

Sue Brooks

Ray Argall interviewed Sue Brooks for australianscreen on 10 June 2009

Q Talk about why you entered this industry?

00:03:44

Brooks I don't know I actually had one of those great moments where I was on that side and then on the other side with it, cos I was working here in Melbourne, and I was working for a medical company and I was doing a diploma in photography part time. And then for some reason I'd met somebody, a series of events, but I met somebody who'd been to the film and TV school in Sydney. And he'd talked about how wonderful that was and he'd been also going to the same photography school, and he said, you should give it a go and see if you like it. So I applied to go to the film school and then my world changed. From that moment on.

Q What were the changes? You arrived at film school knowing

00:04:28

Brooks I didn't know much about filmmaking at all, I can't say that I was actually particularly driven from the point of view of being a really, you know, passionate filmmaker – passionate – somebody who was particularly – I might start again

Q When you arrived at film school you knew very little?

00:05:02

Brooks When I first went to film school I wasn't – I didn't come with a whole world of film making and film knowledge behind me, I'd actually come from the point of a photographer and had taken photography very seriously. I thought I was just going to go out into the world and be a photographer. And I was looking for a way of having more of a creative

life, and being able to, to express myself daily in a sort of a creative way. And that was what was really driving me to sort of go on and do something different. And I went into the photography workshop at the film school, that stage they only took five people per workshop and there were five, five of us, I think three of us were women, two men. And I did that for a year and a half and I moved over into the directing workshop after that.

Q What was the duration of time you were at the school?

00:06:05

Brooks I was there for three years. I did a year and a half in the photography workshop with Geoff Burton, and a year and a half in directing workshop.

Q It was cinematography?

00:06:21

Brooks Yeah, cinematography, yeah ... camera workshop yeah.

Q What did you find and learn from photography going into the directing workshop?

00:06:47

Brooks I guess the thing about cinematography for me was that I found that fairly easy, in a – in that it all made sense, it wasn't that complicated a way of working for me. Because of coming from the photography part of life, you know. But going into direction was mystifying really. Particularly mystifying in terms of how to work with performance, performers. And how to arrive at a good performance with people and it all just seemed to be a lot of mumbo jumbo and really difficult. But the cinematography stuff was just sort of like, and even now I just sort of don't think that very seriously, that's going to be a hard part to interpret because that's the bit that sort of is in your DNA or something, it's just, you know you have it or you don't.

Q For some cinematography is the most mystifying.

00:08:04

Brooks I remember thinking being really mystified about all that stuff about crossing the line. And you know all of those technical terms, I can remember sort of sitting at kitchen tables with salt and pepper shakers a lot and going, you know, but if he's there and she's there, then you can't go there, and having arguments on beaches about whether you crossed the line or not. But nowadays people don't seem to even, they sort of go much more with the comfortable sort of reaction to a shot and to a scene. And I – I mean it's a long time since I've seen someone have an argument about crossing the line. I can't imagine – I can't imagine it happens anymore. If I teach down at VCA I never see any of the students down there having those sorts of discussions anymore. They just, it's like it's organic, filmmaking is much more organic now than it was when I was first learning it.

Q From those who've come from learning those skills, and the next generation coming through

00:09:11

Brooks Well I think what happens when you and I were doing it, like when we were first learning filmmaking it was like um, it was a – it was probably true of a lot of disciplines, you were crossing over into a whole other world and there were lots of rules to learn and there was a lot of sort of mystifying voodoo stuff around it and you had books on it, and I had a whole book on the grammar of film language, a whole book, it was that thick on the grammar of film language. And you know, I can't – now I think there's two things that's happened, there's um, younger people are much more comfortable about telling stories using film, so that's become a lot easier, but the other thing is the audiences have come to film making as well. So that you watch TV at night and we put up with anything, like we don't – things don't have to be technically perfect. You know, like on

the news it can be as rough as anything and we just go yeah, yeah. But when I was learning it first up there'd be sort of men in grey coats virtually sort of looking at great big sort of cameras and monitors and things saying, no, no there's not enough of decibels of this there and you know the whole thing would be rejected because the quality wasn't high enough. Do you know what I mean?

Q There's an argument that the audience is being dumbed down. But there is a real art to a filmmaker's work?

00:10:47

Brooks I'm not saying audiences have been dumbed down, I don't think that's true at all, I just think that our, our – what we accept when we watch something is very broad. Like you can watch a very high level production feature film with extraordinary lighting and extraordinary exposures and you know, like you can almost see the cells of the skin. Through to you can watch I don't know, some rough cooking show. And or home renovation show. And that will be really as rough as guts, but you accept that broad range of material.

Q That acceptance, has that evolved with newer platforms? Have the expectations of audiences changed?

00:11:58

Brooks Yeah, I guess so, I think in lots of ways it's not just screen, screen culture it's – like people accept all sorts of things in grabs now, don't they. And I suppose a lot of that is to do with television and the use of computers in particular I guess. You know like, I want to know what the latest little story was last – yesterday that I'd missed, you know, the current affairs story because there'd been a big kerfuffle about it, so I jump online and I sort of watch it and I sort of read it, but I don't get the whole story, I don't sort of sit there and read a whole article about in the paper, I've sort of got enough information to just go, oh yeah, I know what that latest kerfuffle's about. You know.

Q In your professional work as a director, have you noticed those expectations have evolved?

00:13:03

Brooks What do you mean, do you think they've um ...

Q We're talking about expectation of audience, how that's changed. In terms of your work, have you let those rules go?

00:13:32

Brooks Yeah, yeah, I think I've let go of a lot of anxiety about things that seemed really, really important when I was learning them. But that would be true if I was talking about nursing too. Like, because I was nursing first off. It's like, there are certain things that have just evolved and become easier, but the fundamental things about people going on a journey and telling a really good story and being emotionally connected to something or feeling like their life has been enriched by something, that remains as elusive and as hard to get, and all of that is ever – if not even harder, I reckon. They're all the same things, people still want, still want good stories, they still want to be moved, they still want to feel like you know, they've gone somewhere special. But that's hard, that's always hard to achieve, I reckon. And probably harder, as hard now when I first learned it.

Q I'm interested in your collaborations, talk about that?

00:14:55

Brooks I guess the main collaboration that I've had is with Alison, Alison Tilson because she and I have worked together since film school. And in a lot of ways that was about finding each other at film school and finding that we had very similar sensibilities and sense of very similar values, I think that was – not that you sit down and have the first conversation and say, you know, what do you believe in, it's not at all like that, but you do, as you're

communicating with people I think it's one of the big things that sort of sifts us out is values. How what we think matters and what you're trying to do in the world. And that collaboration and that story telling collaboration has been going on for a long time now. So we've done two films together and hopefully – and a number of shorts. And hopefully do more.

Q There's obviously an ongoing dialogue, over how many years?

00:15:55

Brooks A lot (laughs) a lot of years, yeah.

I think the first thing that she and I did together was at film school, and it was called *The Guild*. And it was based on an idea of – it actually had come from my mum's life, and it was about a church guild and it was a story of how these women – it's a little bit *Vicar of Dibley*-ish, that sort of – but basically about a church guild group of women, how they all interact and everything. And I went to Alison and I said, would she be interested in writing it because she was in the writing workshop and I was in the directing workshop. And I had to have something written and anyhow, so she jumped at it and said, yeah, yeah, I'd love to do it. And I think perhaps that was the sort of starting point of realising that we both have very similar values, sense of humour, take on life. A sort of a warm hmm, you know, sometimes acerbic, but basically sort of a very similar view on people and what they do.

00:18:20

And but she – at that stage it was probably much more that she was writer and I was director. And sort of never the twain would meet sort of thing, but over the years that's evolved to something quite different and now we produce together. And so her, her work as a filmmaker slides up and down that scale, same as mine slides backwards down through to the script. And you know, we sometimes have furious arguments about, you know, interpretations. But by and large I think she thinks my interpretation is probably as often as good as it was going to get, sometimes a little bit

better. But you know, by and large I think we pretty much agree on how things have been interpreted and what they should do.

Q When you see the finished product together, what do you ...

00:19:28

Brooks When you first see your film finished I think it's, it's pretty appalling experience, by and large you look at it and you just think, we've done it, we've achieved it, it's a wonderful thing, but it's – there's no sort of jumping in the air thinking, yes this is wonderful and we've achieved excellence. And I remember thinking we'd seen at – one of the first screenings of *Road to Nhill* that was fabulous was a parliament screening actually. At Canberra. And we were sitting in the middle of the pack and everybody else around us we didn't know and they started to laugh, and um, I remember thinking that was pretty amazing, we'd made strangers laugh was the expression that we used then. But it's just um, I saw *Road to Nhill* about two months ago with Alison, we sat down and watched it because we had to check a cut for some reason. And that's probably the first time I've actually seen the film. Seen it independent of still making it, you know. And just watched it, and not knowing what the next cut was going to be because it was so, you know, ingrained – I still wasn't, wasn't making it, and that was the first time I really enjoyed it. And I did enjoy it then.

Q So minimum ten years

00:20:52

Brooks Ten years um ... it's longer, twenty years isn't it? No, no ...it's about fourteen years.

Q and Alison?

00:21:08

Brooks She was the same, we were down at Torquay and we were just watching it on the DVD and it was like we were watching anyone else's movie, you

know. And we just sat there and laughed and – because it was funny, cos there's a few bits in the film that I don't like, and I had exactly the same reaction, I thought, oh what's that in there for. That was weird. But apart from that, completely happy with it.

Q And *Japanese Story*?

00:21:35

Brooks Oh, I haven't watched it. It's going to take a while, I have watched it, I see parts of it and I think, oh yeah that's an achievement, that's pretty yeah, that was pretty extraordinary. But I don't, I'm probably still making it in, I'm still in that process of still thinking, oh yes that's the day we did such and such, or I felt such and such, or that music's doing – I'm still deconstructing it. But you know, I guess that's the same for all art forms in a way. My uncle used to say the same about clothes, if he'd made clothes he would, you know, he was a designer, and he would put them on he'd always be going oh, I haven't quite got that right.

Q You present the films to audiences overseas. Did you screen *Japanese Story* to a Japanese audience?

00:22:41

Brooks I haven't seen it with a Japanese audience. No, I mean one of the most exciting things that I ever saw of that film, cos it got into the Cannes Film Festival. And for some reason they had these great big screens up on the beach. And they were showing films on the beach. And we were walking down to a cinema one night to see something else and there was – and you could hear it first, you could hear this sort of evocative music. And then this, there you were in the middle of Cannes in the middle of the night of this, you know, these great Australian landscapes sort of ticking over through the gate, it was pretty special. That was good.

Q That was an official screening on the beach?

00:23:25

Brooks I don't know what it was actually, I don't know why they did it. I guess it was.

Q You weren't there to present?

00:23:31

Brooks Oh maybe it was a promotion of it, maybe it wasn't the whole film, maybe it was just a promotion of what was on Un Certain Regard or something. Um, but showing it to overseas audiences, yeah, I mean shown it in France and Hawaii and in um, Telluride and in Florida, but I'd probably say I felt sick every time, I didn't feel I didn't ever feel totally – oh and of course at Cannes itself and Un Certain Regard, that was pretty amazing. But you still feel, you sort of own every breath of it as it goes through the gate. I don't know if other filmmakers feel like that at all, I suppose they do.

Q How does it compare, when you're presenting overseas or in Australia? You presented at the Melbourne Film Festival?

00:24:33

Brooks Yeah, yeah, *Japanese Story* was the Melbourne Film Festival too. It's pretty hard actually in front of your own crowd, yeah. It's pretty – it's pretty nerve wracking. I mean I probably hold onto sort of more personal – the big experience where you've got a thousand people or a hundred people watching it, gets dissipated by all of those many possible reactions there are to a screening. Whereas when we were cutting *Japanese Story*, I took – for some reason my father was staying at our place and I took it home to see how the cut was going. And just put it in the VHS it would have been, and um, sat on the couch and watched it with him. And when it had finished he sort of got up and walked into the kitchen, he was crying a little bit. And ah, that was really amazing. That was really amazing, it still upsets me when I think about that.

Q Do you read that as a positive?

00:25:30

Brooks Yeah because he was really moved by it, he was really moved by it. He thought it was good and it meant something to him that wasn't just that I'd made it. It meant something to him. Of course it's got parts of our lives in it. So I guess he was sort of subliminally picking that up as well.

Q Maybe not so subliminally?

00:25:57

Brooks Yeah, yeah.

Q In a script you can write very clearly reactions in that, and you get it on screen it's so obvious, two people look at each other, it's all there.

00:26:17

Brooks That's what it's like, that's the thing that I love about directing is chasing those moments of just trying to get those really you know, like sometimes when you're reading a script, you know, I'll sit in that very chair and I'll read one of Alison's scripts and I'm moved by it. And then you get to the point when you're trying to direct it and you're trying to capture that moment of it being, that it does to you, and in all the configurations of making a film, which are – basically remove you from those experiences. Basically everything sort of takes you away from being able to be really connected with it. But if you can get connected there and then, there's a good chance it will go on the screen and then it will go on, and then an audience will get to it. Chasing angels, I call it.

Q With the audience, are you making films for them?

00:27:19

Brooks No it's always much more, for me, it's much more a personal thing. You know that I'm actually – I mean even, it can be about being funny as well.

I remember in *Road to Nhill* when Brian trips over the phone cord and you know, and nearly lands in the fridge, which is you know, now my favourite moment in the film, but I can really remember clearly standing next to Robin Plunkett who was operating, and I thought he was going to fall and I made a grab for Robin, because I was scared of that moment that he was actually going to fall, of course he was just acting well. But if you have those moments where you are genuinely moved or find it funny or you can see the connections happening or you find it sad or you, you know, like Toni pulling the – go into the car – pulling the dead body into the car, if you can see –if at the time you feel a little bit sick, and anxious and think that you should call cut because you think you should help, then the moment is likely to be on the bit of celluloid as well. Not always, but usually it is.

Q In that preparation, the upside down car, talk about what you had to do?

00:28:45

Brooks Well yeah, I think, I can't remember – I can't wind back the clock quite clearly enough. But anyhow, I know Alison had written that these women were hanging upside down and we couldn't for the life of us work out how to make that work

00:229:18

Brooks I think it was in the script – yeah it was in the script right from the beginning, that these women were – the car had tipped upside down, and the women were hanging there like fruit bats. I think that was the expression in the script, I'd love to have a -- go back and have a quick look. And one of the things that happens when you get a script, I'm sure you've had this experience, where you get a script and you get something in it and you think, how the hell am I going to do that. But instead of ironing it out and going, well let's cut that or let's just cut forward or whatever, I always like those moments of thinking, I don't know how to do that, and that's going to be a really interesting journey about how to get there. And usually – usually people come in and sort of fill that in for

you. And so what we had to do was work out a way of getting the women to hang upside down and so originally we went through this concept that we would get into harnesses and we would flip upside down. And that's how we would get the women to do it. We'd flip the whole person upside down. So Sue Maslin and I tried it, and I think – I don't think Alison went in the harness, but she was videoing it any how. And at that point we thought, there's no way we can do this, I remember Sue had to go home afterwards cos she felt so sick from it, because there's a lot of pressure, unnatural thing to do. So then we came up with the concept of dropping them over a seat so that not all of their body weight was going down into the head, but just the upper body, but even so we were told by a doctor that you couldn't do that for more than 90 seconds or something or other because if you do it longer than that you're going to cause all sorts of optical and neurological problems for their head. So when you know the women were all over 70, well some of them weren't, but they were meant to be over 70, you don't want to be sending them home with a you know, being blind or

00:31:11

Yeah, yeah, it was nerve wracking. And I remember one day I said to the nurse, we had a nurse on set and I said to her, you know, I'm so into the drama of this and I'm so focussed on that I don't want to have the responsibility of calling cut, cos I can't do both. And so I gave her the job. And she was fairly young and inexperienced at the time, and we were doing this scene and they were talking and everything and then all of sudden there was this voice, 'cut', 'cut'. It was the nurse going that's enough now. So we had to pull them back up and lie them down, take their blood pressure.

Q How did you manage that? How long does the scene run on screen?

00:31:55

Brooks Oh I can't remember. I can't remember.

Q Longer than 90 seconds?

00:32:01

Brooks Maybe a dozen longer than 90 seconds, you needed all of the time, you needed – you had to – it wasn't just dropping them in and start filming because they had to get every bits and you know, their seatbelts sorted and their dresses sorted and everything. And a lot of time was spent fiddling, yeah. I remember Patricia Kennedy one day, she was – I had her dropped down into the shot. And she was acting, as Patricia does, gorgeous Patricia. And anyhow it was the time to pull her up and I said, so I said, cut. And um, and she was being dragged back out again, and she was going, oh no Sue, oh no, I haven't been able to do what I wanted to do. (laughs). So we laid her down and took her blood pressure and took her back down again. But.

Q You physically did that. Directors don't always put themselves physically ...

00:33:07

Brooks Oh yeah, oh yeah we physically did it because we thought, you can't ask these women to do it when you're not prepared to do it yourself. Plus I also needed to know what the experience of it was like in order to know what was happening. Because I mean, mostly the things that was – one of the things that was really important was how it affected the voice. Because everything – all of your body organs come up, you just do it yourself, hang over a chair and start talking, it's quite funny, and some people get really nasally, and some people get really resonant. But everyone gets very affected by it. But the same on *Japanese Story* when um, when I was doing *Japanese Story*, I hated the idea of going – Toni going into that waterhole because it was freezing. So I went out the day before and jumped in and thought, this is terrible. So I went up to Toni afterwards and said, it's really cold, you're going to hate it. And she said, yeah thanks. That was all I did. Cos it was hard, it was hard work for them.

Q Those sequences have all become very strong sequences in the films?

00:34:15

Brooks Yeah I think, I think the thing about acting is that usually what happens for actors is they love to be able to go beyond that limit of what they normally do. So if they're given something that's actually quite, you know, if you give somebody a dinner table scene, and they're talking about whatever they're talking about, it's sort of – I mean sure you need them in your films and all the rest of it, but you give them that extra little something that they're going to try and achieve like um, the film that I've just done, all the boys were playing rugby. And they, they all ramped up a notch for it, you know, like they got fitter for it, they went for it. It's sort of, it's like a gift you give them I guess, it comes out of the script itself. If you give them something that they really want to -- give them a bit of a challenge, I mean you see it in Geoffrey Rush, you see the, the exuberance and the pleasure of being able to go somewhere that, you know, your daily life doesn't let you do.

Q I'm interested in the cultural extremes. *Japanese Story* is an example of that. What's your interest there, how did you stretch that cultural extreme with the Toni Collette character?

00:35:57

Brooks I don't really know what I think about that. I mean the thing that was interesting about Go working in *Japanese Story* was that he was, wasn't so much that his cultural experience – which is what the script represented, the script represented and the film represents a man who's sort of been plucked out of his world and put into something really alien. But what was probably more exciting about what Go was doing was that he, he said all of the time when he was rehearsing, rehearsing that part was that he was getting closer and closer to his father. And that he didn't really quite know why that was except that he was bringing parts of his father into his performance. And I remember him saying to me one day, to Alison and

me, we were driving along and he said, I'm feeling, I'm feeling very close to my father through this. Every day I feel a little closer to him. So I think it's sort of um, what was probably the more interesting journey there rather than the strange man in a strange place was something about a fairly cool, hip, gorgeous man of the you know, of the century going somewhere very special emotionally. And therefore he was able to bring some of that body work into his performance. And re-awakened a naivety, I suppose is what I'm trying to say. Is that in a way Alison had written a character that did have all of that naivety, based on somebody she knew very well who had that – who wasn't Japanese. But the world moves in strange ways with all of that stuff, we didn't – I didn't say, Go think of your father, of course. But he, he went there incrementally until he brought that man into that landscape. And then you have this extraordinary tension.

Q He obviously found a way of getting there which was effective. The landscape is a big thing. Explain how and why you work with landscape?

00:38:52

Brooks I think um, basically I've – I mean maybe it's just how life's panned out – or filmmaking life's panned out that it's ended up being films that have always been shot on location. Well those three films have anyhow. But it – it probably is more fundamental than that, it's probably about having a sense of place and that that place is very important and how particularly with *Road to Nowhere* that it was very much about how people lived in the community, therefore how they danced together and therefore when it came asunder how they had to sort of put it all back into place again. And that was also true of *Japanese Story* is finding the right landscape that had a sort of logic that, for the journey and for the impact that it had on their story. And same is true of *Subdivision*. And I suppose in a funny way I find it hard to cheat in film, even though I admire it when other people do it. Like I saw *Angels and Demons* the other day and you know, it was all completely fabricated. But it's not, you know, in the end it's a fabrication of a real world I guess. But you know when you see films where people

are running on one street and they land in another street, and then another one, everybody knows how to do that these days. But somehow or another it doesn't feel good for me as a storyteller. So I just think as I get older as a film maker I realise that some things you feel comfortable with and therefore you should probably stick with that. Because place to me probably cause of who I am and where I've come from means a lot to the sorts of stories I'm telling.

Q You are all forced together on location. Explain how that works?

00:41:02

Brooks Look I think working on location, if you can work on location, it just brings the most amazing rewards, it's sort of – it puts you all in the one boat to start off with. The crew's all off there together doing the one, on the one journey together. And you know that you're on that journey together and you're going to go through it come what may, whatever tensions happen, you know. But like something with *Japanese Story* for example is that it's actually the dirt itself can affect you, the way you're dealing with that red earth every day of your life, how it gets into the seams of your clothes, you know, how you fall into the earth and the way you, you know, like, you could be working in the Pilbara, you wouldn't ever think of putting lipstick on, do you know what I mean. If somebody put lipstick on you would think, what's she done that for? You know what I mean. The longer you're there the more you sort of seep into the ground. And I think that affects what you put on the film but it also affects how you make a film as well. And if there's some things about life that are easy and well, it's not just about being easy, it's just about – if – how can I describe it. It's about being there in a way, not the film being there, but it's about actually being in the world and therefore creating that world with a sense of truth, really.

Q The two leads in *Japanese Story*, how did that affect they way they worked together? Do you impose the rules?

00:42:54

Brooks No, no I don't impose the rules. I think Toni and Go both really appreciated the experience of being there and not having to sort of um, make it up. Because every time you arrived at a particular location and there were lots of them, that work was already done for them so therefore they only then had to react to that work, to that place. So if you're in the most stunning gorgeous, which is in one of the clips I think, which is like, they've got this most beautiful view and this is after she's just found out that he's married. And she comes and stands – they're standing apart looking at the view and then she's – she walks around and just stands beside him. And they just touch, just slightly, you know. And there's something very accurate about that experience. Like um, and I don't think you can, I mean I suppose you can fabricate that, I suppose you can fabricate it. But there's something good about not having to fabricate it really. That there are these elements which is the landscape, and you in that landscape and therefore what that does to you. And you know, I mean my experience of being in it is that I feel like I'm a – I'm a much more um, honest person really.

Q You're not tricking people. You've captured that in Japanese Story, but you've widened the frame a lot and worked with the landscape, to capture that. Was there a temptation to go big all the time and forget what was in that landscape? How was that challenge?

00:45:09

Brooks No I think we were always – Baker puts this really well, he talks about the fact that just because you can see something beautiful doesn't mean that it's going to be captured and be really beautiful on the screen. And I suppose I learnt a lot from him about that, really. And so yeah, there is that thing of always wanting to show off the fact that you're there, but if you're not following the story and you're not following the story for why you want to tell the story, and what you're trying to tell in that story, then forget it really. But there are times – I can remember there were times on

the film when we would be getting cranky with each other because here we were, we travelled all of this way, you know, we'd taken all of the equipment over on boats, you know, we'd schlepped it all up to the Pilbara, you know, and now we were standing, staring at a brick wall. You know, I mean there are those moments that happens, but if that's the honest shot, um, then that's the honest shot really.

Q You've worked in documentary as well. Any special influence from that, that has carried through?

00:47:05

Brooks Not really, I can't even think.

Q With cast in *Road to Nhill*, how did you find them and how did you work with them? It wasn't a film that ticked a lot of the boxes?

00:47:52

Brooks No, but that's the best thing about being – I'm not quite certain if I'm going to answer your question, but that is the best thing about being a naïve filmmaker is that you don't quite know enough about the market to know what you're meant to be doing. I reckon that's the best thing about starting off filmmaking, is that you don't know enough about what you're meant to be doing so that you just go on and do it because it's what you want to do. And I guess that's one of the things that I wish I could have back again, is that sense of you know, oh you mean a film about a group of older people and there's no main characters, not going to work, oh why didn't somebody tell me that. Because you know, like, do you know what I mean? It's really, it's frustrating when you start getting more and more savvy about markets and trends and box office and previous records and who's – I can remember really clearly when we were doing *Road to Nhill* we were trying to work out who to play the role of Bob, who was Bill Hunter in the end, but at that stage we didn't have him in the role. And I remember somebody saying to me, he does or he doesn't have marquee value. And I had no idea what the term meant. I had to ask somebody

what marquee value meant. And I had to find out then whether – I actually thought it had something to do with marquees on the Croisette at Cannes or something, I still don't even know why they call it marquee, does anyone know?

Q Isn't it the board out the front of cinemas?

Brooks is that what it's about.

Q I think so.

00:49:42

Brooks Any how the point was that he – Bill Hunter did – I think Bill Hunter was supposed to have marquee value. I don't know that, I think ... but you know now when you look at a script you know you go, I don't know about the lead role for that, you know. Is that going to be a strong enough role for, you know, Geoffrey Rush to consider, all those little demons, little nagging thoughts behind you. Which is – I think they're the enemy of good story telling really.

Q The three act structure

00:50:21

Brooks That the one that really, really drives me mad because people talk about things having three act structures and what they're talking half the time is that it's in three parts. You know it's got three parts, that doesn't mean it's a three act structure, you know like, it just drives me mad that stuff, drives me mad.

Q Talk about your work in television.

00:50:56

Brooks For television I think what happened to me was that Bob Weiss rang me up one day and he said would I direct an episode of *Raw FM* and I

remember thinking, aren't I a bit busy, haven't I got something else to do. I don't know. And then he rang back and he said, go on do it. And I said, I don't know about that. And then he rang back again and he said, it's going to be the easiest thing, all you have to do is say yes. And I did, and it was. But I remember being really, really scared going onto a television set because it was a bit back to the pepper and salt shakers stage of you know, there seemed to be a whole bunch of rules that I didn't know how to follow. And um, I was really scared of it because it was very fast and the team, everybody – when you go onto a television set, especially if you're a new director – of course when you're a new director, everyone's more experienced than you are, but you're in charge. And it's just the Noddy-est, the silliest sort of concept that you can come up with really. But it works eventually everybody says, you know, you go with it and it works. And it's good fun. I mean, doing *Something in the Air*, which was years later, was you know, like hell on wheels it was so fast. It was something like twenty five minutes, you did four twenty five –oh I can't remember, anyway it was incredibly fast. And you –it was like cramming for an exam, you just had to remember everything you possibly could just shove it into your brain. But then you just work at this phenomenal speed, and it just creates its own energy. And it can be really good fun. And *SeaChange* was brilliant.

Q Did that help you with your other drama work?

00:52:50

Brooks Um, I think the thing that it helps with -- for me it helped a lot was being able to cut my losses on a film really quickly. So if I um, like when you first go into a film and say you go into a feature film and you're inclined to be incredibly precious about everything, absolutely everything. And you can't let go of anything. Whereas in television you can't do that. You've got to prioritise things, you know, I think somebody taught me very early on just mark up your A scenes, I didn't even know what that meant, but just marking up the scenes that you were going to give priority to, cos your episode wouldn't work if you didn't have those. And so I

know to do that a bit more intuitively than I would have if I hadn't have done TV.

Q And working with actors on television, was there a different process?

00:53:40

Brooks Yeah, yeah, no, I think it is quite different because there's usually a lot less rehearsal time, so you often have to be very clear and fast about communicating something. So I got a lot um, I lost my nerves about um, saying to an actor that that wasn't good enough and we'll just do it again and you lost it really. You know, to being blunt, being blunt and um ... being blunt and honest about also being respectful of the fact that you're there to do a job.

Q Was using more than one camera something that helped or hindered you? Do you take any of that back to features?

00:54:36

Brooks Yeah look I quite like using two cameras on a feature now if I can. But once again I'm really happy to bump it out if it's not going to do the job, you know. And if it starts compromising the lighting on another shot then I will get rid of it really quickly. Yeah, I mean, I think speed doesn't always come through having quantity, that's the one thing I'd say about using two cameras, is that sure it can occasionally get you out of a hole, but by and large being efficient is about being focussed I think and about being clear about what you're trying to communicate and being honest, rather than being – getting a lot of stuff in a hurry, and then rushing back to the edit room and saying, what did I get.

Q So the process of the edit room, and how that changes. I'm thinking about creative control you have on features and not on television.

00:55:47

Brooks I think the edit – I mean the edit room in television is obviously a completely different experience from film. They've already got it nearly edited by the time you get in the room if you're doing a series. So you're on a treadmill basically, and so you meet usually staff editor, and go in and try and sort of focus and shape it emotionally and performance wise. But overall you're working to a team and that team has usually got an executive producer or creative -- whatever, the series producer who's got a stronger, the strong vision of the direction of that episode – those series. And I'm quite happy to sort of fall in line with that because, of course that should be how it should be really, when you're watching television, that's what you want. When you're editing a feature you're really trying to shape the material, you're still working at both ends of it, you're right in the middle of it, you're still working with the intentions of the script and the script writer. The journey that you've been on and what you're hoping to deliver for the audience. And you're in charge of that editing process completely differently I think. And I love it, I love that whole editing bit, yeah.

Q Where does editing sit for you in the process? What you get out of it?

00:57:21

Brooks I, I love the fact, I mean especially when you're shaping the story, which you know, you'd think the script is sort of set in concrete, you don't have to but you do do a lot of shaping of it. Balancing it and moving it around and shaping it with music. And I just like that experience of you know the final moulding of it, if you like, the final sort of – you know cos there's so many cuts that can come out of a film, but most of them aren't any good. There really is only one that's good in my opinion. And getting that, it's not always that easy. You know it's still, you know, like I don't know if you've had that experience where you can go and watch your rushes and night after night just think they're just brilliant rushes, doesn't mean you've got a brilliant film yet. It's the same as drafting a script, you know, you can easily fall off the rails when you're drafting a script, you can -- just because you've done another draft doesn't mean that you've

actually made it any better. Because you've put something in that tips the balance of it, or you haven't landed it properly, or you've um, with editing because you've put music in that's thrown you off course at the wrong moment or, or you've left something in that's far too long or, or you've cut it down so you've lost the heart of it. So now it's just there for sort of expository reasons and now you may as well not have it at all. Those sorts of questions can go on for a long time.

INTERVIEWER Just talking about the experience in the editing room .. the clips in *Japanese Story*. Just thinking about those moments when you're suddenly arriving in a landscape, how you've found that in the editing room. When you discover that moment when something's working or not working.

00:48

SUE Um.. yeah, I mean I think working with Jill Bilcock is probably a fairly unique ... well, working with Jill Bilcock is an amazing experience. I was going to say unique experience but I suppose you can't say that because a lot of people work with Jill. But the thing about working with Jill is that she's got this ... well she did with me anyhow, this amazing way of presenting material to you as if you were going to be the first and only audience to it. So she would let ... she would ... you'd come into the editing room sort of fairly late in the process and she would sort of had stitched ... when I say ...

I've got myself a bit confused here. Anyhow. The thing about working with Jill ... I'll let the train go by now. [background noise] Nearly bought a house in this street once because [inaudible] And at five in the morning they'd be pretty loud too.

01:38

Um.. I guess every editing experience, relationship ... you right there? [crew talk] Okay. I guess every editing director relationship is a bit like your cinematographer director relationship. It's special and whatever that film brings and that material and then you all come together in that one room - it's unique, okay.

And the thing with Jill on *Japanese Story*, Jill Bilcock on *Japanese Story*, was that she was - she was very a very strong advocate of the film. And very protective of the film in a way that was pretty amazing actually. So she would - she would take out the treasures of it if you know what I mean and present those to you in a way that was pretty gorgeous. You'd come into the editing room and she would've worked on it for a few hours and then she'd show you a scene and say, you know, "What do you think?" And, you know, usually you'd love it. Usually you'd love what she had done with it. And there wasn't a sort of a much of a process on that particular film where you'd be going back into the box and sort of trawling through all the material, saying "Isn't there something better in here."

Whereas on *Road to Nhill* because it was such a low budget film and it was all done on 16mm and we had trim bins and everything and, you know, it was way back then. It was um.. it was quite a different experience. Like Tony would ... we would be sort of trawling through the material trying to find the little bit that would give it that ... would lift it over the edge. Or shape the story the right way or, you know, improve the performance a little bit or, you know ... because we were working on a really, really tight budget.

Yeah so, I mean Tony used to call me the ibis i the edit room of *Road to Nhill* because I used to sort of be trawling through the trims all the time, trying to find something. But that wasn't how it was on *Japanese Story*.

INTERVIEWER Do you want to talk about music in sound post production. When you start bringing in those elements.

03:32

SUE Ah.. yeah, music comes in fairly early on for us. Like we usually ... there's usually music discussions at the script stage. And Alison uses music a lot to write. So that she'll have ... she'll be playing music here while she's writing something or on the script that she's working on at the moment, you know, we stop and listen to music and imagine how the music's going to affect a scene or a series of scenes.

I use music sometimes when I'm on location. Not a lot. I know a lot of directors actually walk around with iPods and things. But if there's something that I particularly want to evoke, you know, I might play it. Usually just on the stereo in the car or something, you know, like just jam in a cd or something like that. Um.. which I did on *Japanese Story*.

On *Japanese Story* we had that music that was ... a lot of that music was determined at a ... not determined at a script stage but certainly thought through at that script stage and then that just evolved all the way through that process. So then we used a lot of Sakamoto's music in our ... as our temp tracks. And then Elizabeth Drake came on then and used that as a reference and then she just developed it and developed it and developed it until it became quite something special for her. And for us, yeah.

INTERVIEWER Have there been any mentors who have been important throughout your career, from early on or as a continuing influence?

04:59

SUE No! [laughs] That's a terrible answer isn't it. Let me think about that. No. I can't ... the truth is - the truth is no. The truth is that where I get all of that support from is from friends and work colleagues. And from Alison and from relatives. I don't sort of have someone who's a lot more senior than I am that I can ring up and say, you know, "What do I do here?"

Jill was a mentor on *Japanese Story*. Jill Bilcock. Yeah. I rely a lot on friends and relatives. A lot. And that means work friends as well, you know.

INTERVIEWER Yeah, that as a perfectly reasonable response. I certainly think back on our work in the '80s and we had a group of people and that's how we used to do, like, our screenings.

06:07

SUE Yeah, yeah.

INTERVIEWER And that was always how we built something.

06:13

SUE And that's how I still think, like if I've ... if I'm doing a test screening of something there's - there's a handful of people that I really respect and I want to know what they think. And then I work from there. There's a lot of advice that I find very difficult

to incorporate, you know, if you broaden it out too much you actually find that you're not staying 'on song' as they say.

INTERVIEWER So if you were giving advice to young people starting out now would you do something differently?

06:56

SUE No, I reckon I had a pretty good journey through it really. I mean ... no I don't know. No I reckon the Film School was great. I was a bit kicking and screaming while I was in there, you know, as was our want really, you know, like it was partly to do with - who are they to tell me how to do that. And - what have they ever made anyhow. All of those things. But when I look back on it I think they were pretty keen, passionate lecturers basically. And they guided us a lot really.

INTERVIEWER Yeah, and if you had advice for people coming into it now?

07:36

SUE I think the thing that's fabulous about it for younger people now that come into it is that it's so much easier, you know, everybody says that because the technology is easier um.. so there's no ... the whole thing of the voodoo of it, you know, is gone. There's lot of ways you can do it.

Um.. you know, I was just watching a documentary the other night on the television late at night, you know, and clearly it was a bunch of students who'd got together and decided they wanted to make a documentary about, you know, this particular subject. And it was as rough as anything but because their heart was in what they were trying to tell you couldn't turn it off, you know, because it was engaging.

I think if you know why you're doing it and that you've got good reasons to tell those stories and you've got something to say then um.. it's not that hard. What's hard of course, which remains hard, is the whole thing about financing and distribution and exhibition. That remains hard.

INTERVIEWER It's like Mt Everest in some ways.

08:31

SUE Yeah it is like Mt Everest isn't it? Yeah.

[break in recording]

08:38

SUE So what am I doing here Ray? You going to ask me a question or am I just going to stand here and do show and tell.

INTERVIEWER Sue if you could explain where we are.

08:52

SUE Oh where we are. Yeah, yeah. Well we're in the mother ship. No we're in my office. And this is where I've been working now for quite a few years. And this is the office that we use to develop and, you know, write scripts, put ... work out all the original stuff when we get them into production. And then if we get them into production we move off to a production office.

INTERVIEWER So what productions have been through here?

09:19

SUE *Road to Nhill, Japanese Story*, um.. all of the work that happened on *Subdivision* happened here. *Sea Change. Raw FM*. I think the short films were all done in the front room of the house but [laughs] we had to move out.

INTERVIEWER So how many years have you been here?

09:38

SUE I think we moved here 1990. 1990. It's a long time isn't it? Yeah, 1990. And there's twenty years of junk in it. And paper.

INTERVIEWER You brought it up earlier ... talking about the paper life, just like the afterlife.

10:06

SUE Well I suppose um.. yeah, sometimes I think we're drowning in paper in this place, you know, there's a lot of paper. There's a lot of paper leads up to a film. There's a lot of paper leads ... comes out at the tail end of it. And I know people say, you know, the digital age - you don't need to do all of that, you know, you can just leave it all on your computer and you don't need paper copies but we feel like we do. We're very ... we work with paper, you know, like ... the script we're working on at the moment is a stack this high and we've thumbed through it. Over and over and over and over again. Saying is that one where the, you know, cat falls off the roof is in that one or that one. And we sort of ... it's a tactile process really. And, you know, you'll see around the corner there, there's stacks of scripts like this because that's the way we work.

INTERVIEWER What are you going to do with it when you've made another three copies?

10:53

SUE Well, it's a funny thing actually isn't it because I've just cleaned out my uncle's house who was in his seventies and he died and his wife was in her seventies when she died and he was also a person who made a lot of stuff. Like he made everything. He made ... he was a designer and he made a lot of clothes and he made a lot of artwork and the place was floor to ceiling - chockas, with stuff, you know. And I had to find a home for everything in that house. Everything. [laughs] And I did. We did. We did.

But, you know, it's just interesting what a life is. And if you make things you make a lot of stuff comes along with it. Like, you make *Japanese Story* and it comes out and it's in a little dvd like that, or it's in a film. But that's the product, you know, all of the stuff that makes a product is, you know, a lot. A lot of stuff. A lot of tools.

INTERVIEWER So you have to move into a bigger office.

11:46

SUE Oh no. We'll have to get rid of stuff. We'll have to get rid of it but yeah, while we're still using it you can't just, you know, start throwing it.

INTERVIEWER Can you take us through some of the material you've got. First of all talk about the process of ... I guess when you're going into a location and recording it for the first time.

12:13

SUE

Well yeah, on *Japanese Story* we ... I can't remember how many location recces we would've done but they were a lot. Sometimes ... I think the first one Alison and I did with two mates. And then Alison and Sue and I did it and then we did it again and then I think I did it with Baker the cinematographer.

So each time you start, you know, building up your photographic, you know, records. Um.. and the script had a lot of um.. had a lot requirements. One of the biggest ones was that it needed a really good waterhole which is, you know, I think in the end we found the definitive waterhole for the film. But that was after we'd gone through all of Western Australia and a lot of South Australia.

So every time I went to a waterhole to see if it was going to be any good or not I'd take a series of photographs of it and sort of, you know, paste them all together like that and put them on a bit of paper. And these became all of my workbooks. So um ... and they've been pretty much sort of bastardised really in the process. Because, you know, they're work books. They're things that you work with. So you, you know, you might pull them out and things because you need to work with them. But like, that's the sort of thing that I would do while I was doing *Japanese Story*.

We'd go to ... that's Sue and Alison. That's one waterhole that we went to. I don't know. I'm just picking them here at random but um.. this is us at the mine. So, you know, I leave all the photographs of people in because it gives you the sense of the light and how it plays.

That's the mine. I would've ... we would've photographed most mines over there. We ended up shooting at BHP.

Like photographs like that I take ... is um.. you know like they're just points of reference. I don't expect that to be in the film but I love the saturation of ... that's with no, you know, that's no polarizing or anything. It just comes out like that. There's a sense that the world is as polarized as that.

INTERVIEWER While it's in that same position do you just want to flick back over those first few pages.

14:13

SUE That one's not very interesting. That's Alison, Sue and I. In one particular spot the light was beautiful. This is when we needed a mine, you know, there's a mine in the film so this one's BHP, so that's the one we actually used in the end. But the light's not fabulous at that point but the scale was pretty good.

I was saying to you before that the thing I love about using photographs is that you can, you know, feel them and run your hands over them. You don't get all that with digital.

The last film was all done with digital and I just don't feel like I've ever felt it properly. [laughs] Because I didn't touch it, you know?

Occasionally I do a little map to say where it is.

15:08

SUE Well it's not one we've used. [laughs] But it's, you know, it's the building of it. It's the building of the film isn't it. So that's book 2. Book 3. I mean these are not sacred documents or anything because they get used a lot.

INTERVIEWER Sorry what was that again?

15:25

SUE I said they're not sacred documents. They're working documents, you know, they're things that we, you know, they're the building blocks of trying to get the film together.

There's the three of us again in some extraordinary light.
Beautiful light isn't it?

And shots like this I love, you know, just how those gumtrees are just almost exploding with light.

INTERVIEWER Sorry what was that again?

15:52

SUE [laughs] Sorry. I said shots like these I love because it was a point of reference because the gumtrees were exploding with light.

Constant photographs of roads. More roads.

Oh yeah, this was, for example, this was on one of our location reces where Sue, Alison and I became obsessed about how she was going to be able to get the body into the car. And um.. so we started mocking it up here and trying to work out, you know, this is out there trying to do the location recce but just working out how low this was going to be to the ground and how it was going to be to get it up and um.. yeah. That's what that's all about.

16:37

SUE Just trying to work out how that space was going to work. How low we could get the car to the ground and things like that. I think that's what that's about. Or maybe that's about it being bogged. But, you know, you go out there and do all ... try and do all of those things when you're out there working.

Oh yeah, here we go. This is ... [laughs] this is us out on a location recce trying to work out how to get the body in the car. [laughs] But, you know, that didn't ... in the end became a much, much bigger job. Because that became part of the rehearsal. Toni had a lot of trouble with that actually but, you know, in the end she got there.

17:22

SUE Oh these ones of the ... see this is ... I think that's Alison and Sue, yeah. Having a look at what the possibilities might be for dragging the body in. Because we went through a stage where, you know, in the film eventually what she does is drag the body through the back. Um.. but what we went through for a stage was whether in fact it was going to ... we went through a stage where we thought you wouldn't put the body in the back of the car. It seemed irreverent. And so we thought she should put him in the back seat but in fact that was a lot, lot harder than putting him in the back.

But in the film I think there's a little moment where she's just sitting. That's sort of her moment of thinking that's what she'd like to do but she can't do it. In the end she just has to get him into the back. Getting him into the back was ... and I guess that's the thing about um.. that's the thing about life and death anyhow is that ... I don't know if you've ever looked after anyone that's been really crook or compromised and you ... or even broken

something and you go through the stages ... your first reactions are to keep everything nice. You know? To keep everything as they should be and then, you know, as you get further into the process you just find yourself going one step further and further into what you wouldn't think you would do. But you do. Because you have to.

And that's sort of what she was confronted with in that. Do you know what I mean?

INTERVIEWER When you were a young woman you were a nurse for a while?

18:51

SUE Yeah, yeah. I did nursing first. I did general nursing and then I did theatre nursing.

INTERVIEWER Do you think that in any way influenced the way you work with people?

19:08

SUE Yeah I guess it gives me a grounding about the reality of what happens. Yeah, yeah. I mean I know there were different challenges on this when we um.. well a number of people actually, including Toni, said "Well I can't do it." And um.. I said "Well we can find a film solution or we can keep working it through until you find what you really would do." I don't know. I don't know if that's anything to do with nursing or not but maybe. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER So do you think this was a particularly challenging part for Toni?

19:47

SUE Oh yeah. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. It was shocking for her I think. In some ways. Yeah. Because she um.. I think she had to confront some pretty personal stuff in it. But I can't imagine anybody wouldn't.

I mean, I remember at one stage one of the location reces with the location manager and just he and I were sitting in his four wheel drive and we were trying to work out how it was all going to work. And I said "Well, it sort of has to work really." And so we were just sitting there, you know, in the bush together and the next day he said to me, he said "I was thinking about it. What would I do? What would I do if I was in that situation? If that was my partner?"

And you could see it sort of hit, you know, it had hit him in the gut. And I think that happened for Toni. I know it certainly happened for Go as well. They were really genuinely dealing with death. Unlike what we usually do in film which is um.. have a death in a film and then see what the repercussions of that will be. Which sometimes can be comedy and sometimes can be escalation in the drama but it's very rarely these days um.. just sitting with it and going - what does the death mean. Not just what does the grief mean but what does the death mean?

How do I go from this step to this step? Yeah. So I think she found all of that really confronting.

INTERVIEWER Have you discussed it with her since?

21:19

SUE No. No. [laughs] I mean I think it's a very personal thing and I respect that for her too, you know, like I don't even ... I mean it's personal for me too. Do you know what I mean? Like it's not um.. it's not the stuff of promoting a film or ... it is really part of your life really. And sometimes you have to ... you put little tags of your life in your films, which, you know, I've just done again this time with Hervey Bay ... with *Subdivision*. And I see it go through on the screen and I think - oh, that's personal. And I know I'm the only one that will know that. But then there's another level of how much you have to and you want to disclose of your personal life. You know? I think it's - I think it's hard.

INTERVIEWER Is there a particular personality trait that you have that makes you very good at what you do?

22:23

SUE [laughs] Yeah, I'm stubborn. I think that makes me good at it. Yeah, yeah. Being ... I think I'm pretty determined. In a fairly non-aggressive way. Although I suppose that's for other people to judge isn't it. But I'm ... yeah, yeah um.. usually when I set my mind on something I usually sort of push it through to the end. Um.. and I guess the other thing is that I have the capacity, although I often, often don't do it, but I have the capacity of actually being where I'm meant to be. If that makes sense? Of actually being there.

I recognise when I do do it and I recognise that most of the time I don't do it. But I recognise that there's a place in my life that I can go to be there. And I can do that. And have done it on film. Not all the time.

INTERVIEWER Is that self discipline? Because as a director you're responsible for a lot of people but you're both intimately engaged with them but at the same time quite alone.

23:44

SUE I think it's ... I think what I've learned about it is through performance itself. Actually learning how performers work. And then recognising when they arrive at a good performance is often when they've connected with something very genuine. And then for me I've had to unpack that to work out how I am. Yeah.

But I'm not ... it's not easy. Because I think film making itself actually puts you in a place that makes that hard to do. It actually puts many, many, many, many barriers between you and the experience.

And I think probably the best of the film makers that we know - apart from the sort of spivvy, shooting from the hip, you know, 'I can do anything' film makers - but those that really go somewhere really special for you are very much their own person, if you know what I mean.

INTERVIEWER Yeah.

24:41

SUE Mmm. [laughs] But I'm - but I'm cringing because I just think, you know, I can't do it. I wish I could do it all the time but I recognise it as opposed to ...

INTERVIEWER I know exactly what you mean. But in film making one day maybe just didn't work out but you can come back the next day, usually.

25:05

SUE Yeah, yeah. As long as you're not smarting too much from the previous day. That's the problem. Not smarting from where you've been and not worried about where you've got to go. But actually landing where you've meant to be right now.

INTERVIEWER And I guess that's recovery?

25:17

SUE Yeah, that's recovery. But it's also honesty about um.. it's honesty I think. It happens in teaching a lot too. I think really good teachers, you know, they're the ones that go - just stop and listen. You know. And just don't fill the void all the time, you know.

That was a big deviation.

INTERVIEWER It was.

25:45

SUE A bit ponderous. [laughs] This is just more of the same, that's all. Books and books like this. Boxes and boxes of them. That's what we did.

INTERVIEWER You said one scrapbook. This is several.

26:05

SUE Oh yeah. No this is pulled out of boxes of them. There were lots of them. But, you know, they got ... this is the waterhole we used

isn't it? [crew talk] That's the actual one that we use in the end. Which I think looks better on the film than it does there.

INTERVIEWER What's interesting about location stills is sometimes they're very raw.

26:33

SUE Yeah, yeah, yeah.

INTERVIEWER What do you actually see in those location stills? Do they capture something?

26:38

SUE Well this one for example, it's like the light's flat and it's too green. But we knew we were coming back when it wasn't going to be that green. And we knew we were going to come back at magic hour when the light was going to be just stunning. So that - that for me, is just the architecture of it, you know, so I would take that for where I think architecturally I think it's going to work in the film.

Whereas sometimes I take photographs where I think the light's extraordinary, like those ones of us sitting on a rock. And that's the light that you want, you know, so you just sort of ... you mix it all up.

But it's a means of talking about what you're wanting. Like that light I love. And that light I love. I love that really flat light. Like Baker and I talked a lot about getting that really saturated, in-your-face light.

INTERVIEWER You have to show me again.

27:24

SUE I already showed it before. That one. That really saturated light. That's not even the best shot of it. There'd be others that are better. And this one I think's sort of interesting because it's ... it's sort of um.. is this the right one? Yeah, like that one just looks like a nothing shot in lots of ways but the more you look at it the more you realise that there is a tiny little vehicle and tiny little specks of people. So that was sort of not a shot I expected to have in the film but it evoked something for me about the fact that I wanted us to be like specks in the landscape. That we were ah.. well we don't sort of amount to much really.

This is good for light. That I would've taken for light. That's all. More of the same. Makes you wonder why you sit in the city isn't it? When you could be there.

INTERVIEWER Sorry what was that again?

28:33

SUE I said [laughs] it makes you wonder why you sit in the city and look at that view when you could be living there. I suppose you can't live there though can you? You can't live there.

INTERVIEWER Well you could but I think it would be ...

28:47

SUE But you know, we're here because of the cappuccinos not because of the [laughs] ... this guy - this guy, David Cox, took us

onto his land and showed us a lot of his special waterholes and all of his special places. That was a blessing. We nearly killed him actually because we were so hot, when we all got back in the car we had the air conditioning going full belt. Drove back to his house and when we got there he was shivering. Had to get him out and make him a hot cup of tea with some sugar because [laughs] such wusses, all in our air conditioned four wheel drive.

[laughs] He thought we were nuts.

29:32

SUE But we didn't film on his land in the end. There's the petroglyphs.

30:07

SUE More of the same. Look at that. Isn't that beautiful? We couldn't film there in the end. Can't remember why. And that one there we ... I took it because I loved the light in it but we couldn't use it because it wasn't deep enough. This one I think was deep enough but it didn't have um.. it was too far away or something.

INTERVIEWER Show me those again.

30:43

SUE Oh, haven't you ... you've done them haven't you? That one you've done haven't you?

INTERVIEWER Yes. It's the other one?

30:56

SUE That's these ones. Of the light. The light.

INTERVIEWER Good.

31:12

SUE That one's gorgeous isn't it? This one I love because of the track to nowhere. That's all.

31:43

SUE Oh that one, that's the one that we used ... that photograph is the one that we ... oh there's the airport there. Um.. the Newman airport. When we saw that gorgeous little thing there that you ... where the little truck comes out and you get your bags off. We thought we had to have that. And that's where they ... she meets him for the first time.

And this one here is the café where they have that meal. And I think it looks, you know, a lot better in the film than it does there. But all the elements were there.

32:17

This is Sue Maslin trying out for the ... what he'd do for ... no, she'd do to get the mobile reception on the phone. That's another mine site that we thought of using. This one here, we thought we might use that one for a while because it was disused and we thought we might have better access but in the end we got BHP. So we didn't have to get it.

32:50

You don't want to film too much Ray. You'll be editing this for the rest of your life.

And these, I found these here. These are the photographs out of a whole stack of photographs of the Japanese casting that we did. So that's Yumiko. That's me with Yumiko.

33:17

That's Go. Had to ask Go to take his shirt off to see what he'd look like. [laughs]

INTERVIEWER Was this the first casting you'd done outside of Australia?

33:32

SUE Yeah.

INTERVIEWER And what was the experience like?

33:36

SUE Oh, it was bizarre. We met in a place that was no bigger than this. Maybe even smaller. And there was me, Alison, Sue and the casting director and this endless stream of Japanese actors. And um.. we all just met around this little table and eventually I'd get them up into another room to do a bit of the work. It was - it was great, but interesting.

INTERVIEWER Were you given any rules that you had to stick to?

34:00

SUE Yeah, yeah. Sometimes when we were meeting some of the more senior actors there was a lot of protocol involved, you know, and we had to do all of the bowing appropriately. Talk through a translator of course. Yeah. It was a very serious event.

INTERVIEWER What do you do, what passions do you have, when you're not involved in film? Things to get out of that frame of mind.

34:31

SUE Um.. yeah, it's one of those funny questions really, isn't it. Probably for me it comes through my family. Your life is your work and your work is your life. My father used to always say, you know, when he spoke about somebody he admired he'd always say "He'll die in his saddle." And that's exactly what he did.

Because I suppose it's something about film making or any creative pursuit in a way, it's like ... it is what you do with your life, really. So I don't sort of think of it - finishing at five, I'll go home now and do a bit of macramé or [laughs] crocheting or something or other. It's because it consumes most of my life and then there's the rest that you squeeze around the edges, you know, but then I also put them into the middle of my day as well. So, I don't separate it out like some people do.

INTERVIEWER Good answer. You actually probably never leave it.

35:29

SUE No.

INTERVIEWER When Sue's on the golf course I'm sure she's working.

35:34

SUE Yeah. Look I'm ... I mean I do do other things. It's not like [laughs] it's not like I'm here from eight to eleven or something. Although sometimes you are but um.. I suppose I think of myself

as a storyteller and that's what storytellers do, is they obsess over it.

INTERVIEWER Very good. Alright.

END TRANSCRIPT