

Christine Collins: Oral History Transcription

Name of interviewee(s):

Christine Collins

Reasons why chosen for an oral history: As a dubbing mixer for Armand and Michaela Denis, Christine worked on many of the early pioneering On Safari travelogue programmes for the BBC.

Name of interviewer:

Martyn Harries

Reasons why interviewer chosen:

Sound engineer with an interest in the history of his profession

Name of cameraman:

Alan Griffiths

Date of interview:

17/03/2010

Place of interview:

Enfield, London, UK

Length of interview:

1 hour

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1. The early years

Int: Christine, hi, could you first start by introducing yourself by name, telling us where you are and date would be good actually for the record, and just what your role was within filmmaking?

CC: My name is Christine Collins and today March 17th, 2010 and we're in Enfield, North London.

Int: What role did you have within filmmaking?

CC: Well, I've only had two jobs in my whole life, I'm retired now of course, and it was always concerned with the sound and soundtracks and things like that for films. The first 11 years were for Armand and Michaela Denis and the rest was for Gateway Film Productions, working more as a sound recordist and a dubbing editor on a variety of programmes and films for commercials and commercial enterprises and so on.

Int: How did you get into sound in the first place? What was your route in?

CC: Well, I lived in the same road as a man called David Garner who we always knew had something to do with Armand and Michaela Denis in the early days. They must have been very, very early because I'm very, very old and it was about 1957. He used to say have you seen the programme and I used to say yes. He said what was I going to do when I left school and I said, well, I didn't want to go into a bank or an insurance company, something more interesting than that, photography or something like that. So he said, well, we need a junior, come up and see if you like us and as it was only about two miles up the road from where I lived I thought this sounds good, so I went up there like a shot.

It was great. It was obviously different from what I thought a bank would be and it was sort of glamorous and exciting although the location wasn't particularly glamorous. So they took me on and I swept the floor and made the tea and they showed me how to lace up a projector and I'm going, what? They said just like this and round there and round there and up there, got that, no.

It was a very, very friendly group of people. There were only about, I don't know, four or five of us, something like that. David Garner was a very laid back sort of man, he was a cross between Gordon Brown and Tony Hancock really, he looked a bit like that. He wasn't bothered that you were a girl or anything. He said I'm going to put new bushes in the projector today, you can come and learn how to do it. So I did learn how to dismantle a 16 millimetre projector, I couldn't do it today, but I did manage to learn that. Then gradually you got given one of the jobs in the dubbing process which, of course, was live, live dubbing in real time, put it that way. If you made a mistake, well, we all went back to the beginning, you see, so we had a swear box and all sorts of things.

So that's how I just fell into it. Most of it to start with was music in their early films.

Int: So very few tracks to start with then, just a music track?

CC: Yes, music straight off disks, off twin turntables which then had to feed into a mixer and so obviously you had to mix from one to the other. So we used to change jobs, I sometimes used to drop the records but when I got put onto the mixer I rather liked it. I got a feel for that sort of thing. Then we would add the odd sound effect in the very early days, and I'm talking very early, mainly birds, water and jeep which were in the film. So that's how I got there. Then eventually somebody left and there were less of us and it went on like that.

Int: I love the way that when you're describing how you were mixing you were obviously describing rotary pots there.

CC: They were I'm afraid, yes.



Int: So not **flat faders** or even **quadrants**?

CC: No, well, they probably weren't invented even then.

Int: No, probably not.

CC: It was only a four way mixer. It was a mixer with the big black pots on which in a way was rather nice, there was a sort of nice feel to it.

Int: There is a difference, isn't there? There's a different feel to mixing on rotaries.

CC: Yes, because pushing and pulling is not quite the same as turning really but then I'm going to sound ancient now. I don't want to get maudlin about it.

Int: Well, you and me both. I actually did manage to work on a rotary pot once. So when did you feel that it developed from birds, water and jeep? When did you start adding those tracks, was it Armand's interest in sound?

CC: Well, he had a portable recorder, a quarter inch recorder, an EMI one, the dark green leather job which I think BBC Radio used to take out for interviews, very heavy although it was called portable. So he had one of those but, of course, they didn't have a blimped camera so they didn't record things in **sync** or anything. So he would just record anything that you might need. So the sound of flamingos: you might get five minutes of flamingos at Lake Naivasha or the dogs barking or mongooses, whatever was needed, and he would send those over to us and we would insert them.

So we did change from the music, total music, which I think was the very early stuff which I wasn't involved in at all, and, of course, music copyright clearance was very expensive. To do a 25 minute programme of music copyright was very expensive and it was more natural obviously to drift into effects.

Int: I wondered if Armand and Michaela at the time were more interested in sound than some of the others because I believe that Armand had actually developed an **automatic gain control** for a radio once?

CC: He had apparently in about the 20s or 30s or something. He was in America, I think he was working for Eastman Kodak Rochester Company. He invented what they called automatic volume control which is not automatic volume control but it's the pot really because apparently years and years and years ago steam radios, you turned them on and you turned them off, one volume. So this was quite an invention really but he sold the invention and with the money he went off and made a film in Bali.

Int: So really that invention funded what came after?

CC: Yes. He was always interested in inventing things and using new equipment I think, and later on he



adapted this EMI recorder to take a pulse from the camera which obviously is what was used later on and so forth. It was probably in use anyway but he adapted what he'd got so he was clever enough to do that.

*Int: So he's now recording with a **sync pulse** so he can record some sync sound.*

CC: Well, yes, but not in the field you see. I mean they used to do these infamous introductions and so forth which obviously were done at their home in Nairobi, filmed by Des Bartlett. We only ever heard the sound of it, obviously we saw their faces but they were in a room and Des was the other side of a glass door because he didn't have this blimped camera you see, filming through. So that was filmed obviously in sync and Armand used to have glasses without glass in. Then if Michaela made a mistake which she very often did Des would have to come in. All we heard was the door went squeak, squeak and in he comes.

So they used that for that and then they made a film later on of Dr Louis Leakey who discovered a skull in Olduvai Gorge in Kenya. So they were able to actually interview him in sync and that was the first time Armand had ever used it. He wasn't the first to use it obviously, it was being used by other people but in his world that was the first time he'd used that.

Int: In terms of what you would get back in the cutting rooms, how much sound would come back from Armand?

CC: Well, not a lot really. I mean these odd bits of sound effects and, of course, their roll of voiceover. Now Armand would write the script for the whole programme. He would record the whole programme, then he would take a pen and he'd ring round bits for Michaela to say so there was this sort of toing and froing but if she didn't manage to say it very well then we used him, you see.

Int: So it wasn't a natural two-way conversation they recorded at the time, it was quite contrived in that way.

CC: Yes, but then all voiceovers are, aren't they?

Int: Well, quite. How much editing did you have to do on those and how did you play them into the film?

CC: Quite a lot. Armand didn't make too many mistakes but obviously Michaela did and obviously she was recorded on a different roll of tape, so we had to slip her tape in between his and so forth. So quarter inch tape for the uninitiated was then cut. So you used to mark up the sound, run it on a tape recorder and leave it on play/pause so that it went over the head and you could hear the sound approaching, and you could pull it through. Then mark it with yellow Chinagraph and then mark the end of wherever it was you wanted to join it to, and a natural gap. Then put it onto a little what they called a **bib splicer** which was just a little thing that held the two. It got cut at a diagonal so it didn't sound too much, didn't click or anything, then you put a bit of special sticky tape across it, splicing tape, and onto the next one.

Int: Quite different from now.

CC: Occasionally, as Niels Halbertsma seems to remember vividly, I don't know, because we'd end up

with great piles of thrown away tape you see, mainly obviously Armand's bits and whatever, great piles of it. Occasionally you'd cut off an 's' from the last sentence and you'd go, my God, I've cut the 's' off, where is it, is it this bit? You'd spend hours really trying to find this bit.

Int: Fishing about on the floor for the bit you wanted.

CC: But eventually you find or you take an 's' off of something else.

Int: Yes, and if you trod on it you had to iron out the creases.

CC: No, in the film industry you learn not to move your feet.

Int: Yes, what's on the floor might become important.

CC: Well, that's right, yes, especially if the middle falls out of a 16mm split reel. If you've just got the reel of film that's not on a metal reel that has a core in the middle so you've just got like a roll of sticky tape, and sometimes the middle would fall out. You'd think, oh, my God, nobody move.

Int: I've been there with 15 minutes of film up on to a film bay up my arm – yes, I know exactly how you feel. Going back to the gear that you were using, it must have been quite early days of trying to sync up sound to pictures for this type of programme. So how were you managing to do that and how many tapes did you have, how many machines did you have running?

CC: Well, we only had the 16 millimetre projector that would play 16 millimetre, apart from our 16 millimetre recorder but I mean that's of no use. So if we got stuff in sync because it was recorded obviously on quarter inch with a pulse and we'd have it transferred to 16mm in sync, I suppose. I don't quite remember doing that but we must have had it done by somebody or other. It was very, very laborious and we put the picture through the picture gate part of the projector but it wouldn't go through the rest of it, it would go out through the window. Then the magnetic would come off the back wheel without the rewind spring over the magnetic head, so you could mark up where it started. If they didn't do a clap, Armand sometimes did a clap, but if they didn't, well, you just had to look at it and get it. Usually you could tell whether it was out of sync by running it backwards because if they've got a bit of that left over.

Int: Yes, a much better way than going forwards.

CC: Yes.

2. Sound production methods

Int: How long did it take you to put the sound together for each of their half hour films?

CC: I've no idea it's such a long time ago. I don't know, about a week or so I suppose, something like that and in the early days we would record it onto fully coated magnetic, 16mm magnetic ourselves onto a machine called an Excel, a misnomer if ever there was one I'd say. The trouble with the Excel was that it was variable speed so you had to keep this Excel in time with the picture that you were **dubbing** to. So we had a clever way, everybody was sitting there dubbing the film, the projector was outside the room because it was too noisy, it was shone through a glass door. The Excel was at the end and when the lights were out, the light of the projector was just at the back of the **sprocket holes** as they went along, and you fiddled with this speed control, and once you'd got it right at the correct speed then the sprocket holes would appear to stand still.

Int: So you were using the flicker from the projector through the sprockets, yes.

CC: So that would keep that in sync with the projector.

Int: A very mechanical way of doing it.

CC: Very, yes. You spent hours like this and then you go, oh, no, and then we were all back to the beginning again, hours of endless pleasure.

Int: I think some people would be totally amazed that that was how it was done.

CC: I know. I mean it was terribly Heath Robinson. It was probably more Heath Robinson than it could have been done if you know what I mean but that's the way David Garner set it up and that's the way we did it, I didn't know any more. But then later on we used to become very much more professional about the thing and we would go out to a dubbing suite. We would go to a place called Kay Carlton Hill in London and the dubbing room was on the top of a three storey building which was a funny sort of arrangement really. We'd take our quarter inch tapes. We'd got two tape recorders and every other tape had the successive effects on it.

*Int: Yes, **A and B roll**, checker boarded.*

CC: But not in sync but you'd got a start point and you watched the footage counter and you dropped it off. You could get door slams in sync. It was unusual for the boys at Kay's because they used to say here they come but they were ever so good.

Int: What were they more used to doing? What sort of stuff did they do?

CC: Well, they would do commercials I think mostly. They filmed commercials downstairs I think.

Int: So a half hour wildlife documentary was something of a novelty to them?

CC: Well probably, yes. They had these fiendish cue sheets, which because they had this huge desk,



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obviously not rotary. Their cue sheets, they had made long and narrow so it went along the desk. They would make this cue sheet, I didn't do a cue sheet for them. They'd draw these like little boats like you do and show where it was and which tape machine it was coming off of and so on, so they could see it was passing between them.

Int: Yes, the necessary cue sheets to know what to fade up at what point.

CC: Well, that's right.

*Int: Later cue sheets obviously have moved on and now, of course, you get the cue sheet that actually is the picture on your **non-linear** machine but I still think that a cue sheet from a dubbing editor held much more information than you ever get on the screen these days about what's on the tracks.*

CC: Yes, maybe. When I moved on from working for Armand and Michaela I had a four track rock and roll machine which were four tracks onto one and the picture and it all joined together. A terrible machine called a Bomar, I think there was only two in the country. I don't know why I got lumbered with all these machines that never worked very well. So you could only work on four tracks unless you dubbed down to one track and then added that and did some more. So cue sheets were quite complicated because you didn't have the luxury of one track for footsteps only or one track for birds only, you had to kind of mix them together.

Int: Yes, when you've got very few tracks you have to get a bit creative.

CC: Absolutely.

Int: Thinking back to Armand and Michaela's half hour programmes, they made quite a lot of them, didn't they?

CC: They made 105 half hour programmes (1) (2) (3) (4) (5), yes, and I think they made two series a year for the BBC and I think there were seven a series, something like that.

Int: So when you look or think back to the very earliest which were obviously we've said predominantly just music and you look at the 103rd programme, what differences in the soundtrack would you really say there were?

CC: Well, it was much more up-to-date and much more real. I didn't choose the music for the early ones. There were 26 I think it was with music on and then after that we added sound effects and so on. So they got much more sophisticated and, of course, they didn't make all series about Africa, they went to the Far East. We were given plenty of quarter inch tapes then of various things. In Japan it was full of sounds of the instruments playing and geishas and traffic and this sort of thing, so you had much more to work with so it became much more real. But Armand was able to supply more stuff even for the African things.

Int: When he turned up as a producer was he quite rigorous about the soundtracks?

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CC: No. He was never there when we were doing it I wouldn't say. He never got involved, probably he didn't know what we were using, I really don't know. They only came to this country about twice a year and they stayed up in town of course in a hotel. So that he would come out to the office and discuss things and so forth but we wouldn't see them very often. Michaela would come occasionally. One of the rooms in the offices held odds and ends and held some evening dresses, and a trunk full of black socks and bags and things.

Int: Their in town wardrobe.

CC: Well, yes, you see. So either she'd come out because she wanted the green evening dress for a reception or he'd be given a list which he was no good at that sort of thing at all. He was 6' 6" and I'm only 5' 4", most of the ladies there were not 6' 6". So he'd go into the back room to look for a Dior bag or, as I say, black evening socks or whatever it might be and you'd go out with him because although he was very tall he acted as if he was helpless as most men do. So you'd troll out after him and he'd go I can't see it and he's not even lifting anything up. Then if he had to take a handbag back on the Tube or something he'd say put it in a brown envelope but he was a delightful man.

3. The end of On Safari

Int: After you worked on their programmes what did you move onto next? What sort of stuff were you working on?

CC: What, when they retired from the BBC you mean?

Int: Yes.

CC: Well, the office closed of course because it was only open for them, it was created for them. Armand was an American citizen and could not at that time run or own a company in this country, tax or something, I don't know what it was. So whoever was the dubbing editor was the name of the office, it was David Garner or Winifred Dunn or me. So when they retired the purpose of the office disappeared. We'd been busy before, of course, with them whilst they were busy making the programmes because they had an agent called Frank Viner who sold the programmes to many countries around the world. They were very popular in Holland, extremely popular in Holland and Cyprus, Australia, so we were constantly sending a series off abroad. So we had plenty to do in between the two series that they made every year.

Int: Did you ever put the foreign voiceovers on or did you just send tracks out that were minus English?

CC: No, we just sent effects tracks.

Int: What did you move onto after they closed?

CC: So when they retired, two miles away was Gateway Film Productions. Now when Armand and



Michaela apparently first started and was asked by the BBC to show a film, I think, I don't really know the ins and outs, from what I understand is that they had to do an introduction which they were well-known for. Everybody thought Michaela was deaf because she used to just stare at him but she wasn't. So they had to find somewhere to film this and somehow they knew David Garner, I don't know how that arose. He was a cameraman or whatever in town.

Anyway he knew of Gateway Film Productions which was really just round the corner from where he lived in Palmer's Green in North London, and it was run by an old friend of his anyway and they had studios there at the time. So they filmed the inserts there and we used Gateway later on for making the titles and things because the artists used to have to actually paint titles. They used to do beautiful titles on maps and things.

So when they retired I'd known Gateway, of course, and we'd gone there for various things that they'd done for us. I'd done a bit of evening work for them when their dubbing girl had been off sick. So Hugh Baddeley who ran Gateway Film Productions offered me a job so I was never far from home, two miles, that's it.

Int: What sort of stuff were you working on at Gateway Films?

CC: Well, Gateway were partially Gateway Educational Films. They had a vast library of educational films, most of which they'd made which were rented to schools. It was a very much bigger organisation obviously than in Southgate where we were all scrubbing away in a small room. They made films for charity organisations, religious organisations, anyone - Baptists, Methodists, Church of England, Salvation Army, you name it they'd do it which meant sometimes filming abroad for them. Obviously missionary work was quite busy in those days and whilst they were abroad they would perhaps take the advantage of filming the story of coffee or that sort of thing. So they'd ask permission of the company they'd been out there for if they could use it and they said yes, and they'd make the educational films. So there were religious organisations.

Industrial films: they made a film of the big dam in Egypt, the Aswan Dam, that was before I joined them but they filmed the building of that, and they did the building of bridges and that sort of thing, and any films for training and so forth. As it got further on it was training for supermarkets or anybody really.

The girl in the Sound Department left which is why they wanted a replacement so I was put in there. There was a sound recordist there, a Polish sound recordist, but he fell ill so I was sort of thrown in and, of course, there were all these tracks. We laid tracks and everything which I'd never done but I knew the principle of the thing. They'd got at least three directors working on films all the time, films for the National Children's Home or Methodist Mission or whatever it might be. So they would all filter into the Sound Department and I'd have to create the soundtracks there and dub them down, and obviously through the process of neg (negative) tracks and so on to their completed film.

Int: Did you go abroad for sound recording?

CC: I didn't, no.

Int: You missed out on the foreign trips then?

CC: I missed out on the foreign trips, yes. I went to steel foundries and interesting places like that.

Int: Carrying a heavy Nagra?

CC: Yes, we had a Nagra 3 and **rifle mike** and various other mikes and things. If they'd got a big budget then I might be given a **boom** operator, if it was a fictional thing. They made several large films with actors in for schools. They made one about mediaeval society when we filmed down in Winchester Great Hall, so I was allowed a boom operator then.

I remember the very first shoot I was on because obviously I wasn't used to going on shooting. They were making a series of films on Shakespeare which was very good and they made it in St Alban's. They'd got the Abbey Theatre in St Alban's which they'd had done to look like a Shakespearean courtyard theatre. They'd got a sound recordist obviously on the job called Ted Ball who many people may know or have known, as a great joker as most people in the film industry are. He spoke to me on the phone and he said are you coming out to watch the filming so I said, yes, I would like to. So he said, well, bring your cable gloves. I said cable gloves? He said, yes, bring your cable gloves. So I'm thinking I don't know about cable gloves, he's having me on. So that was quite enjoyable really.

I was there a long time and they gradually progressed through video and so on. We used to have voiceover artists come up and so on, you'd meet quite a lot of people.

Int: Did you have your favourite voiceover artists?

CC: Well, we used to use Michael McClain an awful lot and Michael Aspel from time to time, he was nice, and Richard Baker in the early days of course, very straight. Michael Jayston who was a very nice voice actor. We used all sorts of people. Richard Griffiths who's now in Harry Potter, he came up one day, a beautiful voice. We filmed Barbara Cartland at her home in Hertfordshire and that was an experience.

It was quite interesting, it's nothing really to do with sound recording but Hugh Baddeley was the director on that film. Because she lived just in Hertfordshire which is not far from Gateway she said come up and discuss it. So he said I was to go up, token woman I think really, and I think possibly the cameraman or a stills cameraman or something and him. So we went up to Barbara's place, very, very nice and she was very nice. She wasn't in pink, she was in a normal suit and she looked quite normal, a very charming woman. Hugh Baddeley always wore a bow tie and I remember he was sitting on the settee and she dropped down next to him and said something, and you could almost see his bow tie go round.

She was charming and the butler brought in tea and cake. Then, of course, when we filmed it we had to turn up very early in the morning. She wanted a make-up girl that she'd used at the BBC who kept coming down and saying she keeps telling me what to do. So that was filmed. What I do remember is that you're sitting there with your cans on and it was about some elixir of life, and she'd written out the words herself. She said 'I give this talk twice a week and each time it's different' so we thought that's nice. So she was saying about things, you are what you eat, and she said the inevitable line: 'what can you and I, the ordinary housewife, do about this?' She's standing there in an ermine cape and a long pink evening dress surrounded by flowers.

Int: The very ordinary housewife.

CC: Absolutely, yes, but she was very nice.

Int: I believe you're still involved with filmmaking?

CC: Yes, I do it as a hobby. I always have done which is different because you have to do every job not just the one. So your success is neither here nor there really but I just like it. I just like the medium of communicating visually and audibly obviously. So I started on **standard 8mm, super 8mm, Hi 8 video** and mini DV (digital video) now of course.

Int: What sort of films do you enjoy making?

CC: Well, they're mostly sort of documentaries. I belong to a society and there are cine/video societies all over the country, and they make fictional films as well, of course, story films and comedies and that sort of thing as well as documentary. You name it, they make it, films to records, everything. So I have been making the odd fictional film with people that are available, so I may do the direction or I may do the camera and the direction or just the camera or whatever.

Int: You must be a great asset with all your past experience, they're very lucky.

CC: Well, possibly. It's lighting I can never get the hang of.

4. Armand and Michaela

Int: So, Christine, where do you think Armand and Michaela's programmes fitted in to what was around at the time? How did you think they affected what came after?

CC: Well, quite a lot I think because they were around right at the beginning. As I say, I wasn't working there obviously then, but I think Peter Scott had one programme on the television and then Armand got asked to show a portion of a film that he'd made commercially I think. So it was very, very early on and there was only one television station to watch and it was in black and white. All Armand's films were photographed in colour so they were ready when it went to colour. Holland took colour first. They together with David Attenborough's *Zoo Quest* (6) and so on, and even Johnny Morris (7), it was unusual stuff for the audiences to see because they'd only ever seen animals in zoos maybe or on the big cinema screens.

Int: Was there anything in the cinema at that time, any documentary?

CC: I've absolutely no idea. It's an awful long time ago. But their approach was a friendly approach. Their programmes were generally divided into chapters so they would either have two or three or four chapters within the programme. So there would be sort of a serious chapter you might say and there was always a chapter about their pets.

Int: Did they have a lot of pets?

CC: Well, at one time they had 200 at their home but in the early days I suppose not but Michaela always had a pet mongoose called Minnie. They had a pet baboon called Gilbert, named after Gilbert Harding in those days. So they always showed that and they were always showing them feeding baby animals but we had to make the sound.

Int: I was going to say, did you do Foley sounds for those?

CC: Yes, we did. I found a stick of rhubarb and a pair of pliers was about the best thing. It was unusual for people to see these things, that everything came alive. I mean television was newish in those days really and people were getting a TV in their lounges and so on.

Int: It was still something to sit round as a family, wasn't it?

CC: That's right. So all of a sudden these animals were shown in the wild. I mean they showed just about everything which you see a lot of now but they showed them driving through the bush and coming across giraffe and elephants, baby elephants, rhinos, buffalo. So people got to know everything and also with the pets as well there was this friendly approach, and they had a different approach than wildlife films are nowadays, a sort of family approach.

Int: Your working environment, when you were working on these films was it a happy crew?

CC: Yes of course, it wasn't terribly arduous. We were obviously very busy when the series had to be put together but the rest of the time was made up of sending the films off abroad and so forth but it was a fairly easy time.

Int: Plenty of time to socialise together?

CC: No, not really. No, I don't think so because I was obviously much younger than the other people. I mean we'd seen enough of each other during the day but we'd go along to the local cake shop for an 'Armand' slice! But that was about it really. It was an interesting time, very interesting time and they were a charming couple. Michaela was very vivacious. We were on the first and second floors above a shop. I mean the people of Southgate didn't really know what was happening at all.

So they would come out and see us occasionally as I said before. If we weren't that busy we would post somebody to look out the window because we could see Southgate Tube Station exit from our window. So someone was on the lookout for them to come out. So you used to be able to see. Crowds of people would come out and you'd think, well, there's a tube in but they weren't there. Then all of sudden you'd see this very, very tall man. Armand used to stoop slightly and shuffle, never picked his feet up very well. Michaela, of course, he was walking very slowly but she was walking very fast to keep up with him.

We'd say they're here so we'd all go to our posts, someone's typing and someone's rewinding a film. As soon as the downstairs door went of course you'd hear Michaela, she'd go 'hello, everybody'. You'd think, oh, gosh, here she is. So she'd waft in and Armand would come in round the door just to give you a wry smile

because he was a very dry humoured man with a sparkle in his eye and of course she's all over you. You'd get covered in perfume and goodness knows what else but they were a very nice couple.

They would have us occasionally up to see them at the hotel or I might have to go up there and deliver something. They would often acquire an animal whilst they were in London, I was never quite sure why. Armand got I think it was a kinkajou which is a bit like a bush baby type thing and he kept it at the office in a cage. I don't know what he was going to do with it. Anyway, it was in the office whilst he was over and, to give him his due, he used to come out to the office very early in the morning, every morning, to let it run out. So you could turn up at work at 9 o'clock and there's this big notice on the door which says 'it's out' and you think, oh, gosh. You open the door and this thing comes lurching towards you. It ran up the back of where we kept the records, it ran everywhere but it was good fun really.

Then another time I went up to their hotel and they'd got two toucanets running about the hotel floor. The Athenaeum couldn't possibly have known. They'd make a beeline for your ankles these two toucanets and he said it's all right, they won't hurt and I'm thinking you're not standing where I'm standing. It was never a dull moment.

Int: So it was a happy time?

CC: Yes, it was happy, yes, very nice.

Int: Did you ever manage to get abroad to see them in their natural habitat, as it were?

CC: Armand died in 1971 and I think it was 1976 I went for a three week holiday with Michaela at her house just outside Nairobi. We went round to some of the national parks and so forth but there wasn't much to see. There'd been plenty of rains or something so the animals weren't really about very much. So I didn't see an awful lot of animals but it was an interesting time because she was also a medium, a spiritualist. So, say one Sunday, if somebody was having a party in the very nice houses they've all got and she would disappear. She came back and she said that there had been a man at the party who was having trouble with his arm and he couldn't raise it any more than that. She treated him there and then, I didn't see it obviously, and eventually he got his hand right up.

So she was very, very good at that, she was in great demand, especially in Kenya because they believe in that sort of thing. She was really quite good I believe in the healing aspect of it. Even Armand who was a very scientific man suggested that she had a clinic every Monday afternoon and she made it known that she was at home Monday afternoons. People would come in, I'd be sitting in the garden, and what happened I don't know.

She also had a séance once a week and she said you can come if you want, you don't have to come. I thought, well, I think I'd rather be in the room with them than in another room when they were doing it to be quite honest, and I thought it'd be interesting anyway. So I went to this séance. She had a huge dining table. She always had the same people there, her friends and they would have dinner first, so it was a friendly atmosphere. Then they'd clear away dinner and various things were put on the table. She had a tray with some glasses of water, I don't know why, near her and there was a thing in the middle of the table right opposite me. I could have just reached it, the person the other side could have just reached it. There were all sort of experiments. There was a cone of paper, like cartridge paper, made into a cone painted with fluorescent tape round the bottom and round the top.

So when the lights went out there was a very, very low light in the fireplace and then off we went. Michaela would go ugh, she was gone and being in the sound department of course my ears were like this, I could pick up everything. I thought, well, I'm going to listen to everything. Suddenly there was this voice which obviously came from Michaela. They used to record all of them on tape but it was as if you were speaking very, very low but not taking a breath. There's no way she could have kept it up and it was her spirit guide, he was either Indian or North American Indian, I can't remember which. He, the voice, would mention people. He mentioned me and I'm thinking, oh, my goodness, here am I in the middle of Africa but it was interesting.

He said Armand was there and they were going to try something. Well, by this time my eyes had grown accustomed to the dark a bit and you could see this fluorescent marking on this cone. This cone went up in the air, turned round and came down again, and I know it did and the man opposite could not have done it and I didn't hear anybody. I mean you'd hear cartridge paper and you couldn't twist something like that evenly. That happened, something else happened and I think there was a sound of an animal running around the table. I've heard a recording, it didn't happen that day, but I heard a recording where she reckoned that Armand had spilt this water over her because she'd got married again or was going to get married again, or had been married for a second time. Anyway something happened and I heard the recording and it obviously kind of woke her up I suppose and she said I'm soaking wet.

Int: Armand totally believed in this despite his scientific background?

CC: I don't know that he did.

Int: He was tolerant of it.

CC: Yes.

Int: Great, thank you.

Glossary

A and B roll: used predominantly in 16mm film production, the B roll contains supplemental or alternate footage / soundtrack that can be intercut or transitioned with the main A roll

Automatic gain control (AGC): A control circuit that maintains the desired output signal of an audio device by automatically adjusting the gain (amplification) of an audio signal.

BIB: manufacturer of audio video care and cleaning equipment since 1954. Acquired by B-Tech in 1999

Splicer: A device used to physically join lengths of film together

Boom: An extendable pole with a microphone attached that records audio without disrupting the visual shot

Dubbing: The post production process of editing, auditing and adding audio tracks such as music, sound effects and dialogue to music or film.

flat faders: Used to mix soundtracks, more intuitive than it's rotary predecessors

High Band Video 8 (Hi 8 video): 8mm videocassette format for NTSC and PAL/SECAM

Nagra: Audio recording equipment from the Nagra –Kudelski group

non-linear

Quadrant fader: A variation on the rotary faders which are controlled by a lever connected to the rotary switch at 90 degrees.

Rifle mike: Directional microphone

Rotary potentiometer (pot): A three terminal resistor that results in an adjustable voltage divider that can control things such as volume

Sprocket holes; perforated edge along a film strip, sude by the camera's transport mechanism

Standard 8mm film: Film format developed by Eastman Kodak, where only half the width of the 16mm gauge film is exposed during the first pass and then the second half is exposed, resulting in double the amount of footage

Super 8mm film: Superior quality film format that is 8mm wide and has perforations only on one side

Sync (Synchronisation): Signal used in video systems to coordinate the timings of lines, fields, tracks and frames

Sync pulse: Used as a reference for synchronisation

References

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2. *Filming in Africa* (BBC, 1955)
3. *Armand and Michaela Denis* (BBC, 1955 – 1958)
4. *On Safari* (BBC, 1957 – 1959 & 1961 – 1965)
5. *Safari to Asia* (ATV, 1959 – 1961)
6. *Zoo Quest* (BBC, 1954 – 1963)
7. *Animal Magic* (BBC, 1962 – 1983)



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