muhl and I said, "Here's what Mr. Trumbo says," and I have this pamphlet and I put it on his desk. He wouldn't look at it, he wouldn't touch it, he wouldn't go near it. Okay. A little bit later, Muhl calls me into the meeting again and he said, "You have got to go and tell Trumbo now, there was no such thing as a blacklist and there is no such thing as the blacklist, and he needs to know that, and then all we want to know—," I told you. So Dalton says to me, "Okay. Go back and tell him here's the deal I'll take. Tell them I'll sign what they want me to sign, on one condition: they take full-page ads in the trades stating what he said, 'There was no blacklist, there is no blacklist now, and to prove it, we are going to agree that the first and any subsequent times a role comes up that suits Gail Sondergaard, a multi-Academy Award winning blacklisted actress, Universal will hire her for that role.'" That was the end of that.

So what I'm trying to say is Dalton was maneuvering the whole thing with who gets credit and how, and he urged me to keep pushing Kirk, keep pushing, and not on moral grounds, but that it's the best thing for him and it's going to be great for him. You know, I found—there's an article in one of the trades when Kirk was given the Bill of Rights, the ACLU Bill of Rights Award. I have that if you don't have it. He gives a long interview in which he credits me for having done all of this, that, "If Eddie Lewis hadn't been prodding me and pushing me and prodding me, I would never have done any of this." And that's what I was doing, but it wasn't my doing, it was Dalton's doing. And that's how we ended up. I mean, the stories that I've read, I haven't read Kirk's book, that there was a meeting, he said, with himself and the director—

CEPLAIR

Kubrick.

LEWIS

—[Stanley] Kubrick, in which Kirk says he said, "Okay, now we need to have somebody's name on the script. Who do you think it should be?" And he says in the meeting Kubrick said, "Well, put my name on it." And Kirk was horrified. And in the interview that I've seen, and I guess in his book he says, "I looked in Eddie Lewis' eyes, and that look taught me and showed me that I knew what I then had to do. I had to give the credit to Dalton." Well, there was never a meeting like this, and I never heard Kubrick. I was not fond of him at all, but I never heard him say, "Put my name on the script." Okay. That's one more story.

CEPLAIR

Well, I'd like to know more about the making of Spartacus, I mean, what problems you ran into, how you solved them.

LEWIS

Well, the making was very difficult. First of all, there were four directors on the movie: Kirk Douglas, Laurence Olivier, Charles Laughton, Peter Ustinov, and the director that was assigned. The first guy [Anthony Mann], poor guy, you know, he had a bad heart anyway, and he couldn't handle it. Kirk brought in Kubrick, and the British contingent hated him. Olivier once got me aside and said, "Dear boy, how could you have hired an illiterate like that? There's no culture. Look at the way he dresses. And he knows nothing about history, nothing about Roman history, and he isn't interested in learning about it," and that was true. He didn't give a shit about the project. As you know, he later on—he never includes it in lists of films that he made. It was never his. He took the job for one reason: money and prestige. And he really didn't give a damn at all about the picture. The tension was terrible. Every one of the directors that I named, including Kirk, made beelines to Dalton's house to get him to rewrite their scenes. Whenever Kirk describes his meetings with Dalton Trumbo, he was there as an actor fighting to get better lines and more written. Anyway, the shooting then went the way shooting does. They were, for me—I was never stressed out by any of this because I didn't take any of them too

seriously, but there came a point that the film did not look too good to me. We had several editors on, and they would assemble the dailies. So one day I called Dalton and said, "I'd like you to see the movie." Kirk's vision of Dalton being there under disguise and stuff like that, it's another fantasy of his, believe me. I set up a screening for Trumbo to look at the movie. Have you seen what he's written?

CEPLAIR

Yes, I've seen the report.

LEWIS

You've seen the report and you've read it.

CEPLAIR

Yes.

LEWIS

Okay. The real part of it that bothered him is that there was no slave life at all portrayed, and the result of this is that he wrote a long series of little sketches we reshot on the back lot of Universal. We built the slave camp. Everything in the movie where you see the slaves, dancing, eating, whatever they're doing, they're doing on Universal's back lot, and that's when he conceived that it was vital that there be [the I'm Spartacus] scene. The Romans came across better in the movie than the slaves did. Part of it was my fault and Kirk's. We never cast anybody with any character in the roles of the slaves, with the exception of a black guy [Woody Strode] who duels him. The rest were really nonentities. How they were picked, I have no idea. I certainly didn't argue against them, but we had no characters that were developed there, and that's where the "I, Spartacus" scene came from. So that was it. We did some shooting in Spain. The kinds of things that I was very good at is we needed a big lush set for the Roman baths, the Roman pool, and I got the—

CEPLAIR

Hearst Castle.

LEWIS

Hearst Castle. Nobody shot there before. They told me, "You can't do that." All right. We got the cameras there. We needed an army, and there were budget restraints, so I got the Spanish Army, I'm embarrassed to say, to be partners with us. They provided the army free, all the marching, everything. It wasn't as big an army as it looks to be, but it was large. What the camera did, the camera would be here, and the soldiers would be out of view behind the hill, and then they would come into view and pass by, hundreds of troops, not thousands, and then they would go out of view here. But what they would do is come back and the same bunch would keep coming in front of the camera and going around and coming out. So I got the Spanish army. We gave a contribution to [Francisco] Franco's favorite charity. I'm not proud of any of this, but, anyway, you asked me what went on in the picture. That's what went on.

CEPLAIR

In this latest book, Douglas says that it was his idea, the "I am Spartacus" scene, that Kubrick didn't want it, and he intimidated and pushed Kubrick into it.

LEWIS

No.

CEPLAIR

That's not true?

LEWIS

No. Total nonsense. Kirk's not a writer. I mean, it's so offensive, really, to Trumbo, but Kirk was an offensive guy, period.

CEPLAIR

So at the same time that Trumbo was doing Spartacus, he's also working on Brave Cowboy, which you also had brought to Bryna. Can you tell us something about the Brave Cowboy?

LEWIS

Yes, I'll tell you. There wasn't much about that that was unusual—Dalton wrote a wonderful script. It was shot unlike any other movie that I had anything to do with. It was shot exactly according to the screenplay. The screenplay was like a blueprint for a house. David Miller shot it. I know how easily this was. I think his mother died in the middle of shooting, and we had no replacement, so I was the director for two days, which shows you what it took. All you had to do is read Dalton's script. It was very easy. The camera should be here. Tell the cameraman, "The camera should be here. Where do you want it?" He sets up the camera. Action. So there was no problem. The movie was just one of my favorite movies.

CEPLAIR

But Universal didn't handle the movie very well, did it?

LEWIS

Oh, Universal screwed the movie up. They decided that it was a Western. They decided to have the world premiere in Texas with a big rodeo as the background. Obviously didn't work for that audience, and the picture never got national reviews. I shouldn't say never. Months later, Kirk put a lot of pressure on and wrote letters and made phone calls, and Newsweek and/or Time did end up reviewing the movie, but by that time, you know, the horse was long out of the barn.

CEPLAIR

Then according to my notes, you also brought about the same time Sundown at Crazy Horse or The Last Sunset to—

LEWIS

That was a bad movie. Dalton wrote the screenplay, and I know he's got a letter in one of his books in which he announces that he's publicly shamed when he looks at that movie. It was a bad movie.

CEPLAIR

What were the problems with it? I mean, why did it not work out, from your vantage point?

LEWIS

I can't tell you. I have no emotional involvement with the picture. It was one of the things where we needed to get movies for Kirk, and the studio would want stars. We'd get stars, had to find locations because there was a cattle drive, but it was nothing interesting and certainly nothing challenging.

CEPLAIR

So then you go on to do The List of Adrian Messenger. That, I think, is your next project. What was that like?

LEWIS

That's another one that had a very ordinary book. It was Swifty Lazar who brought that book to me, and it needed something to get made. So I can't remember whose suggestion it was, it might have just been mine, went to John Huston. What I didn't know then, but I've come to learn, everybody has their own agenda. John was very enthusiastic about the project and said, yes, he would direct it, but his enthusiasm was for one reason. John was a foxhunting maven. I mean he was crazy about foxhunts. The guy who runs the foxhunt wears special wardrobe and he saw the ending to this movie being in the middle of a foxhunt. It was not in the story, but it was what he saw he was going to do with it. And, of course, he had this wonderful home in Ireland that he was generous enough to let Millie and I stay in for a weekend. So that's what his involvement was. So it was an ordinary who-done-it book and it was an ordinary screenplay, and now he wanted to shoot the whole thing in Ireland around a foxhunt, but it needed a gimmick. So someone came up with a gimmick—I don't remember who, it might have been John—and that is that we put all the main characters in disguise, and at the end of the movie we have them take off the disguise and reveal to the audience who played them. So I said, okay, the key then, I'm going to get an all-star cast, because if they're going to be in disguise, they don't have to be around for the whole shoot. We can have doubles do most of the work, and some of them can come in and work for a couple of days, maybe a week. So I got everybody.

One of the special ones was Frank Sinatra, and I remember the day Sinatra came on to the set. He walked onto the set, we're all waiting for him, the camera's ready, he says, "Okay, everybody listening? Yes. You've got one take and I'm outta here." [laughter] So that's the way it went, and we had a huge list of male stars that all did it for Huston and also short work and good money, but there was nothing distinguished about the movie at all, and the truth is, even the makeup wasn't very good. But I did learn a lot about foxhunting, because John spent weeks shooting in every detail an accurate foxhunt, how you start it, who blew what, who said what and when. He really did a foxhunt, and he loved doing it. And he was a charmer. There was the charmer of all charmers that I've ever met. He could get anybody to do what he wanted. And that's it.

CEPLAIR

I guess David Miller was probably an easy director to work with for you.

LEWIS

Very. David followed Dalton's script, nothing, no problem. No, the easiest director I worked with, John Frankenheimer.

CEPLAIR

Well, we'll get to him.

LEWIS

Okay.

CEPLAIR

So also in that year when you're doing Adrian Messenger, I guess now we'll get to Cuckoo's Nest. So how did that project arise?

LEWIS

If I remember correctly, it was Millie who gave me the book and said, "This would make a terrific movie," and I gave it to Kirk and

he liked it. We couldn't get a movie off the ground. Nobody would finance the movie.

CEPLAIR

Because?

LEWIS

I don't know. It was too controversial. Part of it obviously had to do, I guess, with the casting. Kirk was a little on the nose for that part. Anyway, we got the idea then of let's try it out, do it as a play first, and if the play succeeds, then we'll get the movie made. So Kirk put me in touch with David Merrick, because I knew nothing about Broadway, and Merrick had really no interest in it, but he lent his name so that we could get a theater and the whole thing. I picked Dale Wasserman just from reading a bunch of playwrights. I can't remember the name of the director [Alex Segal] now; nice guy. But we put the play on, and it bombed. The opening night, we were at the classic place, one of the fancy restaurants where you wait for the reviews to come in, and Merrick, Kirk, and I were having a dinner or something. Merrick left. He said, "I'll be back with the reviews." When he came back, he said, "Close the show." Two of the three reviews that were important were bad, so he said, "Close the show," and he left. I was alone with Kirk. Kirk said, "I'm not letting anybody know that we've fallen on our ass, so I want you to paper the house and I want to keep the show going." He did—I have the dates—for a couple of months. So he said, "I'm going to be able, then, long enough so I can say that I had to leave for previous commitments." So he papered the house every night. This takes guts, by the way, to put on a show knowing that everybody there you've paid to come see. Did I give you the dates?

CEPLAIR

I think it opened November 13th and closed January 25th.

LEWIS

That's it. That's it. So that's two months, right?

CEPLAIR

Yes. [interruption]

LEWIS

Last thing and important, there was an option when we had the play written. We had an option to acquire the motion picture rights, and there was a deadline, and that deadline was during the first week of the show. I remember specifically standing in the back of the theater, and we didn't know how it was going, and I knew that the option date was coming, and I sent word to Kirk that the option date was here and he ought to pick up the option for the film rights, and they did. So that was the last of my contributions. He never could get it made with him. He gave it to Michael [Douglas] and—

CEPLAIR

His son.

LEWIS

The son. They never got along, as you probably know. I'm not getting into gossip, but it was a bitter blow to Kirk when Michael won an Academy Award for acting and he didn't. There was terrible rivalry there. Anyway, that's that.

CEPLAIR

I have a couple questions. Did you enjoy working on Broadway producing a play?

LEWIS

Sure. I enjoyed it a lot.

CEPLAIR

Better than motion pictures or just different?

LEWIS

No, different.

CEPLAIR

Just different.

LEWIS

Different. No, I just enjoyed the movies. I handled the pressure easily. I handled the people easily. I'll give you an example. When we were casting about for a director for Seven Days in May, so I liked John Frankenheimer and what he'd been doing, so I called him in and we had a meeting. I remember we were sitting at one of these director's desks like I have, that's open all the way through, and he's sitting opposite me. He loved the book. I said a few things. "I have to tell you, Kirk is going to play one of the leads and Burt Lancaster is going to play another."

I knew he had done a movie with Burt. And I see him with a handkerchief, twisting underneath there. And he said, "I swore I'd never work with Burt again." And he tells me a story how he had a set, a camera set, set up on the last movie, and Burt came in and said, "No, that's the wrong place for the camera. It ought to be here," told them where to move it to. And when Burt left, John said, "I told the cameraman, 'Don't touch it. It would take a half hour to change the lights and camera. Wait. When a half hour's up, tell him we're ready for him,'" because he was going to show who was running the show. So they called him out in half an hour, and then John showed me, he said, "Lancaster looked where it was." Burt was a very strong man. Frankenheimer was much taller. He was six-four or six-five. And he said, "He grabbed me here, like this, picked me up, moved me over to where he said the camera should be, put me down and said, 'Here's where the camera has to be.'" So he said, "I said I'd never work with him again." So I said, "John, I'll give you a promise. You will not have any problems with Burt Lancaster. This is what I'm good at. You will not be sorry you took the picture because of Burt Lancaster." That, by the way, was really something that I excelled at doing. I was able to handle guys like Burt and Kirk and many others like that. Don't ask me how or why, but I was totally confident and I was not afraid. So that's an aside. [incident happened on Young Savages or Birdman of Alcatraz]

CEPLAIR

Did you have much contact with Ken Kesey during this?

LEWIS

Yes, an interesting one. He invited Millie and I to come out to Big Sur to his house for dinner. So we drove to Big Sur and deep into the woods. We come to this house mobbed with people around, smoking. Millie had to go to the john, so we went into the house. First of all, we opened the door and Millie said, "I can't walk in there." [laughs] It was unbelievable. There's such a thing as contact high. You just had to open the door and you had it. So she ran to the john, came out, and said, "We're outta here." [laughter] That's my contact with him.

CEPLAIR

So you were talking about, I guess, Burt Lancaster, Kirk Douglas when you were talking about was Seven Days in May, right?

LEWIS

Yes.

CEPLAIR

So how did you and John Frankenheimer come together?

LEWIS

Well, I have more to tell you about Seven Days in May, because that was one of the interesting ones. The story, as you know, was very political, and it was the number-one bestseller, and nobody bought it because the Pentagon didn't want to have anything to do with it, and studios depended on the Pentagon. They had a deal, "Make movies that are favorable to the army, navy, marine corps, and we'll give you planes, tanks, guns, uniforms, soldiers, all free." That was the deal. War films were cash cows, so no studio was going to take a chance and get the Pentagon upset, so everybody turned this down. Number-one bestseller for a long time on The New York Times bestseller list. So we were able to get it. Okay.

Now, I got Rod Serling to write the screenplay, but now we needed to know that we had some White House backing. So I called the White House, I got through to Pierre Salinger, and he said that [John F.] Kennedy had read the book and liked it, and he was all for our making it on one condition, that we cast an older man as the president, not a young man like him. And he said, "He'd be happy with Frederic March or Spencer Tracy," and that's how we cast and why we cast Frederic March.

So now I go about the normal business, go to Washington, D.C., get permits to shoot, get a crew ready to go there, and we got to the Capitol and the permit has been rescinded. No permission to shoot now. So, between me and John, there were a lot of guts there, so the opening scene of the movie was on the street in front of the White House —do you remember the movie?

CEPLAIR

Vaguely.

LEWIS

Oh, too bad. It was on last night. It's a very good movie. The opening scene of the movie is a riot that occurs on the streets outside the White House between people who are protesting against and in favor of a new nonaggression pact that the president has just signed with the Soviet Union. So we need to create this scene with no permission. So we go to a YMCA and pick up eight or nine bodybuilders, put them in civilian dress, give them picket signs, and John rehearses this whole thing meticulously. He's one of them. He puts a handheld camera, straps it on his back, has another cameraman as one of the guys, and the musclemen are instructed, on John's cue while they're marching with real—these are the real protestors who are out there, except we've gotten eight or nine of our musclemen in between. He gives them the signal and they start a fight. The signal was very well orchestrated, because also on cue we had a camera car that was disguised. It was a station wagon, had all the windows blocked out, little holes for the lens, two cameras, one in the back, one in the side. On signal, as soon as our

musclemen started to fight, our camera went by, took the shots—there's some wonderful action, by the way—picked up John and off we went with the film. Then we also needed film of—Kirk walking up to the steps into the Pentagon. So we did, again, the same thing, and we had a grip. We had no stars with us. It was just a skeleton crew, John, me, and I have three or four other guys we had in a uniform just like Kirk, and from the back, this grip in Kirk's uniform walks up the step, and our station wagon goes by. As the soldier saw him coming down—he was in a colonel's uniform—they salute him. We had the film [camera] on his back. That was that. I'm just telling you an idea of how tough it can get to shoot.

Then the next thing that happened is we had a whole sequence—I'm sorry you haven't seen the movie—in the desert, and we had arrangements to shoot in Yuma, Arizona. Everything was arranged, the motels are booked, everything is there, the cars that we needed. When we get to Yuma, everything is off. They wouldn't rent us a hotel room, a motel room. We couldn't rent a car. We couldn't do a damn thing. The Pentagon had put out word, "Don't do it." So we had to skip around that. Then we come to a critical scene in the movie where the good guy, the president's guy, Martin Balsam, has to deliver a message to the admiral at sea who is going to be the key guy as to whether there's going to be an overthrow of the government or whether that plot is going to fail. So the key thing was getting this guy onto a destroyer. So now it's John and me and two more people. We go down to San Diego, because here's what I was really good at. I said, "Come on. We'll do it. We'll get it." We go to San Diego, and, of course, they had parked, as you know, often down there, destroyers not too far off shore. So John says, "I'd give anything to get on that destroyer." So I said, "Give me a dime," and I made a phone call to the base. I told them who I was, "My name is Eddie Lewis. I'm producer of a movie. We would love to take one shot on the destroyer." I didn't tell him the name. I just said, "My director is here. He is heartbroken that he can't get on just for one shot. Can I speak to the commanding officer?"

"He's on the golf course." "Well, can you find him for me? It's urgent. I have the crew." So they find the commanding officer on a golf course, and they get him on the phone, and I get him. He's on the phone, and I told him the same thing, who I am. "I'm producing a picture for a major studio. We only need ten minutes. It would make all the difference for our film." He says, "Where are you?" So I described where we are. There was a little pier there. He says, "Okay, I know it. Wait there. A boat will come and pick you up." So in about ten minutes a powerboat comes, and John and I and the cameraman and Balsam get in this boat, and they take us out to the destroyer. Not only do they take us out, but we get piped aboard. [laughter] Okay. Now we get onto the destroyer, and John gets his shot. Then he says, "Boy, I love this here." I'll make it short. We shot there for an hour. We must have made twenty or thirty different shots with all the people, and I'm going around with release pads from the people that are going to be on film. The officers are all fighting to get in the shot, everybody wanted to be in the movie. John, there was no limits to him. Now we're finished and we're ready to go, and he says, "Look out there. There's another destroyer not too far away. It would be fantastic if when our guy gets in the boat to go out, the other destroyer is coming this way."

So I said to the commander of the ship, I said, "How much trouble would it be if when our guy goes out, could you get the other commander to have his destroyer come by and cross in the shot?" No problem at all. Anyway, it made for a great sequence. I don't know whose ass got kicked when they saw the movie, but there were a lot of people in trouble as a result, and I loved it and so did John. Okay. That's it. That's Seven Days in May.

CEPLAIR

How did you happen to get to work with Frankenheimer? Did you just approach him with this project, or did he come to you, or how did you—

LEWIS

How Frankenheimer?

CEPLAIR

How did you two start working together?

LEWIS

No, no, I called him. I was looking for a director, and I knew his work from television and I thought he was perfect for this movie. I called him in for an interview, and he came, and that's the interview that I described. We just got along great. The next thing I did with him—you have the sequence better than I do.

CEPLAIR

Seconds, I think. So you had told me earlier that you and he decided you didn't want to work with Kirk Douglas anymore; you wanted to go off and do—

LEWIS

The next time I worked with John was on Grand Prix. Can we skip to that?

CEPLAIR

Yes.

LEWIS

Kirk, after a while, was pressuring me. "I don't like the idea," he said, "that the only pictures Bryna makes, they make because I'm the star. I want you to put together movies that can be made without me." So I did, and he didn't like that. What happened, when the pictures were a success, he'd demand, "How come I'm not in that movie? How come you put this guy in the movie?"

So that's how Grand Prix came about. Working for Kirk was extremely difficult. He was a very—how can I call him? "Demanding" would be a kind word. Not me, less me than anybody else, the attorneys, the tax attorneys, the accountants, the publicists, his family, he was really cruel and he was enormously critical, not, by the way, with me. I don't know why, except he did know that he needed me. He liked very much that I was getting

these movies made. He once said—Millie and I were at some function with him, something honoring Spartacus or something, where he told people around, "The biggest mistake I ever made was letting Eddie Lewis go. I should have made him a partner. We would have owned the industry," he said. But, anyway, I loved working with John and he loved working with me. If I weren't embarrassed, I would read you something that he gave in an interview with somebody doing a book on him about working with me, which was so different from the relationship I had with Kirk. Can I read that?

CEPLAIR

Of course you should read it.

LEWIS

Well, just read it—this is a book called—do you know Gerald Pratley?

CEPLAIR

No. I know the book, though.

LEWIS

The Cinema of John Frankenheimer.

CEPLAIR

Yes.

LEWIS

Oh, you know the book.

CEPLAIR

Yes.

LEWIS

You know everything, then.

CEPLAIR

Well, some things.

LEWIS

He says, "This leads me to the most important and meaningful development in my life, my relationship with Edward Lewis. In Eddie I found a partner who was not only tremendously and creatively gifted, I also found my alter ego. We got along so well." Anyway, I'm not going to read it. It's embarrassing. But it's a whole page and more about how great he felt, and that was such a change from what I was used to. So we formed a company. It was called Frankenheimer-Lewis Productions. A very simple structure: whatever the director's fee we were going to get on the project, John kept. Whatever the producer's fee was, I kept. And we split the profits fifty-fifty. We had a working relationship. John needed money. He lived very, very luxuriously, and I will explain some of it when we get to The Fixer. But he told me, "The one thing I really need is I've got to make two pictures a year." So that meant I had to leapfrog him. I would find the project. Naturally, he approved it. Then if it required location work, I went and scouted the locations on all of them. I would film them on 8mm, bring them back, and tell John, "Here's where you're going to be shooting." Meantime, we're working on the script. Now came time to shoot, he went to shoot while I'm working to get another picture set up. When he finished shooting, I would do the first cut—this is very unusual in relationship—and he was doing something else. I would do the first cut, give it to him, and he would do the last cut. So it was really a collaboration, and I really loved working with him, and he did. As you've read this, you know.

So we got along just great. I was a perfect counterpart for him, because I didn't want anything that was important to him. I didn't want any of the glory. I didn't want the publicity. I was happy to let him have it. It was no sacrifice, by the way, to me. I don't want to make it sound that way. But I got what I wanted and he got what he wanted. But it didn't always work out very well, by the way. On Seconds, we went to Cannes. We were the American official entry at the Cannes [Film] Festival, and the word we heard was that we were going to win the Palme D'Or. I'm there with John in Cannes,

and I said, “Look, John, this is your glory. I don’t want it. Why don’t you go by yourself. I’ll stay home tonight. Take the credit. You deserve it.” Of course, he got there, and the minute the picture was finished screening, they started booing. It was a horror. It was the worst time of his life, John said. So it didn’t always work out for us.

CEPLAIR

How about Grand Prix? Are there any stories that we would be interested that occurred during the making of that?

LEWIS

I’m going pretty fast here. Well, yes. To get Grand Prix made, we needed to get the approval of all the racetracks where he was shooting them. You can’t stage Grand Prix races. First of all, they have crowds of tens of thousands and more, they have all the drivers, they have the whole audience. You can’t stage it. So John said, “The only way I can make this movie, is you’ve got to get me permission to shoot,” and he named the racetracks he wanted, starting with Monte Carlo and a half a dozen more. That was a major, major undertaking, to convince these racetracks that it was going to be good for them to let John shoot. What he needed is he equipped two cars, very special equipment, with cameras mounted on the front, the back, and two sides, and driven by one of our drivers who was a trained racecar driver. And we would shoot during the race. The car would see to it he was not going to get in anybody’s way. But all around the race, whenever there was an accident, the car was there, and we had fantastic shots.

I also got permission to have cameras in the audience, and I had hired Saul Bass to do the title sequence, so Saul directed all the crowd shots. He had half a dozen cameras all over the place. So that was the triumph of getting something done that worked. Then John shot so much film, I think we had a million feet of film exposed. I get a call when we’re finished shooting, the head of M-G-M [Robert O'Brien], that he’s in a big stock fight and he’s worried about losing his job as president of M-G-M. He asked me is there any way I could get Grand Prix out into the theaters in December

before the stockowners' meeting. So I said yes. You know, the answer is always yes. So I go back to John and I said, "John, we're going to have the president of MGM indebted to you. Can you get the picture cut?" There was a million feet of film. He said, "Well, I'm going to have to move into the studio, and I need three editing teams going around the clock." I said, "Fine. We'll set them up." And that's what he did, and we got a print in time for the opening in—too soon. There was no time to really refine it, but we made a big friend of the president of MGM, and he green-lighted a couple of movies for us later that should never have been made.

1.2. Session Two (August 31, 2012)

CEPLAIR

It is August 31st, and this is the second session with Eddie Lewis. You had some comments from yet our last session you wanted to make.

LEWIS

I did. You said something in there that makes me think that I need to clarify a little bit as to who I am.

CEPLAIR

Okay. Keep going.

LEWIS

You used the word "hustle," all right, after I described some of that. I don't remember which one it was. So I looked up hustle in the dictionary, and hustle is defined as meaning "to obtain something by underhanded activity or by fraud or deception." So I want to make clear that I am not and was never a hustler, and I want to clarify that I'm quite different, I think, in personality and the way I approach things from the way you do. You're a historian. Details are vital to you. They are not to me. My modus operandi was to find an objective, something that needed to be done, try to understand why the people wanted it done wanted it done, and to go about doing it. I was never frightened of failing, which I did many times, and I've

never turned away from a challenge, even though it looked ridiculous. That was my call, hallmark, and I think that's what attracted, unfortunately, people like Kirk Douglas to me. But what I did, I did honestly. I worked hard. Hustlers, I think, find an easy way to get things done. I remember one of your early comments to me when you looked at the list of activities that I had put down, and you said, "Wow, you sure were busy." And I was, and I am, and I work hard at it. So the idea of being misunderstood as hustling stuck badly in my craw, and I want to explain briefly. It would have been one of these incidents. Going back to the first film, the writing of the script for Richard Oswald, I never misrepresented for a moment who I was, what my credits were, which were none, what my experience was, which was none. All that happened is that I knew that he was desperate to get a movie made in America. He needed a decent screenplay. I heard what he had, it was terrible, and I just knew, because that's my personality, that I could do better, so I did. But I never deceived him and said, "Listen to this. I have this script." Nothing, never.

When I went to the bank, by the way, to get the bank loan, I never deceived them. They knew exactly who I was or, really, who I wasn't. Why did they give me the loan? I gave them the credits for the director, I gave them the actors that he had cast, and I gave them a budget that had been prepared. They wanted to make the loan, just like banks now want to make loans, because that's how they make their profit. I never talked them into it and I never deceived them. The third one that it could have been, I suppose, was the Pepsi-Cola thing. I made a pilot for a television series. That was at a time when there was very little filming done on television, and they were impressed with that. When I say I, I had a writer, Marion Parsomnet. I mentioned him. They called me into New York and interviewed me at length, high up in the Pepsi headquarters building on Fifth Avenue. Again, I never told them that I had any background that prepared me to do what they wanted to do, but they know what they wanted. They could have had any architect, any designer in the world, and could have had a first-class special operation built. That is not what they wanted. They were anxious to

get their little show on film so that they could syndicate it, as I mentioned, across the country, and it would, therefore, be much more profitable than it was now.

So I suited that purpose, and I never deceived them. I never misrepresented who I was. They asked me, "Do you think you could do this?" when they told me what was wanted, and I always felt that I could. That's just my personality. I couldn't see any reason why not. And I told them that I had never done anything like this, of course, but, yes, I could. So they gave me the job to do it. But it was not a hustle, and that's all.

CEPLAIR

Actually, I meant that in the most positive sense of the term, in the sense of someone who saw his opportunities and took them and was relatively fearless about trying new challenges.

LEWIS

Okay. Nothing personal, but the word stuck as I was listening back to what happened, and I'm sure other people have thought the same thing about me, but I just wanted to clarify that. So that's it. That's done. Okay. We now go on to—

CEPLAIR

There was one other anecdote about Seven Days in May you wanted to add about Pierre Salinger.

LEWIS

Yes, just a line that might be of interest to people. When I came to Washington with the crew to start shooting, and I learned that the permit to shoot had been rescinded, I arranged to meet with [Pierre] Salinger. I had spoken with him—I don't know if I went into that before—over the telephone, so I got an appointment to see him in the White House and I told him what was going on, that we needed help. The opening of the movie took place on the sidewalk outside the White House, and we needed a permit to shoot it. It was a very short meeting. He said, "Eddie, we control what goes on

inside the White House. We have no say or control over anything that occurs outside the front door," so there was nothing he could do about it. And that's how come we went about finding a way of doing it illegally. That's all.

CEPLAIR

Now, on Seconds, you had an anecdote about Laurence Olivier?

LEWIS

Yes. Seconds was an interesting novel brought to me, again, by Irving Lazar, who was the premier literary agent in Hollywood. You don't know the story, do you?

CEPLAIR

No, I don't.

LEWIS

It's an interesting story. It's called Seconds because it's about a man who's dissatisfied with his life in middle age, and there is a science-fiction-type organization in existence at that time where you were offered a chance for a second life, and they created an entirely new life for these people. In return, they took all their assets, but it included not only a social life and activities that were brand new, but it included very advanced plastic surgery so that when you came out of this operation, this mysterious operation, you were, in fact, a different person. It's a very interesting story not only because of the sci-fi aspects, but it was a very human story. So I liked it, and we got the script developed, and I knew then that there was only one actor that could do this, the before and the after, and that was Laurence Olivier. I sent him the script, and he liked it a lot. He really wanted to do it. So now I went to Universal and said, "Here's who I want to star in it." And they said, "Forget it. He's no box-office draw. Nobody pays money at the box office to see a Laurence Olivier movie. We'll make the movie if you use Rock Hudson," who was under contract then to Universal.

Well, obviously, I caved. What was important was that we got the movie made, unfortunately. So the movie is a failure, a total failure, for the reason that Rock could not play before and after, two roles, so we had two actors. We had one actor who played the character before, and then out of the surgery came Rock Hudson. Ridiculous, unfortunately, so the movie did not work. But as I had mentioned to you before, it did have a few things good about it. It won the Academy Award for cinematography. The Chinese cameraman James Wong Howe won the Academy Award. It gave parts for the first time to three blacklisted actors who had not worked since the blacklist: Will Geer, who played the heavy, the head of this new operation, Jeff Corey and John Randolph, who played the actor before he was converted to Rock Hudson.

CEPLAIR

Was that deliberate on your part to get—

LEWIS

Oh, of course. Oh, yes.

CEPLAIR

How did you know about these blacklisted actors, just in general because people in Hollywood knew that?

LEWIS

Yes, we knew who was blacklisted. When I had made Schlitz Playhouse, I ran into the blacklist in a very overt fashion, because it had a commercial aspect to it. They had someone in my office practically all the time watching what was going on. One of the things that it did is I had to submit to them the names of all the people I was going to employ. So it was their bald-faced, "You can't use this actor. You can't use that actor." So I was very well aware of what it was.

CEPLAIR

Actually, stay on that subject for a minute. So Universal could be very difficult in terms of getting a project made the way you hoped to make it?

LEWIS

No. As long as I made it the way they wanted it to be made, it was no problem, they left you alone, but it had to be the way they wanted to make it. Laurence Olivier, they laughed at me. "He's no box office."

CEPLAIR

Did you think of maybe taking that project to another studio?

LEWIS

No, no, no, that was impractical. It would never happen. First of all, it was a difficult project, and I realized that. How many actors could play this role? John Randolph turning into Rock Hudson. [laughter]

CEPLAIR

Then on Grand Prix, were you going to tell us something about Princess Grace [of Monaco]?

LEWIS

Well, no, very, very minor. I shouldn't even bring this up. It's so unimportant, but it was for me. I was still a kid from Camden, New Jersey, and being invited to a ball at the castle there and dancing with her, you know, it was kind of exotic for me. I remember I rented a tuxedo. Millie wasn't there. But it's not the kind of thing that I'm proud of at all.

CEPLAIR

It's interesting.

LEWIS

As a matter of fact, my date, now I'm remembering, was Harriet Andersson [the original choice, replaced by Eva Marie Saint], who was then the lead in Grand Prix. What often happened, as I

mentioned to you with John [Frankenheimer] and me, is he would be there shooting, and I would be home, number one, which I wanted with my family and also setting up the next project. But very often I would get these urgent calls, "I need you. You have to come immediately." That occurred on Grand Prix in the first week, and I flew there, and he told me, "Eddie, the actress isn't pretty enough. She won't work in this movie. You have to get rid of her." And we had to get someone else. So she was my date to the ball. Okay.

CEPLAIR

That's good. Now, I wanted to interject here something since you're now kind of an independent producer, and maybe you can introduce Ernesto Cardenal to us.

LEWIS

All right. I was then at very luxurious offices at Universal. And I'm trying to remember. Millie and I went to Nicaragua [1980s]. We were interested in what was going on there. I saw something possible for a movie, actually. We got to know the premier. What's his name now?

CEPLAIR

Ortega, Daniel Ortega.

LEWIS

Ortega and his wife, and we got along well with these people. We went off to where the action was. We had a great trip, and I invited them anytime anybody came to Universal, if they wanted a tour, I could arrange a tour of the studio. So one day, they called and here was this Ernest Cardenal, who I believe was the national poet, and he was in the city, and he wanted to make a tour of the studio. So I got one of the go-carts and put him in it, and drove him all around the back lot and showed him how studios looked and what they did, and he was totally fascinated with it. Then later, he sent me this poem.

CEPLAIR

The title is Among the Facades.

LEWIS

Among the Facades.

CEPLAIR

And in it he says, he wrote—

LEWIS

Excuse me. The facades being the sets on the back lot. You know, we had streets. I was proud of the fact that one of the streets had Spartacus. A couple of the main sets from Spartacus are still a part of the Universal tour. The rest of it is all facades, as you know. Have you ever taken it?

CEPLAIR

Yes, a couple times. He wrote, "The producer who teaches me everything—," and then in parentheses, "Ed Lewis, tells me, quote, 'neither the director nor the producer nor anyone is the boss in a movie. It's the bank that funds it.'" End of quotation.

LEWIS

Very accurate then. Hasn't changed.

CEPLAIR

How is it that the bank controls? By what procedures or what techniques does a bank control a movie?

LEWIS

Well, you know, I did once get an inside look. Martin Davis once came to me when I was at Paramount, he was a top executive of Paramount in New York, not the studio—he asked me "Can you see Paramount in your future?" I didn't really know what that meant, and I said, "Yes." I liked it. We were headquartered then, Kirk and I, at Paramount. They brought me back to New York to meet with

the president of the corporation that ran Paramount, not the running of the studio, but the boss of Paramount. I met him, was interviewed, went to a fancy lunch with a couple of the board members, and they laid out generally what it would be like. They were considering me for—they needed at that time a new head of production. Can you picture anybody worse for that than me at the studio? They laid out how it was going to work, how I would have to be in New York at least once a week, meet with them, give them reports, lay out how much money was going to be needed, project what I thought the pictures would make. It was all a business thing, and it sounded very distasteful and unpleasant to me, and I turned it down, not that I would have gotten the job, but I took myself out of consideration.

So I knew firsthand where the buck lay. No head of any local studio has the authority to green-light a picture. They have the authority to turn it down, but they don't have the authority to green-light a picture. You want to get a green light, you go to New York, say here's how much money, lay out all the aspects of it that are of concern to a bank: how reliable is it, that it's going to get finished on time, how reliable is the director in charge of it and so forth and so on, and they make a banker's decision as to whether this is a good or a bad investment. They, too, have guidelines. I learned they have their own budget. They'll decide at the beginning of the year that they will make X number of pictures that are budgeted between this and that, and then a little bit larger number that are budgeted lower than that, and then a third category for low-budget pictures that are risks but have a chance of making a profit. So they had their own guidelines, but it's a financial decision, and that's where the controls of the movies exist, period. No question about it. There's nobody else. For example, Lew Wasserman had enormous control, but that's because he owned the studio as well as being the head of production. So that's what I told him, and it was true, and he understood that it was true.

CEPLAIR

As long as we're in Central and South America, sometime in 1966 you made a trip to La Paz.

LEWIS

No, that's wrong. La Paz didn't exist. It existed as a result of a trip that we made to meet with César Chávez [head of United Farm Workers Union].

CEPLAIR

Do you want to tell me the story of that?

LEWIS

All right. We went, Millie and I and our kids, to Israel on a trip. We were like you, always traveling. We had a great experience there, particularly around the kibbutz's. We were aware of a struggle that was going on with César and the union. They were always in need of funds. Our house was always used a lot for it. And Millie said, "You know, César ought to follow the model of a Kibbutz. He ought to have a central place where he could bring the members, educate them, have social activities, just like the kibbutz. Why don't we talk to him about it."

So I made a date to meet with César with Millie, and she gave him the idea and the advantages of a kibbutz, the communal aspects of it and everything that it could bring to him. We told him then that, "We're not going to go find it, but if you find the place, we'll put up the money to get it started, and then you'll have to operate it from then on." And that was it. We had no expectation. César never said, "Oh, fantastic, and we'll do it, and I need a week," or whatever it is. We never heard from him again for months and months. And then one day he asked if he could come meet us at the house, our house here. He came here and he said, "We have been looking since that meeting, and we have found a place that would be ideal for us." And he told us there was a tuberculosis sanatorium in Keane, California, that had been closed for years, and the state was auctioning it. He said, "It's ideal for what you've described." I think it was sixty or eighty acres. It had its own fire department, for example. It had all

kinds of buildings, dormitories, fantastic kitchens, dining rooms. It was a fantastic place. It was a big sanatorium and room for lots and lots of people to sleep over. He said, "It's coming up for auction. Do you want to see it?" Or, "I want you to see it." Anyway, he took us there. Not him, because he didn't want to be seen, so somebody drove us around. The property was open for inspection before the auction, and we looked at it and said, "Great. It looks great."

So he said, "I have a meeting called for tomorrow with all the important members of the union," and I attend, and he tells this group that there is this auction coming up. They aren't going to bid on it because they figured if they were visible, they would never get it. By the way, Keane, this location, was in the middle of a very right-wing ranch area, real rabid right-wingers surrounding it. So the idea was that I would do the bidding, take title, and then arrange to get it to them later. So he called this meeting, and he had little pieces of paper he passed out to everybody. So he says, "Eddie Lewis wants to know how much are we willing to pay for the property. What should he bid?" I was putting up the down payment, which was like 40 percent, but they would have to take out a bank loan to sustain the property. So the question that he put to everybody—it was a big table, maybe twenty people there—"What should we tell him is our top price?" So everybody wrote a little number, folded it up, and passed it to him, and César had this pile of the little white pieces of paper. He never opened one of them. He looked at me and he said, "Mr. Lewis, you bid as high as you have to get us the property." So it's an anecdote, but it's true. I went. There were several bidders. I outbid them. I took title to the property in my name. I was the owner. When I say I, it included Millie. It had to be joint, and we owned the property. But then very quickly I learned from my own attorneys that there was a big risk involved in this, because it is in the middle of a volatile area, very right-wing, as I said, guys with guns, and the union is going to take possession of it. I'm alerted that there's tremendous personal liability if there's somebody gets hurt, people get killed. I'm the owner. I'm going to be responsible, me. When I say I, I mean Millie and me.

So my attorney devised a way that we were going to lease the property to the union and give them the option to buy it. In the meantime, I took out ridiculous insurance, one of these personal liability things to protect us. Anyway, now came the big day. By the way, on this property were about eight or nine, as I remember, homes, because the sanatorium heads, the chief doctors—Keane is up in the mountains—they lived there, and they were decent homes. César's dream was that was going to be their home. He was going to move his family there. So now came the day where they were taking possession of the property. It was now leased to them. I wasn't there. César told us this story later. They had a procession of cars from union workers; huge. It was an enormous event. They drive up the mountains to the entrance to—he called it then La Paz; they gave it the name—to the entrance to this place. In the front car was César and his wife [Helen]. They both get out of the car, and César opens the gate like a gracious husband, and she stops. She says, "I can't go in there. César, I will never be able to step foot in there." Then she explained that what had happened is when the sanatorium got funded by the state based upon the number of patients that they were treating. So when they were low on patients, they would send guys out in the area—it was an area with many poor workers—and if they saw a child that looked frail or could possibly be sick, they picked them up and put them in the car and took them to the sanatorium, and César's wife was one of these children. She was picked up and put into the sanatorium, and she spent seven or eight years as an inmate, a patient. She wasn't sick, had nothing at all wrong with her, and it was a horrible experience for her. She said, "I told César I will never be able to go into that place that was his dream."

It turned out later, my short story ["Which will Grow?", Masquerade (Red Hen Press, 2006)] that I wrote has a different ending, has a proper ending, where she came to learn that there was more than a personal reason why they should go live there and make this thing work, so it had a happy ending. Anyway, that's the La Paz story.

CEPLAIR

So is it still functioning yet today?

LEWIS

Oh, of course. Oh, yes. Oh, it's an enormous operation. They house hundreds of workers, bring them in every week. They have classes. They teach the women what to do when they're pregnant, what to do after childbirth. It's a huge educational thing, plus recreational. The farm workers take some turn. I think he has a lottery system where they can come and bring their families for a week. There's a swimming pool there. It's a tremendous facility.

CEPLAIR

Did you have any connection with it after your—

LEWIS

Oh, no, no.

CEPLAIR

Now, I see a note here that you—something about tapes to UCLA?

LEWIS

Yes. After this, Millie and I decided we were going to make a documentary on César, so we interviewed him with less sophisticated equipment than you have and accumulated big rolls of tape. But after a while, it wasn't working between us, César was too religious, too orthodox religious, for us. It wasn't the kind of documentary that we would really be interested in making, so we abandoned it.

Then years later, Millie and I were supporting an organization. I just remembered it recently. It was called Casa Libre [Freedom House]. How we learned always about—people were always trying to raise money, and we were supporters of causes. So here was an organization, it was called Casa Libre, and it was run by a man by the name of Peter Schey, who also ran the Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law. This was what he called the Freedom House, and it was a place that was once Charlie Chaplin's estate

near downtown, and it's where he had poker games regularly, and Langer's Delicatessen, the famous one, would cater these weekly poker games. It was a large property, and what he was using it for was a home for undocumented homeless youths that were stranded in L.A., having tried to come up for jobs from Mexico. They housed twenty, thirty, maybe forty kids, fed them, gave them clothes, had doctors bring their health up to something normal. They got them into schools and found jobs for them. It was doing wonderful work. As a matter of fact, I eventually was on the board. It got to be too much for me, it was too far downtown, so I left. Anyway, this man, at one meeting I had mentioned the César Chávez thing and told them I had all these tapes and I really didn't know what to do with them. So he said, "I'm going to set up a meeting for you. There's a man at UCLA, his name is Chon Noriega, and he heads a Latin-American Studies thing, and he'll be very interested in it." So I had a lunch date with these two men, and he was really interested in it, so I gave him the tapes. I've never heard from him since. I put in a call to him. I don't know if the number is still any good. I haven't gotten a call back. But I will give it to you if you want it.

CEPLAIR

Okay.

LEWIS

So that's it.

CEPLAIR

Now, you also did some work on the Poor People's Campaign.

LEWIS

I did a lot of work on that, Poor People's Campaign. I got approached by Ralph Abernathy and—what's the name of the guy who ended up being the mayor of Atlanta?

CEPLAIR

Andrew Young.

LEWIS

Andrew Young. They were in San Francisco, and they asked me if I could come up and meet with them, and I did. They told me that they were in need of funds. The Poor People's Campaign was just under way, but they were desperate for funds, and could I help. So I set up a fundraiser at the Hollywood Bowl. I got—I hate using the word "I," but it happened to be I did this. I got Barbra Streisand, Harry Belafonte, Bill Cosby, and the trumpet player—

CEPLAIR

Herb Alpert.

LEWIS

—Herb Alpert to agree to appear for free. And it was a fantastic night. Abernathy, Young, a whole bunch of others, Coretta King were there, and we sold out, of course. There was an article in the Los Angeles Times that I found. We raised $142,000. But on top of that, the evening after the next day, the day after the concert, I arranged a fundraiser at my house. Coretta King lived with us, moved in, stayed overnight. We had every leading black politician, educator, all were there. I got a turnout from Hollywood that was not to be believed. There was an article in the L.A. Times that said—I tried to find it to give you, but I have it somewhere but I haven't dug it out—that if somebody dropped a bomb on the Lewis' house, that would be the end of the entertainment industry. Everybody came because César's story was the story that Hollywood mined. It's a story of struggle. It was just a natural. That, by the way, didn't mean that everybody that came was sympathetic to him. A lot of executives came to curry favor with their clients, agents, and so forth. But everybody was there, from Lew Wasserman in the business end, to every actor including, as I will now tell you, Marlon Brando and Burt Lancaster, who stands out, because he gave the pitch, after all the speeches. At that time Millie and I had a big home in Bel Air, 7,000 square feet, and it had a huge living room. We put folding chairs. We had a couple of hundred people sitting

there. Burt was making an impassioned pitch for funds, and people were writing checks.

In the middle of this successful fundraiser, Marlon Brando jumps to the front of the stage and says, "This is bullshit. This is bullshit. We're sitting here, liberals, thinking that giving them a few bucks it going to be important - these people are putting their lives on the line. What we're doing is bullshit. The only decent thing to do is for everybody in this room to pledge 10 percent of his earnings from now on." That was the end of the fundraising. There were lots of checks that were already contributed—I had a small office there, and Brando took over the office and he was counting the checks. He was on the phone with—now you'll have to help me. At that time there was a very radical guy who had taken over physically some facility in Arizona.

CEPLAIR

Oh, yes. Corky—not Corky.

LEWIS

No.

CEPLAIR

I know who you're talking about.

LEWIS

You know who I'm talking about.

CEPLAIR

I'll get the name.

LEWIS

Okay. So he's on the phone.

CEPLAIR

Tijerina?

LEWIS

[Reies] Tijerina, that's right. So he's on the phone to this man, whom I'd never met, but he was in the newspapers, and he's pledging the money to go to him. So it was a disastrous evening, as it ended up, and, again, I ended up being the heavy. But, anyway, that's my Poor People's Campaign story.

CEPLAIR

So you came to Poor People's Campaign via César Chávez, not—

LEWIS

No, nothing to do with César, totally unrelated. I got a phone call from Abernathy saying, "Would you come up and meet with us?" I didn't know him, and I went.

CEPLAIR

Had you had any previous contact with Dr. [Martin Luther] King, [Jr.]?

LEWIS

Nothing, no.

CEPLAIR

So they just knew that you were the go-to guy in Hollywood?

LEWIS

I don't know. People found me out, and I went, period.

CEPLAIR

All right. Well, back to movies. The same year, I guess '67, '68, you're making The Fixer. So how do you happen to get involved with that project? Tell us how it worked out.

LEWIS

Well, the book was a National Book Award winner. It was a great book. Actually, it was another one of the properties that Millie urged me to buy, and I did. I got the studio involved, got Dalton [Trumbo] to write the screenplay. Never met the author.

CEPLAIR

[Bernard] Malamud.

LEWIS

Got a wonderful script that Dalton wrote, I think one of his best. I know he thinks it was one of his best too. Made a mistake. What I was doing then was developing projects to be made with John Frankenheimer, not the right person to have made this property, but he liked it very much.

I have a story to tell, but I'm not going to tell it—I've put in a call to Mitzi [Trumbo]—without her permission. It involves the Trumbo family and John, but I won't tell it unless she tells me that I can. So now there's a film that the studio really was not happy with. After all, it dealt with Jews, it's a period piece, it was not a commercial property, so I knew to get it made I needed to find—hustle, as you say—a way of getting it made so the studios couldn't turn it down. So I thought maybe we'd film it in Russia. It turned out, I don't know how I submitted it, they were not interested. The climate was terrible. So I went then to Hungary, to Budapest, for a good reason. Budapest had a very sophisticated film industry, and I submitted the property to them and made a co-production deal. It was the first American behind-the-Iron-Curtain picture contracted for, and made a very, very favorable deal, not unlike what you have now read I made with the Soviet Union, where they were going to provide all the below-the-line elements at no charge whatsoever. We had to provide the above-the-line, which was the director, the producer, the stars, the script, the music. That's what we contracted to provide.

CEPLAIR

And below-the-line would be cameramen, all the technicians.

LEWIS

Everything. Everything else.

CEPLAIR

All the equipment.

LEWIS

The entire crew, all the facilities, all these special effects, costumes, whatever was needed, and we would shoot it there. The deal was made. There was an intermediary, a woman by the name of Clara Reece [Tower International; Cyrus Eaton, Jr.], who headed an outfit called Tower International. They were an outfit that did business, big business, with American firms behind the so-called Iron Curtain. They put together deals for building hotels. As a matter of fact, the man who headed it entertained [Nikita] Khrushchev where he lived somewhere in the Midwest, a very famous name. I'll think of it. If not, you'll—

CEPLAIR

Of course.

LEWIS

You'll solve my memory problems. So they were the intermediaries. We entered into a contract and started shooting there. The problems that occurred were personal ones, no problems with the agreement or Hungaro-Film the studio we were shooting in and that we dealt with. John Frankenheimer, who is a guy I really loved, he was a real complicated man. I think I mentioned to you that he came from a very wealthy family, his father was a successful stockbroker, and John didn't find out he was Jewish until he applied for membership to a fancy fraternity, I think it was, at a fancy northeast school, and it devastated him that he was Jewish and he had no rapport with being Jewish. Anyway, so he lived very high on the hog. He demanded unbelievable luxuries. He had a Rolls-Royce, but having the Rolls-Royce wasn't enough. He had to have an official Rolls-Royce driver. [interruption]

LEWIS

Sent him to the Rolls-Royce school. When he graduated, he wore a little gold pin that he wore on his lapel, always wore a uniform. John had a secretary who spoke French. He brought the Rolls-Royce to

Budapest. First of all, at that time, Budapest was very, very poor. You could look up and down a street, and if you saw three cars, that was a crowd. We stayed in the only decent hotel that they had then, and he had the car, the Rolls, parked out front with the chauffeur guarding it. And in addition to that, he also had a fancy Ferrari, a red Ferrari. They were parked in front of the hotel. They were a tourist attraction for the Hungarian citizens. The locals would come by and see these things that just did not belong in that place at that time.

So we finished. We did the shooting. It was well cast, but misdirected, as I told you.

CEPLAIR

Misdirected how, would you say?

LEWIS

He was the wrong person. John was essentially an action director, and he had no affinity for what this was all about, and he could approach it the only way he could. The action sequences are good, but there was really no understanding of the people or what was going on in the movie. When the movie was finished, we had an ending that we didn't like. The Hungaro-Film people were just fantastic, so they said, "Okay, you want to come back and reshoot the ending?" I had no more money. They said, "We'll pay for it." So we did a week's reshooting. So it was really a wonderful experience that we had with our partners there, but the film didn't work. It did get an Academy nomination. I don't know if he got an award or not, Alan Bates, for best actor. That was a positive experience, and that experience is what led us—we were in Budapest, and the shooting was over. I had the whole family there. Millie said, "You know, we're only an hour away from Kiev," which is where her mother was from. "Why don't we just go and make a trip." So I said, "Fine. Let's rent a car." We did what I now know you do. "We'll drive. Let's drive and see a part of the country that most people don't get to see."

Somebody arranged for us to rent a car with a driver in Kiev when we arrived. I arrive with my wife, two daughters, and we had a little dog. We go to pick up the car, and it's a little Russian car and there's no room for all of us and the driver. So Millie and I huddled, and we said, "Okay. Well, we've driven all over, so let's drive without him." He had an itinerary. We'd go to Rostov-on-Don and then a bunch of other places, and we were going to end up in Sochi. So I go in and I tell them, with no sharing of language, "There's no room for your driver. I'll take the car." "Nyet. Nyet. Impossible. Cannot do that." I said, "I rented the car. It belongs to me for two weeks," or three weeks, I forget what. I said, "I'll be responsible for it. Here's my credit card in case I do any damage to the car, and we're just going to drive." "You can't do it. You can't do it." You yell enough, we did it. We drove for over two weeks, just me and the family, in this little Russian car, and we had unbelievable experiences. The first stop was in Rostov-on-Don, and it happened to be my older daughter Joan's [Lewis] birthday, and I tried desperately to get a birthday cake for her, but I couldn't explain to anybody what I wanted in the way of a birthday cake. That was not, apparently, their tradition. So we're having dinner, my two daughters and Millie and I, and Russian restaurants were like nightclubs. They had a band, had a singer. Millie and I got up and we were bemoaning the fact that we couldn't have a birthday cake for Joan. Millie and I are dancing on the floor, and when we come back—oh, and a Russian man comes and takes Joan, who was then, like, twelve. She was old enough for this, and he was dancing with her. When we came back off the floor, there were bars of chocolate that guests who had come to understand that it was this kid's birthday and that we were disappointed because we couldn't get what we are used to in the way of a birthday cake, and they put bars of chocolate, which were very hard to come by then. So it was that kind of experience.

Then we had driven a long time, and it's an arduous road down the coast to Sochi, and we come to a bunch of tents, and it turns out to be a workers' camp where they're there on vacation, I guess, free. I don't know the details. I find who's the person is running it, it's a

woman, and I explain just by showing her, "We're here. We don't have a place to stay. Can we have a tent?" And she said, "Yes." So we moved into this tent and had a swimming pool, and the bay was right there. My daughter, the older one, had a quick romance with a young Russian boy, and we were having a great time. But we were tired, and now Millie sees one of these—what do you call the boats that float on water?

CEPLAIR

Hovercrafts?

LEWIS

Yes, something like that, but it was a commercial one for transportation. We hear that that boat is going to go to Sochi, so Millie said, "Eddie, you know, I'm really tired, the kids are tired of driving. It is going to be another week of tough mountain driving. Why don't we take the—

CEPLAIR

Hydrofoil.

LEWIS

—hydrofoil to Sochi?" So I said, "I agree. Absolutely." So I go to the woman manager and tell her I want to leave the car and pay somebody to drive it to Sochi.

"Nyet. Impossible." Nobody ever left a car. "You can't do it. The whole thing is wrong." We had a big screamer. And I said, "Look. We're leaving. My wife is packing up now. Please get somebody, I'll pay that somebody well, to drive the car to Sochi. We're going to take the hydrofoil, and we're going to go." We get our bags and go to the hydrofoil station and go. In Sochi, the car is there and the driver wouldn't take any money at all. So that was the kind of experience that we had that got Millie then to say, "Why don't we do something to break this terrible hatred that exists between the two countries. Because there is no reason why we have to be

enemies. Why don’t we try to make a movie here.” So I said, “Fine. Let’s do it.” [interruption]

CEPLAIR

All right. We’ll pick up the story of The Blue Bird a little later when it actually gets made. So the next movie you and John did together is The Gypsy Moths.

LEWIS

I have really very little that I can say about it. I barely remember it. It was an uneventful shoot. Nothing bad happened. There was nothing difficult about it. There were stunts that were extraordinary with the parachuters, but all of that was done not by actors but by special guys, and it just took arranging for them to do it. It was an undistinguished, unimportant movie. As I say, the one memory I have is I had had some not-so-great experiences with a few actresses, but Deborah Kerr was what we call an angel. She was one of the nicest women I have ever met or will meet, and very gentle and honest.

There was just one moment, Frankenheimer wanted her nude in one of his scenes. He was always looking for an edge, it’s not hustling. He knew shortcuts to get attention. For example, in Seven Days in May there was a moment when someone comes in to the president’s secretary to tell her that Edmund O'Brien's character has died, a moment of shock was required. When shock was required for John, he had a very simple trick. He must have done it on every movie. The prop man would get in back of the actor, the actor didn’t know it, he had a cap pistol with a dummy in it, and at John’s signal, would fire the cap, and you’d get shock. So that’s how he got the actor’s reaction. Well, he wanted her to be nude in some scene that did not require nudity, and she just absolutely refused, and that was the only rough time in the picture. John had to end up shooting without Deborah Kerr nude on the couch.

CEPLAIR

Now, that same year, 1969, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art had an exhibit of modern drawings from your collection.

LEWIS

Yes.

CEPLAIR

When and how did you guys start collecting art?

LEWIS

It's a good thing you said, "you guys." The art is 100 percent Mildred's work. Millie had a brother who's an artist, and she was very involved in art. From the first time that we had the dollar that we could spare, it went to buy art wherever we were. That started, the first purchase was in Spain, on Spartacus, and we found in a kind of a junk store a treasure, I'll be happy to show you—two panels, magnificent panels from an old church, seventeenth century, I think. They cost $500 for the two big panels, and I remember we had sent telegrams to Paul [Gerchik], Millie's brother, what did he think of this huge purchase, and he told us to buy them, and we did. Then wherever we were, we were shopping, looking for art, statues. Well, you'll see. If you want, I'll give you a quick tour.

CEPLAIR

Just to mention some that you have: Corot, Delacroix, Daumier, Pissarro, Degas, Gauguin. Fantastic collection.

LEWIS

Oh, yes. They're all originals, and we have a fantastic collection of Chinese art, and I do have a little story there, since I'm telling stories.

CEPLAIR

Absolutely.

LEWIS

It was illegal then to bring anything into America that originated in China. Even though the objects I'm talking about were over a thousand years old, it was technically illegal to bring them in, because you couldn't bring anything that originated from mainland China. They were not our friends. But we had fallen in love with three pieces of sculpture that were earlier than Ming Dynasty, and bought them in London from a major dealer. But, you know, then the question, was how to do it? I knew there was always a way, as far as I was concerned, to do something, to get it done without breaking the law. So I had them crated. One you'll see, the statue is this big. By the time it's crated—it's, after all, very fragile—it was a huge crate. Then there were two others that are smaller. So Millie said,"What are you going to do?" I said, "Well, we're going to take it on the plane as our personal luggage." So that's how I bought my ticket back from London, and now we come through Customs. It was early in the morning, it was that kind of a flight, and there's a big line going through Customs then. Here we are. Now on the conveyer comes these huge things.

So the guy says to me, "What? What is this?" I said, "It's our personal property. We bought it in London." "Well, what is it?" "Statues." I told him exactly what it was. "One is a statue of a horse, another is a statue of a woman, it's pottery, and it's our personal luggage." He said, "I don't have the equipment to open, do things like this. I said, "Well, that's not my fault. I brought it as my personal property. You're welcome to inspect it." It took a long huddle, with people pissed off in the line, and finally he said, "Go." Now, the irony and part of what made me willing to do this is that the worst—there was no morality to not being able to buy it, because if it got confiscated, what the government did was put it up for auction and anybody could buy it then and could keep it here. So that's what I said to Millie, "The worst that happens, let them confiscate it. Maybe we'll go bid for it, and maybe we'll get it." So, anyway, that was my morality, and that's how we have these fantastic pieces of art. The Horse is something the L.A. County has been interested in. That's my art story.

CEPLAIR

The Horse was a—

LEWIS

Book by Arthur Koestler that I liked.

CEPLAIR

No, Joseph Kessel.

LEWIS

Joseph Kessel. Excuse me. Oh, my god. Koestler was The Gladiators. I had to get that out of my system.

Again, I never met the author, but it was going to be a great project for John, because this was an exotic story with fantastic action. Again, the way we operated, I went to Afghanistan to make arrangements to shoot it there. I went with Millie, and the older daughter was in school, the younger daughter we took. We were ready to leave without her, you didn't take a kid to Afghanistan. She got up to say goodbye, good night, to sleep, and she was crying, "Why are you leaving me?" So we said, "You want to go to Afghanistan?" "Yeah." "You're coming." So we have this little kid with us, and we go to Kabul, which was unbelievably primitive. There was no hotels, not one hotel that we could stay in, and the only place that had arrangements for us was with the USAID station where they would put up a guest occasionally. They put us in a room. When we went to bed at night, there was an armed guard outside the door. There were no restaurants that you could go to. We ate in the USAID station, food, hot dogs and stuff like that, that they imported. There was no problem making arrangements to shoot there. They were anxious to have us, naturally. I met the Bushkazi, the horsemen, who were a weird, weird bunch, each of them having a little boy that was a groom and a sex slave. I went around for days with a little 8-millimeter camera, shooting all kinds of fantastic film, things that went on in that city that John could shoot when he brought his cameras. So he loved it, and we make arrangements for a crew to come, and cast. And we get there and

there's no places, as you know, for me to put them in a hotel, so I had a tent city built for the stars, the cast, and the crew. I think we were there two or three days, and John said, "It's impossible." First of all, the people that they gave us to assist, the technical people in every category, were unqualified, and it was impossible to shoot. The crew was unhappy. The actors were miserable.

So John and I decided we're going to move the company to Spain. So I went to the south of Spain, found a location that we could use to duplicate Afghanistan, and when all of this was done, we moved everybody to Spain. Algeciras was the city, I remember. We moved not only the horsemen but their horses, and now I have to put them up. The cast and crew are, of course, in a good hotel in Algeciras, but the horsemen, they were very primitive, scary people. I put them in tents. That's what they were used to. So there was a big parking lot, and I had tents built. The horsemen did not like this at all. They were pissed off. They insisted on being put up in that big building where everybody else was, so I moved them into the hotel. [laughter] It was a nightmare.

CEPLAIR

How did you move them from Afghanistan? In trucks or planes? I mean, how did you bring them?

LEWIS

Planes.

CEPLAIR

Airplanes?

LEWIS

Airplanes, yes.

CEPLAIR

Wow, that must have been a big operation.

LEWIS

It was a big deal. The big deal now came with these—I don't remember how many—there may be twenty of them, of these big men, are in the hotel. And I get a phone call the next day, "You've got to get them out of here." They were building fires in the room and cooking their food in the room. They had never used a toilet before and didn't know how to use the toilet.

So this problem went on for weeks and weeks, at least three or four hotels before we found one and they got used to what was going on. Then we ended up making the movie there.

CEPLAIR

Were there any problems with the script on this?

LEWIS

No, no, none.

CEPLAIR

Trumbo's script was—

LEWIS

It was a good script. Yes, it was a good script, and there's great action. The Bushkazi itself was a fantastic experience with the king of Afghanistan and all the royal court and the fancy canopy. And it's a violent, violent game where they use anything and everything, including knives. We didn't do that. There's a dead calf, that is the ball, and one of horsemen picks up this calf, weighs 100 pounds, carries it under his arm, and then the other guys, all of them, come to take it away from him, because the idea of the game is to have possession of this calf, and drive it to a goalpost, or actually to a post in front of the king and drop it. And when you did that, you won. This would go on sometime for days, the fights, with knives and clubs and fighting each other. It was one of the more interesting shoots that we had. So that's that story. [laughter]

CEPLAIR

All right. So now we come to Harold and Maude. I guess there's a whole good story with your wife and this project.

LEWIS

Okay. Harold and Maude came about again 100 percent because of Millie. The writer, whose name was Colin Higgins, was a very sweet gay man who died, unfortunately, of AIDS. Millie and I had a deal at UCLA. We had a guest house; it was a chauffeur's bungalow in this huge mansion that I told you we lived in, so there was a bungalow that they kept their chauffeur in, totally separate from the house. We had this place to live. We knew the students were struggling for places to live, so we went and talked to somebody at UCLA, and they said, "Yeah, there are students that would love to do it." So they put up notices that here was a place that they could have, there would be no rent.

So a man comes; a student comes. He was older than most because he was a graduate student. He graduated from Stanford and his name was Colin Higgins, and he was a film student working on his master's degree. He tells us one day—he's very quiet and very shy. I told him who I was, I knew what he was majoring in. I asked him would he like to go to the studio. We were shooting a film then. No, he never took me up on anything. But one of the things he did, a part of the deal, our house was out of Susan, our younger daughter's school district. So there was no longer public transportation, so somebody had to drive her to school. So what we got in return for giving him living quarters and stuff was that he took Susie to school in the mornings. Millie would pick her up. Well, Susie [Susan Lewis] is an extremely bright woman who's now a very skilled poet, and she and Colin got along very well, as well as did Colin with my older daughter. He told both of them that he had written a script for an eight-page—his goal at the university, or the course probably required it, he had to film an eight-minute short on something that he had written. So he had written this eight-minute script and gave it to Susan to read. Susan went to Millie and said, "Mom, you've got to read this. This is much too good for a little 8-millimeter film. Read it. It's a fantastic story."

So Millie reads it, and it’s the basis for Harold and Maude. It was an autobiographical sketch that the writer wrote about his mother. So Millie goes to Colin and says, “Colin, you’re making a mistake. Don’t throw this away on an eight-minute student film. You should write a full-length script, and Eddie will get it made.” It was that kind of thing. So Colin thought that made sense then, and he did, in fact with Millie's help, write the first draft of Harold and Maude, and then they gave it to me. At that time, I’m partnered with Frankenheimer and I’m busy. It was not my cup of tea anyway, so I went to Paramount and brought them the script. “I’m giving it to you for forty-eight hours. If you don’t grab it, I’m taking it someplace else.” I gave it to Peter Bart, the reporter. Do you know who Peter Bart was?

CEPLAIR

Yes.

LEWIS

He became the editor of Variety. He was a writer, a journalist from New York Times, and was then second-in-command at the studio. He read it quickly and loved it, and in two days I made a deal and got the writer, Colin Higgins, who didn’t have bus fare, $100,000 for the screenplay. What he desperately wanted was to direct it, and I made them give him a test as a director. But I knew making it, it was just something, it was a bone that they had to throw in, and they did, period. Anyway, that’s how Colin Higgins got Harold and Maude made, all because of Millie, by the way. Then years later—are you up to Harold and Maude?

CEPLAIR

Yes.

LEWIS

Okay. Then years later, the movie was an enormous success.

CEPLAIR

Huge cult favorite.

LEWIS

It was wonderful. Then Millie had another idea. She said, "Why don't we make this into a musical. It will make a wonderful musical." By that time, I had written the book and lyrics and staged a musical of my own. So now we determined, okay, we're going to make this into a musical. So Millie and I wrote the book, and I wrote the lyrics for a musical version of Harold and Maude. But in order for us to do it, we needed to get the rights. Colin Higgins owned the stage rights. The stage rights do not go automatically to a studio when they purchase the film rights. They're separated. So I made a deal with the man, a lovely, lovely man who was the head of Colin Higgins Production. Colin is now dead. He was a friend of Colin's, a very scholarly, erudite man who taught at UCLA writing. I think he still teaches. We remain the closest of friends and colleagues.

CEPLAIR

His name is?

LEWIS

His name is James Cass—C-a-s-s—Rogers. I will show you—I got the fax from him while you were here, because I wanted some dates that he would have. I didn't keep that kind of stuff. So we made a partnership that we, the three of us, Jim, Millie, and I, would produce this musical and would share equally in the profits. I know it was his first time producing, so I gave Jim the first credit in the "presents" on Broadway. It's presented by James Cass Rogers, Mildred and Edward Lewis, so we were the producers. Okay. What we did was lousy, what we wrote was no good, and we all recognized that it's not good enough to try to put it on stage. So then I found the writer who ended up writing the book and lyrics. His name is Tom Jones, a famous playwright on Broadway of musicals, many really top credits, and he picked the composer. Jim and Millie and I, we paid him for the book and the lyrics and for a score. Then that began a series of very difficult [missing word] trying to get the show on. I have the history with dates, you'll be

pleased to know, that Jim Rogers furnished me with yesterday or the day before. So do you want them out of context?

CEPLAIR

Sure.

LEWIS

All right. In 1993 we made the partnership with Jim Rogers. In 1994 we auditioned the musical for the Music Center. Gordon Davidson, the head of Music Center, was there. The actress was Betty Garrett playing Maude. In Jim's letter, he reminds me of what happened—I mean, we were both pissed off. We had rented a facility, a small facility, and he was the only guest, and he had the seat in front of Jim, Millie, and I. In the middle of the first act, he fell asleep and started to snore. I gave him a kick, and he woke up. A little while later, he fell asleep again. When he walked out, he says, "A very sweet musical," and, of course, that was the end of that. [laughter] All right. In 1999 we put it on at the Actors Studio in New York City with Estelle Parsons now playing Maude. It was meant to be a backers' audition. Didn't work. In 2000 we changed composers. The first composer's name was Billy Goldberg—Goldenberg, I guess, and we got a new one—not we; Tom Jones did—whose name was Joseph Thalken, a young composer. Then in the year 2000 we put it on at a theater called the Theatre Works in Palo Alto, and Jim has the review from the San Francisco Chronicle calling it "refreshingly irreverent and buoyant." That's the quote.

In 2001—oh, I forgot, we had a big production at the Paper Mill Playhouse in New Jersey. Then the next time it went on was 2005. We put it on—I can't quite read it there—oh, in Tokyo, a beautiful production with the best Maude we ever had, but, unfortunately, she was Japanese and only spoke Japanese, but these wonderful visuals. I didn't go, but Jim did. He loved the show. He said, "We could have her," and I even tried to talk him into, "Why don't we do the original. She's a great actress. Let's do it, find a way with titles, do it," whatever it was. Anyway, that is still kicking around. We tried Shirley MacLaine and she turned it down. The big problem,

why it never got off is you need a star, and very few women, first, want to play an eighty-year-old woman. Second of all, if they are that age, they don't want to do it. It's a tough grind. Eight shows a week, you know, it's hard work, and the songs are demanding. I think the character had nine or ten solo songs to sing. So now they came up with an idea, Tom and the composer, of cutting the show down and making it into a one-act, no intermission. Many Broadway hits work like that, and it's by the far best version of all. There was a tryout a month or two ago. I can't read it where it is, but it was somewhere up in, I think, Wisconsin. It got very, very good notices, but backers didn't travel that far for something like that. So they are now in the process of putting together again the same show in New York as the other backers' audition. At the same time, Shirley MacLaine comes alive, she always loved the property, and she's tempted. She's another one of the Hollywood performers that hates to say no, but won't say yes. I know it's a wild goose chase, but Jim is all excited. She's read the new—we had new songs written—I have the tapes on all of this—new script that she was given to read, and her only problem is, she says, "I'm really just not old enough to play Maude." She happens to be seventy-eight years old, you see. [laughter] But she says she doesn't feel old and she doesn't want to play old. That's the problem. Anyway, that's where we are with Harold and Maude. Still alive.

CEPLAIR

So then Executive Action will be the next one we want to talk about, how that came to be, etc., etc.

LEWIS

But you said that's how—

CEPLAIR

Yes. John Frankenheimer said in his book that he didn't want to do it because he couldn't do it to the Kennedys.

LEWIS

I never heard that before, but, of course, I never read the book. That's not my recollection [unclear]. He didn't do it because he wanted to go back to Paris. As I said, we did not have an arrangement where he was precluded from taking a big job if it came along, and he got offered a job to direct a film in Paris, and John loved Paris. He was and is a professional chef. He went to the top cooking schools in London. He was a guest chef at La Serre, a top restaurant in Paris where they would let him come on and do some of the dishes. Let me digress. He was so well involved and situated with restaurants that he came to me one day and said, "Eddie, I've got an idea. You could put together all the top chefs into one organization, and we can make a fortune. They don't talk to each other, they're rivals, but you can put them together, and we'll put them under one umbrella, and we'll be able to sell memberships. They'll publish books. They'll put out frozen foods. We'll make a fortune. You can do it."

So I said, "All right. Set me up to meet them." So he sets up an arrangement, and Millie and I are now guests at the ten or eight, however many there were, three-star—is that the top stars in Michelin?

CEPLAIR

Yes.

LEWIS

Chefs in France, and we have arrangements to go to each one of them and stay overnight with them and be feted by them to their favorite food. You can imagine what this was like. We had an unbelievable time. I, in fact, was able to get them to join together in something that was looked to be mutually beneficial. Millie and I did not make the whole tour, I think we made three or four, and said we had had enough. You can die from eating like that. Anyway, that's how John was locked into Paris and France, and that's where he went. He went to live. He must have spent two or three years there, had a fantastic apartment on the Île de France [meant Île St. –Louis] in the same building, by the way, as Pierre Salinger. He had

big friends there, did big socializing. That's where he was, but it ruined his career, because in order to stay in France, he ended up doing a couple of pictures that were bombs, and one of them never got released in America. But, anyway, that's how come he didn't do Executive Action. Executive Action was, I think, my idea. I had read a lot of the assassination stuff. I talked to Dalton, and he was intrigued by it and he said he would write a screenplay. He did a lot of research himself and wrote an interesting screenplay, but there was no studio that would touch this project. It was going to have to be financed by me, not my money, but I would have to raise private money. The first thing I needed was a star, so I went to Burt Lancaster, who was a decent political guy, and he liked the idea very much. He ended up making more money out of that movie than any other. He made it for no money but a piece of the gross of the business. All the actors worked for no money and a piece of the profits. They got profits; Burt got a percentage of the gross. You're aware of the difference?

CEPLAIR

Yes.

LEWIS

So I don't have explain it to you. Okay. Okay. So now we had Burt Lancaster and a wonderful script of Dalton's, but there was enormous pressure not to make this movie, from the Kennedys, so we decided to do it very quietly. We never published a shooting schedule that announced where we were going to be shooting or what we were going to be shooting. We went about our business very, very quietly. The movie gets finished, and we need to open it. The money was raised privately, by the way. There were investors from the Midwest. I can't tell you exactly how I got them; through the different attorneys. I don't know the details. I remember a couple of men who were involved, and it was a very successful venture for them. The picture made a lot of money. But it came time to open it now. We had a theater and we had ads prepared. We sent the first ad to the L.A. Times. We were opening it in L.A.,

and they refused to play the ad. It had a photograph of Kennedy in the sights of a rifle. They said it was too inflammatory. So we took it back and took that out of the ad. It was still too inflammatory.

So then we had Will Geer do a simple ad. He, alone, in front of a camera, nothing behind him, stating, "My name is Will Geer. I'm in a movie coming out next week at this theater. It's called Executive Action. It's a movie I urge you to see." They refused to take the ad. So now I'm desperate, so I called Burt Lancaster, who was now shooting. I think he was shooting The Leopard, and he was in Rome. So I call him in Rome, and I say, "Burt, you've got to come back. We can't get an ad announcing the movie. The only hope is if you'll head—I want to set up a press conference. People will come to a press conference, and we'll get more notoriety. The only notoriety we'll get will be from the press conference, but I need you. He said, "I'll come." So he got on a plane and he flew to New York. I set up in one of the hotels in New York, in the ballroom, a press conference, invited all the New York press to come, and had a screen. I said, "I will screen for you the ads that we submitted that no newspaper is willing to take." So I had the screen and all the press in chairs, folding chairs, and I run on the screen the ads that we had filmed that were all rejected. Burt is there hosting the press conference. That's what got people to come. But they saw the ads, and we got a lot of press in New York as a result of this that described the ads, and the movie opened in New York and L.A., and we did terrific business. So that's that story. After that, by the way, and even before this episode of the ads, the minute the film was finished, I tried hard to get somebody from the Kennedy family to see it. I offered—I said, "Come look at the movie. If there's something that you object to, let me know, and let me see if we can do without it or modify it." They refused to come and see the movie. That's the Executive Action story.

CEPLAIR

Okay.

1.3. Session Three (September 2, 2012)

LEWIS

. . .I remember where the money came from specifically. There were two men that joined with me. One was named Robert Greenberg, an attorney from Chicago, and the other Lee—L-e-e S-a-v-i-n—Lee Savin, an attorney from Cleveland, and they raised the money from private individuals. I do not know who any of them were. It was a very successful investment, and the group subsequently put up money for the other independently financed pictures that Millie and I made, Brothers, and they put up the initial development money for The Blue Bird. So that's it.

CEPLAIR

And you wanted to say something about Harold and Maude? You said about Harold and Maude, about another production of it that—

LEWIS

Oh, okay. There was a production just last year of the new revised version. The composer and lyricist and book writer spent a lot of time and redid the book and altered it so that it's a one-act, ninety-minute for-Broadway production. They tried it out at the York Theater in New York, in Manhattan. Unfortunately, it was on a weekend or something, and backers that they wanted to come were not available, so they are planning another one now within the next month. That's about all I can say. So we keep kicking this horse. It's not dead.

CEPLAIR

And you wanted also to talk about your interest in writing.

LEWIS

I just wanted to add that it didn't come completely out of the blue, that when I came here, I started directing myself towards writing a screenplay. When I was in high school, I wrote lyrics for a musical. I did the same at Bucknell. My second year, I wrote lyrics for a college musical. I also wrote poetry a lot and I wrote essays. In fact, I won a $5 prize in high school, at high school graduation, was

presented to me in honor for an essay that I wrote on Walt Whitman, actually.

CEPLAIR

Did anyone else in your family write or were the only one who—

LEWIS

No, I was the black sheep in every, every sense of the word. [laughs]

CEPLAIR

We didn't talk about it, but you had brothers that you maybe want to talk about now.

LEWIS

I have a sister, Doris, who's three years younger than me. She's married to the same man, married actually longer than Millie and I, Bernie Kirschner. I have two daughters. The elder is Joan, who went to Loyola Law School, UCLA and Berkeley, practiced law for about five years, did not like it, and did what she's always wanted to do and does great: she's a painter and a gifted artist. Our younger daughter, Susan, is seven years younger than Joan, went to Berkeley, to Boalt Law School, graduated first or second at Boalt, had a great career ahead of her, but disliked law as well and did what she loves doing: she's a talented poet. She's been published in, I don't know, fifty or so journals, also written short stories and a novel. The older daughter, Joan, is married to Bob, Robert Cortes who worked on three pictures with me and then decided he was going to do what he wanted to do and became a public defender. He's one of the guys that you really want on your side if you're in trouble. The other, Susan, married an academic. Her husband [David Golove] is a professor of law at NYU, with a chair. They have a son, Lewis, who is a second-year student at Yale. And Joan has a beautiful daughter, Maya, who goes to college now in Cleveland, Cleveland U. And that's my family. Okay.

CEPLAIR

Joan, just, by the way, did the cover for Masquerade.

LEWIS

That's correct, yes, and she also did the cover for our novel. I'll show you.

CEPLAIR

We're going to pick up now with The Blue Bird, which started, I guess, in the mid-seventies. So why don't you talk about how that project arose.

LEWIS

Well, I think I did tell what got us—I did say Millie suggested it. Together we decided, "Why don't we try now." We had a good experience with the co-production with Hungaro-Film on The Fixer. "Why don't we try and go up, raise the bar, and do a co-production with the Soviet Union." And that was a real long shot of an undertaking. You're a historian, you know the climate was very bad then, but that was the kind of challenge that I liked. Anyway, when we came back, I was at MGM then, and the head of the Literary Department of MGM was a woman—I don't know her name anymore—she was a Russian national. I talked to her about it, and she said that would be a terrific thing to do. She said, "I know the person that you should start this with. He's the president of the writers union in the Soviet Union. Let me see if I can arrange a meeting for you." After a while she did, and Millie and I flew to Moscow and met with him. We liked him very much. While we were there, probably I think it was just the day before we had a meeting, we were looking to go to a theater there. We had done the ballet, we were looking for theater, and [Maurice] Maeterlinck's Blue Bird was playing in a Russian theater. It turns out that was a major favorite of the Russian people. We saw the play, and it was a musical version of it, and we loved it. Millie said to me—and this she will not take out—she said, "That's what you should propose for co-production, because it's totally apolitical. Neither side can object to how they're portrayed. It's a totally neutral subject." So we did

bring it up to this guy, and he thought it was a lovely idea, and he said, "I'm going to talk to people in the film industry and we'll get back to you." And this was the beginning of a very long, torturous, arduous road toward trying to get this done. We didn't hear, I don't know, it could be six months, it could be a year, and finally we get word they're interested in a meeting. "Come to Moscow."

So I came to Moscow and met with the heads of something called Sovin—S-o-v-i-n—Film and told them what I was proposing to do, and they nodded their heads, and, yes, yes, sounded interesting. "We'll get back to you." Again, it took six months, could be a year. It was a long time, and I would hear from them. "We're ready to have another meeting." I went back again, and this time it was with three new people that I had never seen before. The first people that I had met that I heard a year later were interested, they were now three new people that I went through the same process with. This happened a third time, and the last time I met, there was a Georgian by the name of Tenishvili. He was the head of Sovinfilm, and he was a man that was easy to dislike. He address me as "Gospodin Lewis." I didn't really know what that meant, but I had a pretty good idea from the tone that it was not a warm, affectionate way of addressing me. Anyway, he was the guy in charge, and he, in fact, wanted to have this done. Then it went downhill, but so gradually, it would take a long time to describe the experiences. But first they gave me a tour of Mosfilm Studios in Moscow, a fantastic facility, at least as big as MGM, if not bigger, and advanced, very advanced in the technology that they had. They made all the great Russian films. The assumption was they were going to be the ones that would be my partner, and I was really happy with that. But, again, a long time went by before I was summoned back again to Moscow, to go over the details of the agreement.

Then I learned for the first time that it was not going to be with Mosfilm, but it was going to be with Lenfilm Studios. I did not find out why until much, much later when the whole thing had collapsed, as far as I was concerned. Apparently, what I'm told by this guy Tenishvili, what happened is that Mosfilm Studios did not believe the

co-production was ever going to happen, and to make a commitment to this project meant that would be one less project that they could be involved in. They had a budget just like we do. So they passed on the project. So Tenishvili went to Lenfilm Studios. It turned out the studio had never made either a major film or a film in color. The head of Lenfilm Studios was a retired colonel from the navy, knew nothing about the film business, a very nice man, but he nodded "yes" or "no" about everything. And the studio was second-rate, with very poor and very limited equipment and facilities. Anyway, that's who the deal was with and that's who the contracts were prepared for. So that was a problem. I was so anxious to do this and so convinced that I was doing something good, that I said yes, and that's where we started to make the movie, and it was a disaster right away. As I said, they had never shot a color film before, and The Blue Bird is a very fanciful thing. It required wonderful special effects and costumes and so forth and so on. So the disaster began right away with, for example, the wardrobe. Liz Taylor and, I must say, the other women, were really unhappy with the costumes that were being given them to wear, and, as a matter of fact, they refused to wear it. [laughs] I left out the most important thing. Before we started, I needed money to make the movie. I had the front money for my trips and all that other kind of stuff, but somebody was going to have to pay the cast, the director, the composer, the things that we were obliged to do in the contract. So I needed a partner. So I went to Twentieth Century-Fox, and they agreed.

The budget that I had prepared was unbelievably low. It looked to be the biggest steal anywhere. I had already arranged for Elizabeth Taylor and Jane Fonda and Eva Gardner. Everybody was seduced by the idea. And the director was George Cukor, who was a scary choice, but not mine. The Soviets had approval of these names, and they wanted famous names. The directors that I offered them were well known here, but they'd never heard of them. But they knew about George Cukor, who by that time was way past his prime. So I went to George Cukor, and, of course, he loved the idea. The Soviets had wanted Elizabeth Taylor. The whole budget for the

movie, since the Soviets were putting up everything except the cast, was under $2 million, as I remember. So Fox grabbed it. They said, “Absolutely, yes, we will do it.” But they needed a guarantee of completion. All films—I don’t know whether you’re aware of this—you can’t make a movie unless you have a completion guarantee, which is a financial guarantee that the film will get finished, and if the production funds run out, they provide the money to have it finished, but they have control then over the production. So no completion company would issue a guarantee of completion for a film being shot in the Soviet Union. None. So Millie and I did the next stupid thing in our lives: we signed personally as the completion guarantors of the picture. We put up our house and everything that we had.

Okay. So now we're on the hook, and that immediately changed me from a creative producer to a completion guarantor. The one thing that I had to watch was not how good the film was going to be, but that it not exceed the $2 million budget, because if it did, I had to come up with the money. So that was the beginning of the horror story. The wardrobe was the first thing that happened. The Russians were to provide the wardrobe, but my ladies wouldn’t wear the wardrobe, and they were insisting on wardrobe being made in Paris or London. I said, “Nyet.” That was what I had to do. I knew from that point on, anything that was going to come out of my pocket, the answer was going to be “nyet.” So I said, “No. This is the deal. These are the costumes.” So there was enough pressure that Fox said, “Well, okay, in this one instance, we’ll put up the extra money.” The next thing I remember happening was Elizabeth Taylor got sick all of a sudden, she said, and she went back to London, so the production stops. Now, when production is stopped, people still get paid. You can’t send people back from Moscow home, and everybody that was on salary—the Russian people, no, but my people, the actors, were on time limits. That was another problem for me. And I get word from London from Liz Taylor’s agent, Kurt Frings, that Miss Taylor has seen on Bond Street a brooch that she absolutely loved, and it was in the form of a bluebird. And the agent is suggesting that maybe if she were given the gift, she would feel

better and feel better quickly. I have to tell you that the first time I met with Liz Taylor at our house, she said to me, "You know, my producers always give me a gift." I said, "Well, I'm going to give you a gift when we finish if everything goes well. I assure you I will not be the exception."

She said, "No, no, no. They always give me a gift before we start." So I said, "Liz, I'm not going to give you a gift before you start," and I explained to her why, and we did not get along well from that point on. But, anyway, it now was clear that this gift, the brooch, was going to cost $20,000, that that was going to be a key thing to getting the picture going again, and I said, "Nyet." So it went again to Fox, and they said, "We'll make another exception," so they bought her the brooch, and she went back to Leningrad and back to work. That's the way it went until, I don't know, maybe a week of shooting, and I get flown back urgently to take a look at the dailies, and they were, in fact, very bad because the camerawork was awful and the quality of the film was black and white when it should have been color. So Cukor and the cast refuse to continue working, and what they wanted was to bring to Leningrad a London film crew, a London cinematographer, and proper equipment, the cameras, the lights, the whole works. I said, "Nyet." Again, back. Now this time was really major. This was hundreds of thousands of dollars. I'm back at Fox and I said, "There's no answer to this. I'm never going to permit it, and you know why? My number one job is to protect my family and myself. The picture will not go over budget." So, anyway, the story ended very quickly. I negotiated, at Fox's request, for me to be relieved of the completion guarantee and of producing the picture. So I never went back to Leningrad and I have never seen The Blue Bird.

CEPLAIR

So do you have a credit on it of some kind?

LEWIS

I don't know. I never saw it [credited as executive producer].

CEPLAIR

You never saw it.

LEWIS

I don't know.

CEPLAIR

That's a fascinating story. All right. So the next project—

LEWIS

So I just have to add, that sometime stupid ideals end in disastrous failure. Anyway, that's it.

CEPLAIR

Well, you know, it was the first time, so—

LEWIS

It's not the first time I failed, but it was a big disappointment.

CEPLAIR

So then after that I have here that you began to work on Brothers.

LEWIS

Yes.

CEPLAIR

Do you want to talk about how that got started?

LEWIS

Again, it was one where I had the financiers that I told you about did so well on Executive Action that they were pressing me to come up with another project that would not fit studios, that they wanted to finance the same way as Executive Action. There was a book that Angela Davis wrote that had the letters that she and—what's his name?

CEPLAIR

George Jackson.

LEWIS

George Jackson wrote. I'll find it there. It seemed to Millie and me a really interesting, romantic, action Hollywood story. So we decided, Millie and I, that we would write a screenplay based on this, and we did, and I think it was a pretty good screenplay. We got Bernie Casey to play George Jackson, who's a big handsome actor and athlete. I forget the actress anymore that played—you'll have it somewhere—her name [Vonetta McGee]. Anyway, we shot the movie. We got a director that had never really done a feature before—I think his name was [Arthur] Barron—and Millie and I had to end up doing the editing of the picture. He didn't.

So I can't tell you it was a great movie, but it's one that I'm happy about, and Millie is, I think. And we did get a wonderful review in the Los Angeles Times, a great spread with Millie's picture and mine. I think I have it.

CEPLAIR

Yes.

LEWIS

You have it. That was it, and we thought—I remember Angela Davis said to us, "Every black person in America is going to come see this movie." Didn't happen at all. The blacks weren't interested. The whites weren't interested. Nobody was interested. The picture was a failure, and so that's that experience.

CEPLAIR

Then I guess along those same lines, you then got involved with Ishi.

LEWIS

Ishi's another one. There was a book called Ishi: Last of His Tribe [by Theodora Kroeber Quinn] that I read and Millie read and we liked. Are you familiar with him?

CEPLAIR

Yes.

LEWIS

As a historian, you know who he is. We adapted that book as a feature, I couldn't get it set up. Nobody wanted to distribute it. But I was able to make a deal with NBC, and they agreed to air it as a three-hour Movie of the Week. So we shot it. It was a wonderful experience. Millie was in charge, and we made it with mostly Native Americans and some professional actors, shot it all on location. I think it was a decent movie, but it had no life. It played once on television. If it played again, I have no knowledge of it. So that was another nonsuccess. Let's put it that way.

CEPLAIR

Dalton Trumbo was working on that when he died, right?

LEWIS

That's correct.

CEPLAIR

Christopher [Trumbo] finished it.

LEWIS

Christopher finished the screenplay, yes.

CEPLAIR

Is there any kind of connection between, say, Executive Action, Brothers, Ishi? I mean, is there a kind of political thread that runs through those, or they were just three different interesting projects?

LEWIS

No, they just appealed to us. There was no political agenda that either of us had, but you could tell there was a certain kind of material that attracted us, just as Spartacus attracted us and Seven Days in May. It was the kind of story that I was attracted to. And

another thing happened. There were only a few people in Hollywood that were attracted to this kind of story, and people knew we were one of them, so we would get—when I would say I don't really know how this book came to me, the one about Angela and George Jackson, but somebody brought it to me, figuring, "Okay, here are a couple of people that are going to be interested in this kind of story." So that's all. It was not an agenda. It was just a question of taste, and those were the kinds of stories that moved us.

CEPLAIR

Now, about that time, you and your wife wrote a novel titled Heads You Lose?

LEWIS

That's correct. Yes. If you say "you and your wife wrote it," I'll never get it by her. I could not have written it or anything, really, without her. She is extremely important to me, both as, I would say, an inspiration, I mean generating the initial ideas, and as a critic and as an editor. But she doesn't think that's like writing it, because I would lock up here and do the writing and then read everything to her, and she would throw it out or correct it or what. But Millie never considers that writing, it's not equal work, and she still to this day hates the fact that her name is on the novel, even though I got her then to agree to that.

CEPLAIR

What was the novel about? What was the subject?

LEWIS

[laughs] It's so complex. I thought I was doing something in fiction that was really based on fact, and it was based on what I saw an allegory of American history. So I was trying to do something, I doubt that I could even explain it anymore, that worked on one level as a recapping of American history from a certain point on, starting with the crash of the stock market, but on the other hand, following American history from way back, and they were working on a parallel level, and intermixed with all of this were fictionalized

versions of a lot of historical characters. So I was doing all this weird stuff without any skill or knowledge or background for doing it. I did my own research. No computers then. I spent a lot of time in the library. And that's what it is. I don't think it works at all now, and I would be afraid to try to read it again. But I did get a lot of people impressed with having gotten some of it, anyway, and it's published by a small but aggressive commercial press called Red Hen Press. They're still in existence. They liked my work. When I did the short stories, they published them. I was not good for them because when the novel first came out, they had set up readings for me, and I am no good. Not only am I no good at it, but I'm terrified at—I don't want to overstate it. I'm not comfortable in front of a crowd and I'm not comfortable being the center of attention. So she would set up readings for me, several here, and I would chicken out. Two days before, my stomach would start getting queasy, and I never, never went to one of them.

So the chief editor of that press was herself a poetess [Kate Gale] of some renown, so for a little while she would take my place and give some kind of reasons why she was reading for me. But I was no good for a commercial publisher, but they liked my work enough that they published the second book. They wanted to publish a memoir. So anyway, that's my story with the writing.

CEPLAIR

Did you want to make it into a screenplay?

LEWIS

I didn't, but I gave the book to Arthur Hiller to read. Arthur was then president of the Academy [of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences], and he had directed one picture for me. I knew him well enough. I gave him the book, looking for blurbs on the back, and he loved the book. He said, "How did you know so much? How did you learn?" And he wanted to make it into a movie. And I said, "Okay, go ahead." He said, "Let me give the book to Abby Mann." But he read it and said, "It's impossible to make this, for me, into a

screenplay," and that was the end of it, period. No, I couldn't write a screenplay.

CEPLAIR

All right. So, again, we get to another interesting political movie, Missing.

LEWIS

Same kind of story. Actually, I was writing an original version of that story as a screenplay. It just appealed to me, the story of this young American kid, an idealist who goes there and ends up getting killed. So I was writing a fictional version of my own, and Millie comes in and says, "Eddie, I just read a review in Time magazine of a book about the story."

The book is written by an attorney. I read the book, and it was much better being real, I was trying to fictionalize. I think the book was called The Execution of Charles Horman [written by Thomas Hauser]. So now we try to get the rights to the book. That was no problem. The attorney was very happy to option the rights to me and Millie, but I knew that you cannot make this kind of movie unless you get clearance from the people involved. You had to have their permission, and that's a tough thing to get because these clearances are really a license to do anything you want with them. The studios demand this kind of thing, because you can't get held up if you're putting $50 million or 30 or 10 into a movie and somebody comes along and says, "Oh, no, no, no. I have the rights to this, and you didn't get my permission," for whatever the works. I had that, by the way, on Executive Action. We got sued by a man who said he was standing outside where the cars came from when Oswald got shot, and, "I'm portrayed in the film, although it was not real, there's a character there, and that's really me." That was the kind of lawsuit that you got, and the studio, by the way, always ended up paying off. They didn't want these suits. They were nuisance suits. They paid off. So what they required is a license. If you're portraying a person's life, you need his permission, and the permission says, "Anything that I say about you is okay. You

approve it.” So that was not easy to get from people who were amateurs, so Millie and I made many trips to New York to get to know the Hormans, who were a wonderful, wonderful family. The father was a Christian Scientist, a religious Christian Scientist. The mother was an artist. The daughter, who was married to Charles Horman was just one of the sweetest persons ever. We took our time. We got to know them. We told them we wanted to do the movie, how we felt about the story, told them the kinds of movies that we had made that might convince them that we would be faithful. We said, “We’ll not do anything that you don’t want, but you have to take our word for it, because you’re going to give us the right to do anything.” After a long time, we got to be very close as a group, and they gave us the rights to do this story.

Then we made a great choice, and that was the director Constantin Costa-Gavras, and that made all the difference in the world. I sent him the book, and he said, “I’ll do it on one condition: I’m not going to show anybody being beaten up or anybody being killed. I don’t want it to be that kind of movie. But I promise you, in the background of almost every shot will be something horrifying, a dead body or whatever. Under those conditions,” he says, “I’ll say yes and I’ll come out,” and he was going to write the screenplay. So I made the deal with him. We really got along fantastically well with him, and we did a lot of reading of scripts for a writer. He needed a writer that could take what he wrote and put it into English, period. Although Costa could speak English, he couldn’t write well enough. So Millie picked somebody [Donald Stewart] whose scripts she had read, who knew how to write a screenplay. He was not what we would call a classy writer. He did the job very well. He was really taking dictation from Costa. But when the Academy Awards came, the screenplay was nominated for best screenplay. Costa, who got the first credit as writer—the other guy, it was written by Costa and this other writer [Donald Stewart]—Costa was filming another picture in Europe, so he couldn’t be at the Academy. So this guy gets up and takes the Academy Award, and he didn’t even have the decency to acknowledge that Costa was the co-writer. He just assumed that it was him, and he took it. We were in the audience

too. Not a word of thanks to Millie who picked him—for giving him this opportunity. He had done only B pictures. That's why we picked him. He went to London and got the British Academy Award for best screenplay. We were there. Never a mention of us or of Costa-Gavras. Anyway, those are sad stories to tell.

CEPLAIR

I noticed—I looked it up—that won four Academy Award nominations and five Golden Globe nominations for that movie, so it was well honored.

LEWIS

Oh, it was a wonderful movie.

CEPLAIR

It was a wonderful movie.

LEWIS

Wonderful movie, and we were intimately involved because Costa wanted us to be, and we were intimately involved in the editing, and we spent a lot of time in Paris with him as he was editing the picture. He not only didn't resent our being there, because we weren't imposing ourselves; he wanted it. If I need any feeling-good time, I can read things that Costa has said to the press about Millie and about me. Anyway, that was one of our great experiences.

CEPLAIR

Speaking of clearances, to go back to Brothers, I know in the L.A. Times story you gave me, there was some question about clearances on that project.

LEWIS

Gee, I forgot that. What does it say?

CEPLAIR

George Jackson or his family said you hadn't—

LEWIS

Oh, god, they hated it. I had a threatening meeting that I remember with his mother, came to visit me—I had an office at Fox then—and really threatening that they did not want this made and would do everything they could, and I took that as a personal threat to see to it that it did not get made. Somehow or other, I was advised that I didn't need it, so I don't remember how any of this ended up.

CEPLAIR

But Angela Davis was cooperative?

LEWIS

Oh, yes, yes.

CEPLAIR

All right. So then after Missing, you did The Good Life, your musical.

LEWIS

Yes. The Good Life was a musical. You can see I was always working. [laughs]

CEPLAIR

Yes. No grass grew under your feet.

LEWIS

I wrote the book and the lyrics and got a very good composer, Randy Edelman, to write at least a dozen songs. I don't remember. We put it on at the—what's the name of the theater?

CEPLAIR

Dynarsky.

LEWIS

The Dynarsky. I have to laugh at the whole thing. [laughs] At the Dynarsky Theater in Hollywood. It was a story about labor unions

and workers, and I assumed naively, just like Angela did, that every black would come to the movie. I thought every union member of every union would come and help support the play. That turned out to be another fallacy. [laughs] So that was a failure, except I think we ran thirteen weeks or something like that, and it was a fun musical and we had modest audiences. It's a small theater, but, obviously, it never found its way to Broadway, which was the original hope.

CEPLAIR

Did you ever think of making that into a movie?

LEWIS

No, no, no, no. It wasn't good enough.

CEPLAIR

Then after that, I have you down as having written four episodes for The Thorn Birds [by Colleen McCullough] the TV series.

LEWIS

No. I didn't write any episodes of The Thorn Birds.

CEPLAIR

Produced. I'm sorry, I meant to say produced four episodes.

LEWIS

No. I have a credit on The Thorn Birds. The Thorn Birds I bought for a movie.

CEPLAIR

So you optioned the novel?

LEWIS

I optioned the novel. We went to Australia. We both met with the author. We spent months scouting Australia. We had a great time, just like what you would do. We drove all over the outback, looking for the exotic locations that she described in the book, and, of

course, it turned out to be all a charade. She made it all up. So we were making arrangements to have the film shot in Australia, and the Australian film industry was going to be a partner, and we needed a star. Did I mention who it was there?

CEPLAIR

No.

LEWIS

Robert Redford. Gave it to Robert Redford, and he was one of the classic actors that would always say maybe, never yes, and never no. But he was attached, and that got Warner Bros. involved in backing me in preparing this as a feature. So I had one, two—maybe three directors, major ones. Herbert Ross at one time, Peter Weir, the Australian director—I'm talking about A-list directors, we were also involved with various writers and Redford and would get him the scripts and have long meetings, and "Yes, yes, it's much better, but—." Anyway, there came a time, a couple of years went by. Frank Wells was the president of Warner Bros. and had gotten to be a friend of mine. Frank was the lawyer for John Frankenheimer, and if I ever do a memoir, I have some wonderful stories that involve him. But we got to be very friendly. As a matter of fact, he was famous as a mountain climber. I don't know if you know this. His objective was to climb the highest mountain on every continent, and he was doing that while he was president of Warner Bros. As a matter of fact, he had a facility built in his backyard in Beverly Hills that was pressurized so that he could spend months and months getting acclimated to high altitude. He ended up getting killed on one of these climbs where he got stuck on a cliff and a helicopter came to save him and bring him down, and he got killed by the helicopter. Anyway, he called me in. We had a very good relationship. I meant to tell you to show you how good, when he did this last climbing expedition he said to me, "I'm going to keep a detailed diary, and I'm going to send a copy of it to my wife with instructions for her to distribute it to people that I would like to know what I'm experiencing. Would you like to have one?"

I said, “Fine.” And in fact, I was one of the people that he wrote this to. Anyway, he calls me into Warner Bros. and he says, “Eddie, we’re at the end of our rope. We can’t make this movie with Redford. He won’t say yes. There is nobody else that we can think of that will justify the cast.” This was going to be a very expensive movie. “I hate to do this to you, Eddie, but we’re going to turn it into a television series.” So I said, “Fine. You have a right to collect on your investment.” But he said, “The toughest part is they won’t take you alone as the producer, because you don’t have any background as a television producer, and this is a huge thing. So they want David Wolper.” So I said, “Fine. Then get David Wolper.” So Frank said to me, “We’ll pay you by the episode.” Paid me a lot of money. “And you will have co-credit with David Wolper for producing The Thorn Birds, because you developed it up to this point.” So I said, “Fine.” That was the way it was. So I never produced a segment, had nothing to do with it, except that I got credit.

CEPLAIR

Huge success, fourteen Golden Globe nominations.

LEWIS

Oh, huge success, yes. I have the Golden Globe there.

CEPLAIR

So the next project is Hanna K. Is that the film with Robert Cortes?

LEWIS

Yes. Bob, as you know, is my son-in-law. He’s just a spectacular man, and he was out of law school. I said, “Why don’t you come and work with me.” At that time, Costa-Gavras had a project that he wanted to make, and it was called Hanna K. He was going to shoot it in France, but he needed somebody in America, so he came to me to set things up. He needed casting, he needed whatever, deal-making. I said, “Look, I’m not doing that kind of thing anymore, but somebody is working for me.” And Bob became the co-producer for Costa-Gavras of Hanna K.

CEPLAIR

What do you mean you weren't—had you just made up your mind that you were no longer going to do it?

LEWIS

No, no. I wanted anything that didn't need me that Bob could do, I wanted Bob to get to do, period, and I knew he could do it certainly as well as I could do it. So that's how I have a credit on Hanna K., the same kind of credit, I guess, as Kirk Douglas has on Spartacus, executive producer, like I have on The Thorn Birds and like on Hanna K.

CEPLAIR

So Hanna K., Crackers, and The River, Bob did most of the work that you usually did.

LEWIS

Exactly.

CEPLAIR

You just kind of were the overseer?

LEWIS

Exactly, yes. I was calling the shots. If a big meeting was required with the studio, I took it. Sometimes the director of The River, if he was pissed off about something, as they usually are, that kind of thing came to me, but Bob did the work. He was what we'd, I guess, call the line producer on The River, on Hanna K., and—what's the other one?

CEPLAIR

Crackers.

LEWIS

And Crackers. Crackers, by the way, was one project that I loved. It took me years. I fell in love with an Italian movie called Big Deal on Madonna Street. Do you know that?

CEPLAIR

Yes.

LEWIS

I loved that movie, and it took me years to get the rights because there were like six writers on it, and you had to get the rights from each one of them, and they weren't talking to one another. When I finally got it, I was really excited, and I went first to Carl Reiner [and Rob Reiner] and ran the movie, the Italian movie, for him and his son [Rob], wanting them to direct. When we finished the movie, he said, "Forget it. You can't do it as well as they done it, and you really shouldn't try." And he was right. I made a very bad choice of a wonderful director, Louis Malle, one of the really talented French directors, really talented, and a very nice man, but totally miscast in this kind of comedy. He got seduced, because they always like to do something that they're not considered right for and prove that they could. But it was a failure, a bad idea in the first place, poorly executed, I guess.

CEPLAIR

But The River turned out to be a very good idea. I mean, it was again many nominations, Golden Globes.

LEWIS

Yes, but it wasn't a good movie. So you'll be able to find out for me how many nominations.

CEPLAIR

Well, actually, I did. I did look it up. The River had five Academy Award nominations and one award and two Golden Globes.

LEWIS

But I mean the total. Somewhere at the end, you'll give me—

CEPLAIR

I'll total it. I'm going to do a filmography with your films and the nominations.

LEWIS

Okay. Great.

CEPLAIR

So The River then is actually your last producer credit, as far as I can tell.

LEWIS

That's right, yes.

CEPLAIR

Why was that? Did you voluntarily move out, or did things just didn't get made?

LEWIS

No, no. I had—you know, look how long I'd been doing this. There's just so much. For a while it's interesting and it's challenging, but then it become just a drag, and the only reason to do it is to make some money, and I didn't need to do that anymore and I had no need to just accumulate, and I wanted to do things that I wanted to do. So I just quit, period. I'm not saying that I could have gotten any more pictures made, because the movie industry was changing too. Bigger-budget pictures were in vogue. More action-type pictures were in vogue. The kind of movie that you know that I was interested in is out of vogue, so I don't know whether I also saw this would be a good time for me to quit, but I was never a quitter, so that wasn't really it. I always thought I could be a writer, I wanted to be a writer, and I could afford to do what I wanted. So I left, quit the studios, and that was it.

CEPLAIR

You put on the timeline you gave me that you did work on a book called Witness to War, and you also did some work on I, Robot [by Isaac Asimov] trying to get that made.

LEWIS

Yes, but that was earlier. I, Robot, if I have the time there—now I have it wrong. I, Robot was much earlier. That was a product, a story of Ray Bradbury's that I liked a lot. I got Harlan Ellison, who was a reputed sci-fi writer, a weird, very interesting, but very talented guy, to write a script, but I couldn't get it made. Witness to War [by Charlie Clements] was another one that appealed to both Millie and me. It was about a doctor somewhere in South America, who was devoting his career to saving people who needed medical attention. It was a true story, and I optioned the rights, and I got Richard Gere interested in playing the lead. So we kind of partnered on it and tried, had a couple of scripts written, one of them by our daughter Susan, whom I sent to meet with Richard Gere without telling him that it was my daughter, because she wanted it that way. She didn't want the job because—so she told him about herself, gave him stuff that she'd written, and she was hired. But her script was no better than the others—not good enough.

But I also did get an independent distributor, his name was Mark Damon, and he ran a successful independent outfit called Vision International. He financed and arranged distribution for a lot of not A-picture projects, and he took this one on for a long time, and then he dropped it. Then Richard Gere got a phone call from his agent saying, "It's time you got rid of this kind of project that Eddie Lewis is giving you," and he had a script for him. What's it called? Pretty Woman. If you see Pretty Woman, you'll see the lead actor that he plays in it is named Eddie Lewis. He did that. [laughter] Anyway.

CEPLAIR

So you wrote another play shortly after you finished The River, called Spring Street?

LEWIS

Yes. Spring Street was an adaptation of Maxim Gorki's The Lower Depths, and Millie and I wrote, I think, a decent adaptation, because it got put on in a lot of places. I think you have them down there.

CEPLAIR

Yes.

LEWIS

We put it on, and it was presented in New York off Broadway. It was played here at the Music Center [meant Los Angeles Theater Center].

CEPLAIR

Cal State Northridge. The El Teatro Campesino.

LEWIS

Yes, yes. If I refresh my memory here. Millie wrote this play with me, by the way. She'll not get out of that. We put it on at Cal State Northridge, at the L.A. Theater Center, and then the L.A. Theater Center invited Luis Valdez to see it, and he liked it, so he optioned the play for his theater in San Juan Bautista. He has a beautiful theater there, and it was performed there, not successfully. We did not get along well with Valdez. Anyway, that's it. That was its background.

CEPLAIR

Then you wrote another play called Ring-a-Ring-of-Roses.

LEWIS

Yes.

CEPLAIR

Another musical, it looks like.

LEWIS

Bringing up all my things. Okay. Ring-a-Ring-of-Roses was an original musical that I wrote, I think the best thing that I have written that way.

CEPLAIR

What was the subject of that?

LEWIS

It's an original about the plague in London, and that's when during the plague "Ring-a-Ring-of-Rosie" is what people would do. They would dance around corpses on the street and sing "Ring-a-Ring-of-Roses," because when you had the plague your face broke out in red blotches. So it's about the plague. It was good enough I submitted it to—I must have it in here.

CEPLAIR

Let's see. You got an award from the Harold Prince Musical Theater and performed for the Denver Center for the Performing Arts.

LEWIS

Yes. Harold Prince had a contest that he was just starting. It was the first year. He was determined to audition and find a play that he would carry from its first performance, from its audition, to Broadway, and it was a very elite kind of a contest. I read about it in the trades, I submitted this, and I won. They paid me a thousand or two thousand dollars to option the play, and it was produced at his theater, an abridged version of the play, maybe a forty-five-minute version.

He partnered with the Denver Theater for the Performing Arts, which was a major regional theater. It was a big thing. They had a production of it, a full production with rehearsals and music and the whole thing. Harold Prince, I remember, loved my opening number. But that, too, went downhill because they put a director on that they picked, and the director then did everything he could to get me to change everything beyond the opening number the way he thought it should be and would be improved. So it ended up being

no longer mine. I went along. So the play was rewritten with this director, and they put it on in front of a full audience and then dropped it. That was the end. It's very sad, talking to you, listening to all these failures, by the way. [laughs]

CEPLAIR

They're not failures. What I'm impressed with is that you continued to have these ideas and to carry them through. I think that's remarkable. Well, let's talk a little bit about Masquerade. I have read the book and I found fascinating for several reasons. One is—it's nine short stories—is your capacity to sort of put yourself in the mind of another person and kind of tell the story from that person's perspective. I know there's three stories about Vietnam veterans. What caught you attention about them? Did you know Vietnam veterans?

LEWIS

No, not one.

CEPLAIR

So why were you struck by their plight, and how were you able to kind of imagine yourself in their situation?

LEWIS

Well, struck by their plight, you had to be if you had any heart or decency. Just all you have to do is read the newspapers and watch television. That's all I ever did. I did no research. I never met a Vietnam vet, really, no, never. I was just taken by what had happened to them and who they must have become. So, you know, I'm not good at this. I didn't research any of this. The only story in there that is totally true was the one about César Chávez's wife, and that's the story he told to Millie. But I can't answer your question. I don't know. Just stories come to mind. Not easily. I'm worried now, for example, when I finish with you, I'm going to have to write a half a dozen more short stories so I have something to present, and I'm worrying already what it is, what am I going to write, because, you know, the inventory is limitless, as you know.

CEPLAIR

Yes.

LEWIS

And it's limitless for me because it's not bound by knowing anything. I don't know any stories anymore that I want to write about. I know plenty of stories about people that I can't even tell you about, but nothing that I want to write about. So that's a problem. I'll struggle with this for a long, long time, and then when I finally find what I think is worth doing—and it needs to feel to me like it's worthwhile doing, otherwise why do it—it won't take me that long to write it. I'll write it, and then I'm a meticulous rewriter. I write, I read, I redo, and I need that badly. So, as I say, as soon as you finish with me, I'm in a down mood. I've got to desperately find something now that I want to do. Do you have any ideas? Please give them to me. [laughs]

CEPLAIR

I think every one of the stories you've told me about your various movies could be—The Blue Bird sounds like a perfect short story.

LEWIS

Yes, but I don't want to do movie stories, you know. [The story I just completed, which is attached to this interview, is all I needed to write about Hollywood].

CEPLAIR

The other thing I noticed in Masquerade, what struck me is one of the stories was about you renting your house to a female film student, which reminded me of the Colin Higgins story you told me, kind of the same, although, of course, much different.

LEWIS

I don't remember the story.

CEPLAIR

It’s a female film student. I think she goes off and she tries LSD and comes back.

LEWIS

I have zero recollection of the story now.

CEPLAIR

I suppose you’re going to tell us you never took LSD, right?

LEWIS

No, I didn’t. As a matter of fact, just last night Millie said to me, because she was reading the article in The New Yorker by this—did you read it, the current New Yorker?

CEPLAIR

No.

LEWIS

The last issue. The doctor who writes in there.

CEPLAIR

Oliver Sacks.

LEWIS

Oliver Sacks. So there’s an article by him in The New Yorker about his being a drug addict, and he was addicted, heavily, seriously addicted, and he describes many experiences on LSD. So last night Millie said to me, “Do you remember you turned it down? Are you sorry, now that you read some of his experiences?” And I had forgotten all about it, and she reminded me that one day somebody from UCLA came to me, and they were doing some experimental work—who knows; it might have been Oliver Sacks—on LSD, and they were looking for colorblind people. Since so much of the experiences of people taking LSD apparently involve color and perception of color and vividness of colors, they wanted to know what would happen to someone who was colorblind taking LSD. So they came. It was a doctor. He was the head of the program. They

were testing. He tried hard to talk me into taking LSD as a subject for them to study the effect that LSD would have on a colorblind person, and I said no.

Oh, Say Can You See is a play that I wrote. I got involved early on before it became popular and on television with the water boarding and the private deals that the U.S.—it was leaking out that we had these deals with countries that would let us put prisoners into their prisons and practice and use things like water boarding and beyond. I was struck that it resembled—there's a short story called—I have to dig these things out. It's a Dostoevsky story, and it's called Ward No. 6 [by Anton Chekhov not Dostoevsky]. You know it?

CEPLAIR

I know that, yes.

LEWIS

Okay. So I decided to adapt that into what I was beginning to get leaks on. Now it's all over the place, and it is about exactly the hidden prisons that the U.S. had contracted the use of water boarding, and it follows the dramatic structure of Ward No. 6. I think it's a good play, the best straight play I've written. I've mentioned to you James Cass Rogers, a very erudite guy who, I think, still teaches at UCLA. I gave it to him to read because he is scholarly, and he was taken by it. I optioned the play to him. He's not a skilled producer, but he's involved in Harold and Maude and takes care of all that business, and he wanted to try. So he submitted it to half a dozen of the local theaters. He wrote me a note on it just recently, and he only heard from one theater. The others don't bother even to turn it down. But it was the theater that he had the most hope for; it's the Fountain Theater. Simon Levy is a very respected theater director all over the country, and he had a very flattering turndown letter from him. He admired the play a lot, but he said there were just too many plays dealing with that subject now that were being circulated and were ahead of me and were in the process of being produced. And that's it. I never did anything more. [End of September 2, 2012 interview]

1.4. Session Four (September 5, 2012)

CEPLAIR

All right. Today is September 5th, and this is our fourth session, Larry Ceplair and Edward Lewis. Mr. Lewis has some comments he wishes to make pertaining to our last sessions. I think you wanted to start with the Johnny Got His Gun tribute.

LEWIS

Yes. I'd like that. I like to add, Larry, to the Spartacus section of the first, I guess, interview. I'd like to add the following, that after the film was completed, Dalton gave me a copy of his novel Johnny Got His Gun. The inscription inside reads as follows: "To Edward Lewis, who risked his name to help a man who had lost his name. Words simply cannot say, and I shan't try and force them. But you understand, as does your friend, Dalton Trumbo, Los Angeles, June 2, 1959." It was a rule of thumb in the industry, if you want to get one film made, you need to have at least six more in active development. There were many projects that I, along with Millie, with Bob Cortes, had in what we call development that I care about and couldn't get made. Among them, most importantly, are the following: The Homecoming, the Harold Pinter play. MGM bought it for John Frankenheimer and me, and I suggested that we get Harold Pinter to write the screenplay. Huge mistake. M-G-M agreed to pay him $100,000 for the script. Millie and I went to London, had several meetings with him. Then we waited for the screenplay, and we waited months and months and months. I kept contacting him, asking him if there was a problem, whether I could assist in any way. "No," he said, "It's a very difficult play to adapt. I'm very meticulous about it and doing it carefully." He was like the guy who owed you some money and said, "The check is in the mail."

Anyway, eventually it came, very, very long after a lot of pressure on me from MGM, and the script finally came. When I opened the package and opened the script and looked at it, it was word for word the play. He had done nothing but added the obligatory fade in, fade out, close shot, two shot, whatever it was, the kinds of

directions that directors paid no attention to because that isn't the way movies were made. You shot a scene by covering it from different angles and you assembled it in the editing room. In any event, he got paid his $100,000. MGM dropped the project. That was a big disappointment. Another one was For Whom the Bell Tolls, which was [Ernest] Hemingway's novel, which I got Sony interested in doing. I wrote a draft of the screenplay. I had another writer write another draft. In any event, we never got that one off the ground. Another one that Millie and I both were involved with was called The Scalpel, the Sword: The Story of Doctor Norman Bethune [by Ted Allen and Sydney Gordon]. It was the story of Dr. [Norman] Bethune, a Canadian physician who went to China and treated the soldiers on the Long March in their fight against Japan, a wonderful story. My hope, my dream, was to have a co-production with China or at least get their permission so that we could shoot it there. We could not do either of them and lost the project. A few years later, a Chinese company got the picture made and, in fact, made it with Donald Sutherland playing Bethune, the doctor. Never played in America.

Then there were several projects that were developed mostly with Robert Cortes' energy behind them. I'll name a few of them. One was Cabo Rio, which had the talented British director Karel Reisz attached. Another was Magic Journey, set up at Universal with Louis Malle to direct. Another one was Flying Tigers where Mel Gibson was attached. And there was one called The Countrymen with Terence Malick and Sean Penn. The last one that I remember was something called Santa Ana Winds that had Michael Cimino attached to direct. So much for disappointments. But I think that's about all I have to say.

CEPLAIR

Let's pick up this theme of co-productions. I know you had two, one with Hungary that was successful, one with Russia that was not, and the China one fell through. What attracted you to these co-productions with all their problems?

LEWIS

Well, first of all, what attracted me to the Soviet one was the principle—I think I mentioned that—of trying to get something decent, a decent relationship businesswise going between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. That was the motivating force. Secondarily, we found the project and then came the disaster. But the others were the projects themselves that propelled it. Hungary was strictly an economic issue. It was a project, The Fixer, which was not attractive as a story to any of the major studios, didn't have a major star, and just wouldn't have gotten paid unless I found a way to get it made physically, very attractively to the Americans, meaning very cheaply.

As I said, I first thought of doing that in Russia, but that turned out to be totally impossible because of the subject matter anyway. And Hungary was the next choice because it had a sophisticated film industry, so that's why I went there and found a way of getting the picture financed. That's really what it amounted to. On the Chinese one, it wasn't the idea of doing a co-production with China; it was the story that hooked Millie and me. It's a fantastic story about this heroic Canadian doctor who was just a bigger-than-life figure and went to China and joined the Long March. He did more than that. He invented mobile blood transfusions. He invented all kinds of equipment, medical equipment, that is still in use. He was an extraordinary character, so that story was fascinating, and we met the man who wrote it. He was a professor who wrote a biography on Bethune, also a Canadian. His name was Ted Allan. There were problems in the beginning because Allan wrote it with a coauthor, whose name I don't remember, and they were at odds. It was a difficult one getting the rights, but we did. Ted Allan was fairly well connected in China because of his being the official biographer for Bethune, and Bethune is a hero in China. I'm not up on the history now, but I do remember he's one of the few non-Asians for which there are statues all over China. He's a heroic figure there. Ted Allan thought that he would have no trouble getting cooperation from China because he was a hero there. So we proceeded, had him

paid to write a screenplay. Millie and I made a few trips to Montreal where he lived and worked on the script, and then he took off for China to get things done, and they turned it down. They were not interested in an American company doing this. Obviously, they wanted this to be a Chinese project, not an American co-production. Without them, there was no way of making this movie. It would have cost $400 million to film the Long March and the war between China and Japan. So that's my simplest answer.

CEPLAIR

So you never went to try to negotiate?

LEWIS

No, no. Ted Allan was—I believe when they finally did make it, they made it based on his screenplay, and he was influential. I'm not sure. I have a feeling—I'd have to check with Millie again—that we did contact Donald Sutherland, the reason being that Donald was a Canadian, and the Canadian government subsidized Canadian films if they had a Canadian star in the movie. So I'm pretty sure we contacted him first. But that didn't do it. The Chinese wanted to make the film theirs. I've never seen it, obviously, and I don't think it ever played in a Western country, but I could be wrong. But I think it was called the name of Ted Allan's book, The Scalpel and the Sword [It was a Canadian, French, Chinese co-production: Bethune: The Making of a Hero (1990)]. It's a cliché to say I couldn't have done any of this without Millie, but it happens to be true. I was the energetic doer, but she was the brain behind my brain. I don't know how to put it. She was more sophisticated, had more developed tastes. After all, she's from Brooklyn, I'm from Camden, New Jersey, and there is a big divide there. She knew a hell of a lot more than I did, and, fortunately, I listened. It was not always easy, but at least 50 percent of the projects totally she initiated. She would suggest them to me and I would do them. She was involved in every aspect of it, in the casting, until it got to, you know, the feet-in-the-mud business on the set and doing whatever. She had zero interest in any of that and zero interest in most of the

personalities that I had to deal with. When it came to things that she finally was interested in enough personally, then she was fantastic.

I want to add to what I wrote. You know, as you could see, I was a compulsive, and still am. I need to be at my desk every day, thinking of something to do that makes some sense and has some relativity to what's going on in the world. But before I would ever start anything, or after I did, I never did anything without reading what I had put down on paper, whether it was a page or ten pages. And Millie was a harsh but totally honest critic, and there was not an ounce of bullshit in her and still isn't. So she was just great for me. That's all I can say. My struggle with her now is, again, she underestimated always what her contribution was and refused to let me acknowledge it, particularly to other people. So I'm still going to try to get her to do a part of this with you. That's my last comment. Except to tell you that we're married—Thursday will be—from '46 to now is how many years?

CEPLAIR

Sixty-eight.

LEWIS

Sixty-eight?

CEPLAIR

In '46?

LEWIS

We were married in '46.

CEPLAIR

Sixty-six years.

LEWIS

Sixty-six years. In sixty-six years, I never had any temptation to be other than faithful to Millie, and I was in a business, as you know,

where it was thrown at you all over the place. Had no interest. And we've had a great marriage that way. Rocky, we both had very strong opinions, and my way of listening to what she had to say is to say, "Absolutely wrong, no," and then think about it for a little bit and then go back and do it. So it's been a long, special relationship, period. She'll hate me for doing this. [laughter]

CEPLAIR

All right. Well, I think we have come to the end of this oral history.

Date: 2014-02-25