

An Interview with Tom Mankiewicz

By Ray Morton

ON HIS LEGENDARY FAMILY

There's something I think about the Mankiewiczzes that was genetic about writing. Mankiewiczzes tend to be glib and write very good dialogue. We have problems with structure. We're king of the flashbacks. Dad...had *A Letter to Three Wives*, *All About Eve*, *The Barefoot Contessa*. Herman -- *Citizen Kane*'s a flashback. Give us a flashback, we do real well.

GETTING STARTED

I was born here in L.A. My father was a New Yorker and the son of an immigrant, a schoolteacher of languages, German, who came through Ellis Island in 1906 or something. In 1949/50, my father had won four Oscars in two years – for *A Letter to Three Wives* and *All About Eve*, for writing and directing – and he said, “Kids, we’re moving back to New York. I want you guys to learn how to read and write. I want you to be with people from different countries, different places, different backgrounds. I want you to have a real education, and now...the work will follow me anywhere and so we should live in the East.”

I had the most proper Eastern education – I went to St. Bernard’s, Exeter and Yale, but in the meantime I just loved the theater and I fell in love with playwrights. And at the time, Broadway was so alive – I mean, you had Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams and William Inge and all these wonderful playwrights and these plays that you could see and musicals like *West Side Story* (and) *Gypsy*.

When I got to Yale I majored in Drama. I kind of thought for a minute that I was going to be an actor. And I was in some plays and I remember my father came up to Williamstown to see me in a production of *The Visit* with E.G. Marshall and Nan Martin. I thought I was really good. And he came backstage and he said, “Take my advice – live with them, sleep with them, marry them, talk to them, divorce them, get mad at them, but for God’s sake don’t be one. Acting you probably are rejected more than any other profession. Writing you can always say, ‘Maybe it’s not their kind of script.’” So I wrote an original screenplay...about the last 90 minutes of a young actress’s life, in between the time she took the pills and the time she died. It was optioned about five times by four different studios for five different actresses, and never made. But I worked off it because it had gone to Universal and some people had read it there. And they said, “Boy is this good dialogue”

There was the last weekly anthology show was on the air. It was called *The Bob Hope Chrysler Theater*, and it was a different drama every week. Stuart Rosenberg, who was a young director – ended up directing *Cool Hand Luke* with Paul Newman -- said, “God, this script (“Runaway Bay,” the episode he was currently preparing) is so lame” and

somebody... said "I read a script -- there's great dialogue in it." Stuart said "Let me read it." He said "Yeah -- get this guy. We're shooting in three days. Let's get some good dialogue in here." Ron Roth, who was the associate producer, called me up and said "Can you come in? Stuart Rosenberg wants to see you. He loves your dialogue." So I came in and I was hired for \$500 to rewrite this *Bob Hope Chrysler Theater*. And I started rewriting and the first day we're on Paradise Cove Pier and I'm rewriting scenes as they're being shot. I'm in the back of the limousine with the typewriter -- I swear to God this is true -- on the jump seat and I'm handing pages out through the window for the next scene. Well, it was just wonderful. I felt "This must be what life's all about. This is just so good." And the show went on it and got good ratings and Stuart was very appreciative.

And I looked at my credit on television -- my father was Joseph L. Mankiewicz, his brother was Herman J Mankiewicz and I was Thomas F. Mankiewicz. And I looked at Thomas F. Mankiewicz on the screen and I thought "This is so fucking pretentious. I'm 24 years old -- I'm not Thomas F. Mankiewicz. I just rewrote this thing for 500 bucks. And I thought "If Billy Wilder can call himself Billy Wilder..." so I became Tom Mankiewicz for the rest of my life.

So I had met socially Jack Haley Jr. -- who was the son of the Tin Man and a wonderful guy and a terrific director -- and we got together an idea that really was kind of like MTV before MTV. We did this musical special called *Movin' with Nancy* with Nancy Sinatra, and Frank was in it and Dean and Sammy. And so we shot it on 16mm and it was on NBC and it was just a huge hit and Jack won the Emmy. And it was written by "Tom Mankiewicz" -- all the concepts for all the numbers in the thing. And Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass... said "Let's get those guys for our special." In the meantime, Fox had read my original and they thought "He's a young guy and we have this surfing movie here and maybe this guy would be good." And so I wrote this little surfing movie called *The Sweet Ride*. Introducing Jacquelyn Bisset. And Tony Franciosa was in it and Bob Denver from *Gilligan's Island*. Now, it was hardly fulfilling but at the time I thought it was *Gone with the Wind*.

And here's how it all came about for me: Because of the musical specials and the fact that I was really young, Fred Coe, a Broadway producer, was looking for somebody to do the book for a Broadway musical of *Georgy Girl*, which had been a big hit as a movie. And I went on to *Georgy Girl -- Georgy!*, it was called -- and we were nominated for four Tonys and closed in three nights and it took a year out of my life. And you don't get paid anything in advance. And I came back to this little place at the beach that I had and I really started thinking "Maybe I should try to play a card with my last name and see if I can be Lew Wasserman's assistant or something. This isn't working out." The phone rings -- it was my agent -- a fellow named Malcolm Stuart at IFA. And he said "How'd you like to write the next James Bond movie?" Bond movies then... were huge events -- there was no *Star Wars* yet, no *Superman*, no *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. And I said "Malcolm, don't fuck with me."

Completely unbeknownst to me, David Picker, who was the head of production at United Artists -- who I'd never met -- was having a meeting with Cubby Broccoli, producer of

the Bond movies -- who I'd never met -- and there was a movie called *Diamonds Are Forever*. They were desperately trying to get Sean Connery back and he had turned down the script. And Cubby had said "It needs a massive rewrite." And he said "But here's what I'd like -- I need a young writer, because I think Bond should get younger now. He's got to be American, because so much of it takes place in Vegas and the Brits write such terrible Americans. And yet, I'd love him to be able to write in the British idiom because we have Bond and Money Penny and M and all these people." And David Picker said, "There's somebody -- I'll check, I think it's Tom Mankiewicz -- he's a Mankiewicz. But since I don't know him, that means he's young, that means he's American. And I saw a play the other night -- *Georgy!* -- and all the characters are British and I thought the book was terrific. He's writing British people and he's clearly American and he's young. Add him to your list." So I get called up to Cubby Broccoli's house and I have a nice meeting with him and with Guy Hamilton, the director, and I'm signed on a two week guarantee for \$1,500 a week. They said "Turn in the first 30 pages and...in two weeks." I turned it in and I'm in my little beach house. The phone rings. "One moment for Mr. Broccoli." And Cubby said two words. That's all. And I'll never forget 'em for my life. He said: "Keep going." And he hung up.

So -- and I stayed on the picture forty-five weeks, went all over the world with it, then wrote *Live and Let Die*, *Man with the Golden Gun*. But I always wondered -- I have great belief in the fact that I'm a talented man, (but) what would have happened if David Picker wasn't in one of only four audiences to see *Georgy!*? Clearly, I never would have gotten *Diamonds Are Forever* because he wouldn't have even been there. And why would David Picker -- the movie (*Georgy Girl*) was a Columbia movie -- why was he in that audience? And I asked him later in life, when I was doing lots of films for UA -- "Why the hell were you even there?" He said "I forget -- I really do. I forget. He said. "But I saw it -- I remember seeing it." How these things happen...

BOND

There's something idiosyncratic about Bond and that's the humor or an outrageous scene where people laugh. In *The Spy Who Loved Me*, he gets into this Lotus with Barbara Bach and they go into the ocean and they're under the ocean -- the car's under the ocean. That's fine, that's Bond. But what makes that -- what I'm proudest of -- is the car turns, but he puts his blinker on under water. That's what Bond is to me -- it's putting the blinker on and the audience roars. That's what made it different than others, y'know.

(Re: the recent Bond films) They have to get some humor back in those films and I think they know it. Some critic said -- and I agree with him totally -- they just have to change the opening lines for him now and just say "My name is Bourne. Jason Bourne." They just look like *The Bourne Identity*. There used to be such style. And the wit. And outrageous puns. I remember I wrote a pun in *Diamonds Are Forever* where Sean arrives in Vegas. (He's) smuggling diamonds (by) pretending to be somebody and he's picking up his dead brother in a coffin at the Vegas airport. Felix Leiter is there and he looks in the coffin and he says "I give up. The diamonds have to be in here somewhere, but where?" And Sean says "Alimentary, my dear Leiter." And so Cubby Broccoli read this

and he said "What is this?" I said "Cubby, it's the alimentary canal. It's his ass and the diamonds are stuck up his ass." And Cubby said "Well, nobody's going to know this." And so Guy said, "No, no, Cubby, it's wonderful. We've got to keep it in." Anyway, we shoot it and we go down to the opening night here at the Grauman's Chinese and it's packed. And they're clearly enjoying the movie. And Sean says "Alimentary, my dear Leiter." And four people out of eight hundred laughed. And I looked over at Cubby – we were standing in the back -- and he said "Big deal, four doctors."

But you wouldn't want to keep those things out. In that same film I had Blofeld – at the end, he's captured Bond on the oil rig or something. And Bond says "Well, it looks like you've won." And (Blofeld) said "As La Rochefoucauld once observed, Mr. Bond, 'Humility is the worst form of conceit.' I do hold the winning hand." And Cubby said "La-what?" He said "This one is out." And I said "No, no. Cubby – he's a French writer of maxims." And (Cubby) said "Out! Get it out." So, every draft came and this thing was still in there. And I don't know why it became Micklemas to him, but he said "Get Micklemas out of the script." He couldn't say La Rochefoucauld. So it comes time to shoot it and Guy shot it in such a way that you couldn't cut it out. And Cubby was just steaming. So, we're starting *Live and Let Die* and Guy said to him "By the way, Cubby, I saw *Diamonds Are Forever* in Paris and La Rochefoucauld...got a big laugh." And Cubby said "France was the only place we didn't make any fucking money."

MOTHER, JUGS, AND SPEED

I had been on the Bonds for a few years...and I was hot. So William Morris, who were my agents at the time, gave me this list of wonderful things that people were interested in and among them, I remember -- I turned it down just by the concept and I could kick myself in the ass for forty years -- was *Three Days of the Condor*. I thought "CIA -- it's the same thing as Bond."

But there was this thing -- Joe Barbera of Hanna-Barbera cartoons had a project that didn't work out, but he still wanted to do it, about ambulance drivers. And I called and said, "Can I drive in an ambulance for a couple of weeks and just see?" And I did and it was just amazing. I mean, the people and the calls and the things and it was comedic and it was horrifying. There's now an argument about the health care bill in this country -- almost every issue is in that movie and it hasn't changed -- the people who don't have insurance and who you can treat and who you can't and an emergency room saying "We don't take obstetrics here, move on down," and so on – nothing is different. And so it was astounding to me at the time.

I wrote this script called *Mother, Jugs, and Speed* -- there's a lot of terrific stuff in it (and) it was very original for its time. And quite by accident, Peter Yates -- a British director who had just done *Bullit* with Steve McQueen -- and I met at a party at Natalie Wood's house. I knew who he was and I said "What are you gonna do next?" -- not for any other reason than I wanted to know what his next picture was. He said "I don't know. I'd like to do a comedy. I'd like to do one with bite." And I said, "Well, I've got a script in the back of my car." I'd just finished it – Fox hadn't even read it yet. And he said

“Well, I’m taking the red-eye to New York tonight at 10:30. So, if you don’t mind, give it to me.” I said “I don’t mind, but you have to understand I can’t offer it to you.” And he said “That’s all right – just give it to me.” So I gave it to him. And he called me the next morning and he said “Let’s do it!”

So we gave it to Alan Ladd, Jr. who... had just taken over (at)...Fox --and he read it and he said, “This is the most offensive screenplay I have ever read. I don’t think there’s any group – blacks, women, politicians -- that you’re not offending in this script. And he said to me and Peter – “Can you guys make this for \$3 million bucks?” “Yes,” we lied. He said “Great – go make it.” And Peter was so generous. He said to me: “You know, you’re writing this – you gave it to me. I can’t produce and direct. Why don’t we make this a Yates/Mankiewicz production and we’ll produce it together?”

And here’s how films accidentally come together. We offered (the starring role of lead ambulance driver “Mother”) to Gene Hackman...and he said “I wanna do it.” And he said to me, “But here’s the deal...I’ve done seven movies in the last two years. My kid has been arrested for drugs, my wife is leaving me. If you guys can wait four months, I’ll play this part.” Peter said no (and then) said to me in that wonderful British accent “I saw the most delightful black comedian last night on television last night named Bill Cosby.” And I said “No, it must be Cosby.” “Oh, is it Cosby? He’s so full of life.” I said “What a good idea.” And we...sent him a script. He was so sharp, so bright and he said to me: “I understand this script was offered to Gene Hackman.” I said “That’s right.” He said, “Well, Gene Hackman and I are not usually offered the same kind of thing. How would you change the part for me? If I played Mother?” And I said “I wasn’t planning to change anything.” And he said, “In that case, I want to do it.” I didn’t change a line. And off we went.

And we shot that fucker all practical – there’s only one two minute sequence where they’re carrying a heavy lady down a staircase and she falls through – that was shot on a stage because you can’t do that practical. Outside of that, every single thing was a practical set. We shot in Venice, California and we just went up and down the streets and shot all day. And we shot out of a thing called a Cinemobile – all the equipment was in those things. Charlie Maguire – who I had known – who was Elia Kazan’s assistant director on *On the Waterfront* and *Splendor in the Grass* and whatever – was our associate producer. Charlie taught me a lot. But it was a wonderful experience. It was so liberating as a writer And I was there obviously every day because I was actually producing the movie, but it was also my script and there were not -- maybe six lines were changed, not because I (insisted, but because) people were obviously happy with them.

Peter and I go to St. Louis with Laddie for the first preview of *Mother, Jugs, and Speed* and everything’s rolling along – people are laughing, the fat lady’s gone through the staircase and out in the street, and everything. And all of a sudden there’s Bruce Davison and he gets his head blown off by little Toni Basil with a shotgun. And about twenty people got up and walked out. They thought they were coming to see a rollicking comedy. And after it was over the cards were very mixed. And Peter and Laddie and I went to dinner and Laddie said “Do you guys feel strongly about keeping that scene in

with Bruce Davison? Because he could just disappear from the cast and we could just put in a line 'Leroy's gone on vacation' or something." And we said "Yeah, we do." And he said, "Fine. Let's leave it in." This would never happen today. Today a studio head would say "It's gonna cost us 25 million dollars in gross. Sorry guys, that scene's going." And I always loved Laddie for saying "Okay, if you guys feel strongly, leave it in."

About, oh, four or five years ago – the Directors Guild (had) a screening (of) *Live and Let Die*. And I'm standing in the reception before it starts and (film critic) Elvis Mitchell...said to me "You know a film you did that never really got what it deserved?" And I said "*Mother, Jugs, and Speed*." He said "That's right!" Then two nights later, I am down at the Music Center, where a dramatization of *All About Eve* is being put on with wonderful actors for the Actors Fund. And Leonard Maltin – we're talking before, he said "You know a movie of yours that never..." and I said "*Mother, Jugs, and Speed*." He said "I didn't give it a good review," but he said "I just saw it again the other night. God, you guys did a really terrific movie. I'm gonna change my review." (And) He did change his review -- yeah. He said "A hilarious black comedy." John Huston used to say "I don't have favorite films, they're all my children," but *Mother, Jugs, and Speed* was always (my favorite) – it meant so much to me in my life as a writer (because) even though I wasn't directing it, I was really controlling the material.

SUPERMAN

I knew Dick Donner very well. We'd never worked together, but we'd known each other since the 60s. And he has a voice that is like the all-clear on a submarine – it's just unbelievable. So, this is absolutely, literally true -- I had just rewritten *The Deep* for Peter Yates...and I rewrote *The Spy Who Loved Me* for Cubby. And so I'm lying in bed. It's five in the morning. Phone rings. It's Dick Donner – that voice – "Get up. Get up, Mankiewicz." I said "Donner, what?" He said "I'm in Paris. I'm gonna direct *Superman*. It needs a lot of work. And you're gonna write it." I said "No I'm not." And he said "Yes, you are." He said "And there's a woman coming to your house right now...with your scripts...and I know you're too nice a guy to go back to sleep -- you're gonna answer the door. I said "Aw Jesus, Dick." So I hang up. The doorbell rings five minutes later. Here's this woman at five in the morning. The scripts were I think between 500 and 600 pages long – the two of them. I put them down and went back upstairs to go to bed. The phone rings. It's Donner. "Are you reading?" I said "No. Dick, they're too heavy to get upstairs. I can't get them upstairs. They're on the table." He said "I'll be back tomorrow. We're gonna do this. We'll have a meeting. Read 'em."

So I read them. (They were) five or six hundred pages long and...very campy. And here's a piece of advice to writers too. Sometimes when you're writing something... like *Superman*...for whatever reason -- whether it's the money or you think its good or whatever – and...you want to show the audience that you're smarter than the material. So you camp it up to show them "We're not really taking this seriously. This is all tongue in cheek." And it was very campy. Some of it was very funny, but it just went on and on and on.

So Dick arrived back. I called him, I said “Donner, listen, I’m not gonna do this. I’ve just been rewriting stuff, I want to do something of my own and I just...” He said “Come over here, we’ll have a meeting.” I said “No, Dick, really --” “Come on over.” So, I drive over there and I ring the doorbell, there’s no answer. I go around the back of the house...and there he is standing on his lawn in the Superman suit. They’d given him the Superman suit, he’s dressed in the Superman suit. And he turned to me and he said “Just try it on and you’ll do it.” And he started running at me and the cape was billowing and I started to laugh. And then he looked at me and he said “If we can get the love story right between Clark and Lois and Superman – if we can get that right – if it can be two kids out on a date – this whole movie’s going to work.” And I stared at him and literally said “Fuck you.” And off we went.

Benton and Newman had written really about a two or three page scene where (Superman) lands on (Lois’s) balcony and I turned it into eight pages and it was two kids on a date testing each other out. And...at the end of it, he takes her flying. And I remember calling Dick at two in the morning and saying “Donner.” “Yeah?” I said “At the end of the thing he takes her flying.” He said “Now we’re talking!”

It was the first movie ever made – successful movie – with a comic book character. It spawned everything from *Batman* (to) *Spider-Man* and all the ones that are out this summer. Everything was spawned by that one picture. And yet...people thought it was a joke at the time. People said “You cannot do a comic book character like that seriously.” And there was that wonderful joy of creating when the whole world says “This is going to be a piece of shit and we know it.”

Dick and I had a little Superman sign on each one of our offices with him flying and the word "Verisimilitude" -- write it like it's really happening. And I think for all writers who write anything like that – when you step outside of the material and either try to show that you're smarter than the material or manipulate it -- that's when you screw yourself up. Get inside it. And if you really believed – (then) I could have Superman and Lois sitting around a table and she could say “Ah, how big are you – uh – how tall are you?” “I’m about 6’2.” People are interested because they played it – and it was written – so innocently as two kids on a date. And...if you get inside the material -- you say “Okay, here she is -- she’s got such a crush on this guy -- and here he is, he’s shy in front of her. He’s working with her every day but he’s kind of shy and it works.” (Then) you can get smart enough to say “What color underwear am I wearing?” “It’s pink,” and she blushes. But the blush is what’s important – that it really made her blush. If you really believe it – and I really mean this – if you believe in your material, then the audience does too. And writers too often – ‘cause we’re so fucking smart, writers -- we always want to put a little thing in to there to say “Just kidding, just on the sly, I’m kind of manipulating you here, watch this.” And audiences don’t like you for it. They want to be in it, they want to be movie fans.

The separate “Creative Consultant” credit was Dick’s idea. There was unbelievable acrimony between Dick and the Salkinds -- Dick and I used to call that movie *Close Encounters of the Salkind*. (So) I became his de facto producer, helping with locations,

casting -- we didn't have a Superman or a Lois or a Perry White or a Jimmy Olsen or a General Zod -- and stayed on through the editing, scoring, etc. (Dick) insisted I have a separate card in the main title which accurately reflected my contribution. I almost certainly would have received first credit as a writer (more than half the sequences and about 80% of the dialogue is mine) but I couldn't have gotten both credits. Dick also insisted that my credit appear in all paid advertising. The dustup with the Writer's Guild was twofold: First, since I was primarily known as a writer, the fact that he put my credit after the screenwriters implied that my contribution was more important than theirs. Second, the screenwriting credits by Guild contract can only be followed onscreen by the producers and the director. There was a formal hearing which I won. As part of the settlement I agreed to have my name appear just *before* the screenwriters in *Superman II*. When I helped Dick put together the DVD of *Superman II: The Richard Donner Cut*, without my knowledge he put my name back after the screenwriters again. I had nothing to do with it.

And the weird thing was, when (*Superman*) came out it was a big hit, but everybody was lying in wait for it. And you get that with movies, where critics are gonna write a bad review even if they like it. And we got some wonderful reviews, but we got some where people had already written the review. And then *Superman II* came out, it got slightly better reviews, but now the first one is so far more memorable than the second. One of my favorite critics ever -- Joe Morgenstern, who writes for the *Wall St. Journal* -- (wrote a column selecting) five big budget films to treasure and (one of the five) was the original *Superman*. He said "Go back and look at this again."

The picture touched a lot of people.

SUPERMAN II AND BEYOND

The reason Dick was fired was he and the Salkinds hated each other -- just hated each other. And they fired Dick and my theory always was if the first one had been a disaster, they would have made Dick finish the second one.

When *Superman II* was gonna be finished... Terry Semel came down to my office before they started up again and said "Would you go back? Dick Lester wants you to finish up the picture with him." I said "I can't do that Terry. Dick is my friend, he brought me on, he's right across the street here. I can't do that." And he said "Well, could you go to London and accidentally bump into Dick Lester and have dinner with him and give him...?" I said "No, I can't do that." And then (the Salkinds) did the unkindest thing of all -- they cut Brando out of the second one because he had a piece of the gross. And they read in his contract if he didn't appear in the film, he didn't get it. And they cut him out. And the whole arc -- and I hate to use pretentious words like that, but as a writer was -- here is Marlon sending the kid to earth -- it is God sending Christ to earth, it may be Allah sending Mohammed to Earth -- and then he defies him by turning the world backwards in the first and bringing Lois back to life and then in the second film when loses his powers, Brando comes and commits suicide through reaching out for him to give him new life. So this was all one story and these pricks cut him out. They didn't want to pay a piece of the

gross even though they knew the picture was going to be a big hit, there was gonna be plenty of money for everybody. And they put out this lame story: it cost too much to get him back -- he'd already shot all the scenes. They were there! He'd done it all.

So after *Superman III* was made, Terry came down to my office. He said "What's wrong with *Superman III*?" And I said "What's wrong with it -- and it's not Richard's fault -- it's a Richard Pryor movie. I mean he's wildly talented and he's very funny, but it's a Richard Pryor movie and Superman movies have to be Superman movies." And he said "Would you and Dick go back -- would you go back and do the next one? And really price is no object -- I mean we want to get this back on track." And Dick and I had a long dinner and talked about it and we thought "No." We'd done everything -- we'd brought him from Krypton. He'd grown up, he'd turned the world backwards, he'd faced Kryptonite, he'd become a human being, and slept with Lois.

But Chris Reeve -- who was a very nice guy -- when he'd wanted to do *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace*, they gave me the script and they said "Would you meet with Chris and talk to him?" And I just said "Chris" "There's certain rules of writing. And you are now exceeding those rules. Superman can do anything. So you don't go to the United Nations about disarmament -- you could disarm the whole world in twenty minutes if you wanted to. You can find every Russian silo and American silo and get them down. You don't talk about famine, because Superman could feed the world. No tsunami will ever hit Thailand, let's say, because with your super-breath you'd blow it back and no one would die. That's why you have to get involved in these plots. Superman cannot go to the UN and say "You must disarm," because if I'm the head of the Soviet Union or the United States, I'm saying "Well, why don't you go do it?" And if I'm the audience, I say "Why don't you go do it?" What happens? I mean, are you willing to see a country blown up because they won't do it?"

So, these are writing rules about fantasy characters -- you've got to figure out where your lines are. When you're dealing with normal human beings, there are no fantasy rules -- a guy that loves potted plants can suddenly turn around and kill nine children, if you can do it correctly. But superheroes have their own rules.

WORKING METHODS

I have to write first thing when I get up. But not the very first thing -- I have a cup of coffee and I read the paper. So by the time I'm writing, I don't answer the phone. I write for four or five hours normally and four hours when I'm on a screenplay. And then I'm exhausted. I'll go to lunch and then take a nap. But I'm as exhausted as if I did fifty laps in the pool or something. But I have to do it then. Some people write at night. I can't write at night. I've read articles, pieces by writers that say "I have a couple of drinks and (then I write)." Every time I've had a couple of drinks and written, I've loved what I wrote until the next morning and I look at it and it's not very good. It looked good when I had a couple of drinks in me, but it's not very good.

Every writer I know writes differently. I have to write a screenplay – I don't think I've ever written a treatment in my life. Ever. But I do know where it's going and I know two or three signposts along the way. So I know that (the protagonist is) coming to New York and he's meeting this girl and I know a third of the way through he's gonna find out she's gay and then I know he's gonna try and love her anyway. And I know her father's coming and there's going to be a thing. And I know what the ending is, but I don't know anything in between. And it gives me a kind of a freedom -- where suddenly I've got two funny lines for the doorman in the apartment building and then he becomes an interesting character. And suddenly the doorman, by page 50, is talking to the father and saying "Listen, y'know, the hero's a really good guy and you shouldn't be..." Because characters run away with you. And I've always preferred it that way. And yet there are great writers – I walked into Alvin (Sargent)'s office one day at Fox when we were both there -- he had 3 x 5 cards and he is going scene by scene by scene, yet his screenplays are so seamless and flowing. But he has to know where's he's going. It doesn't make anybody a better writer or a worse writer, they just work differently. I couldn't stand it if I had a treatment to actually go by – the first thing I would do is not go by it. Something in me would rebel.

But I'm not saying you just sit down and wing it. I have to know three or four big signposts in my story before I can go and I suddenly realize "Jesus, it's page 35 and I'm not anywhere near...I better look out here." Because I do know the story that I want to tell, I just don't know how I want to tell it. And suddenly when the characters start talking to themselves...you let them exercise. And suddenly that little mousy sister turns out to be somebody who actually might be the killer if you just turn this around and that around. And I think that's what's so exciting about writing -- is that you've got all those options. And I don't know one other profession in which you can kill people, you give birth to people, you can give people a disease, you can do anything you want to do.

And I learned very early on – get on with it. Especially Bond where, y'know, Bond has to go to the door, throw it open, turn around, and say: "_____." And you can sit there and, son of a bitch, nothing comes. So I would write Bond: "Blah, blah, blah." And I would just get on with the next scene. Keep going. And you know what? In the afternoon – you're driving to the cleaners to pick up your shirts and the line comes to you in the car.

ON WRITING

All writing is observing -- it's a compilation of things that you've seen and people that you've met...(and) everything that goes on around you. That little scene of the lady falling through the staircase, which brought everybody (to) tears...in *Mother, Jugs, and Speed* -- I wrote that in three seconds. Because when I was driving in an ambulance, I watched the two drivers trying to pick up a heavy guy and they couldn't get him up. So now, if you're a writer, you say – (and) I'm sorry about this, it sounds sexist – "Okay. A woman is funnier than a guy. And if you get a rickety staircase. And..." Now that's called writing.

(And) it has to come from your gut. I'm sixty-seven... and I say to my students: "If you want to step outside and try to figure out what the audience is really gonna like, I can still write circles around you -- I can do it better. But if you make a film from your gut, about what you want to make a film (about) -- even a funny film. If it's from your gut, I can't touch you. Because if you really love those little kids, if you are really torn apart by your father's death, if you really write that silly comedy in a wonderful way and it's coming from inside you -- I couldn't touch you, y'know?"

The audience will screw you up at times. I found that out early on in the Bond movies. I was writing my ass off in terms of Bond always has something witty to say. And the film would start and Sean would turn around and say something... and they would laugh like hell. And I would say "Boy, if they're laughing at that, wait till he says "_____"" -- that'll bring the house down." And he says that and it gets a nice polite laugh. So you've got to go ahead and make your own film -- what you think is funny. And you'll be right more often than not if it's coming out of a real thing in you and not saying "I'm wondering how I can fashion a line to make an audience laugh." I think the only way we screw ourselves up is we say "No, if we do that, the audience might not like us for that." Why don't you just go ahead and make your movie?

I can tell you -- I would have said to Billy Wilder -- -- and I thank God I knew him and I loved him -- about *The Apartment*: "I'll tell you what, there's no way a guy in an ad agency who rents his apartment out to his boss to take hookers and other people is ever going to be a sympathetic character," but you love Jack Lemmon because Billy knew how to write it. But as a then-studio head, I would say to him "There's no way this is going to work. And the elevator operator winds up in his bed and tries to commit suicide and you think people are going to enjoy this movie? Make me laugh." But what a wonderful film-- because it came out of him. And it's not Billy Wilder the director, it's Billy Wilder the writer that said "No, no, no, this is going to work. People are going to want to see this, they're going to get involved in this, they're going to get involved in the characters."

CLOSING THOUGHTS

I'm so full of love for the people who make pictures -- even the pricks. It's a wonderful calling, it really is. And the writer--yes, if you're gonna do movies you need a director and you need a great cast, but the script has got to be there. In the beginning was the word -- I know it's a cliché, but it really (is true).

Writing is a very lonely profession. I don't care if you're even writing with somebody else and you're a team -- it's very lonely and it's anti-social. And it happens before the movie is made. So it's all foreplay in a certain way. And it stays foreplay if nobody shoots the goddamn thing, y'know? So writers are in a very unique position that way. I always envied directors and actors and so on when I was just writing because they didn't work until somebody had already decided to make it.

Writing is (also) painful. Sometimes...it really is real agony. And it's a tougher job than directing. And a tougher job than acting – it really is. And, y'know, I can tell all the funny stories in the world about *Superman* because it came out fine. But I can tell you when I'm in my hotel room at night and I can't sleep because I don't know how to write that scene and Gene Hackman's in that scene and it's pivotal and Marlon Brando's gonna be in the film and I am crazed and I want them to like what I'm writing and I want to get it and I really have to get up and get inside it. It's...painful to write because it comes out of you. And anything that comes out of you – I don't believe you have to cut off your ear like Van Gogh, but...

I would say to writers today “Please take heart.” The good movies – the *Hurt Lockers* and so on -- those are the ones that will keep you working. The fact that you were one of the writers on *Transformers* – and I have great respect for anybody who writes anything – that won't help you. But if you wrote *Ma Vie Un Rose*, you'll get to write five or six different interesting films and you can get up to bat again and go because they're interesting. And if you write really funny comedies -- not manufactured – where people just start to laugh, you can work for the rest of your life. And if you know how to write adventure – or take a wonderful writer like Alvin Sargent, who could write *Julia* and *Ordinary People* and also write *Spider-Man* – what a wild talent. And Alvin – he's older than I am – Alvin will work till he's 110 if he wants to, because he can just do it. He can write. And writing is a gift.

There's something wonderful about writing, because when you do it well or somebody says, “Yes, I want to make this,” it's a singular achievement because...you've achieved something that a director (can't) – directors can't work 'til somebody decides to make a picture, actors don't work 'til there's a part to play. And you wrote that scene and they're saying your lines, these people are actually saying back and forth what you wrote – that's really exciting. It still is exciting.

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