OUT OF THE SEVENTIES: L. A.'S WOMEN IN FILM AND VIDEO

Stephanie Rothman

Interviewed by Jane Collings

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CONTENTS

Biographical Summary viii

Interview History x

TAPE NUMBER: I, Side One (December 11, 2001) 1

Family background—Early childhood in Paterson, New Jersey—Rothman's parents as feminist role models and her early awareness of feminist issues—The Rothman family's Los Angeles home in Crestwood Hills, a mixed-race, planned community—Early education—Early dance training with Eugene Loring—Appreciation for the arts in the Rothman home—Contact with racial minorities during childhood—Rothman's high school social life—Acquaintance with Japanese American housekeeper and her family during post-World War II period.

TAPE NUMBER: I, Side Two (December 11, 2001) 26

Family moves to the Los Angeles community of Brentwood—Rothman spends a year at University High School—Childhood contacts with the film world in Los Angeles—Early love for movies and favorite films from childhood—Thoughts on career possibilities—Effects of Rothman's upbringing on her future accomplishments and her desire to avoid traditional female roles—Starts college at University of California, Los Angeles—Becomes engaged at eighteen—Transfers to University of California, Berkeley, and majors in sociology—Breaks off two-year engagement—Rothman's opinion of cultural life in San Francisco in the 1950s—Effects of sociology background on Rothman's later views and work—Rothman discouraged from continuing her graduate work by the lack of opportunities for women—Quits school and gets a job as a technical writer in Los Angeles—Rothman continues to receive emotional support from her parents—Dates cameraman Jeb Gholson, who encourages Rothman to go to film school.

TAPE NUMBER: II, Side One (January 29, 2002) 50

Rothman's mother's and aunt's upbringing and career paths—Religion in the Rothman home—Education valued in the Rothman home—Rothman's mother's work with Margaret Sanger and family planning—More on cameraman Jeb Gholson—Influence on Rothman of Ingmar Bergman's The Seventh Seal—Rothman on theater vs filmmaking—Rothman enters the

University of Southern California film school—Receives encouragement from UCLA and USC film studies administrators—Experiences in film school—Meets future husband Charles S. Swartz—More on USC film school—Male students' attitudes toward Rothman and her ambitions.

TAPE NUMBER: II, Side Two (January 29, 2002) 69

More on the USC film school—The French New Wave and Rothman's style—Rothman's parents' support of her ambitions—The difficulty of making documentaries vs fiction films—Wins Directors Guild of America fellowship—Prepares to make thesis film, but leaves school for job—Responsibilities as Roger Corman's assistant—Corman as filmmaker and employer—Corman's attitude toward strong female characters in his films—Rothman's directorial debut on *It's a Bikini World*—Leaves Corman's employment, but continues to work with him—Enjoys work as a producer on *Gas-s-s-s*—Corman hires Rothman and Swartz to make a film about student nurses—Rothman discovers that the low-budget films she makes are considered exploitation movies.

TAPE NUMBER: III, Side One (January 29, 2002) 87

Rothman's aunt's clothing business—Rothman's relationship with her aunt Eva—Rothman on the problems of getting work in Hollywood—Support from Swartz in search for work—Rothman on shaping film writing projects—Rothman's social circle in the sixties and seventies.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side One (February 12, 2002) 97

More on Roger Corman and the student nurses project—Corman's new company, New World Pictures—Corman's requirements for the student nurses project—Preproduction of the film *The Student Nurses*—Rothman structures the film to reflect her own social concerns—Description of *The Student Nurses*—Portraying women in the film—Rothman enjoys the variety of styles she is able to employ in the film—Critical interest in Rothman—How the rape and abortion in the film are portrayed—More on portraying women in the film–Working with actors—The constraints of working on a low-budget film—The working atmosphere on Rothman's films.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side Two (February 12, 2002).....115

The music in Rothman's films—Rothman on watching her films with audiences—Comedy in Rothman's films—More on portraying women in *The*

Student Nurses—Rothman's opinion of the film after it was finished—The kinds of films Rothman wanted to make—Rothman's retrospective opinion of *The Student Nurses*—Hitchhiking as a trope in Rothman's films—Later reputation of *The Student Nurses*—Rothman and Swartz work on the preproduction of Corman's *The Big Dollhouse*, but decline to make the film—Rothman and Swartz pitch a vampire film to Corman—Shooting the film *The Velvet Vampire* in the Mojave Desert—Rothman on making a vampire film and on the portrayal of sexuality in her films—Influences of Georges Franju and Jean Cocteau on the surreal elements of *The Velvet Vampire*.

TAPE NUMBER: V, Side One (February 12, 2002) 135

Camera set-ups often included in Rothman's scripts—More on the surreal elements of *The Velvet Vampire*—The marriage portrayed in the film—Audience reactions to the film—*The Velvet Vampire* in retrospect—The setting and atmosphere of the film—The film undergoes a change in title—The role of mirrors in the film—Technical aspects of Rothman's films—Roger Corman worried by the preview audience's reactions to *The Velvet Vampire*—Rothman and Swartz end their association with Corman.

TAPE NUMBER: VI, Side One (February 27, 2002) 147

Psychological dynamics of *The Student Nurses*—More on Rothman and Swartz ending their association with Roger Corman—Starting Dimension Pictures, a production company—Rothman's duties as vice president in charge of creative development at Dimension—Dimension's output—Rothman tries to use women as crew—Rothman and Swartz hope Dimension will be a springboard to more high-budget projects—Lack of opportunities for women directors—Rothman and Swartz end their association with Dimension Pictures—The film *Group Marriage* conceived out of Rothman's admiration for French farce and her interest in changing American sexual mores—The film's characters—Filmmaking as hard work.

TAPE NUMBER: VI, Side Two (February 27, 2002).....169

The actors in *Group Marriage*—Actor Solomon Sturges, son of director Preston Sturges—Aimée Eccles—Importance of tying the farce to real world issues—Rothman's response to her films in retrospect—The theme of people living together in Rothman's films—Deciding to make a prison picture—The blaxploitation element—The premise of an island prison—Writing the screenplay of the film *Terminal Island*—Choosing the crimes for which the characters have been sentenced.

TAPE NUMBER: VII, Side One (February 27, 2002).....190

More on choosing the crimes for which the characters have been sentenced—The theme of redemption in *Terminal Island*—The role of ideology in killing—Designing the characters in the film—The role of women as warriors in the film—Rothman tries to make the film's violence ugly—Inequity in the Motion Picture Association of America's application of the rating system—The opposing social groups in *Terminal Island*.

TAPE NUMBER: VIII, Side One (March 18, 2002).....196

More on the opposing social groups in *Terminal Island*—Social themes in the film—*Terminal Island* in retrospect—The logistical problems of low budget productions—More on social themes in *Terminal Island*—More on the theme of redemption—Making films as an opportunity to think through social issues—Origins of the film *The Working Girls*—Feminist themes in the film—The characters in the film—Description of *The Working Girls*.

TAPE NUMBER: VIII, Side Two (March 18, 2002).....217

More description of *The Working Girls*—Hitchhiking as a symbol in Rothman's films—More description of *The Working Girls*—Cassandra Peterson's strip scene in the film—Rothman's relationship to the characters in her films—The open-endedness of *The Working Girls*—Rothman's attempts to find work after leaving Dimension Pictures—The power structure of the film industry—Audience reactions to Rothman's oeuvre—Rothman's creative legacy.

TAPE NUMBER: IX, Side One (March 18, 2002).....238

More on Rothman's creative legacy.

Index.....239

Jean Rothman: A Remembrance..…….(following index)

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

PERSONAL HISTORY:

Born: November 9, 1936, Paterson, New Jersey.

Education: University of California, Los Angeles, 1953-55; B.A., sociology, University of California, Berkeley, 1958; graduate school, sociology, Berkeley, 1958-59; graduate school, University of Southern California Department of Cinema, 1962-64

Spouse: Charles [S.] Swartz, 1963

CAREER HISTORY:

Director:

Blood Bath, also known as *Track of the Vampire* (1965)
It's a Bikini World (1966)
The Student Nurses (1970)
The Velvet Vampire (1971)
Group Marriage (1972)
Terminal Island (1973)
The Working Girls (1974)

Writer:

Blood Bath (1965)
It's a Bikini World (1966)
The Student Nurses (1970), story
The Velvet Vampire (1971)
Sweet Sugar (1972), story, under the name P.Z. Samuel
Group Marriage (1972)
The Working Girls (1974)
Terminal Island (1973)
Beyond Atlantis (1973), story

Producer:
Beach Ball (1965), associate producer
Voyage to the Prehistoric Planet (1965), associate producer
Queen of Blood (1966), associate producer

The Student Nurses (1970), producer
Gas-s-s-s (1970), production executive

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:

Jane Collings, interviewer and senior editor, Oral History Program. B.A., Communications, Antioch College; M.A., Communications, University of Iowa; Ph.D., Critical Studies, University of California, Los Angeles.

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Victoria Simmons prepared the table of contents, the biographical summary and the interview history. Laura Wyrick, editorial assistant, compiled the index.

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The original tape recordings of the interview are in the university archives and are available under the regulations governing the use of permanent noncurrent records of the university. Records relating to the interview are located in the office of the UCLA Oral History Program.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

DECEMBER 11, 2001

ROTHMAN: Okay, I was born on November 9, 1936, in Paterson, New Jersey.

COLLINGS: Okay. Could you tell me something about your family?

ROTHMAN: Yes. My mother [Shandel, (known as Jennie or Jean) Gershfield] was a registered nurse who became a public health nurse and then a medical social worker. When she married my father [Theodore Rothman] she stopped working. My father was a neuropsychiatrist, and he also was born in Paterson, New Jersey. I was the second generation born there.

COLLINGS: How long did you live in Paterson?

ROTHMAN: I lived there until I turned eight years of age. At that point my family moved to Los Angeles, where I have lived most of the rest of my life.

COLLINGS: Okay. So your father was a psychiatrist.

ROTHMAN: Neuropsychiatrist.

COLLINGS: Neuropsychiatrist.

ROTHMAN: Both a neurologist and a psychiatrist.

COLLINGS: Was he sort of the first of his family to attend college, or did he come from a well-educated family?

ROTHMAN: No, he was the first of his family to attend college and medical school. His parents [Avrum Rothman and Rebecca Geber] were immigrants, just as my mother, actually, was—at an early age—an immigrant, too. Her family came from

Ukraine to Canada, and she grew up in Winnipeg, Canada, and then she came to the United States after she received her nursing degree. My father's parents came from Poland.

COLLINGS: So your father was born in the United States, but his parents were born in Poland.

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: But your mother was born actually in the Ukraine?

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: Did you have much contact with your parents' family members, cousins and that kind of thing?

ROTHMAN: The few that I have, I had contact with. A substantial portion of my family was destroyed in the Holocaust in Europe, so I never met any of my European relatives. But the few who made it, on either side, to the North American hemisphere, I was acquainted with.

COLLINGS: They lived in the Paterson area?

ROTHMAN: No. They lived in the New York area. I mean, they lived in the mid-Atlantic area. I met a few of them as a young child, on my father's side. I really didn't know any of them, though, after we moved to this side of the country.

COLLINGS: Right. In Paterson, in that area, was that a middle class area for the most part?

ROTHMAN: Well, the neighborhood I lived in was, yes. Paterson at that time had an

aircraft plant. The Wright brothers aircraft corporation [Wright Aeronautical Corporation] had their plant there, and during World War II my father actually was the psychiatrist at the plant. He was also the Passaic County psychiatrist. He also took care of private patients. Because of a physical illness, he was not eligible for the draft, and so he had to carry on and take on many jobs, both public and private, because there was a shortage of doctors on the home front. He actually, at the end of the war, got the Selective Service Medal for his service to his country.

COLLINGS: Wow.

ROTHMAN: So that was nice.

COLLINGS: Yes. Your mother at that time was at home with you, is that what you said?

ROTHMAN: Yes, that's correct. But she had an interesting career in one respect, and that is that she worked with Margaret Sanger in the 1920s on promoting birth control, particularly among immigrant groups.

COLLINGS: Right. She sounds like she was a plucky sort. Did she come on her own to the United States?

ROTHMAN: No. Well, yes, she came on her own to the United States. I think she came to Canada at about the age of nine, and then, as I say, when she turned eighteen and graduated from nursing school, she came to the United States. My grandparents [Yussel Hirschfeld and Shifra Katz] had been very traditional people, and they had just wanted her to marry when she graduated from high school. My grandfather didn't

believe in higher education for women, so he would give her no help going to college, and so she entered nursing school because it was free. She wanted very much to have a career and some kind of professional training, and so she became a nurse. Then, from there, when she came to the United States, she went to the New School for Social Research, took additional courses, managed to train herself sufficiently to qualify as a public health nurse and with additional course work and training to become a medical social worker.

COLLINGS: Did she resume her career at a certain time after you were a bit older?

ROTHMAN: No. No, she never did. She *is* interesting, I must tell you.

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: She also was a very enterprising person. She saved her money while she was working and she bought a farm in New Jersey, where she hired a tenant farmer to work the land. It had a lovely eighteenth century stone farmhouse on it, and she grew vegetables for the Campbell soup company, which was not far away. She had a contract with them and she did that. But when she married my father she sold the farm in order to finance his opening up his own private practice in Paterson, New Jersey.

COLLINGS: This is jumping far ahead, in terms of a chronology, but I can't resist asking you if she— She has seen your films, I presume?

ROTHMAN: Yes. I'm not sure she saw every one of them, but she saw almost every one, yes.

COLLINGS: Did she have a response to the women's roles that you put forth in your films?

ROTHMAN: Well, my mother was a very active, forthright, intelligent, and, in the most positive sense, aggressive woman, so I don't think she would have had any other expectations for the roles of women in my films than those that were there. I mean, she didn't comment on it, because it wasn't surprising to her.

COLLINGS: Right.

ROTHMAN: My parents had many friends who were professional women: doctors, university professors, musicians, and so therefore—

COLLINGS: It was a given.

ROTHMAN: It was a given that women acted that way.

COLLINGS: Okay. You've commented a little bit about her personality. Can you think of any ways, when you were growing up, that she was able to sort of communicate these values and attitudes to you?

ROTHMAN: Well, it wasn't just her, it was my father— I actually, when I was growing up, was very dismayed that she didn't have a job and wasn't working.

COLLINGS: Did it seem unusual to you?

ROTHMAN: Well, I understood from quite an early age that women who were economically dependent on men were their inferiors.

COLLINGS: What made you think that?

ROTHMAN: I looked around me and saw that women were paid less, that women

who didn't work described themselves as "just a housewife." I saw the attitudes that men had towards women and their capacities in the world at large, which were very demeaning in some instances, but in most instances were at least dismissive or in some way expressed a belief that women weren't as good as men, couldn't achieve what men could achieve. "Look at the poor record of accomplishment women have." Things like that, that were expressed to me, made me have this attitude.

COLLINGS: But your father didn't treat your mother that way?

ROTHMAN: My father certainly didn't treat my mother that way. He respected her opinions. He admired many things about her, and he certainly— There is no way he *could* have treated her that way. [mutual laughter] She wouldn't have stood for it, and he wouldn't have done it anyway, because he did not—

As a psychiatrist he had women patients, and it was his observation that a lot of their unhappiness had to do with their inferior position in society. He frequently, with women who had the capacity to do so, would encourage them to go out and further educate themselves and pursue careers. He thought that was very important. As I say, I'm not sure— I've lost my train of thought, but I observed from an early age that economic dependency bred a sense of inferiority in women, and a sense of superiority in men toward women.

COLLINGS: Would your father discuss these cases, like at the dinner table?

ROTHMAN: No, that would have been professionally unethical. But he did, over the years, express to me that he had done that with his patients, and that he had observed

what a certain amount of the source of their unhappiness was, and it had nothing to do with mental illness. It had to do with social deprivation, or socioeconomic deprivation, if you will. Not necessarily in the form of poverty, but in the form of not feeling autonomous, not feeling that they had any way of determining their own lives, because they were not economically independent, and it was a very important thing for a woman to be. I, independently, also observed that and thought that from a very early age.

COLLINGS: Right. Did you ever have any discussions with your mother about this subject?

ROTHMAN: Yes, I did. I did, and she was more traditional in one respect, and that is that she said— Well, my father wasn't well. He had a very bad case of arthritis, and she felt she had to stay home and care for him because he couldn't do certain things, physically, that other people could do. She had a very protective and devoted attitude toward him.

COLLINGS: That's nice.

ROTHMAN: Although he was, professionally and socially, a very successful and well liked man, he— She didn't have to work.

COLLINGS: Right.

ROTHMAN: Financially it was not necessary for her to work.

COLLINGS: What kinds of political views did your parents hold, in terms of political party affiliation, or not?

ROTHMAN: Well, as a very young man, when he was in college, my father was a socialist. But as he grew up, as everybody does— They move to the right, it seems, a little bit. So both of them became liberal Democrats.

COLLINGS: All right. You moved to Los Angeles at the age of eight approximately, and where did you settle in Los Angeles?

ROTHMAN: The first place we lived was in North Hollywood. Then we lived there from about 1945 until 1952, and around 1950 my parents joined a cooperative housing association called the Mutual Housing Association, which purchased a tract of land in the hills north of Sunset Boulevard.

COLLINGS: Crestwood Hills?

ROTHMAN: Crestwood Hills.

COLLINGS: Oh, my goodness, you're kidding me!

ROTHMAN: Yes, we were amongst the first settlers.

COLLINGS: How interesting!

ROTHMAN: They took one of the standard designs that was made for Crestwood Hills and they upgraded it considerably. They brought in another architect and reshaped it to meet their needs. The house was built on quite a large lot. I think they actually had a one acre lot, and most of it was flat. We moved in in 1952.

COLLINGS: Oh, wow, I've never known anybody who lived in that community, I mean the original community.

ROTHMAN: The *very* original. I was there, as a young girl, when the first piece of

earth was dug up and turned over.

COLLINGS: Oh, geez, that's early.

ROTHMAN: When there was a ceremony there. Actually, I think they joined it before 1950. They may have joined it as early as the late forties sometime.

COLLINGS: Now— Oh, I'm sorry, go ahead.

ROTHMAN: That's okay.

COLLINGS: My understanding is that the community was intended to be a sort of a mixed race, mixed socioeconomic community.

ROTHMAN: That's right, that's right.

COLLINGS: But could you say more about what the community was intended to be, and what it was in terms of your experience living there?

ROTHMAN: Well, to be very honest with you, I didn't have that much contact with the people in Crestwood Hills. I babysat for a few of them. I was a young girl.

COLLINGS: Right, yes.

ROTHMAN: I really wasn't involved in the politics and the dynamics of it. My parents enjoyed living there. They liked their neighbors. Down the street from us was a gentleman who taught in the English department at UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles], his name was Jorgenson, and across the street from us was an accountant, and down the block was, I think, a man who was a businessman. There were a variety of people there, but I really didn't know them so I'm afraid I can't tell you much more about Crestwood Hills.

COLLINGS: That's okay. Well, it still has a strong sense of community, if you go to events and things at the local recreation center and whatnot that's in Crestwood Hills. I don't know what the status of the neighborhood is now, vis-à-vis the original ideals.

ROTHMAN: No, neither do I. My parents sold. I don't really think Crestwood Hills continued to have much of an identity by the time my parents sold their home and moved out of there in 1967. I think most of that strong identity probably existed in the 1950s.

COLLINGS: Yeah. And why did they sell their home there?

ROTHMAN: Because they decided to move to a condominium. [mutual laughter]

COLLINGS: Okay. I wondered if maybe they were sort of dissatisfied with what had happened politically.

ROTHMAN: No, no, no, no. They just got tired of caring for grounds and so forth.

COLLINGS: Sure.

ROTHMAN: They wanted to travel more, and so they bought themselves a lovely condominium instead.

COLLINGS: Okay. Now, where did you attend elementary school? Was it Kenter Canyon in Crestwood Hills?

ROTHMAN: No. I went to elementary school here in North Hollywood. I went to the Bakeman Street School on Bakeman Street from the fourth grade until the sixth grade. Then I went to North Hollywood Junior High School and then I had one year at North Hollywood High School—no, a year and a half at North Hollywood High

School—and then we moved to Brentwood. I had a year at University High School, because there was no other school around. There was no Kenter Canyon school there, there was no [Pacific] Palisades High School at the time. Everybody from the Palisades on east went to University High School.

I graduated from there in a year. I was sixteen when I graduated, and I went to UCLA after that, for— What was it? I guess it was two and a half years. Then I transferred to UC [University of California] Berkeley, and I went there for another year. I took an extra semester because there were many courses I wanted to take that I didn't get to take, so I indulged myself. Then I went to UC Berkeley for a year in the Graduate School of Sociology. I wanted to get, I thought at that time, an M.A. in political sociology. But after a year of that I decided I didn't, so I came back to Los Angeles and I decided to work for a few years. I got a job as first a technical editor and then a technical writer at Systems Development Corporation, which worked on contracts with the U.S. air force on North American defense systems.

COLLINGS: What year was this?

ROTHMAN: Oh, that I started to work at Systems Development Corporation? I think it was 1960.

COLLINGS: Okay.

ROTHMAN: Or maybe it was late— No, I think it was the end of 1959. I take it back, I think it was the fall of 1959.

COLLINGS: Okay. Let me just sort of take you back a little bit to middle school and

high school periods, in terms of the development of some of your interests at that time. Did you have interests in the arts?

ROTHMAN: Yes, I did. My mother thought that for exercise—when I was about, oh, I guess eight or nine—I should take a dance class. So I took ballet, and I really liked it. I mean they thought of it as just some little thing for me to do after school. I liked it so intensely that I convinced them to let me go to the American School of Dance in Hollywood, which was the school run by the choreographer Eugene Loring. There I trained intensively, and my— He wanted to use me. I mean, I got quite advanced, advanced enough to work professionally by the time I was fourteen. I looked quite mature for my years, and he wanted to use me as a dancer in films that were being shot here in Los Angeles. He also wanted me to try out for the Los Angeles Civic Light Opera Ballet, but my parents were opposed to it. [laughs] They never told me that, by the way. He approached them; he didn't talk about it with me.

COLLINGS: He didn't invite you initially? He worked through them?

ROTHMAN: Yes. He approached them, and they never told me until I was an adult about this.

COLLINGS: Really?

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: What was your reaction to that?

ROTHMAN: Pardon me?

COLLINGS: What was your reaction to that?

ROTHMAN: Well I— I'll pass on that one.

COLLINGS: Okay. [Rothman laughs] All right. Sorry.

ROTHMAN: But of course it is a good question. I could have danced in some of the MGM [Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer movie studio] musicals that were being made at that time, such as *An American in Paris* and the later ones after that. He either sent dancers to appear in those or in some cases he did some of the choreography. Well, now, of course I didn't get to do that.

COLLINGS: What was their reason for that?

ROTHMAN: They were afraid. First of all, they didn't think that dancers could last very long. They didn't have a very good opinion of people who had theatrical careers, whether as actors or as dancers. Not because they looked down on them, but because they thought it was too much of a struggle to make a living, and they didn't want me to have to struggle to make a living. They wanted me to be educated and pursue a career, a career that would feed me rather than a career that would make me starve. That was basically it. They were both products of the Depression, and they had that anxiety, as all people, or almost all people, who were products of the Depression had. The 1930s had a terrible, terrible effect on a whole generation of Americans, who were terribly concerned about their children not being able to make a living. And I was of the generation of children that they had. [mutual laughter]

COLLINGS: Now, were there arts in the home? I mean music, books?

ROTHMAN: Oh, yes. My father was a very gifted pianist. Until the age of fifteen he

had been studying with a pupil of Paderewski, and he was encouraged by his teacher to seriously consider a career as a pianist.

It's a very funny and interesting story. Apparently this man, when he didn't like his fingering or something, would slap his students on the knuckles with a ruler, and he did that to my father when he was fifteen and my father got so enraged that he hit him back and walked out.

COLLINGS: Oh.

ROTHMAN: And never took another formal piano lesson again as long as he lived. But he was a very good pianist, and our home was full of music. The first piece of furniture my parents bought after they were married was a grand piano for him, and he always was playing. He also had a very extensive record collection. Our house was full of music. We listened to music every night. When my mother had brought me home from the hospital, my parents tell me, my father raced upstairs to his piano and he played a piece from Bach's English Suite—

COLLINGS: Oh! That's lovely!

ROTHMAN: —as she carried me into the house and up the stairs to my room. So yes, there was a great deal of appreciation for the arts. Many of my father's friends were professional musicians. My father also took up the recorder, and he had a whole collection of recorders. When we first moved out here, for a number of years we used to have musical evenings in which musicians would come over and we would have chamber music played by them in our house, musicians who were family friends. My

father would sometimes join in on the recorder.

COLLINGS: Oh, how nice.

ROTHMAN: Sometimes they would bring over antique instruments that they had in their collections and play on them. So sometimes we would have evenings with the piano, a viola de gamba and a viola d'amore playing.

COLLINGS: Wow, that's lovely.

ROTHMAN: And my father on the recorder. So, yes, believe me, I was exposed to the arts. Furthermore, my father would, if he had had his way, have been a professional writer, rather than having a career in medicine, but that was a dream of his. And he did have a very nice prose style. He actually published a poem. He was editor one year in college of the college literary magazine, and he published a poem of his which so infuriated the faculty that they wanted to put him on suspension. They were just very irritated with this poem. They considered it too radical and so, at any rate, somehow—

COLLINGS: Politically radical?

ROTHMAN: I think just the imagery in it they considered too radical.

COLLINGS: I see.

ROTHMAN: At any rate, somehow it came to the attention of H.L. Mencken, and he wrote a passing comment about it in an article he was doing and that sort of embarrassed the faculty and so they dropped that idea.

COLLINGS: What college was he at?

ROTHMAN: Clark University.

COLLINGS: In?

ROTHMAN: In Worcester, Massachusetts. It was, at the time he went there, famous for its department of psychology and also for its department of geography, but his physics teacher was none other than Charles—I think his name was [Robert Hutchings] Goddard—the father of rocketry.

COLLINGS: Oh, boy. A brush with greatness, really.

ROTHMAN: Yes, a brush with greatness. There is another brush with greatness in my life that I have— [laughs] A near brush with greatness that I never forgave my parents for, which was that my father was, when he was practicing medicine in Paterson, New Jersey, on the medical staff of the Paterson General Hospital, and so was the poet-physician William Carlos Williams.

COLLINGS: Oh, my goodness.

ROTHMAN: Who was, as you know, an obstetrician and gynecologist.

COLLINGS: I hadn't realized that, wow.

ROTHMAN: Yes. And they knew each other. Not very well, but they knew each other, my father and William Carlos Williams, and when it was time for my mother to deliver me they didn't choose him.

COLLINGS: Oh, no! [mutual laughter]

ROTHMAN: As my obstetrician.

COLLINGS: He must have been in great demand.

ROTHMAN: I don't know if he was or not. I'm not sure he was that famous at that time. But I have always deeply regretted that I could have perhaps had as my delivering physician William Carlos Williams.

COLLINGS: Right.

ROTHMAN: And I couldn't. I mean, I say this—

COLLINGS: It would be on your birth certificate.

ROTHMAN: Yes. I say that facetiously, of course. But it would have been great, and I always used to tease my parents, "Why?"

COLLINGS: "Why—!"

ROTHMAN: "Why did you choose this other man?"

COLLINGS: Right. This nonentity.

ROTHMAN: Right.

COLLINGS: Yes. Okay, so they recommended that you take the dance just as a form of recreation after school, and never intended that you would get very serious about it?

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: What kinds of subjects did they think that it would be good for you to pursue when you were in high school?

ROTHMAN: Oh, well, science, math and literature.

COLLINGS: Literature just to be well rounded?

ROTHMAN: Well, I mean, not in any dismissive sense. They both read and had a high regard for literature, and thought that—my father certainly did—it provided one

with the patterns that one could follow or avoid as one lived one's life. It offered one also the pleasure of reading fine prose. It was a way of living in the world and at the same time living outside the world. All of which was, in his opinion, wonderful, and to be encouraged in me. In no sense— I mean, the more I read, the happier they were.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Now, did you have a television in your house?

ROTHMAN: Well, not until, I think, I entered college. Before that there was no television. Of course, not many people owned televisions in those days.

COLLINGS: Yeah. I just wondered if they were sort of one of the first to.

ROTHMAN: No. Absolutely not. We sat and read books and listened to music, and we sat at the dinner table every night and had long and interesting discussions.

COLLINGS: Did they listen to much news on the radio?

ROTHMAN: Oh, yes.

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: Oh, yes, we would all listen to the news. Definitely. Several, in fact, commentators every evening, as they were called then.

COLLINGS: Okay. Now, when you were at middle school and high school, did you find that there were other kids who came from similar backgrounds or not? I mean among your peers.

ROTHMAN: Not at North Hollywood. Not in North Hollywood, no. They came from families that were not as affluent as mine. My parents had bought their house where they had because they bought it during World War II. There was a terrible

housing shortage out here and so a friend of theirs had encouraged them. In fact, a friend of theirs who is Dorothy Anderson. You've probably heard of Carl and Dorothy Anderson. They have, I believe, a wing in the Skirball museum [Skirball Cultural Center] named after them, because Dorothy Anderson was the niece of Jack Skirball.

COLLINGS: Okay.

ROTHMAN: At any rate, they had encouraged them to buy a house in the North Hollywood area, or live there, because they themselves lived nearby in Laurel Canyon and they thought this was a nice area. There wasn't, as I said, much housing available, so they bought it here. Once they lived here for a few years after the war, they didn't think this was a neighborhood that they wanted to be in, and so they looked around where to move, and that's when they found the Mutual Housing Association, joined it, and became one of the pioneers.

COLLINGS: Right.

ROTHMAN: So— What was your question? I'm sorry.

COLLINGS: Well, it was just about whether there was sort of a disconnect between the cultural activities of your home and—

ROTHMAN: Yes. There was a complete disconnect between the cultural activities in my home and the socioeconomic level of my home and the children I went to school with, and it isolated me. It isolated me because I was better read, I was interested in other things, and when I brought them home they were shocked to see that, you know,

my family had a housekeeper. So I was definitely somewhat removed from them.

COLLINGS: Right. Why had they come out to Los Angeles?

ROTHMAN: My father's condition, his illness.

COLLINGS: I see.

ROTHMAN: As I said, he had a very severe case of arthritis, and the climate out here was much more beneficial to him than the cold, wet, Eastern winters. And my mother, as a young woman, had taken a trip around the Panama Canal on a cruise ship, and she—

COLLINGS: Wow, she's really an adventurer.

ROTHMAN: She had come to California and she had fallen in love with it. So for that reason she always told him, "You really should come to California, and you'd be so much more comfortable here. Your health would improve." And it did. It did improve.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Okay. In terms of racial composition, what was the racial and ethnic makeup of your school community when you were middle school and high school?

ROTHMAN: Well, in middle school it was primarily white. It was overwhelmingly Christian, and the only minority was there were a few Japanese American students who came there after they were let out of the camps, but very few, and some Mexican American kids also. It was very segregated. Everything was very segregated, schools in those days. I was always very attracted to and liked the Mexican American kids. I

found them very warm, very friendly. Most of the other kids disdained them. I never did. I really liked them. I always have. I still do. I mean, I just felt a natural affinity for them, even though we came from different cultures. I just liked talking to them, I liked their way of relating to people.

COLLINGS: You were accepted as a friend?

ROTHMAN: I couldn't say I was accepted as a friend. I did have a couple of friends amongst them that I sometimes went to the movies with. But there was a sense in these schools that it was a line that couldn't be crossed, although I was the only one I know of who did cross it in grammar school, and see these little girls outside of class and go to the movies with them. But on the whole they lived in another area and it was hard for us to get together except to meet at the movies and go to the movies together, because after school I didn't play games, I went home and I read and I did my homework, you know. That's what I did. Other kids did go around and play and so forth, but I really didn't.

In junior high school and in high school that was true, up until North Hollywood High School, I mean until I left North Hollywood High School. Most of the Mexican American kids I knew in junior high school I never saw again in high school. I don't know where they went. My guess is some of them didn't continue with school and some of them had families that moved away to other places and went to other schools. But that's a guess. I don't know for sure.

COLLINGS: Okay. I'm sort of assuming that you did fairly well at school.

ROTHMAN: Yes, I did.

COLLINGS: How did people react to that?

ROTHMAN: Well, I was called a brain, and that was usually an occasion for hostility.

COLLINGS: Okay, yes. Were there other smart girls at the school?

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: Were there any sort of alliances among smart girls?

ROTHMAN: No.

COLLINGS: No. They were in separate social groups?

ROTHMAN: Yes. It was very cliquish, and I was an outsider. I was always an outsider. I mean, I wasn't teased or abused or anything, but I was basically— I was an only child, I lived by myself, you know, without other playmates. I had interests that I pursued, and I was just not part of the group.

COLLINGS: Right. Did you have mentors in terms of teachers at school?

ROTHMAN: By the way, I don't want to give you the impression I had no little friends at all.

COLLINGS: No, I couldn't imagine that.

ROTHMAN: I mean, I had girls I ate lunch with and sometimes went to the movies with and so forth. But I was never a part of the in group. Never. Partly I think by choice, and partly by the fact that I was different. Now, you were saying, did I have any mentors in school?

COLLINGS: Yeah, in terms of teachers.

ROTHMAN: Yes. Yes, I had several teachers who were very kind and encouraging to me.

COLLINGS: Okay. I just had one other question about the school experience. You said that there were some of the Japanese American kids who had come back from the internment camps?

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: Did you ever have any discussions with them about that?

ROTHMAN: About that? No. They tended to stay very much to themselves.

COLLINGS: Okay.

ROTHMAN: It was very hard to socialize with them. On the other hand, we did have a young woman, an extremely bright, wonderful young woman who went to work as a housekeeper—for about I'd say nine months or maybe a year—for my family straight out of the internment camps. She was the first adult I ever had a crush on. She was wonderful. I just idolized her.

Her family were, I think, a sister and a brother and her father, who was a widower. They came over and we met them, and my parents thought they were perfectly marvelous people. They used to come and visit with us for a while on Sunday and then take her off, you know, for a Sunday visit with them. She was about twenty-four. She had a beautiful musical voice, and she sang beautifully and she was always cheerful. I just thought she was the most terrific grown up I had ever met. Her

father opened a nursery in Huntington Beach, and when he opened it—he got financing somehow—he asked her to join him working in the nursery with him, in the business, and she left us. I was heartbroken. The last I heard, they had prospered.

COLLINGS: Oh, that's good.

ROTHMAN: So I did know someone who was Japanese American, and who was—What can I tell you? She was my role model. She was everything to me when I was about— I was about nine years of age then.

COLLINGS: I see. Okay, so you were a little young to have had a sense that there were the internment camps going on.

ROTHMAN: No. No, I wasn't.

COLLINGS: Oh, you weren't, okay.

ROTHMAN: Because I heard about them, you know, when my parents were talking about hiring her. I remember my father saying, after he met her and then her family came over and we met them, "These are wonderful people. That was the most terrible thing that was done to them." My parents, having lived on the East Coast during World War II, were not really very conscious of the plight of Japanese Americans. I mean, they heard about it, and they didn't think it was a good thing, but when they met the Sugita family— That was their name.

COLLINGS: Okay.

ROTHMAN: They were appalled at what had been done. It suddenly became more real to them, and they felt terrible about it.

COLLINGS: Yeah.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE TWO

DECEMBER 11, 2001

ROTHMAN: When my family moved to Brentwood I did, of course, start going to school with people who were from similar income levels and socioeconomic backgrounds to my own.

COLLINGS: Right, right.

ROTHMAN: I made some very good friends there, when I went to high school at University High School, foremost of which was my friend Mary Howard—whose father, I should say, also taught in the English department at UCLA. She was a very bright, inventive, funny person. I just spent a year there, and then, of course, I went on to UCLA.

As far as racial mixture, there was hardly anybody there who wasn't white at University High School at that time.

COLLINGS: Yeah. That's very changed now.

ROTHMAN: I think they had one black student, and he was a football player and he was *very* popular because he was the best player, or one of the best players, on the football team. He was extremely popular and extremely well liked. He was very well integrated into the campus population, but he was the only one.

COLLINGS: Yeah. At what point did you start becoming aware of the film world in Los Angeles?

ROTHMAN: At a very early age, because my parents knew actors and writers and

producers.

COLLINGS: How did they know them?

ROTHMAN: Socially. My father also had some people in his practice who were, but they knew a number of people socially. There was a big colony of them here in North Hollywood, and, of course, people lived in Brentwood also. A very good friend of my parents was a man named Ted [Theodore] Thomas, whose parents were stars of the Yiddish theater. Their names were Boris and Bessie Tomashevsky, and his cousin was— Oh, how could his name escape me? [Paul Muni]

COLLINGS: You'll think of it later, I'm sure.

ROTHMAN: He was a very famous film actor of the 1930s and early 1940s, who— At any rate, he came out here with his cousin and he started getting work as a screenwriter out here. My parents met him and his wife and became friends with them, and through them they met a number of other people who were also screenwriters and producers. Then through other friends they had they met people who were actors and who also worked in the industry.

COLLINGS: So was their core social group film people?

ROTHMAN: No. They had many, many people they socialized with, unlike their reclusive daughter. They drew from the film industry, from the world of music, there were other physicians who were colleagues of my father, and then there were people from academia, who taught at UCLA and USC [University of Southern California], not just in areas where you would have predicted, like the psychology department, but

also my father was very interested in history. He had a number of friends who taught in the history department, and some people who taught in social sciences.

COLLINGS: A wide range.

ROTHMAN: Very wide range.

COLLINGS: Did they take you to see plays and films?

ROTHMAN: Oh, yes, all the time. I went to the movies with my little friends every Saturday.

COLLINGS: Oh, you did?

ROTHMAN: Yes, and in addition to that my parents would sometimes take me with them in the evening, and then we did go to plays. We subscribed every season to a series of plays at UCLA that the drama department put on, and then they would take me to professional plays as well, that were put on here in Los Angeles. On occasion, when I went back to New York, I would go to the theater in New York, too.

COLLINGS: Were you sort of taken up with the films that you saw? Did you collect, you know, fan kinds of photos—? No.

ROTHMAN: No. But I *adored* films. I absolutely— It didn't matter whether it was a good one or a bad one, I was just entranced by the images, and just by the opportunity to escape into a world of strange images.

COLLINGS: What films in particular do you recall liking? Or genres?

ROTHMAN: You know, there were certain films that did impress me very much as a young girl, even in grammar school. One was the [W.] Somerset Maugham novel that

was made into a film, called—

COLLINGS: *Of Human Bondage*?

ROTHMAN: *The Razor's Edge*.

COLLINGS: Oh, *The Razor's Edge*.

ROTHMAN: Yes. I remember I found it absolutely fascinating. Another was— This will sound odd. Let me think for a moment about the titles.

COLLINGS: Okay.

ROTHMAN: Would you like a cup of tea?

COLLINGS: Yes, I'd love one. [tape recorder off] Okay, so you were talking about the films that you saw as a child that really struck you.

ROTHMAN: Yes. One that really did—in fact, it made me afraid to look at paintings for many years—was *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and another was *The Razor's Edge*, and yet another was *Meet Me in St. Louis*.

COLLINGS: Oh, I love that one.

ROTHMAN: *The Bad and the Beautiful*, although that was a little later than *Meet Me in St. Louis* and the others I have named.

COLLINGS: If you liked a film, would you see it again? Would you go back and see them over and over?

ROTHMAN: No. There was no opportunity to do that, because they used to change their schedules between Saturday and Sunday normally. I couldn't go during the week, I was in school. The films you saw on Saturday you couldn't see again on

Sunday. And as I recall, I was usually rationed to one visit to the movies a week. So, no, I couldn't.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Did you have one particular friend that used to love to go to the movies with you, or did you go with just kind of anybody? I mean, did you have a sort of a film buddy?

ROTHMAN: No, I didn't have a film buddy. I went with different kids, and sometimes by myself.

COLLINGS: Did you talk about the films at all afterward?

ROTHMAN: No.

COLLINGS: Okay, I was just wondering.

ROTHMAN: Not that I can recall. We just left dazzled.

COLLINGS: Yeah. [mutual laughter] You had mentioned that year at University High School, where you were finally now with some sort of peers who had similar kinds of backgrounds. Were you aware at all of what their career goals were?

ROTHMAN: Yes. They didn't really have career goals. I was the only one who thought I had a career goal.

COLLINGS: Which was what?

ROTHMAN: To go back a bit—

COLLINGS: Okay.

ROTHMAN: I didn't dance once my parents moved to Brentwood. I had to give up my dancing. That was just as well with them, because— I had to, mainly because

transportation—

COLLINGS: It was too far.

ROTHMAN: It was too far. I had to take a bus, and the bus system was terrible in Los Angeles at that time. It would have taken me two hours there and two hours back, and I used to go very frequently, sometimes as much as five days a week, at a certain point when I was training. But I couldn't do that in Brentwood, and my parents were just as happy that I wasn't doing it anymore.

COLLINGS: Was that hard for you, to give that up?

ROTHMAN: It was hard for me, but I had no choice. At that point I identified very strongly with my father. I always identified very strongly with him and loved him very much. I decided that I wanted to become a doctor like him. He and I used to talk about it. He used to say, "If you do that, and you go through medical school, and you graduate and get your training, and you decide on psychiatry, then you and I can go into practice jointly. Then we can practice together." So I set my mind on going to college and then going to medical school.

COLLINGS: Now, he had gone into medical school with the idea that he would make a living, but you had said that he was interested in writing.

ROTHMAN: Yes. But I mean, of course, once he went to medical school, he found it utterly fascinating. He really enjoyed it. He excelled. He did very well. When he finished his internship he graduated first in his intern class. I mean, he found medicine and science absolutely entrancing once he started studying.

COLLINGS: And thought that you would, too?

ROTHMAN: Yes, he thought I would, and so did I.

COLLINGS: So that was your plan at that time, that you were basically pre-med at high school.

ROTHMAN: That I would be pre-med in college. I wasn't in high school.

COLLINGS: No, but I mean just in terms of attitude.

ROTHMAN: Yes, I thought I would be a pre-medical student in college.

COLLINGS: Okay. Just sort of wrapping up, you know, and then to sort of look forward into the college period— Looking back at childhood and teenage [years], can you pinpoint any particular experiences that you considered to have been really formative for you growing up?

ROTHMAN: In terms of becoming a filmmaker at a later age?

COLLINGS: Yeah, or some other aspect of who you are.

ROTHMAN: I think living in the home that I lived in was really formative. I mean, everyone can say that, obviously, but I think that being removed by my interests and my background from most other children, being viewed as being different and feeling myself different— I don't mean that I felt special or wonderful or, you know, anything of that sort, but I was not a part of any group and I was not really, I would say, accepted as a part of any group, even though I wasn't persecuted or anything like that, or teased or abused. But it just was a fact. I think that was very formative, and I think it set the pattern for the rest of my life.

COLLINGS: Did you feel that you were impelled to excel in any way?

ROTHMAN: Oh, yes. I mean, that was expected of me by my parents, that I would do well, but not in the sense that there was any threat behind it. I know some people have parents who are very threatening and say "You'd better do well or else" in school. I never got that. My parents expected me to and explained that if I wanted to succeed in life I had to. It was really important to establish the discipline of studying at an early age. It was very important to learn how to be persistent until I accomplished what I needed to accomplish, even if it didn't come easily at first, that I had to stick with it until I mastered it, whatever it was. But that was their expectation for me, that I would do well. They encouraged me to do well and they gave me a very good rationale for doing well. It wasn't just "You have to do well." It was "If you want to succeed in life, if you want to succeed as an adult, if you don't want to end up in a situation that is narrow and unpromising and will make you unhappy, then you have to prepare yourself now for the future, so that that won't happen."

COLLINGS: Were there any examples of those narrow situations that you could see?

ROTHMAN: Well, to me, one of them was getting married and having babies.

COLLINGS: Just early on you were singling that out?

ROTHMAN: Yes. That was something I *definitely* didn't want to do, was get married and have babies and do nothing else.

COLLINGS: Was there anybody in particular who stood out as an example of that for you?

ROTHMAN: No, but I looked around me and saw what happened to the older sisters of people I went to school with, and just women in general. I used to pick up from them expressions of "Oh, well, I wanted to do this." I can't tell you what a common conversation it was for me to hear from women, as a young girl growing up, "Well, I wanted to do such and such when I grew up. I had an ambition to do something, but then I got married and had children." It was like "And then my life was over." That was the message that they sent out in the way that they said it. I used to hear that over and over again. This was, I'm sure, not unique to me in the time that I was growing up. I'm sure all women heard that. The difference was that for many that I knew that was a wonderful thing to have happen to them, and they didn't seem to hear, or they chose to ignore, the note of sadness that I always heard.

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: It didn't have anything to do, it seemed to me, with income level. Women in high income levels I'd hear saying that and women in lower income levels I'd hear saying that. It seemed to be a universal female song: "I wanted to do this, but then I got married and had children." That was it, that was the grand finale. It was over. Yet I'd hear men talking about their lives, and their lives were so interesting. They had all sorts of possibilities. They had freedom. They earned money, which gave them power. You know, I heard all of that and I thought to myself, "That's what I want to do. I want to have freedom to determine what I will do with my life."

COLLINGS: Did your parents ever talk to you about, "Oh, well, when you're

married, this that and the other thing?"

ROTHMAN: No, never. They never suggested to me that I was going— Let me put it this way. It was not assumed that I would be married and have children. It's not that I wouldn't be married and not have children, it's just it was not assumed that I would. So they didn't say to me, "Well, when you've grown up, and you've married, and have a family of your own." Other people would say that to me, but my parents never would.

COLLINGS: I see, okay.

ROTHMAN: One of the reasons may be because I said to them at quite young an age, "I don't think I want to get married and have children. It's not what I want to do." So they didn't take that very smug adult posture that one hears so often adults taking with children, which is, "Oh, well, you're very young. You'll change when you grow up." Or "Oh"—you know [laughs] —"You don't know what you want." Or "Oh, of course you will." Or "Don't say that, because it's a bad thing to say." They just didn't say anything.

COLLINGS: When you were a child, did you ever say that you wished that you had a brother or sister?

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: What would your parents say to that?

ROTHMAN: Well, they would say that at the time that they would have perhaps considered having a second child my father got very ill, and they didn't know whether

he would be able to make a living. My mother wasn't sure that he might not get so ill that she would have to go out and support both of us, and so for that reason they decided not to have a second child.

COLLINGS: Okay.

ROTHMAN: I'm really telling you it all.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Well, you know, it's important and interesting, because there are so many of these themes about making a world in the films that you've made, and you investigate so many of these issues with regard to women and class issues in your films, so to not talk about how these ideas came up would be really missing something.

So you went to college at UC [University of California] Berkeley initially, or UCLA?

ROTHMAN: UCLA.

COLLINGS: UCLA. I'm sorry, yeah. And were you planning to graduate from UCLA?

ROTHMAN: Well, since I started college at sixteen, my parents had a hard time letting me out of the nest.

COLLINGS: Sure. That's young.

ROTHMAN: And when I was eighteen I became engaged.

COLLINGS: Oh.

ROTHMAN: To a young man who had graduated from Harvard. You'll put this in

better order, I'm sure, when I tell you— He came from the Midwest, but his parents sent him to an Eastern prep school, Phillips Exeter [Academy], and from there he went on to Harvard. From there he entered Harvard Law School, and after the first year of law school he decided he wanted to be a doctor instead. So he was accepted at Marquette University Medical School, and I think when I met him he had just completed his first year at Marquette. He came out to California for the summer, and some friends of my parents introduced him to me and we got engaged.

COLLINGS: Now, what year was this again?

ROTHMAN: It was 1955.

COLLINGS: Okay.

ROTHMAN: We didn't get engaged until December, actually. I met him and then I left with my parents for a trip to Europe. It was my first trip to Europe, and when I came back I skipped the fall semester that year at UCLA. When I came back I got engaged to him, and he said to me that he really thought that I was overprotected and I really should go away to school for a while. I agreed with him wholeheartedly, and so I applied to UC Berkeley and the following fall I went to Berkeley.

COLLINGS: Okay. Now, were your parents surprised when you became engaged? Was eighteen considered young?

ROTHMAN: Actually, I had just turned nineteen. I take that back. I just turned nineteen. My birthday was in November.

COLLINGS: Okay. And nineteen wasn't really considered that young at that time.

ROTHMAN: No, at that time it wasn't. But my parents did think it was young. But they liked him. He came from a family that was medical also, his father was a doctor, and they liked him, and they met his family and they liked his family. And there was no discussion of my giving up my education or my ambitions or anything of that sort at that time. So he was very happy with the idea that I would go on and get an advanced education and have a career, and so were his parents. They wanted grandchildren [laughs] , but they didn't see anything that I was planning to do as an obstacle to that.

COLLINGS: Were you doing a pre-med program at that time?

ROTHMAN: No. Actually, at that time I had decided that I did not want to go to medical school. I had decided that I did not have the temperament to be a doctor. I used to write on my own, mainly in the form of a journal, which I never kept. I threw it out.

COLLINGS: Oh, too bad.

ROTHMAN: I did, and I really enjoyed writing. My secret desire was to write, just like my father's, but I never told anyone about it because it seemed that everyone in the world wanted to write, and it was some kind of dumb "I want to write." Okay. So write! [mutual laughter] So I wrote. I really didn't share that with anyone, and I thought, "Well, you know, I really need to do something more substantial than that."

I started taking some courses in sociology, and I did extremely well in them and so I decided to switch to a sociology major, with the idea that if I really liked it, in

graduate school I would go on and get a doctorate in it, and try to get an academic position somewhere. Of course, that was *extremely* hard for women at that time. I mean, there were no women, as I recall, teaching in the UC Berkeley sociology department or the UCLA sociology department. I think there was only one woman teaching in the English department when I was there.

COLLINGS: Right. Were there other women students?

ROTHMAN: Yeah, there were other women students. Of course, at that time the majority of college students were male, and so there were more male than female students. Of course, in my pre-medical courses it was overwhelmingly male.

COLLINGS: That was at UCLA, the pre-medical courses?

ROTHMAN: Yes. It was about 98 percent male.

COLLINGS: Sure. Now, why did you say you thought you didn't have the temperament to be a medical doctor? Was that after having undergone these courses?

ROTHMAN: Yes, but it didn't have anything to do with the courses. The more I thought about it, I realized that I couldn't take the deaths that I would have to deal with, and I didn't— I have always been a rather reclusive person. I wasn't sure that I could be around people all the time as much as one had to be, as a doctor. My formative years made me reclusive. Not pathologically so, and obviously I'm voluble and so forth, and I do enjoy other people's company, but there is a side to me that's quite reclusive. I am, to a certain extent, a lone wolf. I'm a more contemplative person than I am an outgoing person, let me put it that way. Reclusive may not even

be the right word, contemplative may be the right word.

COLLINGS: Right.

ROTHMAN: I just decided that this was not for a person of my temperament, and so I switched and I entered graduate school, as I told you, for a year. After about a year I decided this was not what I wanted to do, either. I was rather panicked, actually, because I didn't know what I wanted to do.

COLLINGS: Right. What was the status of your engagement by that time?

ROTHMAN: Let's see, I guess it was after two years I called off the engagement. I liked him very much, but I decided I was too young to marry. I decided there was a big world out there, and that to be married at such an early age would keep me from a lot of experiences because I would have the obligation to be with my spouse. And I wanted to be alone. I thought more interesting things would happen to me as a single woman than as a married woman, especially when I viewed the limited horizons of most married women—although I don't think it would have been true in my marriage with this particular young man. But, even so, to be married is more circumscribed than to be unmarried. You must know that. It's less lonely, but it's more circumscribing in some ways.

COLLINGS: Were you involved at all in the cultural life of Berkeley and San Francisco during that period?

ROTHMAN: Yes. If you mean did I go to opera, yes. That was probably the most social period of my life, actually. It was while I was at Berkeley. Part of the time I

lived in International House, because I didn't have the money to live in an apartment. So I met a lot of students from all over the world, and we went places and we did things together, and we sat around and we talked.

COLLINGS: There was a lot of mixing with international students?

ROTHMAN: Yes, and also with Americans. I mean with, you know, people I met in classes and on campus. It was my most social period, I would say.

COLLINGS: Right. What about anything going on with the Beat movement in San Francisco, poetry readings and what have you?

ROTHMAN: Yeah, yeah. We sometimes went to San Francisco, maybe to a Beat coffee house. But, you know, the level of poetry that was read there was laughable. [laughs] I mean it was awful, and most of these people appeared like poseurs. They were people without any purpose, so they had adopted the trappings of perhaps a core group who did have a reason for defining themselves as Beat, and were productive, did write—how should I put it?—more skillful poetry, did write books that were influential, and even if they weren't, had merit in them. The rest of this stuff was just— It was like the generation ten years later who came to Haight Ashbury. There were a few people there in the beginning who may have had a reason for being there and have produced some cultural artifacts. The rest were just people who were there because it was fun to be there. It was an encampment of youth, you know. So that was true in coffee houses in San Francisco.

COLLINGS: Yeah. So it sounds like that had no allure for you.

ROTHMAN: None. I mean, it was more amusing than, you know—

COLLINGS: What kinds of things were being discussed in the sociology department at Berkeley at that time, when you were a student?

ROTHMAN: Well, the great god of the Berkeley sociologists at that time was Talcott Parsons, who taught at Harvard. The most interesting teacher I had there was Erving Groffman, whom I had a graduate seminar with.

COLLINGS: Do you remember coming to any conclusions that you carried with you later in life as a result of your coursework in sociology?

ROTHMAN: Yes. It gave me a frame of reference, in terms of examining human behavior and of getting a sense of the fact that there were different social groups, with different mores, even within the context of American society. I mean, even amongst people who were born in the United States, as you were saying earlier, there are many subgroups within the larger national group that defines itself as American. So yes, it gave me a frame of reference for observing that, and helped me to define what distinguishing characteristics people from different parts of the world and from parts of this country had. And what were perhaps the dominating themes of their social reality—what their historical narrative was that was different from someone else's, let's put it that way. Let's put it in, you know, contemporary—

COLLINGS: Terms.

ROTHMAN: Jargon. [mutual laughter]

COLLINGS: Okay. So you graduated with a B.A. in sociology and then went into

graduate work in sociology, right?

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: Also at Berkeley?

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: Okay. Then you did a masters in sociology?

ROTHMAN: No, I never— After the first year, I left.

COLLINGS: What was the reason for that?

ROTHMAN: I decided that I did not want to, as I said earlier, be a sociologist, and I did not want to go for a doctorate. I began to have grave doubts that if I did I would ever get an academic position. I looked around again and I didn't see many women doing it.

COLLINGS: So that was the basis of it? You thought that it wasn't going to pan out into a good job?

ROTHMAN: Right. Or into *a* job, and I didn't want to invest that many years in doing something that seemed pretty hopeless.

COLLINGS: What were your parents saying to you, at this point?

ROTHMAN: Well, they were supportive of anything I wanted to do. They were sorry that I didn't seem to find what I wanted to do.

COLLINGS: If you had been a man, would you have continued with the sociology and gotten a Ph.D., do you think?

ROTHMAN: Yes, I think I might have.

COLLINGS: And gotten the teaching job?

ROTHMAN: Well, I at least would have seen the possibility of doing that. I'm not saying no women had it, but—

COLLINGS: It's the odds, yeah.

ROTHMAN: If women had them, they were on the lowest level. That is to say, they could teach in a JC, in a junior college, maybe. If they had them, they were the untenured jobs. If they had them, they were the instructorships rather than the assistant professorships that would put them onto the tenure track. That's what I saw.

COLLINGS: Yeah. But going in, you hadn't seen that yet?

ROTHMAN: No.

COLLINGS: So you had this other idea that it would have been possible.

ROTHMAN: But as I entered graduate school, became friends with other graduate students, some of whom were very close to completing their doctoral dissertations—

COLLINGS: Women, you mean.

ROTHMAN: Yes. I began to see the problem.

COLLINGS: Did anybody ever talk about this explicitly, or were these just things that you picked up here and there?

ROTHMAN: Oh, no, female graduate students talked about it explicitly.

COLLINGS: Did professors ever say anything to you about it?

ROTHMAN: No. No, but it— One of the things I found most discouraging was that one of the brightest graduate students in the sociology department was quite close to

getting her doctorate, and quit and got married. Everyone was very disappointed in her.

COLLINGS: Would there have been a sense that once she was married she could have continued, or was it understood that once she got married she would have to leave?

ROTHMAN: No. There was no understanding. She could have continued, but what I heard was that she just didn't think much would ever happen, that she wouldn't be able to get any kind of interesting position, and at that point in her life she just decided it wasn't worth the struggle anymore. The struggle wouldn't produce anything. I mean, it's such a classic case of, if no hope is held out to you, if you look ahead of you and you see that there is no one left on the ladder, you just tend to give up. What's the point?

COLLINGS: Yeah. Are you in contact with any of those people that you knew?

ROTHMAN: No.

COLLINGS: No. Okay.

ROTHMAN: I don't even know how many of them are alive anymore.

COLLINGS: Okay. So you just didn't enroll again for the following year.

ROTHMAN: Right.

COLLINGS: So then where did you go?

ROTHMAN: I came back to Los Angeles, and I did nothing for about a semester.

COLLINGS: Were you living at your parents' house?

ROTHMAN: Yes, and then I went looking for work and I got a job at Systems Development Corporation, and I moved out and got an apartment of my own with a roommate. I had a roommate for a while.

COLLINGS: Was that considered sort of unusual?

ROTHMAN: No, no.

COLLINGS: And what were your parents saying about that?

ROTHMAN: They always encouraged me.

COLLINGS: Okay.

ROTHMAN: They were encouraging.

COLLINGS: Okay. What were you thinking would come out of this situation?

ROTHMAN: They were very good parents in that regard. I mean, I don't want you to get the idea that they were wildly permissive or anything. They weren't. As I explained to you, they discouraged my dancing. They wanted me to be intellectually disciplined and to plan my life, or plan for the future. But if my career direction didn't work out, they accepted that very gracefully and encouraged me to look again.

COLLINGS: Okay. What were you thinking would come out of the job at Systems Development?

ROTHMAN: When I went in, nothing. It was just a way to earn a living while I looked around some more.

COLLINGS: What were you doing there?

ROTHMAN: I think I worked there three years. The first year I worked as a technical

editor, editing handbooks that were written for the air force for operation of various kinds of equipment. Then the second year I was made a technical writer, and the third year I worked as that and wrote my own handbook. Really interesting. While I was there, they would pay for people to continue their education if they wanted to.

COLLINGS: Did you do that?

ROTHMAN: Yes, I did. I now have to backtrack a bit, and tell you that while I was in Berkeley I went to the movies one evening and I saw a film that absolutely astounded me, because it said everything I wanted to say about the human condition as I understood it, and it was *The Seventh Seal* by Ingmar Bergman. I was absolutely awestruck by it. I thought it was magnificent. Then I saw another film which also impressed me in terms of being a very, very intelligent and moving film, and that was *Paths of Glory* by Stanley Kubrick.

COLLINGS: Oh, I love Stanley Kubrick. Yes.

ROTHMAN: And it sort of occurred to me that it would be wonderful to be able to make films at that time, but I did not think of that as a career goal because I had no idea how one could go about doing this.

COLLINGS: I mean, certainly, if you felt like women couldn't make it in sociology, I don't know how—

ROTHMAN: I had no idea how you went about it. It's true I knew people, through my family, who worked in the film industry. I don't know how they went about it. It seemed to me it was miraculous that they did that. But when I came down to Los

Angeles and I was working at SDC, I met a young man [Jeb Gholson] who was a cinematographer. He had done that by himself, apprenticing to a cinematographer, and he had then gone off to Vietnam and made a documentary in Vietnam. This was long before, you know—

COLLINGS: The involvement.

ROTHMAN: That's right. He had done that in, I guess, something like 1957, not long after the French had left. He was, at the time that I met him, working for a television company here as a cameraman, shooting one of their shows, *Sea Hunt* with Lloyd Bridges. You remember *Sea Hunt*?

COLLINGS: Yes.

ROTHMAN: Have you seen it?

COLLINGS: Not recently.

ROTHMAN: Well, of course not recently. He was one of the cameramen on it. He was a very—how shall I put it?—daring person.

COLLINGS: Right.

ROTHMAN: He was a large person, he was very physically strong. He had gone to Vietnam by himself, and he'd gone into the jungles there by himself. He had marched around the country by himself. He was very physically active and he was a scuba diver, and so he used to do a lot of the second unit action photography on the [ZIV studio] television shows. He would go down and shoot sharks from a shark cage.

COLLINGS: Oh, that sounds like a wonderful job. [Rothman laughs] I mean, not

that specifically.

ROTHMAN: But at any rate he was a member of the Explorers Club, I think the youngest member the Los Angeles Explorers Club had ever admitted. To qualify to belong to that, you have to have done something quite remarkable and adventurous.

I didn't date him for a very long time, just for a few months, but he kept on telling me— He took me to the television studios and showed them to me, and I saw a show being shot. He talked about his work, and it sounded so fascinating. I said, "What if I wanted to do what you do?" He said, "Well, you'd have to apprentice to somebody, but I've never seen a girl apprentice to anybody." He said, "Maybe someone would take you on as their camera assistant or something." And I said, "Well, isn't there any other way I could learn how to make films?" And he said, "Yes, you could go to film school." I had never heard of film school. He told me about the University of Southern California Film School and also the UCLA Film School, and so I kept that in mind.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE

JANUARY 29, 2002

COLLINGS: We were talking a little bit about your mother.

ROTHMAN: Yes. Well, my mother grew up in a very religious family. My grandparents were very observant orthodox Jews, and my grandfather was a very forceful person. He was a man of integrity, and he was widely respected within the Winnipeg community in which he circulated. He was a businessman, he was known for his integrity, but he was very religious, and he spent most of his spare time raising funds for various charities. The greatest achievement of his life was that he was a major fundraiser, perhaps *the* one, for the Jewish old folks home in Winnipeg, Canada. His name and my grandmother's name, in fact, are on the cornerstone of the building.

COLLINGS: Oh, my goodness.

ROTHMAN: He was also instrumental in bringing many immigrant Russian Jewish families from Ukraine to Canada. He spent his time, his energy, and a lot of the family's money in those charitable activities. He definitely was a religious man who was devoted to good deeds and good acts, and his children admired that in him. But while they were children they saw very little of him. He was not home very much. He was busy either working to make a living at his business or engaged in charity work and raising money, or in spending time at his synagogue. So my mother and her brothers and sisters felt deprived of his presence.

In addition to that, he was not sympathetic to girls getting advanced education.

My mother and my aunt—her older sister Eva, that is, my aunt Eva [Gershfield Kahana]—wanted to go to college, and they were not given that opportunity by my grandfather. So each, in their own way, went out and pursued what education was available to them. In the case of my mother, she went to nursing school at Winnipeg General Hospital and became a registered nurse at the age of eighteen.

When she left my grandparents' home she stopped eating kosher food; she had to in order to enter nursing school. But she also gave up all religious practice, because she found my grandfather's and my grandmother's religion oppressive. She found, first of all, that it separated her from the rest of the world. She could not go and socialize with people who were not kosher. Furthermore, she was not interested in having her life confined to a narrow circle of friends and acquaintances centered around a synagogue. She wanted to make her friends where she found them. She wanted to embrace life and do what she wished to do. She wanted to become, as much as she could on her own, an educated woman with a profession, and she wanted to go out and practice it. So for those reasons she stopped being religious.

She also did not find the belief in a deity credible. My mother was an agnostic all her adult life, and there was nothing about religious ritual or religious belief that interested her or in any way attracted her, or convinced her of anything that was being said by the particular religion. She was a very ethical person. She inherited my grandfather's and grandmother's ethics. They were good people. They were honest people. She was the same way. But she quite correctly separated religious belief—

spiritual belief—from being an ethical person.

COLLINGS: Where do you think she was able to develop that perspective on her own family?

ROTHMAN: I think she did it on her own. She did it independently. So did her older sister, my aunt Eva.

COLLINGS: How many girls were in the family?

ROTHMAN: There were four girls and three boys.

COLLINGS: And where was your mother in the birth order?

ROTHMAN: My mother was the third oldest child. The first three children were girls. The fourth child was a boy.

COLLINGS: I see. What did the other sisters go on to do?

ROTHMAN: My aunt first went to work as a social worker in Winnipeg, and then she married my uncle and they immigrated to the United States in the late 1920s. They went to work at— I believe it was like a kind of utopian community [Woodbine]—that's the only way to describe it—that was started by someone named Baron [Maurice] de Hirsch. I really can't tell you much about it, except that it was in New Jersey and it was there to help recently arrived immigrants.

But my aunt began taking painting lessons and she turned out to be a very talented painter. She studied under Robert Henri, the early twentieth century artist who is very well known in the history of American art in that period. His last name is spelled H-E-N-R-I. And he really thought she was talented and wanted her to go on

painting, but by that time she had two children, and her husband never was very good at making a living, and so she had to start her own business to support them. So she became a painter, an avocational painter. She studied all her life and she painted all her life, and she was friends with many professional artists. She lived in Manhattan and she used to take lessons at the Art Students League. One of her teachers was—I'm sorry, I forget his name now.

COLLINGS: You can fill it in later.

ROTHMAN: Reginald Marsh.

COLLINGS: Oh.

ROTHMAN: He also was very enthusiastic about her work and tried to encourage her to become a professional rather than an avocational painter, but she explained to him that it wasn't possible. She went on painting until the very end—she died, I think, when she was ninety-three—and she always enjoyed it. But her real talent was one that she never could make her life's pursuit.

COLLINGS: I see. Now, let's see, I've sort of lost my train here. I guess I'm just sort of wondering— You said that she wasn't interested in growing up in this narrow community in Winnipeg. Do you think that if there had been a larger Orthodox community there, that it would have been more satisfying to her?

ROTHMAN: No.

COLLINGS: No, okay.

ROTHMAN: I think she was interested in assimilating into the larger society, which

she did very successfully. Even though she immigrated from Ukraine when I think she was probably about nine, she never had any accent left, and she really didn't tell people where she was born. I don't think she had much pride in it, because it had been a very miserable place. At the time that my mother was born there were pogroms, and my mother didn't remember them but her older sister, my aunt, did remember going through several, and the family being in fear of their life. That's why my grandfather immigrated to Canada. So as a result she remembered it as—as she once put it to me—a cruel and ignorant place. She really didn't want to think about it, and so she would not tell people that she came from there. She told them she was born in Canada.

COLLINGS: I see. When did she start sharing some of these remembrances with you?

ROTHMAN: Well, she didn't really share anything about her early life in Russia with me at all. I got most of this from my aunt. A little bit from my mother, but she just didn't like to talk about it. It was a bleak and depressing memory to her. But just over time she shared her memories of her young womanhood in Canada, and going to New York and living there, and meeting my father, and what happened after that until I was born. There was no particular time when she suddenly poured it all out.

COLLINGS: Were she and your father agreed upon not raising you with the organized religion?

ROTHMAN: Oh, yes. No, my father couldn't stand organized religion either.

[laughs] He actually was not raised religiously at all. My grandparents, his parents, were not religious. I mean, they were religious in the sense that on a major holiday they might go to worship, but more because it was a custom than because they had any profound belief or anything of that sort. So from earliest childhood he had no religious belief.

COLLINGS: Even though they didn't participate in religion much, did they have a kind of sense of cultural identity, sort of ethnic cultural identity, subscribing to certain intellectual—? You know, valuing education and other kinds of—

ROTHMAN: You mean my mother's parents or my parents?

COLLINGS: Yeah, your parents, in the community when you were growing up.

ROTHMAN: Well, since my father was a neuropsychiatrist, he obviously valued education because he had acquired a great deal of it. In addition to that, he was constantly reading and expanding his knowledge, not only of medicine but also of other areas that he was interested in, social science, literature, history, the history of ideas, music. Well, of course, it was— I mean, I realize that it is a stereotype to think that Jewish people value education as a group more than perhaps some other groups do.

COLLINGS: But it sounds like your family really did.

ROTHMAN: My family did, not because it was the great grail of education, but because they were educated, intelligent, lively people who thought that that was the best way to live one's life, was to go on learning. They believed in lifetime learning

before it was even an expression in our language. Was it ethnic? Well, I guess it was ethnic in the sense that, at least on my father's side, his parents thought that education was a good thing. But he had to get his own education. They didn't pay for it. He got it through scholarships all the way through. I suppose as an abstraction they said, yes, education is a good thing, and a library is a good thing, and you should get good grades and read, and they encouraged him to do those things. But I don't think that's really ethnically unique. I mean, I don't think that's terribly ethnic. Parents all over the world do that for their children.

COLLINGS: Well, we hope so.

ROTHMAN: Well, obviously, where they have any conception that such possibilities exist.

COLLINGS: What about your mother's work with Margaret Sanger?

ROTHMAN: Really, I don't know anything more about it than what I told you. She knew her, she worked with her. At the time she knew her she was a medical social worker. When she went into the homes of poor families, she was often the first person there to deliver to them information about birth control, and how important it was to keep the size of their families small enough to allow them to take care of their children properly, and also, secondly, as an issue of health for the mother, so that she did not become sick and worn down from too much childbearing, because she saw a lot of this.

COLLINGS: Yes. And she had some personal experience with that.

ROTHMAN: Yes. That's true. My grandmother became ill from too much childbearing when my mother was still in her teens.

COLLINGS: Right. Your sister, you indicated in your document, actually spoke to your grandfather about this.

ROTHMAN: No, it wasn't my sister. It was my mother's sister Eva.

COLLINGS: Your mother's sister, yeah.

ROTHMAN: Yes. My aunt who, when she was about twenty-one, observed how my grandmother was becoming weaker and weaker and sicker and sicker, and having miscarriages, and how she'd have to take to her bed to recover from them for long periods of time, and she grew very alarmed that my grandmother was really, gradually going to be killed by this. So she did something which I think is quite amazing for any daughter to do, in any era. But she did this in, I guess it must have been the late teens of the twentieth century. She took my grandfather aside and said to him, "You're killing my mother. You don't want to do that, I don't think. But you are, because you're not using birth control, and you should use birth control," and she explained to him what birth control was.

COLLINGS: This is a really amazing story.

ROTHMAN: She urged him to do so if he wanted my grandmother to live, let alone live a healthy life. She was really, seriously concerned that my grandmother might die soon. So that very day he went out to a drug store and bought some condoms, and my grandmother's health improved and she didn't have any more children after that.

COLLINGS: That's quite courageous on her part.

ROTHMAN: I think it was. Courageous and also decent. That's real decency, you know.

COLLINGS: Yes, it is. Yes.

ROTHMAN: My grandfather, I mean he loved my grandmother, he really did. It was just that someone had to bring this to his attention.

COLLINGS: Right. Okay, let's go back, sort of get back in the chronology that we were on at the end of the last session. You had mentioned an acquaintance of yours as being the person who inspired you to get into film. You had a friend who was doing all kinds of action sequences for films, and I was just wondering what that person's name was, and if you had any idea what he was doing now.

ROTHMAN: Yes. His name was Jeb Gholson.

COLLINGS: Okay.

ROTHMAN: He worked, I believe, as a cameraman for various television companies for a number of years. I knew him for a fairly short time. I did run into him once when I was a film student and I told him that he had been my inspiration to do this, and he seemed quite pleased. Then when I was writing and directing films, and my husband [Charles S. Swartz] was producing them, he called me to ask if I might have any work for him as a cameraman. I said that the only occasion I had to employ a cameraman was when I was making a film, and I wasn't making a film at that time, but I would certainly keep him in mind. Then some months after that I read in one of

the trade papers that he had been filming from a helicopter and the helicopter had crashed, and he had been very badly burned.

COLLINGS: Oh, dear.

ROTHMAN: A few weeks after that I read an obituary in the same trade paper. He had died from his burns. I believe this was about in— I think maybe 1973.

COLLINGS: Wow. Quite a while ago. Well, that was one of the pick ups that I had from the last time. It's sort of a sad note, that story.

ROTHMAN: Yes, it really was. Working as a cameraman can be a very dangerous thing, and since he was very interested in doing adventurous and physically challenging kinds of camera work, that was a risk he took.

COLLINGS: Yes, certainly. Sort of like foreign correspondents.

ROTHMAN: Yes. Exactly.

COLLINGS: I think one of the other things that we had wanted to talk about again, just sort of briefly, were some of the films that you had really enjoyed. I know that you had said that you really liked *The Seventh Seal*.

ROTHMAN: *The Seventh Seal* is the film that suggested to me that it would be interesting to make films, yes. It made me think I'd like to make a film like that.

COLLINGS: Yeah. I was just thinking that, because *The Seventh Seal* is based on a play, and then in an interview with you that I read, you were saying that *Group Marriage* was based on— You were sort of inspired by the idea of *Hotel Paradiso*?

ROTHMAN: No.

COLLINGS: No? Oh, I read that in an article on you.

ROTHMAN: No, actually—

COLLINGS: Oh, no, I'm sorry. Wait a second. [tape recorder off]

ROTHMAN: I'm amazed at some of the inaccuracies that are written.

COLLINGS: Yeah. That's sort of one of the values of something like this. We can kind of get straight some of the stuff that is written. But I guess my question had been, were you ever interested in theater either? Because the question had come to my mind that at least *The Seventh Seal* was based on a play, so—

ROTHMAN: Was it really? You're telling me something I didn't know. I thought it was an original screenplay written by Ingmar Bergman. It was based on a play that he had written prior to the screenplay?

COLLINGS: I don't know if he wrote it or not. But that was just something that I was reading about the film, when I was sort of touching base. You had mentioned that you liked several films, and I was sort of touching base with them and looking for similarities.

ROTHMAN: I'm really impressed. Thank you. [Collings laughs] You've just told me something I never knew.

COLLINGS: So did you ever have an interest in theater as opposed to film?

ROTHMAN: Well, in college I acted, and I took acting classes when I was interested in directing. Was I ever interested in writing a play or directing plays?

COLLINGS: Yeah, because a lot of your films, they are very character driven. So the

thought crossed my mind, yeah.

ROTHMAN: Well, I loved the marriage of images and the elements of playwriting that you could combine in filmmaking. I always wanted to make films; I never really wanted to write for or direct theater. For one thing, the whole world is your canvas, the whole world is your palate, when you are making films. With a play you're confined to a very narrow physical universe, and there is only so much staging you can do. You can't compose and be totally in control of images the way you can in making a film, and you don't have the same painterly issues of texture, of light and shadow, of depth of focus, of other elements of composition that you do in film.

COLLINGS: Absolutely.

ROTHMAN: I'm not saying they don't play a part in the staging of a play. They do. I mean, you obviously have a lighting director, and you have a set and then a set designer involved, but all of these things are not as immediately accessible to someone writing and directing a stage play as they are to someone who is directing a film.

COLLINGS: Absolutely.

ROTHMAN: It is immediately accessible and under their control.

COLLINGS: Right. I can see how much you enjoy that by just the way you are talking about it. It's very clear that you really enjoy those elements of it.

Why don't we just pick up with the chronology then. You were working at Systems Development Corporation— [laughs] Eyes roll. And decided to go to film school. Did you say something about how Systems Development Corporation paid for

your—?

ROTHMAN: Yes. They paid for the classes I took in preparation for entering the full time graduate program at USC [University of Southern California], at the USC film school. I could have just applied for it and taken these same courses, but I wanted to find out if I could do this kind of work. You know, if I had any ability to master the information that I would have to in order to do this. So, for I think it was about two years, I took night courses at USC—basic camera, basic editing, sound, screenwriting and so forth—and then I applied for graduate school.

But what's really interesting about how I ended up at USC is that a member of the UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles] faculty, who was very influential in the development of what was then the Department of [Theatre Arts], urged me to go to USC. He was a family friend. His name was William W. Melnitz.

COLLINGS: Oh.

ROTHMAN: I knew him as a young girl growing up, and I knew him when I was interested in going to film school. I went to see him to discuss this, and he said to me, "Stephanie, you probably could be admitted to our program." He knew my grade history and so forth. But he said, "I don't recommend it for you, because our course here will require you to go through a complete theater course first. You'll have to learn how to sew costumes and build sets and do things that are really not relevant to you as a graduate student." He said, "I really think what you want to learn is the technique of filmmaking, and while it is taught here, it will take you a long time to get

to that level by the way our coursework is constructed. If you go directly to USC, you can start learning these craft areas immediately. It's a very good school, and its emphasis is somewhat different than ours, but I don't think you need the emphasis that we will offer over here. You need the emphasis that they will offer." So I said "Thank you!" [laughs] He basically said, "Don't go to UCLA. Go to USC." So that's what I did.

I went there, and I went to see the chairman of the department of cinema, a man named Bernard [R.] Kantor, a really wonderful man, who was a born teacher who really encouraged people. I went to see him, and when I arrived there I saw that all the students were male. I would be only girl there. They were lugging all this equipment around and they were doing things with pieces of equipment that I had never seen before. I mean, the things they were doing I had seen before, but I had never seen many of these pieces of equipment before. It was a completely alien world to me. I went to see him and I said, "I'm interested in becoming a filmmaker," and his first reaction was "That's wonderful." He was so encouraging. I said to him, "Looking around, all of this is very foreign to me. I don't know if I will be able to master it." And his response was, "I've seen your grade transcript. Of course you will, don't worry about it. You'll master it if you want to." He was so encouraging and so kind. I'll never forget his kindness and his encouragement.

COLLINGS: Yeah. That makes an enormous difference.

ROTHMAN: It really does. He was, by the way, quite a young man to be chairman

of a department, at least for those days. He was, I would say, no more than maybe in his very early forties. Maybe forty.

So I started going to the night classes, and occasionally I'd run into him and he'd give me a report on how I was doing from the people who were teaching the night classes. He was always encouraging and always cordial.

COLLINGS: What did SDC, the Systems Development Corporation, plan for you to be doing for them with this education?

ROTHMAN: They wanted me to go to work in their film unit. They had a documentary film unit. There were only about four or five people in it, but I said I would be interested in doing that, and so they said, "That's fine."

COLLINGS: Were there any other women in the classes that you were taking?

ROTHMAN: In some of them. Not many. I don't think there were any in the camera class, or any in the sound class. I think a couple in the screenwriting class.

COLLINGS: Would you do projects independently or would you form crews and work as groups?

ROTHMAN: In the initial classes I took we worked independently. When I started at graduate school, when we would make films we were assigned to crews and we would work as crews, yes.

COLLINGS: What was that like, working in the crews at film school?

ROTHMAN: Well, many of the students who were there, I would say maybe as many as half of them, were sent by the armed forces to learn filmmaking. So many of them

were actually professional military men. There was only one military woman there. She was a captain in the air force. They tended to be older. They were anywhere from, I would say, their late twenties well into their forties. In fact, one man, who was a very nice man, left to become— Excuse me, he didn't leave, he was offered the opportunity to become John Fitzgerald Kennedy's photographer, the White House photographer.

COLLINGS: Wow.

ROTHMAN: He was an excellent still photographer, but he wanted to start doing cinematography. He turned it down because he was too politically conservative for that. He just didn't want to work for Kennedy. As a human being, he was not at all conservative. I mean, he was much like Bernard Kantor to me, very encouraging, very kind, a very decent man.

Anyway, there were these people from the military and then there were a younger group who were just entering graduate school. The military people were always mature. What can I say? They were mature, they were polite, they were businesslike.

COLLINGS: And this was what year again? Just to sort of keep track of that.

ROTHMAN: I entered graduate school at USC in 1962. Most of the other students were— I didn't know them very well. You got to know the people on your crew. I met my husband [Charles S. Swartz] the first day of graduate school.

COLLINGS: Really? My gosh.

ROTHMAN: I met him, actually, in the registration line. I was standing there, and someone else who was with him, a friend of his who was also a graduate student—they were both a year ahead of me—said, "Haven't I seen you around the cinema department?" I said, "Yes, I've been taking classes there in the evening." He said, "I thought so," and he introduced himself to me and then he introduced his friend, who was my future husband.

COLLINGS: But he didn't introduce him that way.

ROTHMAN: No. [mutual laughter] None of us were prescient enough to know that. But when I met Charles, my future husband, he actually said nothing, he just stood there and sort of smiled all the time. But the first day of the semester he walked up to me. The cinema department at USC was in an old stable at that time, and it had a central courtyard. I was waiting for my first class in the courtyard, and he walked up and he said hello to me and we started talking. It turned out that we were both going into the same class, which was a production class. The mission of this production class was for the students to work on small films, films of varying length, during the course of the semester. When it was time for crews to form the students who were second year students, who were going to be directing these and writing them, had to request people to be on their crews. He asked me to be on his crew. So that's how we met.

The other people on his crew, one was a young man who—how should I put this—felt it was his duty to belittle the fact that I as a woman was doing this. He was

going to do the production management. But there were two other young men on the crew also. One was the young man who was going to be the cameraman and the other was— I forget what he was going to do. I was going to edit it, and I think he was going to also do the production management on it as well. He was named Alex Sessa. He was from Argentina, and he was the heir to the Alex Labs, which at that time was the largest film processing laboratory in Argentina. It was located in Buenos Aires. I don't know who it was started by, but it was the family business. Alex had a degree in engineering, and he had come here to learn motion picture production before he went back to take over the family laboratory and run it. Which he did, for the rest of his life.

COLLINGS: Wow.

ROTHMAN: I read, sadly to say, about I would say three or four years ago in *Daily Variety*, that he had passed away. He was wonderful, he was a delight to work with, and so was the young man who was the camera operator, whose name was John Koester, who went on to become a working cameraman.

COLLINGS: So not everybody in the film program was planning to become a director, it sounds like.

ROTHMAN: No.

COLLINGS: By no means.

ROTHMAN: By no means. Charles was uncertain at that time, but in fact I think that directing these three films, and going on and making another film as well, made him

decide he really didn't want to direct. He wanted to write and produce, which he did. So actually I was the only person from that crew who became a director.

COLLINGS: Was that your intention to start with?

ROTHMAN: Yes, it was. It was to actually write and direct. It always was to write and direct. It was a very funny thing that Alex said to me about halfway through the semester. He said to me, "Stephanie, you know, you're the only one in this group of us on this crew who is a real artist. You're the only one who really should be a director." And I said, "Alex, how can you say that? You don't know that. You haven't seen everybody's work yet." And he said, "No. I know it. You're the one who should be the director amongst us." This was in a time when there were no women directing professionally, and he was from a country where machismo was greatly valued, but Alex was his own man with his own mind.

COLLINGS: What was he pointing to in your work at that time, do you think?

ROTHMAN: Well, it obviously wasn't my directing ability. He liked the way I was editing the film. He had talked to me, and I think we were in a screenwriting class together, so he knew something about the way I wrote, and that was just his conclusion. I just mention it because I thought it was interesting, in the sense that that was his view of me at that very early stage. He had nothing to gain by saying that.

COLLINGS: No, no, no. I was just wondering what had brought that out, in particular.

ROTHMAN: I wish I [knew].

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE TWO

JANUARY 29, 2002

ROTHMAN: Unfortunately I don't remember the name of the young guy who felt it necessary to make contemptuous remarks to me. However, that was put very quickly to an end by my future husband.

COLLINGS: Was this an aberration, the way that guy in particular was behaving toward you, do you think?

ROTHMAN: Yes. I did not experience this in film school, with the exception of him.

COLLINGS: All right. Now, were you working in sixteen millimeter or thirty-five millimeter in film school?

ROTHMAN: We worked in sixteen.

COLLINGS: All throughout.

ROTHMAN: Yes. I think maybe our very first film— No, we always shot in sixteen. Black and white sixteen.

COLLINGS: Was there a critical studies component to the program, or was it entirely technical?

ROTHMAN: Well, no, there was. That is to say, there was sort of a critical studies component. Arthur Knight, the film critic and historian, taught film history and criticism there. In fact, Charles and I became teaching assistants for him in his film history and criticism course after taking his courses. But he was the only one who offered anything of that sort there. So, yes, I took several courses in the history of

film. Really there were no courses about critical approaches, or schools of thought of film criticism, that were in any way taught there.

COLLINGS: I guess the reason that I was thinking about it was because some of the playfulness of your films reminds me of the French New Wave work, you know, which was being done about the same time. I was wondering how you were able, in the context of film school at least, to start developing some kind of sense of what your own vision and style was going to be.

ROTHMAN: Well, the New Wave preceded me by about almost ten years.

COLLINGS: Right, so it would have been fodder for course curriculum at that point.

ROTHMAN: I cannot deny that the New Wave films impressed me very much—I admired them, I admired the techniques that were used in them—and that when I started making films I incorporated them, I hope not in imitation. But I incorporated them because I thought they were very desirable ways of presenting images, making points, conveying moods and sometimes ideas. So yes, they were very influential, and it's very possible that there were techniques that I used that indeed were originally used by New Wave filmmakers. Although I doubt that, because almost every technique that was used by New Wave filmmakers was used far earlier than that by somebody.

COLLINGS: Of course.

ROTHMAN: In the forties, in the thirties, in the twenties, even back into the very end of the nineteenth century. Knowledge in filmmaking is cumulative just like it is in

many other fields. So, yes, I was certainly building on the knowledge that had been developed over time by people who preceded me. But you're right, I think the New Wave was very influential, and I did admire them.

COLLINGS: Yeah. I think that the spirit of play is something that I find in your films, and that sort of reminded me— I was thinking of this other genre cycle that has a spirit of play in it as well.

ROTHMAN: It also could be partly attributed to me.

COLLINGS: Of course! Of course, that's the main thing.

ROTHMAN: I mean, comedy is my preference, and in addition to that the sheer joy of making films. I think when someone really enjoys making them that shows up in the way they're assembled.

COLLINGS: Right. Yes, I think it really does. Was your family supportive of your filmmaking venture, your move into directing?

ROTHMAN: Yes, but with many caveats, since they had many friends who worked in the film industry and they knew how hard it was to make a living, and how unstable employment was, and how cruel people could be, and how much rejection there was. They were very concerned that I was making this choice, but they were still, at the same time, supportive, in the sense that I obviously had to work out my own destiny and I obviously had to at least try it and find out whether I could do it. They certainly didn't believe that people should not try to pursue whatever vocational interest they had. So they were encouraging, with caveats.

COLLINGS: Right. But the focus of the program was not specifically to go into fiction film directing, right? You were saying that a lot of people were doing—

ROTHMAN: Documentaries.

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: You mean, were going back to work in documentary film units? Yes, that's true, but, I mean, the techniques are the same. It doesn't really matter whether you're doing a fiction film or a documentary.

COLLINGS: But you specifically struck out toward fiction film.

ROTHMAN: Always. Yeah, I actually thought that the idea of making a documentary film was so daunting. How you imposed a shape on this disparate material, how you made it coherent and moving and interesting. I found that so mysterious and daunting. I don't think I would have had the courage to try to make a documentary.

COLLINGS: Were you ever assigned a documentary as a student?

ROTHMAN: No. You didn't have to do that if you didn't want to.

COLLINGS: And did you do a thesis film as a student?

ROTHMAN: Well, I started to. I won the Directors Guild of America award. It's an award that no longer exists, but when I was in graduate school it was given every year to one graduate student at USC [University of Southern California] and one at UCLA, and you were given $1,500 to do with what you wanted, but specifically they wanted you to make a thesis film with it. After I completed all my graduate work I applied for

that, and I was the USC student that was awarded it. I was the first woman, I'm told—it was a fellowship—in the history of the fellowship that was awarded it.

Having told you that I never made a documentary, the proposal I made to the board of the Director's Guild of America was to make a documentary about a harpsichordist— Oh, this is terrible, I can't remember her name. [Alice Ehlers] She was actually, I believe, on the faculty at USC. She was a very renowned harpsichordist. But I never did it.

COLLINGS: How did the subject come to your mind?

ROTHMAN: Well, I loved the harpsichord. I had many recordings of harpsichord performances. I was aware she was on the faculty. It seemed like something I could do for such a small amount of money. Even then, $1,500 was not a lot of money. We were not allowed to supplement that.

COLLINGS: Oh, wow.

ROTHMAN: So it seemed to me doable, and it seemed to me that I could perhaps do something interesting, and which would have gorgeous sound, which could be emotionally moving, could be beautifully composed, and would be a nice calling card for me for future work. I approached her, and she said she would be willing. Then I got a job offer, so I took the job offer. It was, as the cliché goes, an offer I couldn't confuse. Refuse, I mean.

COLLINGS: Yeah. It was with Roger Corman?

ROTHMAN: Yes. Actually, I did work briefly at another job before I went to work

for Roger Corman. It was for a film unit at some aerospace company, and I was hired with the understanding that I would actually work in production, but when I got there all they wanted to do was use me as a secretary.

COLLINGS: Oh, yuck.

ROTHMAN: So I left after I think about a month.

COLLINGS: Yeah, of course. How is it that Roger Corman offered you the job? How did that come about?

ROTHMAN: He called USC and he said he was looking for an assistant, and would they send over the people who they thought would be most appropriate for this. So they sent over several people, and I was one of them. It was Bernard [R.] Kantor who was the one who decided to send me over. I think, actually, he did confer with— I shouldn't say he alone decided. He called me to tell me about this job opportunity. I believe he did talk to other members of the faculty also, and they decided who would be the most appropriate people, and so I went over and I met Roger Corman.

COLLINGS: What were your impressions?

ROTHMAN: Of Roger Corman? He was very articulate. He was very friendly. He was very encouraging.

COLLINGS: What was the job going to be?

ROTHMAN: It was going to be to be his assistant, and since he had just gotten a contract to make some films at Columbia studios, it would mean reading script material for him, because he would be looking for his first project. It would mean

doing any research for him that he wanted. But he also financed low budget films for his own little company, so he told me that, since I had won the Director's Guild of America award and the faculty thought very well of my filmmaking abilities, that they had given me a very good recommendation in that regard, that he would like me also to work on the production of these films when I wasn't engaged in any of his work at Columbia. He asked me if I would be interested, and I said, "Yes!" [mutual laughter] "I would love it!"

There is a funny story that has to go with this, I suppose I should tell you. Apparently the other candidate for the job was sent to him from UCLA—the other strong candidate—and he hired me instead of her, but he asked her out on a date, and she eventually became his wife [Julie Corman].

COLLINGS: Oh, my goodness. [mutual laughter] Was he specifically looking for women at that point, because he needed an assistant? Or—

ROTHMAN: He had had assistants of both sexes before that. I think Francis [Ford] Coppola had been his assistant, and I think there had been another woman before that who had been his assistant.

COLLINGS: This was just almost a coincidence that it was the two women who went on the interview then.

ROTHMAN: Yes. I don't know for sure, but I think especially at USC they didn't have any other women to send. So if they sent anyone else, the overwhelming likelihood is it was a man. Or men, I don't know how many they sent.

COLLINGS: What was it like in the early days of working for Roger Corman? What kinds of things were you doing?

ROTHMAN: It was *very* challenging. It was fascinating. I really enjoyed it. I did indeed read scripts for him, and when he hired writers he always had me write notes, but he also sent me out to initially observe some of the productions he was financing, to see how the sets were, to report back to him if there were any problems, and to step in to help the people making these films if they needed an extra hand. Then after that he put me to work on some films that he had financed that had been shot in Yugoslavia, that he found unplayable in the American market. He had hired a young man who was a UCLA film school graduate to shoot additional footage for one of them, and he had been dissatisfied with the result. So he asked me to come up with a new screenplay which would incorporate the original Yugoslavian footage, as much of it as I could use, and any footage I could use of this young man's, whose name was Jack Hill, and my own original footage, which I would write and then incorporate into this, so that a whole new film would be created.

COLLINGS: Then what was the name of that film?

ROTHMAN: That was called, initially, *Track of the Vampire,* but it played under that name and also under the name *Blood Bath* in theaters. I also re-cut another Yugoslavian film, which had been shot in English, for sale to television. I did not do the physical editing myself, I sat with a film editor and supervised the cutting of these films. I mean cut by cut.

COLLINGS: It sounds like even more challenging, really, than starting from scratch.

ROTHMAN: In a way it was, yes. It actually was, because I had to invent something, and working this way was so restrictive. What could I do with it? It had originally been an action murder mystery. Or actually, it hadn't been, I think it had been a tale of smugglers and revenge, and then the Jack Hill version had been a story about a mad artist who killed beautiful young women. After suggesting several story lines to Roger he picked one of them, which was, why not turn this shadowy figure who was the mad artist in the second version that was shot into a vampire who stalks people? So that's what I did. It was because it was the only way I could figure out, and Roger agreed, to make all this material comprehensible.

COLLINGS: Right. You know, sometimes one reads about the Roger Corman school of filmmaking.

ROTHMAN: Yeah.

COLLINGS: What do you think that means? What did that mean as far as you were concerned?

ROTHMAN: What it meant was that Roger gave a lot of young people the opportunity to work as filmmaking professionals. He gave them a degree of responsibility and freedom that nobody in Hollywood would do, ever. He paid very poor wages to them, and many of them complained about that, but I must say that he did not treat me that way. He was very fair with me. He paid me decently for what I did, and he gave me a great deal of freedom and he showed a great deal of faith in me.

COLLINGS: Right. Were there other young directors such as yourself working there at the same time?

ROTHMAN: He did finance some other films, yes. At the time that I was making *Track of the Vampire* he did finance another film. It was called— Excuse me, let me start again. Yes, he did finance several other films at that time. He financed some low budget science fiction films that were directed by Curtis Harrington, who is a very well known director of terror films, and he also financed a film called *Beach Ball*, which was a beach movie. I actually shot the second unit on that. I directed the second unit. It was just some action scenes, some comedy stunt scenes with cars and with actors. *Beach Ball* was distributed, I believe, by Paramount Pictures— I'm not sure. You know, I take that back. I'm not sure who it was distributed by. But yes, those were being made at the same time.

COLLINGS: Was there any kind of sense of a community of young directors that you were in contact with as a function of this?

ROTHMAN: Well, with Curtis, yes. I actually worked as an associate producer on those films, so I was around the set. Curtis was very cordial, and I enjoyed watching him work and, you know, I learned something from watching how he functioned on the set, and how the production went along. He was comfortable having me there and I was grateful to be there to learn from him.

COLLINGS: Roger Corman is somebody who had somewhat of a social conscience.

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: Is that something that was manifested on the set, within the workplace, in terms of the kinds of things that people would talk about?

ROTHMAN: No.

COLLINGS: Not at all.

ROTHMAN: No, not at all. Roger did have a social conscience, he made a very famous film that was about racism [*The Intruder*, 1961] , but most of his films did not manifest that.

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: But as a person he did, you're correct.

COLLINGS: That's something that I had read in a biography of him.

ROTHMAN: Yeah, he did. He was interested in politics, he was interested in fairness, and Roger gave people jobs, people who otherwise wouldn't have been employed. It's true he benefited from that by paying them very little, by making his films for very little and by selling them at a profit, but that's all right. [laughs] You know, he was the benefactor of large numbers of people who were otherwise unemployable.

COLLINGS: Right, yeah. But some of the strong female characters and this kind of thing that were allowed to exist, like in *The Student Nurses* for example— Is that something that was important to him and important within the context of New World Pictures?

ROTHMAN: Well, I don't really recall his having much of an interest in the question

of having or not having strong female characters. If a story had a strong female character and he thought it was appropriate to the story, I mean, it was just an appropriate character to the story. On the other hand, after the success of *The Student Nurses* he did want people to write scripts that had strong female characters.

COLLINGS: I see.

ROTHMAN: He decided it was a good commercial decision. Would he have done it if it wasn't a good commercial decision? I don't think so. But he certainly wasn't opposed to it before then, if it was dramatically appropriate.

COLLINGS: But the only reason he was interested in that type of character was because it was a good commercial decision?

ROTHMAN: Yes. Usually that's why Roger approved anything that was made in a film.

COLLINGS: Okay.

ROTHMAN: That's why he was so successful as a businessman. Occasionally he would take a chance because he found something artistically or intellectually intriguing, but the reason he could take those chances is because he made strong commercial decisions the rest of the time. You don't survive in filmmaking if you don't do that.

COLLINGS: I was just wondering if he had somehow found some kind of magic formula for running two interests simultaneously.

ROTHMAN: Well, not that I know of.

COLLINGS: Okay.

ROTHMAN: His story about that might be a little different.

COLLINGS: No, I certainly wouldn't know if it was.

ROTHMAN: You know, these were not thoughts that he shared with me.

COLLINGS: Okay. I was just wondering, just based on your experience working in that environment, if there was anything that you could comment about that.

ROTHMAN: I don't think he would turn his back on a strong female character just because it was a strong female character, definitely not. If she was appropriate and interesting and an enhancement to the story, he would certainly approve of her.

COLLINGS: Okay. You mentioned the one director, was there anybody else's work there at the time that you admired? Was there anything else going on there that—?

ROTHMAN: At the time he was not financing any other films. The other film was a beach picture, and it was directed by an actor whose name was— I don't remember his name, I'm sorry, but it was directed by an actor. Oh yes, his name was Len Weinrib, and I think he went on to become a comedy writer. I don't know what else he directed, but I don't think he had a long career as a director.

COLLINGS: *It's a Bikini World* was your own first film as a director, is that correct?

ROTHMAN: The first complete film I directed, yes.

COLLINGS: Yeah, okay. Then I read, in one of these dubious articles that we mentioned earlier, that you went into a short period of retirement after that. Is that correct?

ROTHMAN: Well, I stopped working for Roger, yes. And I couldn't find any other work.

COLLINGS: Now, were you planning to leave filmmaking?

ROTHMAN: No.

COLLINGS: No. Okay, that was never on your mind.

ROTHMAN: I tried to find other work but Hollywood was— There was no place I could find work.

COLLINGS: Okay. Why did you leave Roger Corman at that point?

ROTHMAN: Well, there was really nothing— Let me start again. I didn't want to make another exploitation film.

COLLINGS: Okay. And you couldn't have free rein.

ROTHMAN: No, I couldn't, that's all he wanted to make. I just wanted to see if there was some other way I could make something more personal and more unusual.

COLLINGS: But *Student Nurses* was a New World release, right?

ROTHMAN: It was the first film ever made by New World Pictures, yes. That was the company he started.

COLLINGS: So how did that work? I mean, you had left, you were no longer working for him?

ROTHMAN: That's correct.

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: But we were still friends. In 1969 he made a deal with American

International Pictures to make a film in New Mexico called *Gas-s-s-s*, and he asked my husband and myself if we would like to come along and work as, well, the title we got was "production executives," on it. Basically we went out ahead of the film, while it was still being written, and we went to Texas and New Mexico and, based on the first draft, we found locations for the scenes of the film that were to be shot in these two places. Then we turned into production managers. After that we set up the places that everybody would stay and made the arrangements for all the other amenities that would be required at that time. We got cooperation from the state of New Mexico and we got the right to shoot on an Indian reservation. We negotiated all these rights, with the tribe, with the state. We did all of that. In other words, we set up the production so that when the crew came out, and the cast came out, and the film was written, everything was ready for that to begin shooting in all the various locations. And it was a road picture, so there were many, many—

COLLINGS: Too many locations. [laughs]

ROTHMAN: —locations. In addition to that, I did a lot of storyboarding on the film for Roger. I also shot the second unit scenes. The film was not a successful film. It was constantly being re-written as we were shooting. It was a kind of fantasy film about a group of hippies who survive the end of the world and wander through Texas and New Mexico meeting up with various other survivors who are very eccentric people. It was a comedy, it wasn't a serious drama. It had a very popular rock group of the time appearing in it, Country Joe and the Fish, and it had two actors who went

on to be very prominent and are still acting today. One was Bud Cort and the other was Ben Vereen. I had a wonderful time working on that film. I loved it, I really did.

COLLINGS: What was it that you liked about it?

ROTHMAN: I liked all the things I was allowed to do, every bit of it.

COLLINGS: Just the variety of it?

ROTHMAN: The variety, the challenge of creating. What I was doing, and so was Charles—what production designers normally do—was go out and find a location and make it match the look that you need to achieve. It was interesting meeting all these people in these different states, and negotiating with the tribe for use of their reservation, and negotiating with the state for the use of certain state lands. Just everything about it was so interesting, so different, so challenging, and an adventure. I really enjoyed it.

And I liked the advanced storyboarding work I did for Roger, and how he would shoot the various scenes. I'd have to go a day ahead of the rest of the crew and actors to the new location that would be used the following day, and I would have to work with the art director sometimes to arrange it, get it ready, and the art director's crew, and I would have to, you know, again do some storyboarding right then and there for Roger for the next day's shooting. And sometimes it would be during the day, sometimes it would be— One time it was at night during a snowstorm. The art director and I were arranging a junk yard, an auto wrecking yard, and the snow was falling and we had very little light. People were driving these old wrecks of cars,

they're pushing them around to arrange them properly for various angles for the camera. It was delightful. [laughs] I know it's— And then, of course, I enjoyed very much shooting the second unit scenes.

COLLINGS: Why didn't you continue with this kind of producing work, and—?

ROTHMAN: Well, Roger called up Charles and me, about I guess a couple of weeks after we had all returned to Los Angeles and the film was being edited, and said, "I'm going to start a new film company, a new film studio in fact, in which I want to produce a regular slate of films, and I would like you to make the first film." And that first film was *The Student Nurses*.

COLLINGS: So you just sort of jumped right back into the directing mode at that point.

ROTHMAN: Yes. At that point I realized two things. First of all, that I was not going to get an opportunity to make films anywhere else. Only Roger was giving me that chance, and I really appreciated it because I saw that my chances anywhere else were nonexistent. I reconciled myself to the fact that I would be making an exploitation film, which—

Originally, I hadn't realized that what I was making were exploitation films. Up until then, Roger always characterized them as low budget films. It's only after I made *The Student Nurses* and reviews were written about it that I realized it was an exploitation film. I had been making exploitation films with him. I knew that they were, you know, commercially restrictive low budget films. They could only be made

in certain genres, and they had to be made for very little money, and they could only play a certain group of theater circuits. Basically I knew they were exploitation films in every way except in name, and it was after I made *The Student Nurses* that I realized, after reading it described as that, that it was an exploitation film.

But I knew I didn't want to make films with such grave limitations when I left Roger, and now here I was back again, and I knew I was going to be making a low budget film. It had to be a genre film. He wanted a film made about student nurses because he had talked to various film distributors around the country and they thought that would be a very commercial idea for a film, because nurses are viewed as very sexy by men and so this might be a very successful film because of that. There had been a film out recently that had been successful—a very low budget, bad film—called *The Babysitter*, and so they wanted a film that was sexy like *The Babysitter*. Their idea of sexy, of course, was to have nudity in it, because only recently American films had started to have nudity in them, and the films that had nudity in them were much more successful than the ones that didn't. So that was required. But aside from that, I could do anything I wanted. [laughs] Roger said that, you know, "Make it exciting, and I want some action in it, I want some excitement. I want lots of nudity, and come up with an interesting story."

COLLINGS: Okay. I want to talk about *The Student Nurses*, but—

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE

JANUARY 29, 2002

COLLINGS: Okay, let's hear about your aunt Eva, Stephanie.

ROTHMAN: Well, she had to make a living, and so what she did is she started— She was a very good seamstress, so she started making clothes. First she did alterations for a few months, and then it developed into making clothes for people, and she began to become acquainted with people who worked in the clothing manufacturing industry in New York. She went into a partnership with a retired model, a Norwegian woman whose last name was Hansen. I don't remember— Edith Hansen was her name, who was a very beautiful woman, who never married and always lived with her mother. My aunt and Edith Hansen went into partnership and opened a shop. This I think was in the height of the Depression, in the very early thirties, and they were successful.

What they sold was clothing made by various American fashion houses, but they did not sell the complete line or different sizes. What they did is, before the season began, they would buy the model outfits that were made, not for modeling by fashion models, but the prototype outfits that had been made by these houses for a particular design. They would buy them, and they were usually only in one size, and they would sell them. They would get them at a very low price and they would sell them at a much higher price, but below the price that you could buy this outfit for if you were to buy it at other retail stores. Nobody objected to them doing this, because they would have only one copy of it. It would only be in this one size. After a while

they got to know the owners of these fashion houses, and these people began to sell them multiple copies of these things, but never so many that they would be in competition with the other retail stores, so that they would not be accused of selling to people who could undercut these other stores. What they'd get is the same items but in other sizes, larger sizes or smaller sizes as the case may be, so they would have one in each size, perhaps. One of each size, but not a lot. She sold the work of some very famous American designers through her career, starting with people like Hattie Carnegie and Scaasi, Ben Reig, Bill Blass, Pauline Trigère and many others.

COLLINGS: That sounds like an interesting line of work for somebody who was just sort of thrust into a situation where she had to make a living.

ROTHMAN: Yes, well, her talent as an artist, of course, influenced the taste that she exercised in what she chose to sell, and so as a consequence she sold really beautiful things. She didn't buy everything in someone's line that might be available. She tried instead to really pick lovely things, and as a consequence she dressed many people from all over the country. She and Edith Hansen got a very widespread reputation, and people would rely on them to pick outfits for them and just send them to them to their homes in different parts of the country. So they became, in a way, not only shop owners but also personal shoppers.

COLLINGS: Right. That's interesting.

ROTHMAN: My aunt had a very successful business until she decided to retire, I think at the age of ninety.

COLLINGS: Wow.

ROTHMAN: Many of her customers were very dismayed when she did. They didn't know where they were going to go and what they were going to do, because many of them were very wealthy people but they relied on her to pick their wardrobes for them.

COLLINGS: Did you have a lot of contact with her when you were growing up?

ROTHMAN: Yes, I did. She was my favorite aunt. We were very close, and she used to call me almost weekly when I became an adult. She was a very witty woman and she was very insightful about people's psychological strengths and weaknesses. She helped me to have a lot of insights about my mother and her particular life struggles that I would not otherwise have had. She also told me a great deal about the early life of my mother, that my mother didn't share with me. Especially in Russia, what happened, but also some things about her life in Canada that I would not have known about otherwise. [tape recorder off]

COLLINGS: What were you saying, about your aunt appreciated Russia?

ROTHMAN: Oh, well, my mother had a very bleak view of her early childhood in Russia, but my aunt viewed it as more of a colorful place. There was pain and there was danger and there was poverty, but there was also a collection of colorful people and memorable events. I think in perspective, as time went on, she thought of it as a colorful, exotic, lost world. Which it was. It was a lost world. It was the world that the Yiddish writer Sholem Aleichem described in his books. That's the world they came from, and my aunt remembered it with warmth and with relish. My mother

chose to forget it as much as she could.

COLLINGS: Because there were things she wanted to forget, or because she had not been old enough to really experience any of the—?

ROTHMAN: What she remembered was the sadness. She didn't remember any of the happy moments. She just remembered it as, as I said earlier, a place where people were oppressed, as a dangerous and frightening place, as a place that they had to escape.

COLLINGS: Yeah. It would be scary for a child.

[tape recorder off]

Okay, so to pick up where we left off a little bit, you said that you did take on the Student Nurses project with Roger Corman. What was it that had made you feel like you wouldn't get a job working in Hollywood other than working with Roger Corman?

ROTHMAN: Well, I certainly wouldn't get a job as a filmmaker in Hollywood.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Right.

ROTHMAN: If I had perhaps tried to join a craft union I might have been able to apprentice, although nepotism was very common in those days and it was very hard to apprentice into any craft union if you didn't have family members there already. I really didn't see the chances of that being very likely. I tried writing some things, but got nowhere. No one was interested in anything I had written. I couldn't get an agent to represent me. I had no access, for example, to anyone producing television shows

who might be looking for young directors. They sometimes gave people a chance, but they certainly didn't give women a chance. Nobody I knew was hiring any women, and the few times I enquired I was told, you know, they don't hire women. As a consequence I did not think that it was very likely that I would get a chance, and I really didn't know where to go to get a chance. I tried writing some things and going to some people who supposedly had access to financing for making independent films, but all I got was talk. [laughs] I never got any interest in anything I showed them, and I never got to meet the people who were the source of the financing to try and sell them on an idea.

So I was at a total impasse. I had no place to turn. There was no institutionalized way of apprenticing or looking for employment. There were no employment agencies. You just had to do it through acquaintances, through connections, through what today is called networking, and I did not know where the network was. There were no networks that were available to me. There was nothing.

COLLINGS: You mentioned the nepotism, but do you think that you would have had a chance if you had been a male in this position, trying to break in?

ROTHMAN: Not in those years, actually. The unions had not opened up to many young people in a long time. They had been very protectionist and they really wanted to restrict employment. The few young people they took in were usually relatives of people who were already in the union. It was very hard for a young person to get started then. It was not the way it is today; today it's hard if you're not young. But in

those days it was almost impossible.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Did you know that when you went into film school?

ROTHMAN: Not as fully as I understood it when I went out trying to find work. However, that would not have deterred me from going to film school. I was young and I was not timid, and I was going to try my hardest whatever discouragements I encountered, or whatever deterrents I encountered, because I was of the belief—as I am still of the belief—that if you listen to the conventional wisdom about things, which wants to discourage people, you will do nothing and you will accomplish nothing. I'm not saying that there aren't realistic warnings that we all have to take into account, but in a situation where you know you are going to be a pioneer, you just have to go ahead and disregard the conventional wisdom. And I was, to some extent, a pioneer.

COLLINGS: Yeah, for sure. What was going through your mind, in terms of what you were going to do, as you saw closed door after closed door in attempting to find other directing work? Did you have a kind of a plan B in mind?

ROTHMAN: Do you mean, did I want to have an alternative career?

COLLINGS: Yeah. Or what?

ROTHMAN: Not really. I just refused to believe I couldn't do it.

COLLINGS: Yeah. So you never had gotten to the point of leaving that position before Roger Corman contacted you about the student nurses project? Is that—?

ROTHMAN: Well, I did. I worked for Roger on *Gas-s-s-s* in Mexico and Texas.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Yeah, but I mean you had not been so frustrated in your own efforts to get other directing work that you ever considered leaving filmmaking or anything like that.

ROTHMAN: No, not at that point.

COLLINGS: Okay. Did you ever consider that in those early years?

ROTHMAN: No.

COLLINGS: No. Okay. All right. We'll talk about *The Student Nurses* next time, but— [tape recorder off] What else would you like to say about the period between *It's a Bikini World* and *The Student Nurses*?

ROTHMAN: It tested me. That was a period that really tested me. I very much wanted to make films, but I wasn't going to give up just because I wasn't making them. I just steeled myself to keep trying and, of course, I had the advantage of having the belief and encouragement of my husband.

COLLINGS: What was he doing professionally at that time?

ROTHMAN: Nothing. The same thing I was, trying to find work.

COLLINGS: So he also didn't have any of these necessary connections?

ROTHMAN: No.

COLLINGS: Okay.

ROTHMAN: But I believed in him and he believed in me, and we gave each other the encouragement and the acceptance that we didn't get anywhere else.

COLLINGS: How old were you at that time?

ROTHMAN: That was from, let's see, '66 to '69. Twenty-nine to thirty-two.

COLLINGS: Did you and he have some sort of—

ROTHMAN: He's younger than I am, by the way.

COLLINGS: Oh, okay. Did you and he have some sort of ideal film in mind that you really wanted to make, at that time? Or some favorite themes that you sort of talked about?

ROTHMAN: No, I don't think we had favorite themes we talked about. We came up with ideas that we thought would be marketable. We didn't think that we just could pursue favorite themes.

COLLINGS: Yeah. That was completely out of the question.

ROTHMAN: Frankly, I think that for most people who make films it's completely out of the question.

COLLINGS: [laughs] Yeah.

ROTHMAN: It's one thing when you're sitting down to write a short story or a novel, or paint a painting, because the materials involved are very inexpensive. But when you're talking about something that is enormously expensive you just can't think in those terms.

COLLINGS: Right. Were there any actors at that time that particularly interested you? That sort of sparked your imagination in terms of work that might be done?

ROTHMAN: No. I have never written anything with an actor in mind. I'm interested in the character. I'm interested in creating a character. There are many actors in the

world who can play a character, but, no, there is no single actor who I would ever write a part for. Maybe that was one of my mistakes. [laughs]

COLLINGS: No, I don't know. People talk about pitching ideas. Was there that kind of a scenario at that time, where you were—?

ROTHMAN: Did people go in and pitch ideas?

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: And did you?

ROTHMAN: Well, on the rare occasion I had an opportunity, yes. If I could also send in written material, I would, certainly. But it was a rarity. I just did not have access, and I was not in the social circles, I was not in the working circles, I was not in any kind of circle that would allow me to do that.

COLLINGS: Did you know other young filmmakers who were in similar circumstances?

ROTHMAN: A few. I knew a few. I could think of one or two who were luckier than me, who went on to have some success in their careers.

COLLINGS: But was there any sort of salon climate, or something like that, where people were talking about things?

ROTHMAN: No. My husband and I did not draw most of our friends from amongst people who were filmmakers. We had a few, but we drew our friends from actually a much wider circle of acquaintances, and they were people with different occupations,

people whom we liked for, you know, their inherent qualities.

COLLINGS: Right. All right. Well, next time why don't we talk about how you started to write the student nurses project and make it.

ROTHMAN: Certainly.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE ONE

FEBRUARY 12, 2002

COLLINGS: Okay, good afternoon, Stephanie. The first thing I wanted to ask you about was how you got started on the student nurses project in particular.

ROTHMAN: All right. Roger Corman, who had produced and directed many low budget films during the 1950s and sixties, including some directed by himself and some financed by him and directed by other people, decided that he wanted to found his own company for both production and distribution of such films. He contacted myself and my husband and asked us if we would be interested in doing the first production that this company would make. The company was called New World Pictures. He did acquire, before the first picture we made was released, several of what are called distribution pickups, where he distributed films that had been financed and made by people outside of his company or studio but that he agreed to distribute for them, for a fee. But the first in-house production was the film made by my husband Charles [S.] Swartz and myself. What he told us was that his partner in New World Productions, who was going to be the head of distribution, a man named Larry [Lawrence] Woolner, had gone around the country talking to various film distributors— They were known as independent film distributors because they didn't distribute major studio films. They distributed other films, films that weren't major studio ones. That's the only way to describe it. They had told him, after he had taken a poll, that they thought a very commercial subject for a film would be a film about

student nurses.

COLLINGS: Based on a poll, you said.

ROTHMAN: Well, I mean, after he had polled them— He visited them all over the country, and he had asked them, "What do you think would be a good subject to make a film about?" They had told him a film about student nurses sounded very good to them. Now, whether the idea originally came from him, or he talked to one of them or two of them and they had said this and then he presented the idea to others, I really don't know. But he came back with the sense that there was wide agreement that this would be a very commercial subject for a film, and was one that they were willing to at least partly finance. I believe actually that they probably— I'm not sure how the financing was distributed. [tape recorder off]

I was saying that exactly how the financing was distributed between the film distributors and New World Pictures, which of course received financing also from Roger Corman, I don't know, but I believe all of them participated in this.

So Roger approached Charles and myself and said, "Would you be interested in making the first production for us?" Charles would produce and I would direct. Ultimately, we shared the producing credit, because I did, on this particular film, share more of the pre-production producing responsibilities with him than I did on later films that the two of us made together. But he wanted to know if we would like to do that, and he told us what the subject would be. He said that the main thing he wanted to do was make it an exciting film with lots of nudity, which was very important, as

much as the law would allow at that time—or I should say the Motion Picture Producers Association would allow, because they were the ones who imposed the film ratings—and still get it an R rating. He said other than that he would like us to come up with an interesting story. He would like us, obviously, to make it exciting, but he would leave the selection of those elements and the story construction using those elements up to us. What he was interested in was to be sure that we got in sufficient sex, nudity, and, of course, there had to be a little bit of exciting action too.

He gave us a very limited time in which to do this. I think he approached us in January, and he wanted us to start shooting, I think, no later than the end of April. So we immediately got to work with the story editor at New World Pictures, Frances Dole. The three of us sat down and we—for about, I guess, I don't know, a week—threw out ideas for each other's approval, disapproval, inspection, analysis, etc., and we agreed on a plot. Having constructed this story we, Charles and I, then went out looking for somebody to write the screenplay. We could have done it, but we didn't have the time, because to get together a production that quickly—by then, you know, it was probably the beginning of February—to find the locations, which we had to do based on the story, to start casting it, to supervise the writing, to do everything else involved in setting up a production would have been just too demanding. So we found at UCLA, in their cinema department—or I guess their film department, they don't call it a cinema department, they call it their film department—a graduate student whose work we thought was quite good, and so we hired him to write the screenplay.

His name was Don Spencer. He did several drafts. He did, in our opinion, very good work. He contributed some excellent dialogue. The attitudes, the approaches, and what happens in the piece were mostly our ideas. The way it was executed, in terms of dialogue and the tone of the dialogue, were largely his. We did make some contributions there, but it was largely his work, and he did very good work.

COLLINGS: Now, as far as the elements such as the nurse who becomes involved with the Chicano activist, and the other one who undergoes an abortion—were those kinds of elements welcomed by Roger Corman, or he just didn't have an opinion one way or the other, as long as you met those other requirements you had mentioned?

ROTHMAN: Yeah. Basically he didn't object to them. He was not unsympathetic to them. Let me put it that way. I mean, would he have said to us, "I want something like this in my piece"? No. He didn't say that. But we had both known him for a number of years now, and we knew that he was very open-minded about these issues, and so we didn't expect him to not accept them, and in fact that turned out to be true. I mean, he felt this was fine, this was interesting. It added richness to the plot, but it was nothing that he, in any way, would have wanted. [laughs] That was not his selection. It was our selection.

COLLINGS: Just sort of as a little tiny aside, did he ever mention to you why he named the company New World Pictures?

ROTHMAN: Well, actually, the way the name of New World Pictures came about, in

my experience, was he asked people for names that they thought might be interesting for a company. He came up with a number, and then he had a list, and he sort of went around asking many of the people he knew, "Amongst these names, which one do you prefer?"

COLLINGS: I see. All right. Just wondering, in relation to my other question.

In terms of coming up with some of the situations and the characters, were those things that you came into the production— You had sort of already formed the characters and the situations? Tell me a little bit about the process of how you decided on having the four nurses, and how you decided on the kinds of social situations that they would get themselves involved in.

ROTHMAN: Well, to be very honest with you, the reason those social situations were involved was because I was interested in them.

COLLINGS: Yeah, sure.

ROTHMAN: They were ones that were of concern to me, and they were ones that I felt reflected the major concerns of the time. I wanted to make this something that was rooted in its time, and was rooted in the conflicts of the time, because these characters were going to be nurses. They were going to work in a hospital, they were going to be exposed to the various historical currents washing over all of us at that time, more so perhaps than many people who led more isolated and insular lives. So I thought that it was an appropriate vehicle in which to explore these subjects, and to give them a perspective that you normally didn't see in films. A perspective that

indeed was mine, and certainly Charles's as well, and Frances's also, but, I mean, I admit that these were strongly concerns of mine.

COLLINGS: Because the film is not so readily available, would you mind sort of sketching out the major situations and characters in the film, so that someone could perhaps get that from the interview?

ROTHMAN: Well, you asked me about why I chose the four part structure. First of all, because when I approached this subject, I thought, "Student nurses, they're going to be very young. They're in an occupation where they don't get much respect. I don't know that I could really write an interesting feature length story about a student nurse." But also, there had been—and this was something that Roger had pointed out to me—some very commercially successful films made in Hollywood about young doctors about ten years earlier. It seemed to me that it would be much easier to tell the story of four people than to tell the story of one, and sustain it, and really make it a dynamic and interesting story.

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: So that's why I chose the four. I must confess my own proclivities meshed with his commercial demands to some extent. He wanted lots of pretty young actresses in it; if I told four stories I'd have featured four pretty young actresses. Another consideration was that we were going to pay the Screen Actors Guild minimum salary under the Screen Actors Guild contract, and that meant all the actors— Some of them might be well known, some of them might be highly

experienced, but for the roles of pretty young women I was going to have more of a problem finding people who were good actresses. So for that reason, because those qualities, sometimes they do but they don't always go hand in hand—

COLLINGS: Right, right.

ROTHMAN: I wanted to not have to put the full burden of a feature length story on the shoulders of just one pretty young woman.

COLLINGS: Right, right, right. I see, yeah. Well, I think one of the other things that that allows, which is nice about the film, is that it shows a friendship among the women. They're not competitors. They're not stabbing each other in the back.

ROTHMAN: Yes. By the way, that was one of the things that appealed to me about it, once I had made that decision for these other reasons, that I could show a relationship amongst women that at that time just wasn't shown that much, which was that they were not only friends, but their concerns were quite adult. They were not frivolous. They were not looking for husbands. They were not obsessed with clothing, or their looks, or all the other disparaging associations that at that time were made with youth in women.

COLLINGS: Right. That's right, yeah.

ROTHMAN: They were serious young women about to embark on adult life, and they had placed themselves in a very challenging place, a hospital, where there were a lot of grim realities that they were going to not be able to avoid, and which most of them openly embraced.

COLLINGS: Yeah. And there's the mentor, the woman who is the head of—

ROTHMAN: The nursing instructor.

COLLINGS: The nursing instructor, yeah. I think she's a very strong, positive sort of character as well. What about the issue of the audience that would be attracted to a movie that had a lot of nudity in it, did you have any special feeling that you were bringing perhaps a new message or kind of storyline to this audience?

ROTHMAN: Yes, I hoped so. [laughs] I did, I hoped. The kind of audience at that point in time that went to see R rated films was actually very varied. In the mid 1960s this was more shocking. By 1970 this was not that uncommon. My greater concern was this was a low budget exploitation film without stars, and that it wouldn't attract that many people of any sort to go and see it except people who wanted to see sleazy exploitation films, and my concern was that the word wouldn't get out that this had more to it than that. This was a story about our time.

COLLINGS: Right. In the beginning, you know, one of the reviews of the film, by Pam Cook, writes—I think we talked about this a little bit—that each of the nurses is depicted in a different way and in a different style, and according to her that's a way of preventing the viewer from settling into a sort of a comfortable voyeuristic position vis-à-vis the women on the screen. I was wondering what your response to that observation on her part was.

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: Okay.

ROTHMAN: That was part of my design, to make it a very dynamic film, and to give each of the nurses a very different character by varying the visual style as well as by varying the world into which they went. How shall I put it? There is more than one way to tell something on film about not only the world in which a character exists, but about the characters themselves. I didn't know if I would ever make a film again, you know. This was my first— Well, not my first chance to make a feature, it was actually my second feature, but it was my first chance to do something at *all* of an exploratory nature, since the first picture had been a beach picture. I wanted to try out every visual style I could. I had so much fun making this film in that respect, because I never was able to be that varied again, and the structure of it just welcomed that kind of exploration. It welcomed that kind of variation in style. It was a very conscious decision.

COLLINGS: Did you ever meet Pam Cook, or discuss your work with her, that you recall?

ROTHMAN: Yes, I did. I met her in December of 1999 in Cologne, Germany, where we both were invited to a conference on girl gang films. That meant, to the German critics who invited us, more than just films about girls' gangs, but rather about groups of women who act assertively and who define themselves rather than allowing themselves to be defined, by men or by adults or by anybody else, and who are, in other words, not objects but subjects, and who are somehow iconoclastic. There were films from the nineties, from the eighties, and then they chose to show several of my

films from the seventies, one of which was *The Student Nurses*. Another was *Group Marriage*, and the third one was *Terminal Island*.

COLLINGS: Okay. At the time that you were making this film and others—not specifically this film because that would be too early, but sort of later on—were you aware about this kind of discussion about your film, such as the kind of thing that Pam Cook wrote? I mean she wrote that in 1976, which was well after the film was made, but were you at all aware of that vein of debate? Or were you sort of in another world, as it were?

ROTHMAN: I knew very little being written about me anywhere at that time. Occasionally, someone would actually send me a copy of something they had written, but there was very little written about me. There was very little interest in me. I did learn about her in 1979 when I was invited to the Toronto Film Festival. They were, in a sidebar, going to show *The Velvet Vampire*. It was a sidebar called the American Nightmare. Robin Wood, the film critic, and Richard Lippe, also a film critic, were the people who had organized it, and they had invited me up there, and they knew about this article by Pam Cook and brought it to my attention.

COLLINGS: What about Terry Curtis Fox? He wrote a lot on your work too.

ROTHMAN: Yes. Outside of Art Murphy of *Daily Variety*, he was the first person whom I read who ever had anything positive to say about any of my films. Nobody else did that I was aware of. There may have been, you know, local reviews around the country, but I never saw any of them. Terry Fox was the first and the most

generous.

COLLINGS: Yeah, he seems like he really likes your work and really enjoys the images of women in the work.

ROTHMAN: Yes, we're still friends even today.

COLLINGS: Yeah, I'll bet. One of the things that he says in one of his reviews of *The Student Nurses* is that you put the attempted rape of one of the women in at the very beginning of the film in order to sort of, according to him, provide the required element, you might call it, of the sex and violence at the beginning, so that you can just move on from there. Is that something that you would agree with?

ROTHMAN: Yes, absolutely. It was to give that part of the audience who would come for that what they wanted. It was to surprise them, because it happened so quickly, right at the beginning. It was also to, I should say, surprise them [not only] with the shock of the act, but also to surprise them how the act is resolved.

COLLINGS: Yes. How is the act resolved? To just get it on the record here.

ROTHMAN: Well, she fights him off, and she gets a doctor and an orderly in there who subdue him with an injection which sedates him. But the point is that he tries to attack her, and pull up her skirt, and remove her underwear, and he doesn't succeed. She gets free of him after he's pulled up her skirt. But he ends up, at the end of the scene, having his trousers pulled down by these two men and unceremoniously stabbed in the buttock.

COLLINGS: With a tranquilizer.

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Right, so it sort of flip flops at that point.

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: Yeah. As far as the four characters go, Priscilla, the character who goes to the love-in and meets this unnamed guy and undergoes the abortion, in many ways seems like a central character. Would that be your assessment?

ROTHMAN: You mean the central character?

COLLINGS: Yeah. How did you decide on the four characters? How did you decide on their attributes?

ROTHMAN: Excuse me, she's no more central than anyone else, in my opinion. However, I think her plight to many people is very moving.

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: Her naiveté, her desire; I think it's a kind of attitude that many people can identify in themselves in their youth, which is that they are looking for adventure, for excitement, for sex with a stranger. I mean, she really isn't looking for romance, she's just looking for sexual excitement, and she finds it and she pays a terrible price for it. She becomes pregnant, and this was not something she wanted. She knows how to deal with it, and she does, and despite all the— And her experience of going through it is not the way anti-abortion advocates portray it at all. It's the antithesis of that. That is to say, she is in control of her mind and her body, and while this is not an experience anyone would necessarily pursue—after all, there are physical dangers in

it, and she undergoes it illegally, fortunately with people who know what they're doing—she comes out the other end a person who is now, in a way, much more focused on what she wants to do, and is no longer looking for any sexual adventure. It forces her to grow up and to confront her lack of judgment and her naiveté, and discard those things.

COLLINGS: The scene where she's being interviewed by, I guess it's a doctor in the hospital, who will make a decision about whether she's mentally unstable and so therefore could have a legal abortion, is quite chilling. How did you research that scene, if you recall? This is sort of going back many years.

ROTHMAN: I didn't really research it.

COLLINGS: Okay.

ROTHMAN: I mean, that was just an imagined scene. That's all. I think that what makes it most chilling is you never see the face of the doctor. He just has a disembodied voice, and you see her squirming, trying to answer questions in a way that will not make him decide to deny her the abortion, which of course he ultimately does. Squirming because she doesn't really know how to address the things he's asking her, also because they seem so unrelated to her own state of mind and her own situation in life.

COLLINGS: Yeah, that's right. What kinds of things did the actresses who played the nurses have to say about working on the film?

ROTHMAN: Well, they all worked very hard on it. They wanted to be in it.

COLLINGS: But in terms of the subject matter and the themes?

ROTHMAN: They really didn't have an opinion on the subject matter or the themes. They obviously weren't opposed to them, because they threw themselves into their roles as much as they could, as much as they were capable of. In that sense I suppose it was an endorsement. There was nothing that put them off.

COLLINGS: I guess what I'm trying to imagine is that, when you look at a film such as this now— I mean, it looks like something fairly groundbreaking really, I mean in terms of the kinds of social issues that are addressed and the images of women that are put forward, and I'm just wondering if this kind of thing was at all exciting or intriguing, you know, for some of the people who worked on it.

ROTHMAN: I think playing these roles, they were actresses. To be very honest with you, there are some actors and actresses who are ideologues, but I think they were in love with the idea of playing these roles. They liked the idea of these characters, so in that sense it was an endorsement. They obviously were not offended by the ideas. Did they say to me "I agree with you about this issue"?

COLLINGS: Or "I'm so glad you're making this film." Nothing like that?

ROTHMAN: Nothing like that. On the other hand, they did find it very enjoyable to be working with a woman for a change and not being directed by men.

COLLINGS: How do you work with actors?

ROTHMAN: Well, there's no one way you can work with an actor. It depends on the individual. Some people need to have discussions of the attitudes of the character, of

what their underlying motives may be, of what psychological stress they may have. Others need to be helped with line readings, because they are perhaps overlooking a meaning or something of that nature. Others, all you have to do is say "Action" and they have an excellent grasp of the character, and they may add new riches to the tone of the scene, some of the action of the scene, and the best thing to do is to let them at those.

COLLINGS: Yeah, okay. As far as on this particular film, did you ever have any conversations with them about sort of the feminist content of the films, to sort of help put them in the scene, as you say?

ROTHMAN: No, I didn't, because the feminist content may be an ideological underpinning, but that's not what an actor has to deal with in portraying a scene. I mean, in acting within a scene they're dealing with, you know, the responses of the character at that time. Now, some of those responses may be feminist responses, but to talk about some overarching ideological framework, no, I didn't do that, because that really, I don't think, would have been very helpful to them as actors.

COLLINGS: Okay. What about the crew? How was your crew responding to the work that was going on? I mean, any sort of grumpy reactions to filming?

ROTHMAN: The content?

COLLINGS: Yeah, exactly. No?

ROTHMAN: First of all, crews are very busy when a film is being made, and they're each concentrating on their respective areas, and—how should I put it?—there is a

customary restraint about expressing your opinion about a project. Either you want to work on it, or you don't want to work on it. And if you're working on it, then it's really not your place to make a comment about the content. If anybody had such opinions, they kept them to themselves, and they were not communicated to me. I don't really think that many of them really were that interested in the subject matter of the film. They were interested in doing their work to the best of their abilities, and, in some cases [laughs] , not to the best of their abilities. Fortunately there were not many cases like that, but, you know, that's basically the ways crews think. Now, if the crew is watching a scene being shot and, you know, the dialogue is funny, or the action is exciting, they'll comment on that. Or they may laugh. In fact they may laugh [laughs] while the sound is being recorded and ruin a tape. Not deliberately, but it does happen. I mean, they are sometimes immersed in witnessing, you know, the scene, and giving their response to it. But usually crews are too tactful to talk about the script they're working on.

COLLINGS: You know, your films do have a kind of a light, really joyful kind of feel. Is there that kind of feeling on the set as you're working, do you think?

ROTHMAN: Yes and no. I shot films in a very short period of time, much shorter than a studio feature length film would have been shot in. I never had more than I guess it was a month in which to shoot a film. That was the maximum I had, and so as a consequence we had to work very fast. Our crews were very small, we had very little money, we had to work very hard, so there was a very serious aspect to making

these films, and we worked very long hours. Not many mistakes could be made, believe me, because the budget dictated only so much film could be used, and the budget dictated that we had to get this many shots done, and those were a lot of shots. I only got to do a maximum of two takes, unless it was an action scene. But if there was a dialogue scene—

COLLINGS: So that was a rule? Maximum two takes, that was a rule?

ROTHMAN: Well, occasionally, if somebody really couldn't do their lines correctly, or some kind of mechanical problem occurred on the set, then I would do more takes. But I tried to restrict that because, on as low a budget as we had, film was a very expensive commodity. For an ordinary film, film is a very inexpensive commodity, in terms of—

COLLINGS: It's all the rest, yes.

ROTHMAN: Yes, total expenses. But on this film it was a significant portion of the budget, so from that standpoint working on the film set was very serious. But I did try—and the more films I made, it became even truer—during the course of the day to make jokes. And, say, when people did things well I tried to reinforce that. I mean, amongst the crew as well as the cast, I tried to. I tried to get to know everybody in the crew. I'm terrible at remembering names, but I tried very hard to know everybody's name. You know, to say good morning to them, to let them know that I thought their contribution was very important. Which it was, by the way; that was not a form of hypocrisy on my part. But I did consciously, as a morale builder, try to do that, yes.

When I made more films, and I began to use the same people over and over again—the people who did the best work and who I got along with best—our relationships began to have a history that we could refer back to. We shared reminiscences, you know, we were more relaxed with each other, because we knew basically how we behaved, and so I was able to introduce more humor onto the set. We had more time, even as intensely as we worked, to engage in more verbal play, and that relaxed things. But it was also— I mean, I looked forward to it. It was fun. As time went on, the sets became more and more fun.

COLLINGS: Okay. Perhaps the restrictions of the two takes became more easy to manage, too, as time went on.

ROTHMAN: Well, no. I mean, I always tried to rehearse my actors as much as possible before we actually ran any film through the camera. So the restrictions of the two takes were not in any way eased. But they were just something that, as a general rule, had to be imposed.

COLLINGS: Yeah. To make it cost effective.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE TWO

FEBRUARY 12, 2002

COLLINGS: Let's see, what about the music for the film for *The Student Nurses* and I guess for all your films? I know that the film starts out with a very optimistic sort of song at the beginning.

ROTHMAN: "We Can Make It If We Try."

COLLINGS: Exactly, yeah. You've got the girl, Priscilla—I was sort of thinking of her in some ways as a main character—sitting on the convertible and the hair flying and everything, and I was just wondering if there's anything you'd like to say about some of those very optimistic kinds of images and the positive nature of the soundtrack.

ROTHMAN: Well, the music, obviously, was composed to reflect the content of the scene. My husband had as much, if not more, to do with the music— Well, I shouldn't say that. Let me start again.

COLLINGS: Scratch that.

ROTHMAN: Yeah, scratch that. My husband and I shared the responsibility of telling the composer what we wanted. We made equal contributions. When it came to re-recording the music, he had some very excellent and strong ideas about how to do it, and I think his contribution in the re-recording of the music was greater than mine. But we tried to get the music to reflect the nature of the scene. We wanted it to be in the most popular style of the time, because we thought this would make it a more

timely picture, and we wanted to be dramatically appropriate.

COLLINGS: Sure. Let's see, what about viewing— There is one article where you talk about viewing the film with an audience, and there is a sort of a reaction during the scene when the policeman is killed.

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: I was just wondering, how often you did tend to see your films with audiences?

ROTHMAN: Well, I saw all my films with ticket buying audiences. Other audiences can be instructive, because most people respond rather universally to things. I would like to watch my films with other people from the very beginning, because it immediately clued me in to whether or not there were some things there that were bad laughs, or had not been edited in such a way as to be as clear as they should be, or whether there were things that needed to be given greater emphasis, either visually or in terms of sound effects or music. So it's very helpful, always, to see films with other people. But I liked to see them with ticket buying audiences because they were obviously, in my opinion, the most critical. They had nothing invested in being anything but honest, and it was always fascinating to me, when you go to a theater and sit with an audience and listen to them, how much they are having a dialogue with the film right there in the theater, and what you can hear and what you can learn.

In the particular instance of the scene where the policeman was shot, I was always— I didn't get that response from people I watched the film with while it was

being cut, and I think we screened it free for one audience before it went into release. But when I sat there and watched it with a live, ticket buying audience, I was *very* struck by the fact that the death of the policeman always was very affecting to them. I mean, there were lots of violent films made in 1970, and there were certainly films with a lot more physical action than this film had, and yet people involuntarily used to exclaim, or gasp, or something, or sigh, when the policeman was shot. Frankly it made me feel very good, because it indicated that I had done something correctly. I had conveyed what I wanted to convey about that scene, which was that this was a terrible thing. This was something very sad. That even though you or I might identify with the characters who were instrumental in killing him, even though they might move us, and we might admire them and their goals and their attitudes towards everything, in this one instance circumstances had conspired to make them do a terrible thing. What I wanted the audience to think was "This is even more terrible than ordinary, because it was done by people we understand and we can empathize with."

COLLINGS: It's also the only— It's a fairly isolated incident, so the audience hasn't been desensitized.

ROTHMAN: To violence.

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: Right. Was that a required element for that film, the shooting?

ROTHMAN: You mean of the policeman, or just—?

COLLINGS: In general.

ROTHMAN: Well, it was supposed to have some action and some violence, yes. But did it have to be the shooting of a policeman? No. I think that that is always, however, a shocking thing to people. I think people are—and I have always thought this—very upset to know that someone who is supposed to protect them, and who is a public servant who is there, in the best of circumstances, as their defender and their friend, not as their enemy, could be vulnerable. It makes, I think, them feel more vulnerable, and it makes them feel badly for the policeman figure. So that's why I chose the policeman.

COLLINGS: Did you ever see the film with a Chicano audience?

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: And same reaction?

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: I never heard anyone applauding the death.

COLLINGS: No, no.

ROTHMAN: I mean, I have seen films during that era where that was considered a good thing to do, but I think that, the way it was set up in *The Student Nurses*, it was clearly meant to indicate this was not a good thing to do. This was not going to get anyone anywhere, and all it did was it created a problem for the people who had done

it. A serious problem.

COLLINGS: Yeah. When you did go to screenings, you would just sort of find out where the film was showing and just buy a ticket like anybody else, is that—?

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: That must have been kind of interesting.

ROTHMAN: We just went to neighborhood theaters.

COLLINGS: Yeah, yeah.

ROTHMAN: I mean, I didn't go to great numbers of them, but I went to a few.

COLLINGS: Yeah, okay.

ROTHMAN: I couldn't go in other parts of the country, we had to be here in Los Angeles, but I tried to go to different neighborhoods.

COLLINGS: That's interesting.

Your films have a great deal of comedy. Achieving the comedic elements, was that something you were able to sort of elicit from your actors, or was that something that you worked on?

ROTHMAN: Well, first of all, they were deliberately written.

COLLINGS: Yeah, right.

ROTHMAN: The scenes in which they occur. It starts with the writing.

COLLINGS: Yeah. But there is also a— The comedy seems to sort of bubble forth from the fabric of the whole.

ROTHMAN: Well, I certainly discussed with the actors the way to perform comedy,

which is to be very serious, not try to be funny. In a way, in comedy you have to be more serious than you are in drama, because any indication that you are not thoroughly that character, and thoroughly immersed in all the thought processes of that character, which are the seeds of the comedy, will defeat it, and will make the scene not be funny. Of course, there were also—which I always welcomed—some suggestions for a way to do this that would be rooted in the character and what they were doing and their attitude, but would be funny, suggestions of that nature from the actors. But also, of course, in advance I spent long hours working out business that would be funny as well. So it's always got to be a collaboration between the director and the actors, and they obviously, also, because of their own unique styles and own unique beings, added something that was uniquely theirs to this comic situation. I wouldn't want to detract from that. They obviously had something very special of their own to add to it.

COLLINGS: The comedy is very important to you, is that correct?

ROTHMAN: Yes. That's my view of life.

COLLINGS: The film has to have some kind of comedic element.

ROTHMAN: Well, life is a comedy, you know. Sometimes it's a dark comedy, sometimes it's a light comedy. [laughs] Sometimes it's a tragic comedy, but it's always a comedy.

COLLINGS: Okay. Do you think that comedy was expected in those films?

ROTHMAN: No.

COLLINGS: No. That was a surprise to audiences generally, or—?

ROTHMAN: Well, I don't know. Were they surprised? You know, I don't think they came in with many expectations. They came in with the expectation that they would see a story about the subject that it was advertised to be about. Beyond that, I don't think they have— I don't have many expectations when I go to see a film with actors I don't know, made by someone I'm not acquainted with, unless they advertise it as a comedy, and *The Student Nurses* was not advertised as a comedy. It was advertised as a drama. So I think there may have been some element of surprise that there were comedic moments in it. But then all good drama— Or, I should say, well, most drama has comedic moments in it. Scratch the good part. [laughs]

COLLINGS: Do you think that the images of the assertive women are made more palatable by the comedy? Or no?

ROTHMAN: No. I think the images of the assertive women are made palatable by the fact that these are the kind of women that people, both women and men, have met in real life. That image that films showed of women, either as the femme fatale, or the housewife who was a secondary character and not very interesting, or the secretary, or— Always someone subordinate to a man. Or, if she had sexual attractions, someone who was dangerous to a man. All these images that were so common in Hollywood films at that time— I've lost the train of my thought. What is your question again?

COLLINGS: Well, I was just wondering if you thought that the comedy made the

images of the assertive women more palatable.

ROTHMAN: Oh, yeah. I think that just the reality of these characters, and the fact that audiences could look at these characters and say, "I know people like this," that they were not exotic to them, if anything they were real young women who everyone knew, was what made it palatable. I think that the ideas in the film were not that shocking to people who read newspapers and watched television and talked to their friends. They were shocking to find in a commercial motion picture. That was the shocking part of it, and that's because films were so reactionary in their view of women.

COLLINGS: Yes. Exactly. I think, in fact, that the comedic elements flesh out the personalities and the characters of the women and in fact make them more real than they would be otherwise.

ROTHMAN: Well, I think comedy does that. I mean, comedy that's just not, you know, one line jokes.

COLLINGS: Yeah, of course, yeah.

ROTHMAN: I think it contributed to that, but I don't think that's what made these characters palatable for audiences. I really think that even when I watched it with audiences what made it palatable was they could identify with these characters.

COLLINGS: Yeah, right. Well, just in general, in that film and in all the films, I particularly really enjoy the joyful spirit of them. I'm sure that audiences of that time did as well.

ROTHMAN: Thank you. [tape recorder off]

COLLINGS: I guess I wanted to ask you, just as a wrap-up, how you felt about the film when you were finished with it.

ROTHMAN: Ambivalent. On the one hand, I was not happy that I had to make a film that met the requirements of an exploitation film. I would not have chosen the subject of student nurses if I had been allowed to independently elect what I would make a film about. I had found it a challenge for that reason. I wanted to make something more ambitious and more serious and more original. In other words, I thought I had probably failed on all these fronts. I was also very anxious because, if this film was not successful, I thought that my career was over, and I would not probably ever get another chance from anyone else, because I had had great difficulty getting this chance and everywhere else I had looked I had been rejected. So that was the negative side of my ambivalence.

The positive side was that I was thrilled for the opportunity to make this film, and also to be able to do all this kind of stylistic experimentation. And the sheer process of filmmaking was something I enjoyed, and so I was grateful for once again having that opportunity.

COLLINGS: Was there any specific idea in your mind at that time of what you would have liked to make at that time if you had had the chance?

ROTHMAN: I honestly can't recall if there was a specific thing. There may have been at the time, but I can't recall that, I'm sorry.

COLLINGS: Yeah, because I would be sort of wondering how that would have found its way into this project.

ROTHMAN: I mean, if I could have made something like *The Seventh Seal*, I would have much preferred to do that.

COLLINGS: Yes, right.

ROTHMAN: I suppose you could say that what I always had in my mind was to make a film that was about moral challenges, and about the way people lie to themselves about what life's meaning is, and how they punish each other if they don't share the same beliefs about what life's meaning is.

COLLINGS: Well, there is a lot of that in this film, actually. I mean, particularly in the reaction of the one nurse—I'm sorry, I've forgotten her name—to Priscilla's abortion. I mean, she definitely, in her small way, tries to punish her for that.

At this time, did you ever consider the very avant-garde, sixteen millimeter kind of experimental film making as anything that you would ever be interested in?

ROTHMAN: No, I never was interested in doing that. When I was a film student I saw a lot of it, and over the years, on and off, I have looked at some. But no, I have no interest, and I really had no ideas that would lend themselves to that kind of filmmaking. I think people who come from a more painterly background, who have studied painting and graphic arts and things of that nature, are more likely to be the source for that kind of filmmaking. Sometimes people from theater are, but my background steered me in another direction, and the background I had was because of

the interests I had, so my interests steered me in another direction also.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Okay, is there anything specific to *The Student Nurses* that you'd like to say as we leave that film?

ROTHMAN: Well, I have seen it several times over the years since then, and I expected it to be more dated than I have found it to be. I don't think it's terribly dated.

COLLINGS: I don't either.

ROTHMAN: I mean, there are issues there that— They haven't disappeared, but they have been modified over time. As you watch *The Student Nurses* you have the advantage of hindsight, you can see how American history has gone since that film was made. But the same conflicts and the same concerns still exist today.

COLLINGS: Yeah. I think also one of the things that's very interesting about it is that, because it's almost a documentary in the sense of attitudes, you can see attitudes of that period in great detail, and I think that's one of the things that people from our period now find so interesting about it. It's a historical record of 1970, in a way.

ROTHMAN: Yeah. And yet it's a record that has a great deal of resonance for today.

COLLINGS: Yeah, exactly.

ROTHMAN: The other thing I'm pleased with when I see it—that it contains, or at least that's what I see in it—is the driving ambition and resoluteness of youth, because each of the student nurses in her own way has this. It's a very youthful film, and by that I don't mean youthful in the sense of being, "Oh, they're so young and they're so naive," and, you know, "They are so pretty!" I mean it's youthful in the sense of the

kind of nervous energy that you have only when you're very young.

COLLINGS: Well, I think that the hitchhiking scenes embody that for me, because there are two particular instances that I am thinking of, the one at the beginning and the one at the end, where they don't have transportation and they just start hitchhiking, almost without even discussing it, and just get where they're going. I think those are very nice scenes for that reason.

ROTHMAN: Of course, I think it was more common to do that in the seventies than it is today, because there's been such a history of violence against hitchhikers since then, but it was more common then. It's interesting you mention that, because I have hitchhiking in several of my films, and to me hitchhiking is a wonderful way of beginning an adventure. Even if it's the end of the film, it says something new is going to happen to this person. We are now picking them up and then taking them to their next adventure, and that's what I liked about it. It always represented to me adventurous possibility.

COLLINGS: Have you ever spoken to any of the actresses who were in the film? Have you ever had contact with anybody who was in the film, later on?

ROTHMAN: No. I mean, I did meet I think maybe one or two on the street since then. Except for one, excuse me, Barbara Leigh, who was Priscilla, and she appeared for me in another film, in *Terminal Island*. She played the character Bunny, who had lost her ability to speak.

COLLINGS: Oh, Priscilla and Bunny *are* the same actress! That's what I thought.

Yeah, that's interesting.

ROTHMAN: But other than that, no.

COLLINGS: I was just wondering if they had become aware that the film had begun to be written about and that kind of thing.

ROTHMAN: I have no idea. I do know that there was a show by a Texas— I believe it was actually an academic who called himself [Joe] Bob [Briggs], and he used to have a cable television show, and he showed *The Student Nurses* one night. He invited all the actresses to come and talk about the film, and they did. Apparently, at some point in their discussion he asked them if any of them knew whatever happened to Stephanie Rothman, and they said, no, they didn't.

COLLINGS: Geez.

ROTHMAN: So I was amazed that he never was able to find me. Maybe he didn't want to find me, but I was rather amazed that he didn't make the effort. Actually, I wouldn't have even heard of the show if an old friend of mine hadn't told me about it. About a year and a half later he told me about seeing this, and hearing this question about, "Does anyone know what happened to Stephanie Rothman?" So. [mutual laughter]

COLLINGS: All right, so you wrapped up the production on the film, and what happened after that?

ROTHMAN: After that Roger Corman asked us if we would like to make another film, and we said yes. He said, "Do you have anything in mind?" Actually, he asked

me if I wanted to direct a production in the Philippines

COLLINGS: Oh, really?

ROTHMAN: Yes, that he and some distributors were financing, and I believe there might have been some Philippine money involved, too, I'm not sure. But, yes, it's a screenplay that Charles and I supervised the writing of for two drafts. That was written by Don Spencer also. It was based on a script that Roger bought and had the rights to. It became a very famous exploitation film, called *The Big Doll House*, but it was not my kind of material. I was not interested in making a women's prison picture with lots of sex and violence in it. At any rate, after the script had been finished Roger asked me to— He had been in Europe making a film of his own while it was being written. When he came back he asked me if I would be interested in directing it, and I said no, I would not be, and so he had someone else direct it.

At that time I said, and so did Charles, "We do have an idea for another project, though, if you would—" And he said, "Yes, I want you to make another project." So the next project was what became the film called *The Velvet Vampire,* although at that time our working title for it was *Through the Looking Glass*. So we made that in the winter of 1971.

COLLINGS: So this was unlike the student nurses project, where he brought the basis of the film to you. This time you brought it to him.

ROTHMAN: Yes. Well, we knew we had to make another exploitation film, and that meant another genre film, and both Charles and I wanted to stretch our wings and see

how well we could make another type of film. I in particular felt it was very important for me as a director to explore all types of films, not to restrict myself to any one—at least not at the beginning, before I discovered what my strengths and weaknesses were. So we thought what we would do would be a fresh approach to a traditional film genre, the vampire film, and that's what we did.

COLLINGS: All right, and how about the writing of the script, how did that come about?

ROTHMAN: Well, Charles and I sat down and, again, created characters and a plot. I don't think in this case we actually wrote a treatment, I think we just sort of sat down and, you know, wrote out what kinds of characters we wanted, and the various plot developments we wanted to happen, in sequence. Then we hired a writer to write it, again because it had to be made very quickly. We hired a writer who was named Yale Udoff [also known as Maurice Jules], and he did a good job on the script, although when he was finished, in our roles as executives we did have to considerably rewrite it. But it was mostly his work. I don't want to detract from his work. It was mostly his work, but we did do a final polish of it ourselves, some cutting and some rearranging of scenes and so forth, even before we shot.

Then we shot the film, which was set in Los Angeles and in the Mojave Desert. The scenes shot in the desert were very difficult to do, not because— Well, partly because of all the sand and the cacti, which I walked into several times. Very painful.

COLLINGS: Oh, gosh.

ROTHMAN: Everybody did. But also just because of the very changeable nature of the weather in the desert. Within minutes you can have a warm sunny day and then suddenly a sand storm can come up, obscuring the sun, and you are in this dark, overcast weather, and you are being abraded by millions of little grains of sand that are blowing at you with great intensity, and lodging in your eyes and your mouth and your hair and everything else. It could go also from being very hot to being very cold in very short periods of time. And the sun, you know, was very harsh, and so you had very harsh shadows. You didn't always want that, so you had to use filters and you had to use other tools that camera crews use to soften shadows. So it was very hard working in the desert.

COLLINGS: Yeah. What were you thinking when you were creating the character of Diane? I'm just wondering what went into the creation of her.

ROTHMAN: Well, I started out with the intention of making what I thought was at the heart of all vampire films, which is an erotic tale. I always thought a vampire was a very erotic figure, and I wanted to make a highly erotic vampire who was very appealing and very seductive, and was a modern woman—seemingly a modern woman.

COLLINGS: She does seem to be very dangerous. That's clearly what you wanted.

ROTHMAN: Yes, well, I consider that part of the excitement of vampires is that they're dangerous.

COLLINGS: And her sexuality is sort of tied up with that. With the danger.

ROTHMAN: That's right. And she is omnisexual. She has a great appetite not just for sex but for what is her reward after sex, which is the blood of her victims.

COLLINGS: [laughs] Right. I'm really struck by the difference between Diane, being this dangerous vampire, and some of the characters of *The Student Nurses* and characters in other films, because in some of the other films the sexuality is not characterized as this powerful, dangerous force. And so that to me seems to really set *The Velvet Vampire* apart from your other films.

ROTHMAN: Yes, I think you're right. Well, depending on the human being that is practicing it, sex can be dangerous, it can be safe, it can be warm and comforting, it can be cold and terrifying, it can be gratifying, and it can be painful and without any gratification. So there are many ways to approach the subject, and I never had any intention, during the time I was making films, to say only one thing about it.

COLLINGS: I guess I have a stiff question. I'm not exactly sure how to put it, but I guess I'll just read the question, which is: Do you feel that you needed to develop any kind of theoretical expertise to feel comfortable using women's sexuality in film the way you do? Because you specifically are not interested in exploiting the sexual images of women, because you're trying to do something else with those images. I mean, there's a lot of theory that would come afterwards that could be attached to that film, which would—

ROTHMAN: To *The Velvet Vampire*?

COLLINGS: Yeah, which would valorize the powerful sexuality of this character,

and I'm just wondering where your ideas along those lines came from, if you could kind of trace the roots back.

ROTHMAN: Really, I don't think it's specifically associated with any theory I had about female sexuality rather than the view that women were half the human race, and they, in greater or lesser degrees as individuals, had all the traits that men did, and that they could be anything. I mean, they could be sexually powerful and they could be sexually powerless, and that sometimes, even, great sexual power leads to powerlessness, because it can exclude other aspects of human existence from a person's life.

COLLINGS: So how did you see Diane? As powerful or powerless, in the end?

ROTHMAN: I saw her as a pathetic obsessive [mutual laughter] , who was powerful but whose power was her destruction.

COLLINGS: In one interview you said that you were thinking a little bit about Georges Franju and [Jean] Cocteau when you were making the film, and I was just sort of wondering if you remember making the comment and if you care to elaborate on that.

ROTHMAN: Well, they both used very compelling surreal images in their films, and I admired them for that and it was something that I aspired to do also. I tried to use surrealism to some extent in all my films, sometimes more consciously and sometimes it was just built into the nature of the story and I didn't even have to try for it, it was just there because of the way the narrative went. So that's what I admired about them,

was their surrealism.

COLLINGS: I really found the images of Diane coming across the desert in the dune buggy quite engaging.

ROTHMAN: And also surreal.

COLLINGS: Exactly, yes. How did you come up with that particular image? Do you remember what went into the making of that?

ROTHMAN: Which were you saying? Diane coming over the desert? Diane riding this dune buggy when she makes her first appearance in the desert, flying over a dune in a dune buggy?

COLLINGS: And she seems to sort of fly.

ROTHMAN: Well, I thought it was a startling image. A vampire appearing out of nowhere in a dune buggy. This sort of elegant, urban woman suddenly appearing from the dunes from nowhere. It gave it, I thought, a surreal quality. It also implied there was some magic in her. How did she know how to find them out here in the middle of nowhere like that?

COLLINGS: Was this particular shot planned before you even went out into the desert?

ROTHMAN: Oh, sure.

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: Within the script.

COLLINGS: Do you tend to sort of see things visually when you're setting up your

scripts, or are they more narrative based?

ROTHMAN: Well, the images in all film scripts—

TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE ONE

FEBRUARY 12, 2002

ROTHMAN: I'm sorry, I've lost the train of what we were saying.

COLLINGS: Okay, I was just asking you about how you organized your scripts, and how much a role planning along visual lines played.

ROTHMAN: Yes, and I was saying that I did include camera angles and moves, and I included descriptions of what the scene looked like in some detail—when I knew it. Or how I would like it to look, I shouldn't say "when I knew it." How I would like it to look, at least. Yes, my scripts were not just dialogue, by any means. They never are.

COLLINGS: The scene where Diane appears in the back of the bus, towards the end—

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: —is another one of those sort of surreal kinds of images. It's very surprising. It's quite scary, actually.

ROTHMAN: What about when she walks through the mirror? Walks out of the mirror, I should say.

COLLINGS: Yes, that's another one of those, definitely.

ROTHMAN: Well, that was my homage to Jean Cocteau.

COLLINGS: Right, that's right. One thing that I think works in an interesting way in that film is the contrast between Diane, and this very surreal and sort of unnatural

force that she is, and then the kind of friendly and playful relationship between the man and the woman of the couple.

ROTHMAN: Which she destroys.

COLLINGS: Yes, yes, she does destroy it. [laughs] I think you have this in a number of your films, but in this film in particular the couple sort of bicker a lot, and I found that to be sort of intriguing because I feel that it shows them really on an equal— They really seem to be on an equal footing within their relationship. That seems to be something you don't see very often in films either, sadly. Particularly of that time. Is that something that you thought about when you were writing your scripts?

ROTHMAN: Not as a device for making them equal so much as a device for giving scenes some energy, and for furthering the plot when it was appropriate, and as also a vehicle in which to have comic actions and reactions.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Okay. Where did your idea for the ending come from? Because I was sort of surprised to see Susan, who had escaped thus far this vampire, in effect double-crossed at the end. What were you thinking about there?

ROTHMAN: Well, I think it's pretty obvious that there is more than one vampire around. That we're all, you know, subject to surprises, that she will not escape so easily.

COLLINGS: Did you think of this as a sort of comedic end or something that was quite scary?

ROTHMAN: I thought of it more as an ironic ending.

COLLINGS: Okay. Did you ever see the film with an audience, with a ticket paying audience, as you—?

ROTHMAN: Yes, I have seen it a number of times over the years.

COLLINGS: What are some of the ways that people have reacted to it?

ROTHMAN: It is a very polarizing film. People tend to either really like it or *hate* it. It's been my observation that people who expect a vampire film to be very traditional, where the vampire, one, is probably a man, and secondly is very menacing, and there is no humor, are confused and react in a hostile fashion to the humor in the film. They either think it's unintentional and bad, or they just don't like it for what it is. There are other people who have a more open view of what this kind of film should be. If they like it, they tend to like it rather strongly.

COLLINGS: What kinds of audiences do you think liked it better than others?

ROTHMAN: I honestly could not characterize the audience, or even the age. You know, there are some films in which audiences will respond differently depending on their age or on their sex. It didn't work out that way with this film. People either got it or they didn't. They either liked the fact that it was different or they really resented it.

COLLINGS: How was it marketed?

ROTHMAN: It really wasn't. It was marketed as a vampire film, but, I mean, it didn't have much marketing. It sort of went out there and disappeared. It was made

for so little money that eventually it earned back its investment, and I'm sure over the years it has made some money, but it got very little attention.

COLLINGS: How do you feel about the film?

ROTHMAN: You mean in retrospect?

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: I'll tell you, to be very honest with you, all my films surprise me. I was surprised at how much it held my attention.

COLLINGS: The making of it or the viewing of it?

ROTHMAN: The watching of it, yes. I really didn't expect it to hold my attention as much as it does when I watch it each time. Because of the settings and the texture of the images, because we're out in the desert and there is sand, and there is cacti, and there are mountain ranges, and the sunsets, and, you know, beautiful long shadows, and because of the contrast between the desert scenes and the urban scenes, and because of— I think that the performance given by the actress [Celeste Yarnall] who played the vampire is more riveting than I realized it was when she was giving it, and I think it holds up quite well, actually.

COLLINGS: Yeah, yeah.

ROTHMAN: I think she is quite good in it.

COLLINGS: How did you feel about it at the time, when you were finished?

ROTHMAN: I was really glad to get it over. It was so hard to make.

COLLINGS: Did you think that it had lived up to your expectations?

ROTHMAN: No. I was very disappointed in the actress [Sherry Miles] that I cast as the young wife. She was very unpleasant on the set—to everybody. She was very young and I think she was very insecure, and so she took it out on everyone around her. I just think that her fear made it difficult for me to get her to give the kind of performance that I think would have made her look a lot better. She got very rigid and very frightened, and it was really very hard to work with her, harder to work with her than I have *ever* experienced in my entire career. I find her performance, just as I did when she was doing it, and just as, you know, I knew it would be, stilted and awkward and not what it should have been.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Do you think she had any problems with the material?

ROTHMAN: No. I later found out she was difficult on several other films, just as difficult. After that, she didn't work. [laughs] But I think a lot of her problem, and the reason she was, was fear.

COLLINGS: So when you were working on the film you were all staying out in the desert, is that right?

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: Yes. I think that that comes across in the production. You get a real sense of being just stuck out there for the weekend.

ROTHMAN: Well, that's what the story is about, this couple who gets stuck out there.

COLLINGS: Yeah. But there's a real sense of being cut off. The rhythm of this

household is continuing out in the middle of nowhere, and it seems to be connected to nothing. It's quite atmospheric and quite successful in that way.

ROTHMAN: Well, thank you, especially since the exterior of the house, as you saw, was in the desert, but the interiors were shot at a house in the Hollywood Hills, so— [laughs]

COLLINGS: So you did the outdoor scenes, of course, obviously, in the desert, but all of the rest of the action you shot in town?

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: Oh, I sort of had an image of the whole crew out there for, you know, two weeks doing this thing.

ROTHMAN: No. No, I think we were in the desert for about a week, and the rest of the time we shot in Los Angeles.

COLLINGS: Well, the sense of isolation comes across really well. Is there anything else that you would like to say about that film?

ROTHMAN: Well, I suppose it was my— All my other films I think have more in common, than this film has with any of them.

COLLINGS: Yes, it does seem to stand out.

ROTHMAN: It was, I suppose, my most surrealistic film, consistently surrealistic. I think I've always felt glad that I had done it. It taught me that to make a film in which suspense plays a very important role is very difficult. Suspense is one of the hardest things to create, and you can't just do it in the editing room. You have to do it in

terms of how you conceive the staging of the scenes, and how they're shot, and how the actors perform. It's very hard to do that so it doesn't look silly and it's not a bad laugh. I'm not sure I always succeeded in that regard in *The Velvet Vampire*.

COLLINGS: Well, I think that one of the things that works in that regard is that you get a sense of how the rhythms of a household can sort of continue. That a house, once it gets into its own rhythms, can almost be on a sort of an autopilot, and so there's a kind of a— This is not my interview, so I don't want to go on and on about it, but there is a sort of suspense built into the character of the house as well, in a way.

ROTHMAN: Well, I'm glad you observed that, because it was supposed to be a somewhat strange and disorienting house

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: And I'm glad you saw that. I picked the house that we used for that very reason, because it was built on three levels in the Hollywood Hills so there were a lot of stairways between rooms. Part of what you may be describing as suspenseful is the unusual shifting of levels that seem to take place as people go from one room to another.

COLLINGS: Yeah, yeah. It's a good setting for that kind of action.

ROTHMAN: And how when they spy on each other they sometimes— Well, of course the vampire spies behind a mirror on the couple, but when the wife finds her husband making love to the vampire, she spies upon them but they're at a lower level; she is high at the top of the staircase and they're down in this large living room. Then

again, when the wife goes into the vampire's bedroom, she goes up some stairs, you remember, off a little passageway. So it's a house that is almost like a little maze that you run through.

COLLINGS: Actually, the film functions well as a family melodrama in that sense. [Rothman laughs] The life of the family.

So you said that you undertook the film because you wanted to explore different kinds of modes of filmmaking, but apparently you didn't decide to continue on with that kind of style?

ROTHMAN: No. The next film I made was an outright comedy.

COLLINGS: But you had no desire to ever go back to the kind of thing you were exploring in *Velvet Vampire*?

ROTHMAN: I wouldn't say that, but I knew that I wanted to try something different for my next film.

COLLINGS: Was *Velvet Vampire* satisfying in the end, as an exploration of a style?

ROTHMAN: Yes, in many ways it was. In terms of how I used the camera and the images I got, yes. As I said, the one area in which it was extremely unsatisfactory was that one actress's performance, which always when I see it just really upsets me.

COLLINGS: Why was the name changed?

ROTHMAN: Because the head of distribution [Lawrence Woolner] did not think that would be a very appealing title to audiences, and they tried to think about— His wife [Betty] actually came up with the title *The Velvet Vampire*, and he liked it, I presume,

because it suggested sensuality—velvet—and yet it's a vampire movie.

COLLINGS: Did you like the title?

ROTHMAN: No.

COLLINGS: No.

ROTHMAN: I never liked it.

COLLINGS: What about the title of *The Student Nurses*?

ROTHMAN: I thought that was fine, it said what it was, but I never liked *The Velvet Vampire*. Every time I hear it, even to this day, it doesn't appeal to me. Obviously, I couldn't have used *Through the Looking Glass*, either. But I would have preferred to have been allowed to come up with something that did have some reference to looking glasses, and the enigma of looking glasses, and what they can mean, what they tell you, what you don't know that they're telling you, what lurks behind them, what is in front of them. Something that referred to that.

COLLINGS: I think that would be good, because the title is a kind of clue that lets the audience know what door to enter by.

ROTHMAN: Well, if you think about this, there are a lot of mirrors in this film, and they are there by design. Charles [S. Swartz] and I and the screenwriter [Yale Udoff] all wanted to have mirrors play a role. You know, the mirror told you something about what was happening with the vampire the first time after she kills the man in the arcade, in the city, before she goes to the art exhibit. She takes out a compact and she looks at her eye, and we see there's blood in her eye. Then, of course, there is the

mirror in the dream that she gives the young couple. Then there is the mirror that she lurks behind.

COLLINGS: Was this film more complicated to make, in terms of set ups, than *The Student Nurses*?

ROTHMAN: Well, you mean in terms of camera settings?

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: No.

COLLINGS: No.

ROTHMAN: No, it was just physically getting to the locations and working on them, that's what was complicated. When I made my films I did not have the money to rent a lot of track, a lot of dolly track for my dolly shots. I could only afford a good dolly so many days, and then I would have to go to something that was less expensive. Fortunately, I had a wonderful cameraman, Daniel Lacambre, who was very good at doing handheld camera work long before there was the camera mount that's called the Steadicam. He would do a lot of beautiful handheld work that people don't even realize is handheld, he did it so smoothly and so well.

COLLINGS: Actually, what role did you play in terms of editing your films?

ROTHMAN: I didn't physically edit them myself. I supervised the editing. I usually let the editor make a rough assembly and then I would sit down with the editor and go over that and try, you know, different takes, or try leaving things out, or reassembling it until it came to fine cut. Charles also played an important role in that as the

producer.

COLLINGS: Did *Velvet Vampire* meet Roger Corman's criteria, in terms of the kinds of elements that he wanted to see in the film?

ROTHMAN: Well, we went to a sneak preview of it and he saw this polarized audience reaction, and when he saw that he got very worried. He thought it wouldn't be very successful, and he made me shoot an additional scene that's in there of the mechanic, I think he is, getting killed on the tines of a pitchfork.

COLLINGS: Oh, really?

ROTHMAN: Rather than by the vampire, because he thought that his death in her arms was too soft and unmenacing and he wanted something more exciting and dynamic, so I shot that. After he saw it with an audience I don't think he had much faith in the film.

COLLINGS: Okay. Did that affect your relationship at all?

ROTHMAN: I can't answer that. I really don't know the answer to that. What really affected our relationship after that was that he wanted to offer us less money for our next project.

COLLINGS: When you should get more, because presumably—

ROTHMAN: Well, at least the same amount.

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: But he didn't say it was because he was dissatisfied with my work as a director, or with the script or anything. It was just his way. He liked to make things

for less and less money, and so he wanted to offer us less money.

COLLINGS: What was the next project going to be?

ROTHMAN: We hadn't discussed that. He just wanted to tell us what he'd pay us for it, and then we could come up with some ideas and propose them to him, and we were not happy with that. So that was the last work we ever did for Roger Corman.

TAPE NUMBER: VI, SIDE ONE

FEBRUARY 27, 2002

COLLINGS: Okay. Well, I actually did have a specific question about *The Student Nurses,* as a sort of a follow up. I was thinking about the scene, just to sort of take you back, of Priscilla on the motorcycle and walking in the field of flowers when she meets this guy, throwing the frisbee and that kind of thing, and I was just wondering what kind of meaning those scenes held for you.

ROTHMAN: Well, it was meant to portray her very girlish view of romantic love.

COLLINGS: I see.

ROTHMAN: In other words, she picked up this fellow at a restaurant, dressed in a very provocative way, and he had a very frightening, threatening image, at least in terms of his appearance. He rode a very powerful motorcycle. He wore dark clothing. He had long hair and an earring and all of these things. He was big, he had this resonant voice, and she was a very young girl. I was trying to tell the story of her attraction to someone so different from her and different from the people she worked with in the hospital. He was obviously at least acting like he was an outlaw, if not an outlaw in fact. He was what we called in those days an outlaw type, and so the wandering through the fields, and the playing with the dog, and the two of them riding behind him on the motorcycle and clinging to him, and all of these things, I created to show how, first of all, he knew how to seduce her, and secondly, she knew how to seduce herself, you know, because all of this seemed so attractive. Here he was, so—

At least visually somewhat scary, and then in fact he was a nice, playful, gentle, romantic fellow. That's what those scenes were there for.

COLLINGS: They're intended to convey something specific about that character in particular, or about a larger statement about a particular generation?

ROTHMAN: No, it's not a statement about a generation so much as it is a statement about somebody who thinks that, you know, doing something dangerous and exciting will have no consequence.

COLLINGS: I see. Okay. Why was that important to put in the film, do you think?

ROTHMAN: Well, it was important because I was trying to show what different minds each of these young women had. When I was discussing the character with the actress, Barbara Leigh, we both talked about what a child Priscilla really was, how she really had not grown up emotionally, how she had not developed any kind of judgment about other people. While academically she was doing all right, socially she had a lot of development that she had to do yet, and that was the character, at that point in her life, of Priscilla. She certainly learned from her experience with this man, with, you know, taking LSD, and getting pregnant, and being left on her own to get an abortion, and all these things that happened to her afterwards. But at that point she was still basically a very naive and trusting girl, who thought that engaging in dangerous activities would have only excitement involved with it, and perhaps unexpected pleasures, and she had not taken into consideration, or at least it in no way intimidated her, that there might be a down side to that, that there might be very negative

consequences that would affect the rest of her life. I wasn't trying to really tell a story that would say to young people, "You mustn't ever experiment, you mustn't be daring, you mustn't go in search of adventure." That was not my point. It was rather that you can do all of those things and get into a lot of trouble. I mean, you can also do all of those things and perhaps develop into a stronger and better person, and do a lot of beneficial things at the same time, but in the case of Priscilla that wasn't true. She went about it in a very dumb way, and the way that I think it was demonstrated was by the kind of man she selected. He obviously announced that he was going to be trouble all along the way—

COLLINGS: [laughs] Yes.

ROTHMAN: And instead of understanding that he was going to be trouble, she assumed these were wonderful attributes that he had. You know, they were exciting, and they were dangerous, and they would only be pleasant for her.

COLLINGS: Right, yeah. The novelty of it, perhaps. Priscilla is kind of an unusual name. Was that your first choice of a name for her?

ROTHMAN: It seemed appropriate.

COLLINGS: Let's see. Going back to pick up where we left off, we were talking about Roger Corman. Just to sort of get the flow going, I'll ask you if, upon parting with Roger Corman, did you part friends?

ROTHMAN: Oh, yes.

COLLINGS: Okay, all right.

ROTHMAN: We remained friends.

COLLINGS: The next thing that you did was to start Dimension Pictures, is that right?

ROTHMAN: Well, I didn't start Dimension Pictures. The way Dimension Pictures started was that the man who had been the head of distribution at New World Pictures, a man named Lawrence Woolner, met another man [Sam Pulitzer] at a race track in New Orleans. Lawrence Woolner came from New Orleans, and Sam Pulitzer was the head of the Wembley [Neckwear Company] men's accessories and clothing company, which was located in New Orleans. They got to talking about what Larry did, and eventually the man said, "You know, I wouldn't mind investing in a film company myself." I think Larry explained to him that the films that New World had made up until then were very profitable. Which was true, they were. So Larry left New World, and he asked my husband Charles [S.] Swartz and myself if we would like to become partners with him in a company that he was going to start. Of course, the majority shareholder was the man who owned Wembley, and then the two minority shareholders would be Charles and myself and Larry, with Larry having the largest portion of it.

COLLINGS: So you put money into it?

ROTHMAN: No. I put no money into it, and neither did Charles. What we put in was our labor and our imagination. Charles produced, we both participated in the writing of screenplays, and I directed some of the films for Dimension Pictures.

COLLINGS: Now, I saw somewhere that you were the vice president in charge of creative development?

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: What did that mean?

ROTHMAN: Well, that essentially meant that I supervised the development of ideas for films that came in the door, and also if Dimension was going to invest in a film or an idea for a film that someone brought in the door, and a script for it, I would be the person who would either work with that person to rewrite it or would evaluate its potential as a script for making a good commercial film.

COLLINGS: How many films, over time, did the company produce? Roughly.

ROTHMAN: Well, the company lasted longer than we were there, so I really can't tell you. It only produced a portion of the films that it distributed; it was both a production and distribution company. Lawrence Woolner took care of the distribution, and he was assisted by his wife [Betty]. But I would say that the first year that we were in existence—

COLLINGS: Which was 1972, right?

ROTHMAN: No.

COLLINGS: No?

ROTHMAN: No, it was nineteen-seventy— Yes, 1972, you're correct. I'm sorry.

COLLINGS: That's okay.

ROTHMAN: We actually produced in house I don't think it was more than two or

three films, and the rest were picked up for distribution.

COLLINGS: One article that I read about it listed as 1972 releases *The Doberman Gang, The Hitchhikers, Sweet Sugar*.

ROTHMAN: Those were not all made in 1972. *Sweet Sugar* and *Group Marriage* were made in '72. Those other two films were made in '73.

COLLINGS: *The Single Girls*, what about that? And *The Sin of Adam and Eve*?

ROTHMAN: *The Sin of Adam and Eve* was released in '72, and *The Single Girls*—I'm sorry to say I don't know what that is.

COLLINGS: Oh, that's okay. Did you have input into those films?

ROTHMAN: Oh, *The Single Girls*! I'm sorry, I remember it now. It was released in '73. *The Hitchhikers*, I don't recall that being a Dimension film. Maybe they picked it up for re-release or something, so I shouldn't say that, but all that stuff was in '73.

COLLINGS: So are these examples of films that you had some sort of creative input into, in terms of—

ROTHMAN: Yes, *Sweet Sugar* is, and *Group Marriage*.

COLLINGS: Of course, yeah.

ROTHMAN: Of course. No, the other three, I didn't.

COLLINGS: That was before you were doing that, okay. You know, we sort of talked—

ROTHMAN: No, it wasn't before I was doing it, it just so happened that those were projects that I didn't. *The Sin of Adam and Eve* was a Mexican film, and my husband

and I did have some supervision over the way it was re-cut and also for the way it was dubbed, because it was dubbed into English for the American market. The other two– *The Single Girls* and *The Hitchhikers* were the product of another American company. I believe *The Hitchhikers* had already been put into release and American Dimension Pictures re-released it. And *The Single Girls*, no, I had nothing to do with.

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: I insist. [mutual laughter] I can't remember exactly how that arrangement was, but no, I didn't with that particular one.

COLLINGS: Okay, now this is something that you were quoted as saying in a *Hollywood Reporter* article in 1972, that, in terms of the films made by the company, you were intending to use women as crew whenever possible.

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: Did that work out?

ROTHMAN: To a certain degree, yes, but much more limited than I would have liked. On *The Student Nurses* the sound recordist was a woman. I used female art directors on *The Velvet Vampire* and *Group Marriage*. After that I found it very hard to find women who had any crew skills at all. It was too early. You know, when I was in film school, as I told you, there were almost no women there. There were very few women who had engaged in training. I was certainly open to it, but I just couldn't find them.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Why did you want to do that, to use women as crew whenever

you could?

ROTHMAN: Well, because I wanted to give them an opportunity. I didn't want the assumption to be that only men could do these jobs. I knew that that wasn't true.

COLLINGS: So it was an affirmative action kind of idea. You wanted to give them an opportunity.

ROTHMAN: Yes. I strongly believe that women should have the same opportunities for all jobs that men have. I deeply opposed and was outraged by the idea that, less than ten years earlier, the newspapers had sections— For example, the most, I suppose, obvious example is the newspaper classifieds, where there was one section with men's jobs, and then others with women's, and women's were always low paid, and were limited to secretarial work or some kind of care giving, while men's just ranged all over the place and had much, much better salaries. I mean, it was outrageous, and I certainly wanted to do what I could to change that.

COLLINGS: In general, what were your hopes about when you got involved with Dimension? [tape recorder off] Okay, so I was just asking you what your hopes were when you got involved with Dimension Pictures, in the beginning?

ROTHMAN: Well, I was hoping that it might be a stepping stone for myself and for Charles toward making more expensive, ambitious, and interesting films, that were not exploitation films. Neither of us assumed we would be part of this company forever, but we hoped it would be a home where we could make better quality films that would be our calling card.

COLLINGS: Did the films have sort of the stipulations that Roger Corman had put upon them?

ROTHMAN: Yes. Same thing.

COLLINGS: So why did you think it would be a better situation?

ROTHMAN: Because I thought that if we made enough of these, and we made sufficient profit, we would have the opportunity to do one that didn't have those exploitation film standards.

COLLINGS: Did you have, at that time, any prediction about what the situation for women directors would be in the future? I mean, what were your thoughts about what the future would hold for yourself as a woman director, and for women directors in general?

ROTHMAN: Well, it certainly wasn't promising at the time I was working. I was, at one point, the only one. At other times there would be a couple of women, maybe, whose films would come out sporadically. There just wasn't any evidence that it would get better. Of course, when I went out looking for other work, after I left Dimension, I found out it was going to be even worse, because nobody would meet me. No one was interested in meeting me. Friends of mine who were working in television and working for major production companies would make enquiries on my behalf. "Would you at least like to see her work and meet her?" I won't say uniformly, but frequently the response was "I would never let a woman direct a film."

COLLINGS: Because it's sort of bad luck? [mutual laughter] Like having a woman

on board ship? Or were there stated, specific—? Did anybody say specifically—

ROTHMAN: The idea was just offensive to them. If you want my theory about it, it is that a director on a film exercises overt power, and these men did not want to see a woman hold that kind of power.

COLLINGS: Okay. All right.

ROTHMAN: The other thing is that maybe they had no confidence that women were as competent as their own sex was. Which was, you know, something that they could go on believing as long as they never gave a woman a chance to prove otherwise.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Okay, before we go on and start talking about *Group Marriage* in particular, is there anything else that you would like to say about Dimension Pictures and your involvement with it? I mean at that time, I know that you went on later.

ROTHMAN: Yes. We left Dimension Pictures because the original man who financed it got pressure from his family, who were on the board of his company with him, to withdraw his investment. They did not feel the financial returns were satisfactory enough. Some of the films made money, but then there were others that didn't. I'm not talking about my films. My films eventually did all right. But there were films that were picked up for distribution that were not very good, that went out and did very badly, and there were several films that they financed that didn't do that well. They did have one film that did very well, *The Doberman Gang*, but that was about it. [tape recorder off]

When this man wanted to have his share bought out, my husband and Larry Woolner went down to New Orleans to negotiate it. Larry Woolner was extremely dubious that they would be able to get an arrangement that would be satisfactory, but my husband was very positive about it, and when they went down my husband was instrumental in getting good terms for the buyout. When we came back— We had a yearly contract with Dimension Pictures to produce and direct films for them, and this had gone on for— In I think it was ’72, ’73, and ’74, but it had started in the fall of ’71. Actually, the first contract went from the fall of ’71 to ’72, to ’73 to ’74 in the fall. When our contract expired, which was about— I think maybe it was about to expire about two months after my husband and Larry Woolner got back from New Orleans. Prior to the expiration, he told us that he no longer wanted to renew our contract, that we would still be partners in the company but he didn’t want to have us make any more pictures.

That was just as well, in our opinion, because we could see that, the way he was managing the company, it wasn’t likely to be very successful, and that what was happening is that a few pictures made money and the rest didn’t. A lot of it had to do with the kind of material that he was selecting. While he would ask our opinion of these projects, he wouldn’t necessarily agree with it, and he tended, in our opinion, to pick projects that were not as promising and were not as likely to be commercial. The most extreme example of this was that there was a film of the rock group Pink Floyd that had been made in Europe, and the filmmakers were now looking for an American

distribution deal. My husband urged Larry to pick this up. It would have cost a substantial amount of money to do it, but my husband said, "Believe me, this is"—at that time it was true—"one of the biggest rock groups in the world, and if you get this film and distribute it, you will more than make up for your investment. It could be a very profitable investment." Well, Larry asked his young son, who was then in high school, if he had ever heard of Pink Floyd, and he said he hadn't, so that was the reason that Larry gave for not picking it up. Later, after we had left the film, it was picked up by someone else and made a fortune for this man. It made him a multi-multi-millionaire. So after Larry didn't want to pick up this film, and we could see that the company wasn't doing very well, we decided that there wasn't any point in renewing our contract either. Although we did think that the timing— That is to say, when my husband had been instrumental in negotiating Larry and ourselves getting back the company, that he did it at that time was rather ugly. But that's the way it was. So we left, and we began to look for work elsewhere.

COLLINGS: You had a contract to produce and direct a certain number of films per year, is that—?

ROTHMAN: No, it wasn't a certain number, it was just to write and direct films. It was looser than that. But I found that to write and direct, and do what other work I had to do around there, one a year was just about what I could handle.

COLLINGS: Sure, yeah.

ROTHMAN: And do it well.

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: Let me amend that, do it as well as I was able to do it.

COLLINGS: Under the— Yeah. Okay, so *Group Marriage* you did make when you were at Dimension Pictures.

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: It was the first film I made for Dimension Pictures.

COLLINGS: Okay. Now, you're quoted in an interview—and we've talked before about the unreliability of these documents, but—that it's a comedy of manners in sort of a nineteenth-century French style.

ROTHMAN: Well, I was trying to make a bedroom farce.

COLLINGS: The play that you pointed to in the article was *Hotel Paradiso*?

ROTHMAN: By Georges Feydeau, who made bedroom farces and just farces. They were very funny, and I always admired them. In college I had even acted in *Hotel Paradiso*, as a matter of fact.

COLLINGS: Oh, which character did you play?

ROTHMAN: I played the— I forget her name, but she was the outraged wife.

COLLINGS: Does the play bear a strong resemblance to the characters of the—

ROTHMAN: No.

COLLINGS: In any way?

ROTHMAN: Not at all.

COLLINGS: Not at all? Okay.

ROTHMAN: No resemblance whatever. It was just the farce form that I admired.

COLLINGS: Okay. What do you like about it?

ROTHMAN: Well, I like the fact that it's very dynamic, things are always happening in it. The humor is fast and furious. The people are put in extreme situations and must devise ways to get out of them.

COLLINGS: Right, yes. Do you like [Ernst] Lubitsch films?

ROTHMAN: Yes, I very much like Lubitsch films. In fact, *Group Marriage* was compared by one reviewer to a Lubitsch film.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Oh, I could see. Which film did they compare it to? Do you remember offhand?

ROTHMAN: No. It's just the reviewer, as I recall, said something like, "She's in the tradition of Ernst Lubitsch, and given the right material she probably could make a Lubitsch film." Something like that.

COLLINGS: Something very complimentary.

ROTHMAN: Very, very.

COLLINGS: Okay.

ROTHMAN: My mouth dropped open.

COLLINGS: Sure!

ROTHMAN: With pleasure. [laughs]

COLLINGS: Right, that's right. Okay, so talking about *Group Marriage*, where did

the larger idea for the plot of the film come from?

ROTHMAN: Well, I pretty much— Let me start again. Larry Woolner wanted me to make a sexy film, and I tried to think of how I could do that and anchor it in something that said something about sexual mores. I was reading at that time a book called *Future Shock*. It was a book by— I forget what his name was. Alan—?

COLLINGS: Alvin, I think.

ROTHMAN: Alvin Toffler.

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: Thank you. About changes in customs that were taking place, and what results this was going to have for society at large. One of the things he talked about was group marriage. I read about it and I thought, "You know, that might be a wonderful framework in which to create a sex comedy that said something about the temperaments of the people involved, their goals, the social pitfalls of trying to do something like this in a society where it's neither legal nor admired particularly." And also, what would be the dysfunctional aspect of doing this, and what would be the comedic possibilities of these? So the more I thought about it, the more I thought it would be a very rich subject for a film, if handled in a way that was not sordid and sleazy. I tried very hard to handle it in a way that wasn't, that was humorous and pithy and imaginative. Whether I succeeded or not is not for me to say, but my intention at least was to make something that was a surprise. You went to see a film called *Group Marriage* and you were surprised. Here was a thoughtful discussion of

all the ramifications of what a group marriage would mean. Social ramifications, political ramifications, sexual ramifications, all of those things.

COLLINGS: No, I like the film very much. Let me just run through the professions of the different characters, because I think that's interesting. You've got a divorce lawyer, a parole officer, an artist, basically— Sander, who makes the bumper stickers, I sort of think of him as an artist.

ROTHMAN: Well, I thought of him as a businessman, actually.

COLLINGS: Oh, you did? [mutual laughter] Oh, okay. Well, that's interesting, I didn't—

ROTHMAN: I thought of him definitely as a businessman.

COLLINGS: Oh, I see.

ROTHMAN: Always trying to think up new slogans to sell new bumper stickers.

COLLINGS: It's funny that we would— All right, so you've got Chris, who is the main character, in essence. She provides cars and she fixes cars, right?

ROTHMAN: Yes. She works at what would be a traditional woman's job in the world of automobiles, that is to say as a rent-a-car agent. But her real interest and love is fixing cars.

COLLINGS: Okay. I sort of see her as the catalyst for the group.

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: Yeah. You also have a lifeguard, and you have— I have here 'homemaker/consumer,' which is Jan. She doesn't have any kind of profession.

ROTHMAN: No, she has none. She's not really a homemaker, either. She doesn't want to be a homemaker particularly.

COLLINGS: Yes, but she decorates the house and—

ROTHMAN: Yes. She is more or less a person who floats. I mean, she's floating through life. She has no strong commitment to doing anything, and, as we find, ultimately she has no strong commitment to the group either.

COLLINGS: Yeah. You have a long scene with her that shows her shopping, and surrounded by flowers at a flower stall and at the [Grand] Central Market.

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: I was wondering what that scene meant for you.

ROTHMAN: Well, as you say, in that sense she's a homemaker. She is a sensuous person. She enjoys beautiful things. She likes to have fun. She is one of these people who decorates the lives of others, you know? She's very pretty. She's got a sweet temperament. I mean, who wouldn't like Jan?

COLLINGS: Right, yeah.

ROTHMAN: She's not stupid, but she has no sense of vocation, no strong sense of commitment to anything. She is a pleasure seeker.

COLLINGS: That particular scene reminded me a bit of the scene with Priscilla in *The Student Nurses*, just in that it's a sort of a montage of a character exploring an environment. Do you see any connection between those two?

ROTHMAN: Well, they're different characters in different films, but the way I was

making films at that time, in the amount of days I had to shoot in, it was a shorthand way of showing a certain quality of theirs, without dialogue. Which filled up time, to be very honest with you, that would make the film long enough to be feature length. Because in the amount of time I had to shoot, dialogue always takes more time to shoot than scenes that you can shoot without synchronized sound, and so I needed a certain number of those in every film. I had to carefully choose where to put those scenes, so that they did advance the story and tell you something about the character, but at the same time allowed me to not use synchronized sound.

COLLINGS: Would you have had those kinds of scenes in your films if you hadn't had the time constraints?

ROTHMAN: Not in all of my films, no. I think that they appeared more frequently in my films because of the time problem.

COLLINGS: Okay. So what about the professions of the characters, how did you decide on the range of occupations?

ROTHMAN: Well, I wanted to have an interesting mix. I wanted to have some surprises, like the divorce lawyer and the lifeguard. I wanted the different work experiences of these people to draw issues into their lives together that otherwise might not have been drawn in, if they all did the same thing. Since they worked in different worlds, they drew in people from different worlds into their home, and they had the capacity to deal with the challenges of the group marriage differently. Let me express that again. Each one of them had, because of the experience in their different

work worlds, a capacity to deal with the challenges of the group marriage that was different from the others.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Okay. I mean, I sort of see them all as being characters— I mean, not all of them, but the divorce lawyer, the parole officer—

ROTHMAN: Social worker. No, you're right, actually. You're right, he was a probation officer. Excuse me, you're right.

COLLINGS: Probation officer. They all seem to have something to do, those two in particular, with breaking away from a previous life. You've got a divorce lawyer negotiating a divorce, and the parole officer as a sort of a link between, perhaps, jail time and hopefully embarking upon a new life. Then the lifeguard, Phil, seems almost like some sort of guardian angel in that sense. [laughs] I mean, I was just sort of playing around in my mind with what the characters are, and especially the fact that Chris seems to be connected to mobility, and I was just wondering if those professions had any larger meaning for you.

ROTHMAN: Any particular profession?

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: No.

COLLINGS: Okay.

ROTHMAN: No, it's just I wanted a mix of people who, as I said earlier, could draw on their work experience in some way that would affect the common life experience that they shared during the time of the story.

COLLINGS: So they do end up finally living in the house together, and Chris, surprisingly—or perhaps not so surprisingly—becomes pregnant, and you have a discussion in the film about whether she's going to keep the baby or not, right? In fact, the paternity of the baby is not known.

ROTHMAN: That's right.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Why was that important?

ROTHMAN: Well, in a group marriage that doesn't seem to be a surprising turn of events. It seemed to me that's one of the things you should address in a story about a group marriage.

COLLINGS: Yeah, all right. The film is very light in many ways, and I really enjoyed some of the comedic elements, like the scene of people coming to the door to answer the ad that they placed to fill one of the gaps. At one point you have a sort of play on—I think it was a Clairol commercial—"does she or doesn't she?" It's when they're first meeting—

ROTHMAN: The divorce lawyer.

COLLINGS: Elaine, yes, the divorce lawyer, and—

ROTHMAN: That's right, it was a parody of a Clairol commercial, only used for comedic effect.

COLLINGS: Yeah. There's just a lot of that in the film, and I was wondering if there's anything that you'd like to say about how you were using the comedy in the film.

ROTHMAN: Well, there's not much more I can say about that than that I was using it to make my points as strongly as I could. I mean, there are different kinds of comic situations you can construct. There is one kind that's a visual joke, like the scene in which the three men meet Elaine. She's running along, and their vision of her, because she is a very beautiful woman, is that she is like a woman in a Clairol commercial. And, of course, they get so tangled up in each other because they're watching her run by that they all fall, but when they fall, they fall as though they were in a Clairol commercial.

COLLINGS: Right, in slow motion.

ROTHMAN: Right, in slow motion. So that certainly is one style in which one can tell a joke. Then there were people sitting around at a table in a restaurant telling verbal jokes, one liners. Then there were the scenes, for example, with the four people in bed. Also, again, a scene that's primarily verbal, but full of comedy, also with some actions which are comedic, which are nonverbal. It's a scene, I should say, that's a combination of both verbal and nonverbal comedy. I mean, it certainly gave me the opportunity to use different styles of comedy to tell the story.

COLLINGS: Was it a fun film to work on?

ROTHMAN: I can't say that any film I have ever worked on was fun. A film is a lot of hard work. You get very little sleep. You have to set a tempo for the cast and the crew to work at. Nothing is leisurely. There is always the anxiety, especially if you're working on a low budget, of how much film you're consuming and using, and how

much film you're consuming while shooting a particular scene, because, of course, I had a limited amount of film that I could afford to use for the entire film. There were always many other issues that had to be addressed on the set, regarding props, regarding costumes, regarding the politics of the actors. There was always something.

COLLINGS: Was there anything in particular that you recall about that, things that came up with this film?

TAPE NUMBER: VI, SIDE TWO

FEBRUARY 27, 2002

ROTHMAN: Well, there was one actor in the film who was very awkward, and he kept on trying to suddenly, in a scene, inject business that would either throw the cameraman, because he wasn't expecting him to do something, or— The cameraman was an outstanding cameraman, so it wasn't because of ineptitude on his part, but because this fellow was being very irresponsible and putting in gestures or actions— Sometimes he would, you know, try to upstage people by grimacing at a certain time. He was just a problem, a nuisance, and one of the ways I solved that was to use him in fewer scenes. You know, these things have a way of coming back on the people who try them.

COLLINGS: Which character was that?

ROTHMAN: He played the probation officer.

COLLINGS: Oh, yeah, yeah.

ROTHMAN: Unless they've changed it since then. [laughs]

COLLINGS: One of your actors was the son of Preston Sturges?

ROTHMAN: Yes, that was Solomon Sturges.

COLLINGS: Who was the probation officer.

ROTHMAN: No, no.

COLLINGS: Oh, oh, oh.

ROTHMAN: He played the bumper sticker manufacturer, Sander.

COLLINGS: Oh! Him! Oh, I never would have thought.

ROTHMAN: A wonderful young man and a wonderful young actor.

COLLINGS: Right.

ROTHMAN: Oh, it was a pleasure to work with him. He was so good. He really had a firm grasp of the character, and he enhanced the role.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Did he go on to act in many other things?

ROTHMAN: I don't know of anything else he appeared in after that, except one more film for me, *The Working Girls*. But he had, earlier, in the 1960s, been the star of a short lived television series. After that, I think he did occasional work in dramatic television, but I don't recall hearing or knowing of anything that he had done after *The Working Girls*, which was made two years after *Group Marriage*. He may have. But I know at the time of *Group Marriage* he was trying to start his own business.

COLLINGS: Did you specifically go out and try to bring him into your film? Or how did that happen?

ROTHMAN: No. He was sent to me by William Morris [talent agency], who represented him at that time, and when I met him, I was eternally grateful to William Morris. He showed me an interesting letter when he came in to meet me, actually, written to him by his father. His father had been in Paris in the early 1950s, and Solomon had been raised I think primarily by his mother. I think his parents were divorced. He showed me this marvelous letter his father had written him, a wonderful, comic letter. It must have been about, oh, very long, maybe eight or ten pages typed.

COLLINGS: Wow.

ROTHMAN: And he had kept it with him. He had it under plastic. I think it was a very precious object to him.

COLLINGS: What about the casting of the film in general? Did you have a hard time casting it, or did things fall into place fairly readily?

ROTHMAN: I think they fell into place pretty quickly, yes.

COLLINGS: What about the Chris character?

ROTHMAN: Aimée Eccles.

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: What do you want to know about her?

COLLINGS: Well, I'm just kind of intrigued by the fact— Is she Chinese?

ROTHMAN: She is half Chinese and half English. She was, I believe, born in Hong Kong, and she was adopted by an American couple of European ancestry. They weren't Chinese. She was raised in the United States, and she became an actress at quite an early age. She wasn't that old when she played this role—I don't think she was more than twenty-one—and she had been in a film previous to that, with I believe it was Burt Lancaster, called *Ulzana's Raid,* in which she had played a native American woman. I liked her. I thought that she would make a refreshing change for a leading lady. She, first of all, had this impish quality about her which was very nice. She had this impish quality and she had this sort of sparkling manner that I thought made her very right for a comedy. I also liked the idea that it was nontraditional

casting at that time, having someone whose features were Asian play the leading lady. The leading lady was definitely an American girl, I mean a very American girl, and I liked making the point that a very American girl didn't only have to look like somebody whose ancestors came from a European country.

COLLINGS: Was that something that was in the script?

ROTHMAN: No.

COLLINGS: No, that came out of just meeting her.

ROTHMAN: Well, it came out of meeting her and deciding this was a wonderful opportunity to do this.

COLLINGS: Did you shoot the film as it was originally written in the script, or were changes made along the way?

ROTHMAN: Well, there are always changes that are made along the way when you're shooting a script, no matter how flawless.

COLLINGS: Significant changes?

ROTHMAN: No.

COLLINGS: No, okay. All right, I was kind of surprised— I was watching the film, and I was delighted by the comedy that we've talked about and I was enjoying the characters, and then their house— They've publicized the fact that they are having this group marriage by putting an ad in the newspaper, and they come home one day and their house has been attacked, or sort of—

ROTHMAN: Trashed.

COLLINGS: Trashed, yeah. I was really surprised by that scene, because up to that point it seemed like they had been— You know, it was sort of like a soap bubble, the film. They were sort of existing in their own world, and this was a reminder that the film existed in a larger context.

ROTHMAN: That's exactly the purpose of the scene.

COLLINGS: Yeah, okay.

ROTHMAN: Nobody exists in a little bubble.

COLLINGS: Were you ever tempted to make the film just a pristine kind of farce, something not connected to the larger world?

ROTHMAN: Well, you know, in farce people are connected to the larger world too. I don't think that's a characteristic that's unique to my film. It depends on who's writing the farce.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Because it's very much a shift in the tone of the film. I was wondering if you had had a hard time making that decision, or whether that was something that was very central for you, that there would be that shift there.

ROTHMAN: Yes, definitely. I knew there would be the shift. I wanted the shift. It gave the whole story more weight, in my opinion.

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: It said, no matter how comic and how amusing these people are, there are serious issues underlying this world in which they live and the world that they've created, and these serious issues are not only social disapproval but possible

persecution. The threat of pregnancy, and what do you do when a pregnancy comes and nobody knows who the male parent is, and does it matter? Can these people get along? Will everybody sustain this relationship, or will some people flee from it and other people remain together? What will they do when there's an uneven balance of the sexes? Will they accept that? Will they rectify it? How will they rectify it? *Can* they rectify it? Could they ever find anyone else who would want to do this?

COLLINGS: Now, it's at the point of the pregnancy that Jan leaves, right? Because she feels that she will be stuck with the child care. I think that's an interesting—

ROTHMAN: Well, she's not the kind of person who wants any serious responsibilities, and child care is certainly a serious responsibility.

COLLINGS: Okay. Related to professions, how did you decide to put Chris and her friend into a car rental office in the beginning of the film? I'm just kind of intrigued by that placement.

ROTHMAN: Well, as I said earlier, it's because it allowed this character to have a job that was both traditionally female and yet have all the aptitudes for having a similar job that was nontraditionally female.

COLLINGS: The car repair. Okay. How did audiences respond to the film? Do you know?

ROTHMAN: Yes. Very positively. Very. We sneak previewed it at a theater in Santa Monica, a very large theater, and the response was very gratifying.

COLLINGS: Lots of laughter?

ROTHMAN: Lots of laughter, from beginning to end.

COLLINGS: Were you happy with the film?

ROTHMAN: I'm never entirely happy with any of my films. I always see things that, if circumstances had been different, I would have done differently. I also see things that I think, even if I had done the same thing, I could have done it better. When I look at a film I don't just see the narrative made concrete through images and sound. I also see everything that went wrong that I know about, that may not be on film but I know is there, just outside of the image.

COLLINGS: Well, when you say if circumstances were different, you mean if you had a larger budget?

ROTHMAN: Well, it could be any number of things. It could be that. It could be, you know, the problems of the day, the problems of the moment, that have nothing to do with budget, that have to do with— The timing of things wasn't the way I would have liked it to have been, or a noise occurred in the background and we weren't able to remove it, so it goes right over the dialogue and there's nothing we could do about it. Lots of things like that.

COLLINGS: But was it mainly those kinds of things, like glitches with sound and what have you, that grated against you with this film? Or were there some other issues as well?

ROTHMAN: I think the issue that I had with all my films comes up with this film—if only I'd had more time and more money, I could have done certain things much more

skillfully.

COLLINGS: Specific shots.

ROTHMAN: Specific scenes.

COLLINGS: Okay.

ROTHMAN: Time and money are I think the great wound—

COLLINGS: Yes. [mutual laughter]

ROTHMAN: —in my history as a filmmaker.

COLLINGS: So what do you think of the film now? Have you seen it recently?

ROTHMAN: I saw it a few years ago, yeah.

COLLINGS: At a festival?

ROTHMAN: Yes, it was being shown. Well, if I don't see my films for a few years, they're always a surprise to me. I haven't made films in more than thirty years—let's see, '74, '84, '94, excuse me, in more than twenty-eight years now—and I look back at them and, of course, today I'm not the person I was then, none of us are the people we were twenty-eight years before. Of course I have memories, and of course there are certain behavioral patterns I still retain—my face is older but it's still the same face—but at the same time, I look back and I think "I made that" and there's something surprising about that. It fills me with a kind of awe that I did that. I mean, I'm not saying that what I did was awesome, but the sheer fact of having done it awes me.

COLLINGS: You feel that way with all the films? Not just one or two in particular?

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: And do you recognize the person who made those films?

ROTHMAN: Oh, yes. Definitely, I recognize her. [mutual laughter] She's still there.

COLLINGS: Yeah. What do you like best about *Group Marriage*?

ROTHMAN: Well, what I like best about it is the fact that it's a comedy.

COLLINGS: Yeah, that's what I like about it too.

ROTHMAN: That it deals with a serious subject in a comedic fashion, which is something I like to do. In fact, it's not something I like to do, it's the only way I can do it. I'm not capable of writing relentlessly serious drama. I mean, I can write serious moments that are dramatic, but I can't keep it up for long.

COLLINGS: Right. Well, *Group Marriage* and *The Student Nurses* seem to have more in common with each other than *The Velvet Vampire*, because *The Velvet Vampire* doesn't have the lightness of tone.

ROTHMAN: Well, of course, it can't be, because it's a suspense story and you can't, with suspense, have the same lightness of tone. But it does have comedy.

COLLINGS: Yes, it does have some, for sure. Also, *Group Marriage* and *The Student Nurses* are more of the ensemble cast than you find in *The Velvet Vampire*.

ROTHMAN: Well, I wouldn't say that. It's just that what *Group Marriage* has, what *Student Nurses* has, and what *The Working Girls* has—for different reasons, but they all have it—is a large group of people sharing a home.

COLLINGS: Right, right.

ROTHMAN: And we follow the stories of all those people pretty equally.

COLLINGS: Well, actually, you can look at *Terminal Island* that way too.

ROTHMAN: Yes, you could.

COLLINGS: And in *Velvet Vampire* they are sharing a home as well. [laughs] But in a different way.

ROTHMAN: No. They are just visiting for the weekend.

COLLINGS: Yes.

ROTHMAN: They are just guests for the weekend. They're exploring the strangeness of the vampire's home.

COLLINGS: So is that theme of people exploring a home something that you intended to work with when you were doing these films? Or is it something that you see looking back now?

ROTHMAN: Well, there were different reasons for doing it then. I mean, in the case of *The Student Nurses* and *The Working Girls*, I was— Specifically, in the case of *The Student Nurses*, asked to make a film about a group of young nurses.

COLLINGS: But they didn't necessarily have to live together.

ROTHMAN: No, they didn't. But obviously, again, it made it more dramatically interesting and intricate, and it allowed me to take them away from the hospital into the real world, or into the world, if you will. So I used that as a vehicle there. In the case of *Group Marriage*, obviously they had to live together. It was a marriage. In the case of *Terminal Island*, they were forced to live together as people are in a prison.

And in the case of *The Working Girls*, the man who financed the film wanted a similar structure to *The Student Nurses*. He had seen that film and he liked it, and he wanted something similar.

COLLINGS: I see.

ROTHMAN: So that's why I did it in *The Working Girls*. [tape recorder off]

COLLINGS: All right. Okay, so you made *Terminal Island* in 1973, right?

ROTHMAN: Right, the spring of '73.

COLLINGS: Was that a quick turnaround from finishing up *Group Marriage*?

ROTHMAN: No, I finished *Group Marriage* in the spring of '72, late spring, and then Larry Woolner said that he would like to make a women's prison picture, because when he had been at New World Pictures they had had a series of successful women's prison pictures. It was considered a very good exploitation film topic, because it was about women without men in a confined environment, who are supposedly horny and violent, and can play active assertive roles because they're in control of their environment. So Charles and I sort of refined that idea into, "Let's make an interesting prison picture, one that will have both women and men in it. It will be a little different."

Larry Woolner said, "All right. But if we're going to do that, let's make it appeal to the black audiences that are out there and are now watching blaxploitation films." So I said, "I'm not sure that I know how to make what you're calling a blaxploitation film. What I would be happy to do, however, is have a story in which

there are black and white characters. That's fine with me." But I don't want to make a blaxploitation film, in the sense that I don't want every black character in it to be involved in some sort of tawdry enterprise the way they usually were in blaxploitation films. At that time in those films, they usually glorified either very violent and aggressive detectives, or they glorified pimps, or women who were whores. There was a very strong reaction against these films by thoughtful black people, who found them offensive and a horrible model for young blacks who would be watching them. I certainly didn't want to have any part in something like that. But I was making a prison picture, and all sorts of people go to prison, and so what I thought was that I would do that and I would hope that it would appeal to black audiences as well as white audiences. So that was where we left it.

COLLINGS: Okay. What were your first thoughts when you were asked to make the prison picture? Were you optimistic that you'd be able to come up with something that you liked, in terms of a script?

ROTHMAN: I was optimistic that I could come up with something that I could make into a film. Would I like it? That was unknown at that time. I mean, did I like the idea of making a prison picture? Not particularly, because, first of all, the idea of a prison is not my idea of an attractive or likeable social institution.

COLLINGS: Right. [mutual laughter]

ROTHMAN: Secondly, I don't think it's easy to be very fair to the multiplicity of people and reasons that people have for ending up in prison.

COLLINGS: Right. You had earlier turned down making a women's prison picture.

ROTHMAN: That's right. *The Big Doll House*, which set the pattern for—or, I should say, was the model for—all these later women's prison pictures that were made in that era.

COLLINGS: Why did you think it might work out this time?

ROTHMAN: Well, I wasn't going to make a picture like *The Big Doll House*. I would be in control of how the subject matter was treated, and while I had to put in the usual elements of sex and violence, I also could introduce ideas about how prisoners were treated, and how they could treat each other, that were not necessarily in these other films. I didn't have to turn it into what most of these other films were, which was a cartoon.

COLLINGS: Right. Where did you come up with the idea for the island?

ROTHMAN: Well, traditionally there have been Devil's Island pictures, which is, I guess you might say, a substrata of prison pictures. It seemed like a very interesting idea to make a Devil's Island picture where all these people were isolated and we didn't have to shoot it on a set, you know, in a very confined space. To build a set and to rent a stage would be very expensive; shooting it in the outdoors would be much more economical and visually much more interesting. So that's why.

COLLINGS: There are no guards in the film.

ROTHMAN: That's right.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Was that an important part of the premise?

ROTHMAN: Well, we decided to put it on an island, and then what suggested itself was the premise that if you put people on an island, they could be isolated there. We started thinking about how through the years we had often heard individuals exclaim, "Wouldn't it be great if you could just ship off everybody who committed crimes to an island and forget about them?" Then, with some free association, Charles and I discussing it came up with the idea, "Wouldn't it be an interesting idea if the death penalty were abolished, and the solution was to ship all those people who would now have to be held in prison for life off to an island?" Especially since, at that time, the death penalty in California was still illegal. Let's put it this way, people who wanted to bring back the death penalty often expressed their complaint about having to subsidize for life, or pay for the living— Excuse me, I lost—

COLLINGS: That's okay.

ROTHMAN: People who wanted to bring back the death penalty pointed out that if there is no death penalty, then everybody who would be sentenced to prison for life without possibility of parole would have to be supported by the taxpayers of the state. We thought it would be an interesting approach to a prison film to have the prisoners who normally would have been sentenced to life without possibility of parole, because the death penalty no longer existed, be exiled to an island and given minimal supplies to survive with, which were regularly replenished, which would save the taxpayers a great deal of money. The whole idea was, wouldn't this be a grand idea for continuing— No, forget that, scratch that. Wouldn't it be a grand idea? Can I listen to

that sentence?

COLLINGS: Yeah. [tape recorder off]

Okay, let's see. You have the "man on the street" interview where you have this montage of people saying basically what you just said, and I was wondering, why did you use that particular device? It has a documentary aspect, and I hadn't seen that in any of your other films, so I was just curious about it.

ROTHMAN: Well, that's why I used it, to give the film a certain authenticity by showing real people.

COLLINGS: These were real people? These were not actors?

ROTHMAN: No, these were not actors. These were real people who I approached on the street with a cameraman and a soundman in Downtown Los Angeles around the Civic Center, and asked them if they would be willing to express for the camera their views about saving taxpayer money by sending people off to an island, since the death penalty no longer existed, and what would they think of doing that with people who had no possibility of parole? I would ask them that, and they would express their views, and some of them did it in a very clear and succinct way, and some of them rambled. I was able to piece together that little sequence from that.

COLLINGS: Do you think you used most of what you shot?

ROTHMAN: I used, I'd say, about fifty percent of what I shot.

COLLINGS: Okay. Just wondering. Yeah, that's a very effective sequence. Then as you go into the beginning of the film you've got a news team in a TV studio.

ROTHMAN: Yes, which actually was the TV studio of Loyola University.

COLLINGS: Oh, really?

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: Actually, it's a very effective sequence, where they review the photographs and the biographies of the characters that we will be meeting later so we know, just going in, in a very efficient way, what their crimes were. But at the same time, the news people are obviously very, very bored.

ROTHMAN: And cynical.

COLLINGS: Yeah. I was just wondering what you were doing in that scene with that?

ROTHMAN: Well, I was just showing how the lives of these prisoners who were in an extreme situation were just, you know, more food to feed the giant news maw with. That's basically what it was, and that these reporters recognized that, in fact, what they were doing might not even be very interesting to an audience, if they even had an audience. That basically their purpose was to fill time in between commercials.

COLLINGS: Right. And you have the news director smoking a pipe. I was wondering, were you suggesting that he was like kind of a liberal? Or is that just a device for letting him be distracted?

ROTHMAN: I think that was just a device.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Just wondering. I thought—

ROTHMAN: I didn't know liberals smoked pipes.

COLLINGS: Well, you know, sort of the college professor type. Just thought I'd ask.

ROTHMAN: I thought pipes were more conservative. Because nobody smokes a pipe anymore. Pipes have disappeared from the face of the earth.

COLLINGS: Yeah, yeah. Well, now they have, right.

ROTHMAN: I think it's going to be an exotic artifact in a few years.

COLLINGS: Sometimes a pipe is just a pipe. Is that what you're trying to say?

ROTHMAN: Right. Exactly. Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.

COLLINGS: Okay. The writing credits for the film are you, your husband, and Jim [James] Barnett?

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: Okay— What were you going to say?

ROTHMAN: You want to know about Jim Barnett?

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: Jim Barnett, he was an old time television writer. My husband met him when he—when my husband—was fresh out of film school. He got a fellowship to work at Warner Brothers at that time and he met Jim there and they became friends and we thought— Jim had worked on some prison pictures I believe earlier in his career. We thought he might be able to offer something and so we had him write the first draft. His treatment of the women was just unbelievable. I mean they were so passive and so empty, so we knew we had to do something about this and we were getting the production together and so we hired another writer. Oh, let me preface this

by saying, earlier, Charles and I wrote a story outline and then we gave that to Jim Barnett. Then after Jim Barnett came we hired another writer named Henry Rosenbaum, who did a very good job of rewriting. Henry decided not to take credit because, I'm not sure exactly what all his reasons were, but I know one of his reasons was that he did not like the idea that he had not written this from the beginning. At any rate, I had to rewrite it yet again because it was not really in any kind of form to be shot and some of the scenes just needed rewriting because the perspective of the characters was not exactly what I wanted in them. So at any rate, I did another major rewrite and so that was the final rewrite. That was the shooting script.

COLLINGS: So when you say the perspective was not exactly what you wanted, what *did* you want?

ROTHMAN: You know, I'm sorry, I can't answer that question at this point. I don't remember. It's been so long—1973, and this is 2002.

COLLINGS: Yeah sure. I just wondered if there was something specific.

ROTHMAN: I honestly don't remember what it was I wanted to— I know I kept a lot of the dialogue Henry did, not all of it but a lot of it. It was very good. And I just, you know, structurally changed a number of things in it. It was sufficient that when we submitted the script for arbitration to the writer's guild—which we had to do because we were executives on the film and there's an automatic arbitration, there was even then—the arbiters read all the scripts and decided to give shared writing credit to Charles and myself as a team and Jim Barnett as an individual. So clearly it was

enough to warrant that.

COLLINGS: Okay. All right, so the cast is introduced, as it were, and then you have the scene where the main character, you might say, Carmen— I mean in some ways she is a main character.

ROTHMAN: Yes. We follow her from the beginning to the end. You're correct. She is the main character.

COLLINGS: Okay. All right. Is going out by boat to the island and you have a kind of a, almost a sort of Johnny Cash type song?

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: And the sea and the island, it's kind of in contrast to the earlier scenes with the man on the street interviews.

ROTHMAN: What kind of contrast are you talking about?

COLLINGS: Well, it seems more— It seems kind of pleasant, even. I mean the song is nice to listen to and the views are pleasant.

ROTHMAN: That's true. I always felt that was the one seductive thing about this script, that the island was always beautiful and yet the situation of the people on it was dismal.

COLLINGS: Yeah. That's an interesting tension. So let me ask you a little bit about the crimes that the characters had committed. Okay. You've got Bunny, who is the socialite who killed her parents.

ROTHMAN: Well, she's not a socialite. She's a Lizzy Borden character.

COLLINGS: When I say socialite, I mean like she seems like an upper middle class, upper class [person].

ROTHMAN: Yeah, she does not seem to have been raised in the streets. You're right. At least she is middle class, I would say, yes.

COLLINGS: And Carmen. What was Carmen's crime again?

ROTHMAN: She committed murder.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Who did she murder, though?

ROTHMAN: I'm sorry, I'll have to look that up for you. I really don't remember.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Okay, because that wasn't— It didn't stand out to me and I wanted to ask you about that.

ROTHMAN: Is it really that important?

COLLINGS: Well, I was just wondering, because it seems like they've got a lot of different kinds of crimes here.

ROTHMAN: Well, yes.

COLLINGS: I was wondering if it was important. And Bobby, who is kind of the psychopath, killed his partner. He didn't want to share the loot of a robbery.

ROTHMAN: Right.

COLLINGS: And Lee is the—

ROTHMAN: The little political ideologue.

COLLINGS: Right.

ROTHMAN: Right.

COLLINGS: That's right, and she has a Ph.D. in an area of the sciences. And Joey killed her husband.

ROTHMAN: Joy.

COLLINGS: Joy. I'm sorry. Maybe that's a typo. And Roy, who is Bobby's sort of assistant—

ROTHMAN: No, that's Monk.

COLLINGS: Monk. Okay. Roy is a serial killer? Oh, you can't remember, I'm sorry. I don't mean to put you on the spot. I guess my point is that—

ROTHMAN: If you want, I'll look these things up for you and tell you next time.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Okay. Maybe we could. If *you* think it's important, because it just seemed to me that the—

ROTHMAN: Well, what I was trying to have was the varieties of murder that can be committed. I mean that was the point of having them all commit different kinds of murders, everything from parricide to— I mean patricide, excuse me, patricide to serial murder.

COLLINGS: Okay.

TAPE NUMBER: VII, SIDE ONE

FEBRUARY 27, 2002

COLLINGS: What you might call the bad guys had committed fairly random acts of murder, and what you might call the good guys possibly had really compelling reasons why they had committed their crimes. Is that reading too much into it?

ROTHMAN: Yes. I think they all had compelling reasons why they committed their crimes. The point I was trying to make in that film is that, even if somebody has committed something as horrible as murder, there are people who are capable of some form of redemption and there are people who are irredeemable.

COLLINGS: Okay. So they are redeemed by their experience on the island?

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: Okay.

ROTHMAN: That doesn't mean it's an argument for setting them free. It means that they redeemed themselves as human beings who demonstrate that they are capable of living amongst other human beings with regard for other human beings, and even perhaps the desire not to kill again.

COLLINGS: Was there anything in particular that you were interested in expressing with regard to the Lee character, the one who had a Ph.D. in science and who had blown up the bank?

ROTHMAN: Anything specific that I wanted?

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: Well, I suppose what I was trying to show is that one can be very smart in one area of one's life and very stupid in another.

COLLINGS: Okay.

ROTHMAN: I mean, what is the point of blowing up a bank?

COLLINGS: Right.

ROTHMAN: And killing a guard? Someone who, you know, is just collateral damage. It's one thing if you're doing it in defense of something that's threatening you, but she was just doing this out of ideology.

COLLINGS: Were there any particular events around that time that sort of inspired that? This was—?

ROTHMAN: It was '73. It was the time of the SLA [Symbionese Liberation Army], but it was not at the time—

COLLINGS: It was before then.

ROTHMAN: It was before Patty Hearst went into the bank.

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: Well, I'll tell you, actually, it had nothing to do with the SLA at all. What it had to do with was the Weathermen. I was very struck by the futility of what the members of the Weathermen, who were mixing up explosive materials in the bottom of a New York townhouse, had done. I mean, it seemed so futile and so pathetic.

COLLINGS: What about the character of Bunny, who doesn't speak? I was

wondering what your thoughts were about her character, the one who had killed her parents.

ROTHMAN: Well, I wanted someone who remained mysterious to everybody else, as some people who murder do, and I wanted someone who, in the midst of a group of people who are always acting out their rage, was very repressed and contained hers. I wanted the contrast of that.

COLLINGS: Yeah, okay. What happens in the film is that a number of the prisoners escape to a different part of the island because, while there are no guards, one of the prisoners has in effect turned himself into a guard by trying to rule over the rest of the prisoners.

ROTHMAN: A tyrant, in fact.

COLLINGS: A tyrant, yes. I was interested in the ways that, once the women prisoners come to that second group, they start introducing the notion of different kinds of weapons technology, if you might call it that. Let's see, Lee teaches them how to make crude explosives from rocks that she finds in the—

ROTHMAN: From wild mustard.

COLLINGS: Right, and Carmen teaches them how to make a kind of poison for their arrows.

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: I was just wondering why you chose to let them be the ones to bring this new thinking to this band.

ROTHMAN: Well, first of all, because it's a nontraditional role for women in a story that's about a war, and by this time the groups of prisoners are warring with each other or preparing to go to war. Secondly, not because they were women, but just it's the kind of knowledge that people may have in a piecemeal way. It was kind of interesting to see them pool their knowledge and come up with a series of weapons. Not all the weapons are devised by the women, just some of them. Some of the weapons are devised by the men. The bamboo stake that springs out and impales somebody was thought of by one of the men. But I just wanted to demonstrate that if women put their mind to something, and they're intelligent and they're informed, they can do it regardless of what it is.

COLLINGS: How did you feel about shooting the violent scenes in the film? It's the only film of yours that has scenes of that sort.

ROTHMAN: Well, I didn't like the idea of making a violent film, but once I resigned myself to doing it, I tried to do it—given, again, limited time, money, and resources—as effectively as I could. I actually was impeded a little bit by the Motion Picture Association [of America] when they rated the film, because I had several scenes in there from which they made me remove some of the violence. Which ruined the scenes, because part of their impact was to show how ugly the violence was, and I did try to make the violence as ugly as I could. The one that comes to mind immediately is the scene where a man gets his throat cut. I had a close-up of the man's throat being cut, and when you saw it being done, you saw him dying in a longer shot. I shot it

both in a longer shot and I shot the close-up. But when the film went in to get rated, they made me take out the throat cutting if I wanted to get an R rating, otherwise they were going to give me an X rating.

COLLINGS: For that scene alone?

ROTHMAN: Yes. What really angered me about it is that about, oh, I'd say six or nine months later, a film called *Papillon*, with Steve McQueen and Dustin Hoffman, came out, which was actually a novel based on life on Devil's Island, and there was a scene of a man getting his throat cut in there, and it was done in close-up, and they let it remain in. The same people who forced me to take my close-up out let that one remain in. The only conclusion I and everyone I knew could reach was that it was made by a major studio who funded them, and so they were given more latitude than I was given, because I had made just a little exploitation film, and we only paid a small fee to get it rated, relative to what major studios paid them to keep them in business. Therefore they didn't feel the same obligation toward me.

COLLINGS: I see. A number of the violent scenes are in long shot.

ROTHMAN: Well, that's not true. [tape recorder off] Well, I don't know that there were any more long shots than were necessary. I feel like Mozart felt in the film *Amadeus*. I used only enough notes to write what I needed to write. I mean, there was no aesthetic decision that way. Action is made in cuts. You create an action sequence and knit it through many cuts, and you can't really do that if you hold on a long shot for a long time.

COLLINGS: There was one fight scene in particular where, I can't think of it in particular, but it seemed like the camera was sort of holding back from the scene a bit. I was wondering if you were trying to take some of the involvement, the visceral excitement of the fight scene away, and leave the viewer with just the harsh reality that this fight was going on.

ROTHMAN: It's possible. I mean, in other words, I did not shoot every scene the same way, so it's very possible. I don't know what scene you're referring to, but that sounds like a good possibility.

COLLINGS: Yeah, okay. So we're both talking hypothetically. [laughs] I didn't take a specific note on that, so I can't tell you exactly what was happening in the action at that time.

So you have these two opposing societies who are at war with each other. How did you see those two societies? How would you sort of describe the dominant tenor of each of them?

ROTHMAN: Well, one was definitely authoritarian. They had most of the resources on the island. It was ruled by this one extremely cruel man who was in, I would say, an—unconscious on his part—homoerotic relationship. Well, scratch that again. I'm sorry, but that's not exactly what I meant. You know, maybe I've just talked too much today.

COLLINGS: Okay.

TAPE NUMBER: VIII, SIDE ONE

MARCH 18, 2002

COLLINGS: Stephanie, we were going to pick up talking about *Terminal Island*, and you were going to talk about the two different social groups that existed on the island.

ROTHMAN: Yes. Well, of course, initially everyone who was sent there was a prisoner who had a life sentence, and there was no grouping. Groups arose because the most authoritarian and the most violent people began to dominate the others, and some of the others got together and decided to escape and not live with this group. They weren't strong enough to fight back; they didn't have enough resources and enough people.

COLLINGS: When you say escape, the more authoritarian ones had begun to view the other prisoners as their own property?

ROTHMAN: Yes, or they had at least begun to view them as under their control, and wanted to use their labor for their own benefit. So the ones who were being used escaped and decided to live in other parts of the island, but they had to usually keep moving in order not to be found, because the ones they escaped from often went out looking for them. When women came to the island, this group decided to steal the women. They knew some of them because they had been there before, but when the final woman came to the island, in the story of *Terminal Island*, they decided to steal them. So they stole these women.

COLLINGS: What was their reason for stealing them?

ROTHMAN: Their reason for stealing them is not very clear. [mutual laughter] No, I'm joking. The reason for stealing them is that, first of all, they would increase their numbers; secondly, they liked them, and had developed a certain amount of camaraderie with them when they were all under the control of the dominant group; and finally, I think it was a way to fight back against the dominant group, since women were used as chattel by this dominant group and were highly prized; and also they felt sorry for the way these women were used and abused. They thought they would try and help them, and maybe have the benefit of their female company. [laughs] So that's why they did it.

COLLINGS: Okay. You know, I thought, in terms of some of the crimes that the criminals had committed, that there was almost a theme of remaking society, and I was just wondering if that was something that was intentional. I mean, in the sense that one of them had killed their parents, one of them had killed a husband, another one of them had blown up a bank, you know, sort of an economic structure, and I almost saw those crimes as being a way of getting to a kind of a ground zero in terms of remaking a society. I was wondering if there was anything like that in the film, as far as you were concerned.

ROTHMAN: Well, I wouldn't exactly link the crimes that they committed with the eventual outcome of the story, in which the initially weaker group manages to overthrow the leaders of the stronger group and rally the stronger group's followers around them now. I wouldn't link that with their earlier crimes so much as with the

fact that everyone came to understand that if they didn't stop fighting they would just kill each other all off, and that maybe it was time to take stock of where they were and how they might go on improving their living conditions. Even if they were exiled on this island and they all had committed terrible crimes, they had a chance now to redeem themselves, to start anew under very primitive conditions, and perhaps live in a way that they could all enjoy more, rather than slaughtering each other. It seemed like— I shouldn't say it seemed like, but since there were enough of them of that group to overcome the more murderous ones, it would even be possible to perhaps redeem the more murderous ones, the ones who had not been killed in the final battle. To somehow turn them into a constructive part of the social unit.

That certainly is the final message of the film, or a final resolution, I should say, of the story, but I'm not sure that the crimes they committed made them somehow any more suitable for doing this. The reason I chose the prisoners to have committed very different crimes was just because it made them more interesting as characters. We wouldn't want a replication of the same character again and again. It also allowed them to have resources that, if they ever were to try to turn to doing more constructive things on the island, were different, so that everybody would have a different contribution to make.

COLLINGS: Right. In the end of the film, the character who is a doctor is pardoned. The authorities come by boat to inform him that he has received a pardon, and he tells the authorities that that person is dead. Why does he decide to remain on the island?

ROTHMAN: Well, the simplest explanation is that he has bonded with these people. He now feels that he is a part of this world and I think he has found more sincerity among these people than he found amongst those who would send him to prison for showing enough compassion to someone who was dying a painful death to help them die. In other words, he was like Doctor [Jack] Kevorkian. [mutual laughter]

COLLINGS: So was it important that the change, that the way that the prisoners had redeemed themselves and the change in the way that they were now going to be living, be kept a secret from the mainland? I mean I almost sort of see that, see it as those characters having purified themselves in a way and not wanting to even risk sort of diluting what has happened to them by any kind of contact with the mainland.

ROTHMAN: Well, I suppose you could say that about the doctor. I'm not sure you could say it about anybody else. I think, first of all, in the way the story was constructed, the mainland wanted nothing further to do with them. [laughs] It wasn't a question of they didn't want any further contact with the mainland.

COLLINGS: Yeah. But I mean, just in that scene, rather than sort of saying "I'm here!" and telling the good news about what kind of social changes had transpired on the island, he instead elects to hide the whole thing. "That guy is dead."

ROTHMAN: Well, I'm not sure he is intent upon hiding the changes that had taken place, it is just that he doesn't want to be taken back. He doesn't want to go back. But I don't think there is any curiosity about what's gone on in the island and I think that he doesn't want any curiosity about him. I think it's true he makes a willful choice not

to let them know about him.

COLLINGS: Okay, at the very end of the film a girl, a new prisoner, arrives at the island. It's a young, good looking girl [laughs] , and in the last shot she is greeted in a friendly fashion on the beach, and I guess she is pleasantly surprised to be greeted in this way, and there is sort of a freeze frame of her smile and that's the end of the film. I was wondering why you chose to end the film that way.

ROTHMAN: For its irony. The initial character who comes out there comes out to a dark place. It is, you know, covered with scrub, nobody around, and when she finally does encounter people, they are cold and threatening and she is beaten and humiliated, and now this new person comes and ironically it's the same place and the same people, but she is greeted warmly and is looking forward to what she'll find. She's not afraid of taking the next step into the body of the island—or into the heart of the island, I should say.

COLLINGS: And how did you feel about the film when it was finished?

ROTHMAN: Relieved that it was finished.

COLLINGS: Did you like it? It's really different from your other films.

ROTHMAN: Yes. Well, of course, a number of my films are different from each other. Did I like it? It's very difficult to say you like a film of yours when you've just finished making it. I would not have made this film at all if there were not a commercial requirement for me to make it. I mean, I didn't have any options about what kind of film I was going to make. I tried to imbue it with some ideas that I have

about human behavior, but did I like it? I neither liked nor disliked it at that point. I was just curious to finish it and, having finished it— I should say, I was curious, having finished it, to send it out in the world and see how it would fare.

COLLINGS: And how did it fare?

ROTHMAN: Well, ultimately it did make money, but initially it did not do that well.

COLLINGS: Why was that?

ROTHMAN: Well, it did well in certain cities but not well in others. I don't know the answer to that. Some films I've made have done very well. I really don't know the answer to why. It may have been the publicity campaign was wrong. It may have been there just wasn't a public interest in that kind of subject matter at the time. I don't know. I mean it sold in a number of foreign markets that didn't usually buy films like this. I know it sold to Italy and Spain and Mexico and England, and it was even shown at the film market at the Cannes Film Festival, where I believe a French critic saw it who liked it very much and then wrote to me about it.

COLLINGS: Really?

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: What did he say?

ROTHMAN: He just said he really liked it. He thought it was an interesting film with a very interesting premise and what was my next film going to be about, and please let him know. But I really don't know the reason. I think it's very difficult to, in most cases, explain why some films are successful and others aren't.

COLLINGS: I'm sure, yeah. I suppose you never had any control over what films your films were shown with, on double bills and that kind of thing.

ROTHMAN: No. I didn't even have any control over the advertising or anything.

COLLINGS: Now, as far as shooting the film, did you actually shoot on that island?

ROTHMAN: No. This was not shot on an island. It was shot at Lake Sherwood which is near Westlake.

COLLINGS: And did shooting so many outdoor scenes pose any special problems for you?

ROTHMAN: Well, yes it did, because it was raining most of the time we were shooting.

COLLINGS: Oh my gosh!

ROTHMAN: There were actually several other studios out there shooting at the time that I was making this little low-budget independent film, and whenever it rained they just left, but we went right on shooting, rain or shine.

COLLINGS: Oh, geez. Oh my gosh.

ROTHMAN: All we tried to do is make sure that if we started shooting a scene before the rain started we tried to shoot at an angle where light would not show that it was raining at the time. We'd just dry off the actors and go right on. [laughs]

COLLINGS: Oh, you guys needed an endurance award by the time you were done.

ROTHMAN: Well, almost all my films have been very physically trying, because we didn't have the resources that even independent films that had somewhat larger

budgets had. On my films there would be a trailer for the actors to get dressed in, there would be a trailer for the make up to be done in, but I never had a trailer.

COLLINGS: So where did the actors dress, usually?

ROTHMAN: There was a dressing room trailer, but I mean I never had any place to go to, you know. I'd sit under a tree when it rained. [mutual laughter]

COLLINGS: So when you were working on these films, given that, how did you feel usually? Was it sort of an endurance test or were you caught up with the adrenaline of the moment?

ROTHMAN: Both. It was an endurance test and I was caught up with the excitement of the process of making films. Mostly I was caught up with the excitement. I mean, you know, you just got used to working in the rain and in the mud. We used to have to carry equipment across streams because it was raining so badly while we were making this film, hand carry stuff because we didn't have vehicles that could ford the streams. And for beach scenes, it had to be carried up and down these steep cliffs. I didn't do that because by then I was so tired and it was toward the end of the film. I would just carry myself up and down. That would be enough.

COLLINGS: Now, were these conditions unusual for the crew and the cast? Or did they have these kinds of conditions on other shoots as well?

ROTHMAN: I would say not for the crew. First of all, crews work in all kinds of weather conditions. As to our other working conditions— We always made sure that we had excellent food.

COLLINGS: Great.

ROTHMAN: And lots available. And if it was raining there was always a tent people could stand under. And these were young, vigorous crews and, you know, that's not so unusual for filmmaking. Believe me.

COLLINGS: So never a peep from them.

ROTHMAN: Pardon?

COLLINGS: Never a peep of complaint.

ROTHMAN: Not about that, no. No, people are used to that. If you're going to make films you better be used to rough physical environments. You know, there's a certain amount of danger. You're dealing with special effects. You know, we had fires and explosions in the film. That's just part of the nature of the job.

COLLINGS: Yeah. And didn't one of your main actresses, Ena Hartman, break her arm at a certain point?

ROTHMAN: No, what she did is she sprained an ankle—a very, very bad sprain.

COLLINGS: Oh, okay. Was it in the course of the filming?

ROTHMAN: I think it was like the second or third day that she did it and as a consequence she couldn't be very active. And this was an action film and so I had to change her role so that she was not in any of the action that involved running or jumping or anything like that, much to her dismay—and to mine, for that matter. She was a very good actress, but we had to adjust to that. She's about the only actor I have ever had on a film who had an injury during filming. She just turned an ankle, that's

all.

COLLINGS: It's so easy to do.

ROTHMAN: Well, especially out in the country. When you're fording streams and—[laughs]

COLLINGS: Right. Well, I mean, the circumstances sound like— But I mean even just walking down the street you can just turn an ankle. You step the wrong way.

ROTHMAN: Exactly. I mean, she was very good natured about it. She very much wanted to go on working, and she knew all her lines and was there and was uncomplaining in every sense of the word, but she just couldn't do that action and she was disappointed.

COLLINGS: Yeah, that sounds like it was not a lucky break.

ROTHMAN: No, but she still is a major character in the film.

COLLINGS: Well, I think actually that leads a little bit to my confusion, because I think earlier on in our discussion about this I was asking you if you consider her the main character, because she appears to be the main character in the beginning and then later on it's not so clear. And probably this is the reason.

ROTHMAN: Yes, the reason. Although at the end the idea of the narrative is that these people have formed a collective, you know, and so it's deliberatively emphasized that they are now a collective, that they are a group and have group identification as they didn't earlier. I mean, initially they're all much more atomized, and separate from each other, each grieving in their own way over what's happened to

them and what the rest of their lives are going to be like. As they grow together, though, and work together they become more optimistic.

COLLINGS: Another one of the things that's interesting in the film is the idea that even their own— They wouldn't be able to receive visitors, and even their own families and communities would be cut off from them, as if in fact they were dead.

ROTHMAN: Dead.

COLLINGS: Exactly. Is there anything that—? We had talked about *Group Marriage* last time, and then this today was sort of a continuing discussion of *Terminal Island*, and as we go on to *The Working Girls*, I wonder if there was anything that had come up in your mind that you would like to add about either of those films since we met last time.

ROTHMAN: You mean *Group Marriage* and *Terminal Island*?

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: Well, you know, it's funny, at different times I have different things to say.

COLLINGS: Yeah, I know.

ROTHMAN: I'm not sure I've been sufficiently eloquent or even organized in what I've said about them to you. It's unfortunate. I suppose the only thing I would say about *Terminal Island* is that one point I wanted to make about it was that— Not everyone, but there are many people, even people who have done terrible things, who under the right circumstances might be able in some small way to redeem themselves

if given the chance. That really was the most important point I wanted to make and it depends on the environmental circumstances. I'm not saying everyone. I'm not saying there aren't people who are absolutely homicidal and will always be, or who are terrible serial killers.

COLLINGS: Well, you seem to be putting the Bobby character in that category.

ROTHMAN: Exactly. But there are other people who, for circumstantial reasons, commit a terrible act, but given other circumstances will not do it again and might be able to redeem themselves. Now, that doesn't mean that I would casually dismiss the importance of people paying a penalty for what they do. I certainly wouldn't. But even while they are paying the penalty, that doesn't mean that they can't engage in some kind of redemptive behavior.

COLLINGS: Now, is this theme something that you would have been interested in exploring if you had not been put in the position of making a prison film, or do the two go hand in hand?

ROTHMAN: I would never have explored it if I had not been required to make a prison film, and it is perhaps the one reason I'm grateful for having been required to make a prison film.

COLLINGS: Right.

ROTHMAN: Because it made me think about things I otherwise might not have thought about at length—or, I should say, at any length.

COLLINGS: And any closing thoughts about *Group Marriage* that you'd like to sort

of put on the record?

ROTHMAN: I could say, though I think as a generalization, one of the great rewards of having made my films, and screenplays also, since then, was and is the opportunity to think about issues that we all think we have opinions about but never think about at length in much depth unless we're compelled to, as I am and as I was when I made these films. It usually makes your attitude much more flexible, at least that's been my experience. It's made me a lot less judgmental, a lot more understanding, and also a lot more appreciative of the traditions, the folklore, the mythology that underlies a lot of our attitudes about the subjects that I have chosen to make films about. [tape recorder off]

COLLINGS: Okay, so we're going to talk about *The Working Girls*. And let's just sort of get into the film by— I'll ask you where the idea for the film came from.

ROTHMAN: The origin of it was quite mundane. There was a motion picture distributor in Canada who wanted to finance a film that would be distributed by the company that I had a minority partnership in.

COLLINGS: Was this Dimension Pictures?

ROTHMAN: Yes, right. And what he wanted me to make it— He'd seen *The Student Nurses* and he had liked it, and he wanted me to make another film about a group of attractive young women who lived together and about their adventures.

COLLINGS: And specifically that they would live together?

ROTHMAN: Yes. Also I made this film for less money than I made any of my other

films for. I made it for, I think it was like $103,000.

COLLINGS: Was that a requirement?

ROTHMAN: You mean to make it for so little money?

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: Well, that was all I was going to get. [laughs] I don't know if you mean was it a requirement. I don't know what that means. That's what I was given. I actually went over budget. I think he gave us $100,000 but I couldn't quite bring it in for that to completion. There are economies of shooting that are involved in having characters who all live together. It means, you know, you can have fewer sets. It also meant with so little money we could have a nicer set because if we had to go to multiple locations we'd probably have to, you know, spend less money on each location and this way we could get one nice house and use it for all the characters and set many scenes in it, which we did.

I thought it would be interesting to have a group of young women live together this time, who did not do the same job, they did different jobs. And then the more I thought about it, I thought it would be interesting if all of them had higher aspirations than they were at the current time able to achieve, so that there would be some irony in the title *The Working Girls*, aside from the double entendre that working girls are both women who work as well as it being another name for prostitutes. I thought that would probably be a commercial asset, you know, in the advertising campaign but I was not personally interested in implying that these people were, in any sense,

prostitutes. But it seemed to me for the kind of market that the company was making it for, or would go after, it would be an intriguing double entendre to be able to use. So the thing that I was interested in, though, was the irony that they were working but none of them were working at what they wanted to do. Essentially they were employed, but they were underemployed.

I also liked the idea of making a film that had another irony involved with the title and that was that they were not referred to as women but as girls. The term working girls, especially at that time in the mid 1970s, was applied almost as a generic term to women who worked. They were working girls, just like the term girl was applied to women no matter what age they were, and certainly I was aware, as were many other women, that this was a way to demean women, to undermine their seriousness, because you never heard about working boys. Men were never referred to as working boys but women were referred to as working girls, just like women were referred to as girls when they were spoken to by men, but women rarely referred to men as boys. There was another irony that I hoped to emphasize, which is that the world thought of these young women as working girls, which meant that the world did not take them as seriously, as I would show in the stories, as these young women took themselves. And that was the approach that I took to writing this story.

Now, having said that, of course, I tried to make it as comedic and as energetic and provocative as I could, and to throw in as many ideas as I could, about what it meant to be young and female and ambitious in a world that did not particularly

approve of ambition in young women.

COLLINGS: The main character Honey has a masters degree in math, isn't that right?

ROTHMAN: Right. Yes, and yet when we first meet her she's homeless and at the end she takes off once again to be homeless. She certainly does not initially find employment in which she can employ her knowledge of math, although she eventually does find a way to do it in a very innovative way, and she actually makes money doing it, and recognizes that she has the capacity to make money, and starts thinking by the end of the film about what does one do with money if one makes it. There must be something better to do with it than just be a consumer.

COLLINGS: And she is working for a while for a character who seems almost like a Howard Hughes kind of character?

ROTHMAN: Yes. The character was modeled on Howard Hughes, exactly. Except I hope he was more amusing than Howard Hughes was. [laughs]

COLLINGS: Yes. So he's a sort of an idiosyncratic character who works out of his car.

ROTHMAN: He's a selfish eccentric, completely selfish. He is, you know, interesting to Honey and he's amusing and he provides her with an adventure in employment that she certainly didn't expect ever to find, but he's basically not a nice human being.

COLLINGS: Yeah. He seems to be just very focused on, well, making money for the sake of it, even just sort of for the game of it.

ROTHMAN: That's right, and that's what he teaches her, too, that it's a game, but she's more of a compassionate and rounded and thoughtful human being than he is. So she sees beyond the game of making money to the fact that money should be put in service of something and that then maybe making her money could be justified and useful.

COLLINGS: Yeah. And why did you call her Honey?

ROTHMAN: I suppose the reason was that first of all I like the alliteration between her first and last names, Honey Holtzman. It is kind of comical sounding. And secondly because I wanted her to be basically a very sweet human being.

COLLINGS: She sort of reminds me of some sort of twenties— There's a particular twenties and thirties era actress that she— And I'm just trying to put my finger on who it is, whether maybe it's Irene Dunne—

ROTHMAN: You mean the actress Sarah Kennedy, who played Honey Holtzman?

COLLINGS: Yeah. Does that ring a bell to you at all?

ROTHMAN: No. Actually people have often alluded to the fact that because she's a very small, pretty, blond woman, that she seems more like, when you look at her, the prototype of the dumb blond, and she has this very sort of childish little voice and she—

COLLINGS: She's like Betty Boop, in a way.

ROTHMAN: Yes. There's a kind of naiveté, a seeming naiveté about her, and yet at the same time she's terribly smart and, as we learn during the course of the story, she

has quite a bit of depth. She's a good woman.

COLLINGS: She's a catalyst as well, in the way that the Chris character is in *Group Marriage*.

ROTHMAN: Right, and even though she is very small and she seems very vulnerable, she is actually quite tough and quite capable of getting her way and engaging the loyalty of other people, and she is self sufficient, too.

COLLINGS: Yeah. In the beginning of the film she's coming into a restaurant and she's hungry and she orders a meal and then she tells the proprietor of the restaurant that she can't pay for the meal and that she'll work it off.

ROTHMAN: He suggests she'll work it off by having sexual relations with him, and so she calls his bluff and humiliates him by taking off her blouse right there and saying, "Okay. Let's do it right here, right now," and he immediately pulls it on her again and throws her out of the restaurant, and so she buttons up, puts on her backpack and walks off, picking her teeth, having had a very good free meal. [laughs]

COLLINGS: Right. I think it's really interesting the way that she just sort of drains the shame and the victimization out of that scene and turns the tables.

ROTHMAN: Yes. Well, that's something I try to do often in scenes, is have people who are initially the potential victim turn the tables on those who would victimize them.

COLLINGS: I was going to ask you what you feel that this scene is about and that sounds like that's what it is.

ROTHMAN: Right. It's to introduce the fact that she may look small and vulnerable and naive but she is quite capable of thinking her way through situations and maintaining control of her destiny.

COLLINGS: Right. Okay. Now, in contrast to that there are those scenes where she's job hunting. There are a number of long shots. One in particular I recall where she's going down an escalator and she looks quite despondent. She is going in and out of offices trying to find a job, and I thought that that particular montage was fairly dark and I was wondering what you were thinking about when you were depicting her in that way.

ROTHMAN: Well, definitely that she was discouraged. Yes. I mean, it was a discouragement montage. A growing discouragement montage.

COLLINGS: Well, it just struck me because in tone it's just very different from, say, the beginning of *The Student Nurses*, where they are riding in the convertible and it's very upbeat and the song is "We Can Make It If We Try." In this particular scene, and in parts of the film in general, I sensed a darker mood than I had seen in some of the other films and I was wondering if you would agree with that statement.

ROTHMAN: Well, of course, the scene where she is hunting for a job is not at the very beginning of the film. It's actually a little way into the film, I think at least— It's been so long that— I would guess at least maybe ten minutes into the film.

COLLINGS: No, I was just contrasting it with the upbeat nature of something like *The Student Nurses*.

ROTHMAN: I don't know if *The Student Nurses* is upbeat.

COLLINGS: No, no, it just felt like there was more possibility in that film.

ROTHMAN: Than in this one?

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: Even at the end?

COLLINGS: Well, how do you see the end, then?

ROTHMAN: Well, basically there is no more employment possibility for these people at the end than there was at the beginning. But they have developed certain strengths. They have developed a certain strength of character. They have gone through adversity and they have prevailed and they've survived the adversity, older and wiser but not deterred from their ambitions. They will carry on. They will go on.

COLLINGS: Okay. So it's hopeful in that sense.

ROTHMAN: Well, yes. I mean, it's not hopeful in the sense that there is any promise there of anything better. But they have developed fortitude. It's a story of how three young women develop the fortitude to continue and perhaps achieve something at some point after the end of the film. And they have benefited, they have all benefited, from knowing each other and from knowing Honey in particular. Honey has already begun to be the generous person that she has envisioned. She will be if she can make even more money and she has done that by sharing the money she has made, the windfall that she has earned.

COLLINGS: Can you sort of review how she got the windfall, just to sort of sketch

out some of the details of the film?

ROTHMAN: Well, she went to work for this eccentric, very rich man. And he hired her to be his companion, to just talk about things. And when she asked him what sort of things he said, “Well, I want to talk to you about life.” And she said, “All right.” And so she would sit with him in his car, which was also his office and his home and it’s the—

TAPE NUMBER: VIII, SIDE TWO

MARCH 18, 2002

ROTHMAN: [They would sit] amidst the Coke bottles and abandoned cookie boxes and they would talk about life and he would also conduct his business—his many businesses. He bought and sold commodities. He made his wealth mainly from doing that, which he did on the telephone in his car as they were driven around by his chauffeur. She began to learn from him and then she decided to do some independent research and bring it to him. And so she did, about a particular commodity, and he was very dismissive of what she had done. In fact he was so dismissive that he fired her, and she was absolutely shocked to be fired by him.

COLLINGS: And she put a lot of research into that particular report, didn't she?

ROTHMAN: Yes. She was very proud of it, and she gave him recommendations of when to buy this particular crop and where to sell it, and he just— You know, she didn't know what she was doing and he wasn't interested and he was offended that she would even suggest something to him and he fired her. And so she was very—

COLLINGS: Put her in her place.

ROTHMAN: Yes. She was of course very discouraged by this and humiliated, and then a few days later she gets a package in the mail and she opens it and she discovers it's from him, and it contains a huge amount of money, packages and packages of bills. He has sent her, not a check, but bills, and with it a letter saying that he took her advice after all. He made a fortune and he is sending her what he thinks her

percentage should be. And it's just a small— I think it's like—

COLLINGS: One percent or something.

ROTHMAN: Yes. One percent of what he has made, but it turns out to be something like $60,000. And she is excited and inspired by this, and the more she thinks about it— She thinks, "If I did this once, I could do this again. Obviously I'm as good at this as he is, and now I'll have a little bit of money to stake myself, too." And she realizes that's why he has given her that. But she also talks to her friends about the fact that what she'd like to do with this money is make more money so she can give other people jobs. And if she made enough money then she could start a business and employ people and she'd be useful.

COLLINGS: And she plans to employ people on sort of a profit sharing basis, isn't that right?

ROTHMAN: No.

COLLINGS: Does she say something about that?

ROTHMAN: No. She doesn't go that far.

COLLINGS: Oh, I thought she did.

ROTHMAN: No, she thinks: What I can do with my money is start a business and the purpose of that business would be to give other people jobs and that would be a good thing. At the end of the film she suddenly disappears, and all she does is leave three bags of money for her two roommates and the boyfriend of one of the roommates who has received a very bad beating after engaging in a dope deal that went bad. And she

leaves a letter telling them all that she is going in search of the eccentric rich man again, because she has other ideas for him and he is not going to get away from her that easily [laughs] , and she's going to go on and make more money and realize her ambition of creating some kind of enterprise eventually.

COLLINGS: Right. Well, in that sense it is actually very optimistic.

ROTHMAN: And we last see her— The last shot is of her standing on the Pacific Coast Highway during rush hour as the sun is setting, or close to setting, and she's hitchhiking. And there is this little figure just hitchhiking with her little backpack and finally a car stops and she runs up to it and gets in and it goes off down the highway.

COLLINGS: And you always see hitchhiking as being sort of a visual image of opportunity, right?

ROTHMAN: I used it that way in my films, yes, as a possible opportunity, as the beginning of an adventure, not as a threatening experience. Although I'm not sure anymore I would ever use hitchhiking if I was still making films. I think it has a threatening aspect to it today that wasn't as true when I made my films. People still did hitchhike. You saw people hitchhiking a lot. You don't see people hitchhiking much anymore.

COLLINGS: Oh, no. You never see it now. I haven't seen it for years.

ROTHMAN: It was quite commonplace when I made my films and it did seem to be a wonderful way of expressing how someone was presenting themselves for adventure.

COLLINGS: Yes. That's right.

You have a few subplots in the film, like the one where, as you mentioned, the boyfriend of one of the characters is involved in drug dealing.

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: And the other one where a woman is setting her husband up to be murdered.

ROTHMAN: Yes. That woman was played by the actress Mary Beth Hughes, who was an actress who made a lot of films in the late thirties and forties.

COLLINGS: Oh! That's interesting. And what were your thoughts about those subplots? Why did you decide to have subplots of that type in the film? And they are both fairly shady kinds of situations.

ROTHMAN: Well, because I wanted to have Honey have all sorts of strange job offers before she finally accepted what was another strange job offer, to sit and discuss life in the food-littered car of an eccentric rich man.

COLLINGS: Okay, so this is after she has put an ad in the paper saying she's willing to do anything.

ROTHMAN: For money.

COLLINGS: For money.

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: Right.

ROTHMAN: And that's one of the invitations she has to do something for money. And she discovers, of course, her limits.

COLLINGS: Okay. And what about the character who is working in the club? Her roommate. I'm just kind of curious as to why you chose to have the strip scene in there, and to have the character of the stripper and to include the strip scene in the film. Were you sort of required to have a scene like that or did that scene have some kind of special significance for you?

ROTHMAN: Well, actually, there were two strip scenes in the film. There was one by the professional stripper.

COLLINGS: Oh, and then the one by the roommate herself. Yes.

ROTHMAN: Which was so self conscious and anxious. Was I required to have strip scenes?

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: No, but you know, I had to have nudity in my films and it got tiresome having to do it with two characters in bed making love. You notice I didn't really have that.

COLLINGS: No. That's not in the film, no.

ROTHMAN: And so I decided one way to do it was to have a stripper, which would not require total nudity and would have the addition of having some dancing and music. You know, I could make it very glamorous and reasonably entertaining, I hoped. Also then I could take advantage of having a strip scene in which there was a dramatic narrative going on with my character, where she first was seen by the man she would eventually have the love affair with and I could make it rather ironic, in the

sense that first of all she was very awkward in it and very embarrassing and he was very unimpressed with her, and when her employer asked him what he thought of her his comment was, “She’s not the type to be doing that.” [mutual laughter] So I thought that was also rather— It would be rather amusing and a little ironic.

COLLINGS: One thing I really liked about the strip scene with the professional stripper was the way she talks later about how while she was doing her act she thought of a great new way to arrange her patio furniture, and I thought that was a really interesting way of bracketing the spectacle that she represented. Had you advertised specifically for a professional burlesque performer?

ROTHMAN: No, actually, I had not, and I would not have used one, because I needed someone to do lines in the first place, and secondly because most of them—the women who did that that I saw, and I did go to a number of strip clubs to see them—looked too hard and they were too old. They would have been all wrong.

COLLINGS: Really? In what way?

ROTHMAN: In the way they looked. Basically the way they looked. I mean, they were very— I don’t know how to put this. They were rather formidable looking people.

COLLINGS: That’s interesting.

ROTHMAN: So I saw some actresses who were willing to do this and one of the ones I saw was Cassandra Peterson. And Cassandra had never been a stripper, but she had worked as a showgirl in Las Vegas for a number of years and she had worked with

strippers and she knew how to dance and do showgirl routines. She and I both went and watched strippers in some strip clubs and we discussed what would be the appropriate moves that would not be too ugly, very frankly, because a lot of the moves strippers do, if you saw them on film you'd find them quite ugly. I wanted her to do—and she wanted to do—something graceful and sexy, not ugly and distorted looking. So we jointly choreographed a routine for her and it was, I think, quite graceful.

COLLINGS: It has a classical sort of feeling to it.

ROTHMAN: Yeah. And it's fun. I mean you feel that she's having fun and you— A number of people who saw it commented to me that although they didn't watch strippers, and in some cases had never watched one, they were not in any way taken aback by it or put off by it. They found it quite attractive.

COLLINGS: She seems to be in control of the situation.

ROTHMAN: Yes. Exactly. So I was very fortunate to find Cassandra and I think she did a very good job and we kept it within the bounds of being a graceful performance. She removes her clothes—she doesn't remove all of them, she wears a G-string and pasties at the end. Cassandra had a spectacular figure, and she does it like a dancer, with a very graceful but good natured ebullience. A smiling, kind of friendly, dancer.

COLLINGS: Right. She's sort of friendly about it.

ROTHMAN: She's very friendly about it and she doesn't put off the audience. So that's how I found her.

COLLINGS: Yeah. She worked out well in that way. But you were planning to have

a night club, a situation where one of the characters worked in a night club and there was the question of possibly working as a stripper.

ROTHMAN: Yes, the character who is a law student. She takes a job in a night club working as a cocktail waitress, but the owner offers her more money if she will become a stripper. She tries it, but fails because she is too clumsy and embarrassed; so the club owner, who knows she is bright and ambitious, offers to let her manage the club instead, while he takes a short vacation.

COLLINGS: Right. So she actually becomes the manager.

ROTHMAN: Right. The manager. And so she actually has quite a career advancement during the course of the story, although it's certainly not the career she wants. But she's obviously a person who gives promise of having a bright future.

COLLINGS: Yeah. She definitely does. And you have Solomon Sturges in the film again. [laughs]

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: Yes. He's really great. Now the reason why I asked you about the stripper scene was because I wondered if you had built that particular setting around that character because you knew of her and you knew that she would be in the film. But instead you—

ROTHMAN: You mean Cassandra?

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: Oh, no.

COLLINGS: No. Okay.

ROTHMAN: I had the good fortune to have her come in the door.

COLLINGS: Yeah, because that was really perfect casting for that.

ROTHMAN: It was her first acting role too, by the way. She did, after that, join an improvisational troupe that is very well known here in Los Angeles, the Groundlings. Then she went on to do, I think, a few more roles before she became the hostess of a television show in which she played a character named Elvira, who was a kind of vampire or at least a dark lady, and who introduced horror films and wore a very tight black satin gown with a very deep décolletage and very heavy make up, and she had a long career as Elvira.

COLLINGS: Yes, I've seen her as Elvira.

ROTHMAN: Now eventually they made a film starring her, one film [*Elvira, Mistress of the Dark*, 1988].

COLLINGS: As Elvira.

ROTHMAN: Mmm-hmm.

COLLINGS: Oh, I didn't know that.

ROTHMAN: Yeah, a number of years ago.

COLLINGS: Okay. In terms of the main characters of this film and of some of your other films— Did you identify with any of the characters, personally identify with any of the main characters of your films? Honey, for example, or any of the others?

ROTHMAN: In order to write any character I have to be able to identify with them,

and in order to direct a film and conceive of how to work to reveal who that character is, I have to become that character. So I identify with every single character—

COLLINGS: [laughs] Every single one.

ROTHMAN: —that has ever been in any of my films.

COLLINGS: Any one more than the others?

ROTHMAN: No, I can't say I have identified with any one more than the other. I can say that there are some that I am fonder of than others but they are not necessarily the nicest ones. [laughs]

COLLINGS: Well, which are the ones that you are fondest of?

ROTHMAN: Well, in *The Student Nurses* I really liked the nurse Phred, who is of the four student nurses, and probably the least admirable. But the actress [Karen Carlson] who played her did such a good job with her, made her so fiery and so certain of everything, that I kind of liked her cold power. You know what I mean?

COLLINGS: Yes.

ROTHMAN: And I would say that in *The Working Girls* I kind of liked them all. [mutual laughter] I really did. I liked all three of them.

COLLINGS: Yeah. I think *The Working Girls* is a very nice film. They all are, but that one in particular seems to be grappling with a number of important questions and leaving a lot of questions unanswered.

ROTHMAN: Thank you for noticing that. I happen to agree with you. I think it's my most mature work. It was my last and I think it's my most mature.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Interesting too that you should say that it was the lowest budget, so it just goes to show how these things don't always go hand in hand. What were the budgets of all of the five films that we have talked about? Comparatively?

ROTHMAN: Well, as best I can remember, I think *The Student Nurses* was about $140,000, *The Velvet Vampire* was about $165,000. *Terminal Island*, I believe, to the best of my knowledge, was around $250,000. Maybe a little less, but between $240,000 and $250,000 for sure. And *The Working Girls* was, as I said, $103,000.

COLLINGS: And when you were finished with *The Working Girls*, did you feel that you had said everything that you wanted to say in the film? I mean, because we sort of mentioned that there were sort of questions unanswered. Is that an important part of it for you?

ROTHMAN: Well, you know, I think that in an interesting dramatic work there are always unanswered questions. That's part of how you provoke people to want more and think about what you've done. You don't want to answer every question. What was your question? [laughs]

COLLINGS: Well, I guess it was just— When you finished *The Working Girls* did you feel that by then you had sort of said everything that you had wanted to say in the film? Or—?

ROTHMAN: Oh, I don't think I have ever, ever finished a film where I felt that way. I don't think I ever would. I think that everything I've ever done in my life I view as a work in progress. I ran out money, I ran out of time, I ran out of film. [mutual

laughter] It will always be a work in progress, too.

COLLINGS: Because in the way that the film ends you were sort of saying that she would go on to do better things after the point in time where the film ends.

ROTHMAN: Or at least try to.

COLLINGS: Or try to, yeah. It gives the end of the film a very open-ended feeling and I was wondering if you were satisfied with that.

ROTHMAN: I love open-ended films.

COLLINGS: Yeah.

ROTHMAN: I mean, we all live in open ends until it's the end. [laughs] Right?

COLLINGS: Yes.

ROTHMAN: We're all works in progress until the progress comes to a stop.

COLLINGS: Yes. The film has a lot of people helping each other, which is a nice thing about this one.

ROTHMAN: Well, that's true in *The Student Nurses* too. It's also true in *Terminal Island*. And it's true in *Group Marriage*.

COLLINGS: Yeah, that is something that is nice about all of them actually, that spirit of sort of helping each other along. What were your plans for the future at the time that you finished *The Working Girls*?

ROTHMAN: Well, I had hoped to be able to see if I could not make films that were more ambitious.

COLLINGS: You were planning to leave Dimension at that time? Or not?

ROTHMAN: No. When I finished it I wasn't. I think I told you how we left Dimension.

COLLINGS: Uh-huh.

ROTHMAN: But shortly after that we were more or less edged out of Dimension, and I hoped that I could find some work in television or perhaps I could get someone's attention at a studio who would let me make a film, and in fact that happened. I found a man who had a deal with American International Pictures. My agents [Craig Rumar and Larry Kubik] sent me to him. He was a man, I guess in his early sixties. He had been working in the film industry a long time. He saw my work, he liked it, and he hired me to write a screenplay with the intention of my directing it and he producing it as one of his pictures—or, excuse me, executive producing it. The producer was going to be the son, Louis [S.] Arkoff, of the owner [Samuel Z. Arkoff] of American International. I wrote a draft and I didn't hear anything for several months. My agent couldn't get an answer out of them and it turned out that there had been some decisions made that I was not privy to and this man had left American International. His deal there had been terminated and Louis was no longer interested in going on with this project and so that was the end.

And after that I could not find work. I could not find work in television. I had friends who worked in television, who tried to help me talk to people producing television shows. I got new agents, the Shapiro-Lichtman Agency, who tried, but nobody was interested in meeting me. I did get feedback from some sources that—

I'm not saying this was true of everybody—because in most cases I didn't get any feedback, no one was interested in meeting me. But I did [get feedback from] a couple of places that they weren't interested in having a woman work as a director. I did get several approaches by people making R or X rated films, exploitation films, or worse, wanting to know if I would be interested in directing them. Mainly they were just soft core pornography that they were interested in making. I had no interest in that. I was offended to even be approached. And basically that was it. I could not find work. I tried for nine years.

COLLINGS: Wow. That's a long time.

ROTHMAN: And then basically I stopped trying, because, you know, I felt it was unrealistic.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Did you have any sort of foreshadowing of this at the time that you were making *The Working Girls*, with the looking for work theme?

ROTHMAN: No.

COLLINGS: No.

ROTHMAN: No. I was not very good at what is called networking. I really didn't know how to go about it. There was another woman who has had a career, a successful career, as a director, who was just getting started then and she was much better than I was at doing that.

But my agents did show people my films and in some cases people wouldn't even look at them, or they would leave the prints for them to look at and they wouldn't

like them. My husband and I tried writing a screenplay based on a novel by Philip [K.] Dick called *The Man in the High Castle*. We got an option on it. In fact, we renewed the option for several years. We wrote a screenplay that was very well received by a number of literary agents and it was well received over at CAA [Creative Artists Agency], but the agent who showed it to the clients at CAA could not get any of them interested then. And, you know, we spent a lot of time and effort. It was a highly imaginative job. I mean that was the response we got from literary agents who read it. They liked it but it went nowhere. And then, you know, the time came to make a living.

COLLINGS: So what did you choose to do?

ROTHMAN: Oh, well, you know, I'd really rather not discuss this if you don't mind.

COLLINGS: Oh, okay. No, that's quite all right.

ROTHMAN: I mean it's not that it was anything to be ashamed of. That's sort of the end of my life as a filmmaker.

COLLINGS: Oh, no, I thought— I didn't know if you meant, you know, like producing or something.

ROTHMAN: I did sell a couple of options and a screenplay or two. Actually I sold a screenplay and I sold several options, but that was it.

COLLINGS: And how old were you at this time when you were attempting to find other directing jobs?

ROTHMAN: I was in my late thirties. I think from the age of thirty-eight to forty-

seven I tried.

COLLINGS: Because you certainly hear a lot about ageism in the Hollywood industry as well.

ROTHMAN: Well, nobody really knew my age, though. I don't think it was a factor. And also I was pretty youthful looking.

COLLINGS: Yeah. But, you know, you sort of see reports about people being fired by bosses who are twenty-three years old and what not. [mutual laughter]

ROTHMAN: Oh, it's true. Yes. But when I was getting started it was just the opposite. It was the gerontocracy, and they didn't want young people and you could only get the most menial of jobs. And you could only get that if you had a relative who worked in the industry already. So the world has completely been turned upside down in that respect.

COLLINGS: Okay. You have shown your films a lot at film studies kinds of situations?

ROTHMAN: No. I haven't a lot. Over the years my films have been shown sometimes by film teachers to their students at universities and colleges. I have on occasion been invited when my films were shown, but I wouldn't say it's been a lot.

COLLINGS: Okay. All right. And what kinds of comments and questions would people direct to you on those occasions?

ROTHMAN: I really have had very few question and answer periods. I don't really recall the questions but I do recall that sometimes they were very insulting.

COLLINGS: Oh, really?

ROTHMAN: Yes, and stupid. [mutual laughter]

COLLINGS: In what way?

ROTHMAN: Well, I mean, people saying things like "I don't like your film." [laughs]

COLLINGS: In film studies situations?

ROTHMAN: No, not in film studies situations.

COLLINGS: In what kinds of situations?

ROTHMAN: Well, where the film was shown publicly.

COLLINGS: Yeah, yeah. Okay. Did you say your films have been shown in Germany?

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: And what kind— Did you say that you had traveled to Germany?

ROTHMAN: Yes.

COLLINGS: What kinds of responses did audiences there share with you?

ROTHMAN: I only went to Cologne, and the responses seemed positive. They were positive.

I only did a question and answer a couple of times and I found it to be very distasteful and so I stopped doing that. I introduce my film— I'm not talking about in Germany. I'm just talking in general. I'll introduce my films now and I'll talk a little bit about them, but I will not do questions and answers any more.

COLLINGS: I see. This is sort of changing the subject, but one of the interviews that—

ROTHMAN: Excuse me. Forgive me, I will do it with a moderator. I mean, I'll answer the questions of a moderator or someone conducting a symposium. I will, you know, if I'm being interviewed by critics or historians or something like that. But I won't do it with a general audience.

COLLINGS: Yeah. Because you had some bad experiences?

ROTHMAN: Yeah, and because the questions generally are very dumb. [mutual laughter] To be very frank. They're, you know— "How much did this film cost?"

COLLINGS: Yeah. "What lens did you use?" or something.

ROTHMAN: What does it matter how much the film cost?

COLLINGS: One of the interviews that I read with you suggested that you liked the latitude of the B movie because it gave you the scope to explore social themes.

ROTHMAN: It gave me the scope to explore different genres of films. I mean, I never made the same film twice, which was wonderful. You know, people have whole careers based on making one kind of film.

COLLINGS: Right, over and over again.

ROTHMAN: And I was able to use different visual styles. It was very nice from that standpoint.

COLLINGS: We talked a little bit about the films that inspired you. Were there films that you were seeing as you were working that you particularly enjoyed? Or were you

just too busy to go to the movies? [mutual laughter]

ROTHMAN: No, I went to see films all the time, but I don't remember exactly which films came out which years when I was making my films. I certainly remember the films that inspired me to want to make films and that I admired. But what I saw in a particular year that I liked while I was making films, not really, no.

COLLINGS: Yeah. And in terms of a film community, where there any particular people that you were talking about ideas with? Or how were you sort of generating your thinking about what kinds of scripts you were interested in making?

ROTHMAN: I really had very few friends who worked in the film industry. My closest friend was the story editor at New World Pictures when I was there and she's remained my closest friend through life. Her name is Frances Doel. I have a few other friends who were or are screenwriters, but other than that, I really don't have any friends in the film industry.

COLLINGS: All right. And I guess one other little sort of question. Pretend that film had never been invented. What medium do you think that you would have chosen to express some of the ideas that you put into those films?

ROTHMAN: I think that's an excellent question. My compliments. [mutual laughter]

COLLINGS: Thank you.

ROTHMAN: Well, I come from a family that has a natural affinity for drawing and painting. That's on one side, my mother's side. On my father's side, my father was a

very good writer and I think I probably would have been a novelist. Or possibly I would have done something in the visual arts. I don't know why.

COLLINGS: Yeah. I could see something like some of the etchings that you showed me, because they've got the visual dimension and also some social themes as well.

ROTHMAN: That's what I think I would have done probably.

COLLINGS: Okay. [tape recorder off]

ROTHMAN: I suppose what I'd like to say in summary is that I never set out to be an exploitation filmmaker. I didn't even realize that what I was making was exploitation films until a reviewer described *The Student Nurses* as an exploitation film. I thought I was just making low budget pictures, because that's what I had always heard people referring to them as being. I had hoped that I might make art films or commercial films. I would have liked to have been another Ingmar Bergman. So would many other people, obviously. [mutual laughter] Things did not turn out the way I had hoped they would, but I am gratified that so many years after I made these films, there remains an interest in them amongst some film historians and critics, and that they see in them interesting content and visual interest, as well, that merits attention and merits being remembered.

I don't know how long they'll be remembered, how long they'll last. The prints themselves have either disappeared or are badly faded now. However, I am aware that at least the negatives of *The Student Nurses* and *The Velvet Vampire* are in good condition and I hope that whoever has the negatives of the other three films has

taken reasonably good care of them, so that if there were any curiosity they could be restored as film or perhaps some day put on DVD. However, I'm very aware that film is a very transitory medium and that there are a lot of people, as time goes on, who will be producing works and that I probably will sink into oblivion [laughs] , like most of us do.

COLLINGS: Well, I think that your films actually have a very unique place and I think it's ironic that you were required, as you say, to have the pretty girls in the bikinis and what have you, because it's almost as if, you know, if you had that you could do whatever else you wanted to do. And so, sort of in between the lines of these required aspects of the films, I think that you did a really nice job of creating almost like subjective documentaries of the years in which the films were made, and you have a really wonderful view of the questions and the emotions and the ambitions of women of that period, and the films are well made and aesthetically pleasing and so one is able to follow the emotional life of these women, and they are very effective in that regard.

ROTHMAN: Well, I hope we can follow their intellectual life too. [mutual laughter]

COLLINGS: Yes, yes. So I congratulate you.

ROTHMAN: Well, thank you. I often think of what I could have done if I had had more resources and opportunities.

COLLINGS: Absolutely.

ROTHMAN: And I deeply regret that I never had them.

COLLINGS: I regret that too.

TAPE NUMBER: IX, SIDE ONE

MARCH 18, 2002

ROTHMAN: But what you just described about what you like about my films is what makes a filmmaker an auteur.

COLLINGS: Right. Exactly.

ROTHMAN: You have essentially described it. And thank you for thinking I'm an auteur. That's all I was going to say.

INDEX

Aleichem, Scholem, 89
An American in Paris (film), 13
Anderson, Carl, 19
Anderson, Dorothy, 19
Arkoff, Louis S., 229
Arkoff, Samuel Z., 229
Babysitter, The (film), 86
Bad and the Beautiful, The (film), 29
Bakeman Street School, 10
Barnett, James, 228–29, 186
Beach Ball (film), 78
Bergman, Ingmar, 47, 60, 236
Big Doll House, The (film), 128, 181
Blass, Bill, 88
Blood Bath (film), 76–78
Bridges, Lloyd, 48
Briggs, Joe Bob, 127
Carlson, Karen, 226
Carnegie, Hattie, 88
Cocteau, Jean, 132, 135
Cook, Pam, 104–6
Coppola, Francis, Ford, 75
Corman, Julie, 75
Corman, Roger, 73–86, 90, 92, 97–102, 127–28, 145–46, 149, 155
Cort, Bud, 84
Country Joe and the Fish (musical group), 83
de Hirsch, Baron Maurice, 52
Dick, Philip K., 231
Dimension Pictures, 150–59, 208, 228–29
Doberman Gang, The (film), 152, 156
Doel, Frances, 99, 102, 235
Eccles, Aimée, 171
Ehlers, Alice, 73
Elvira, Mistress of the Dark (film), 225
Feydeau, Georges, 159
Fox, Terry Curtis, 106–7
Franju, Georges, 132
Future Shock (book), 161
Gas-s-s-s (film), 83–85, 92
Geber, Rebecca (grandmother), 1, 2, 55, 56
Gershfield, Shandel (mother), 1–10, 12–14, 16–20, 23, 24, 26–28, 30, 33–38, 43, 46, 50–57, 71, 89, 235
Gholson, Jeb, 48–49, 58–59
Goddard, Robert Hutchings, 16
Groffman, Erving, 42
Group Marriage (film), 59, 106, 152, 153, 156, 159–79, 206, 207, 213, 228
Hansen, Edith, 87–88
Harrington, Curtis, 78
Hartman, Ena, 204
Henri, Robert, 52
Hill, Jack, 76, 77
Hirschfeld, Yussel (grandfather), 3–4, 50–51, 57–58
Hitchhikers, The (film), 152, 153
Hoffman, Dustin, 194
Hotel Paradiso (play), 59, 159
Howard, Mary, 26
Hughes, Howard, 211
Hughes, Mary Beth, 220
Intruder, The (film), 79
It's a Bikini World (film), 81, 93
Jules, Maurice. *See* Yale Udoff
Kahana, Eva Gershfield (aunt), 51–54, 57–58, 87–89
Kantor, Bernard R., 63–65, 74
Katz, Shifra (grandmother), 3, 50, 51, 57–58
Kennedy, Sarah, 212
Knight, Arthur, 69

Koester, John, 67
Kubik, Larry, 229
Kubrick, Stanley, 47
Lacambre, Daniel, 144
Leigh, Barbara, 126, 148
Lippe, Richard, 106
Loring, Eugene, 12
Lubitsch, Ernst, 160
Man in the High Castle, The (book), 231
Marsh, Reginald, 53
Maugham, W. Somerset, 28
McQueen, Steve, 194
Meet Me in St. Louis (film), 29
Melnitz, William W., 62–63
Mencken, H.L., 15
Miles, Sherry, 139
Muni, Paul, 27
Murphy, Art, 106
New World Pictures, 79, 82, 97–101, 150, 179, 235
North Hollywood High School, 10, 21
North Hollywood Junior High School, 10
Papillon (film), 194
Parsons, Talcott, 42
Paths of Glory (film), 47
Peterson, Cassandra, 222–25
Picture of Dorian Gray, The (film), 29
Pink Floyd (musical group), 157–58
Pulitzer, Sam, 150
Razor's Edge, The (film), 29
Reig, Ben, 88
Rosenbaum, Henry, 186
Rothman, Avrum, 54–56
Rothman, Avrum (grandfather), 1, 2
Rothman, Theodore (father), 1–10, 12–20, 23, 24, 26–28, 30–38, 43, 46, 54–56, 71, 235
Rumar, Craig, 229
Sanger, Margaret, 3, 56
Scaasi, 88
Sea Hunt (television show), 48
Sessa, Alex, 67–68
Seventh Seal, The (film), 47, 59–60, 124
Sin of Adam and Eve, The (film), 152
Single Girls, The (film), 152, 153
Skirball, Jack, 19
Spencer, Don, 100, 128
Student Nurses, The (film), 79–80, 82, 85–86, 90, 93, 97–112, 115–27, 131, 143, 144, 147–49, 153, 163, 177–79, 208, 214–15, 226–28, 236
Sturges, Preston, 169, 170
Sturges, Solomon, 169–71, 224
Swartz, Charles S. (husband), 58, 65–69, 83–85, 93–100, 102, 115, 127–29, 143, 144, 150, 152, 154, 156–58, 179, 182, 185–86, 231
Sweet Sugar (film), 152
Systems Development Corporation, 11, 46–48, 61–62, 64
Terminal Island (film), 106, 126, 178–207, 227, 228
Thomas, Theodore, 27
Through the Looking Glass (film). *See The Velvet Vampire*,
Toffler, Alvin, 161
Tomashevsky, Bessie, 27
Tomashevsky, Boris, 27
Track of the Vampire (film). *See Blood Bath*,
Trigère, Pauline, 88
Udoff, Yale, 129, 143
Ulzana's Raid (film), 171
University High School, 11, 26, 30
University of California: Berkeley, 11, 37, 39, 40, 42–45; Los Angeles, 9, 11, 26–28, 36–37, 39, 49, 62, 63, 72, 75, 76, 99
University of Southern California, 27, 49, 62–67, 69–70, 72–75

Velvet Vampire, The (film), 106, 128–45, 153, 177, 178, 227, 236
Vereen, Ben, 84
Weinrib, Len, 81
Williams, William Carlos, 16–17
Wood, Robin, 106
Woolner, Betty, 142, 151
Woolner, Lawrence, 97, 142, 150, 151, 157–58, 161, 179
Working Girls, The (film), 170, 177–79, 206, 208–28, 230
Yarnall, Celeste, 138