

**Oral History Interview of
Michael R. Casey**

**Interviewed by: Daniel Sanchez
May 24, 2018
Abilene, Texas**

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*General Southwest Collection Interviews***

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Transcript Overview:

This interview features Michael Casey as he discusses his career in the film industry. In this interview, Michael describes how he got started in the film industry, his various jobs in the industry, and how he would solve problems while filming.

Length of Interview: 01:21:14

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Keywords

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Michael Casey (MC):

This is stereo isn't?

Daniel Sanchez (DS):

Yeah, um-hm. My name is Daniel Urbina Sanchez. I'm in Abilene, Texas. And today is May 24, 2018, and I'm with Michael R. Casey. Michael, we're going to kind of just do this free-form. The only thing I'm going to start off with is what's your complete legal name?

MC:

Michael Ray Casey.

DS:

And where and when were you born?

MC:

I was born in Wichita Falls, Texas; May 21, 1947. I call Abilene home because I've [clears throat] lived there every summer, then when my family got divorced and moved to California, every summer I'd come to Abilene. After school I lived here in Abilene until I went out to LA and got in the movie business.

DS:

Okay. You know, appropriately enough, we started off with genealogy, and you just pulled out the family tree. You want to go through that with us and just—

MC:

Yeah. I joined *ancestry.com*. You put your father and mother's name and then they'll tell you who your grandfather was, maybe, then they fill out and you've got to research this. I thought, They want to have you on this for a year. I wrote them, I said, "I'm cancelling my membership because mine's better than yours and more accurate." But anyway, Abner Casey was born in Tyrone County, Ireland. After that, he came to Florence County, South Carolina in 18—I mean, 1736. It says 1790; but 1736. And he had one, two, three, four, five, six boys—seven, eight boys, actually. All six of them fought in the Revolutionary War: Jesse, James, Randolph—that's his daughter.

DS:

It says, "Daughter."

MC:

Moses, Christopher and Benjamin. Christopher fought in the Civil War—I mean, the

Revolutionary War, and he worked under Francis Marion, who was called Swamp Fox in South and North Carolina. Was in a lot of battles. Then—where's Isaac?

DS:

I think you might have your hand on him.

MC:

Yeah. There's Eli Casey. He was another son, and he was a colonel in the South Carolina Militia, and fought in the war. And later he moved up to General and was elected to Congress in 1804, and he died in office in 1807. Then from—from Jessie Casey here, you go down to Levi N. Casey in 1827 in Tennessee, then you go to Jessie Newton, who was in Arkansas. That was my great-great grandfather. Then my grandfather was—let me see—Francis Marion Casey. He was born in Lead Hill, Arkansas, and he moved to Comanche, Texas in 1900. He was married to Allie Nance. She died in 1918 in the bad flu or plague epidemic. I remember they said Papa, my grandfather, had to reach down her throat and put out phlegm because she was choking. Finally she died from it; lungs filled up. She had to lay there a week. It was winter. And they had to put her in the barn for a week till the ground thawed out enough to dig a hole for her funeral. And Francis had—my grandfather had Thelma Casey, Norma Clow [?] [0:03:56], Barbara Anne, Ramona—no, there's—I'm sorry. Thelma Casey, Essie Pearl Casey, Inez Casey, Elida Casey, Wester Newman Casey—who's my uncle here—J.B. Casey, and Dorsey Jean Casey, and Mary Francis Casey. Those two were from Mrs. Minnie Garrett, who was the second wife he married. But then if you go to Raymond Garland Casey, my dad. He was born February 1905. It says, "Comanche, Texas." He was actually born in Church, Texas. He married Florene [?] [0:04:47] Lofton, my mother. They had two children: Charles Francis Casey and Michael Ray Casey. Then Charlie had Lori and Colin, his daughter and son. It doesn't list my children: Elizabeth K. Casey, born in 11/7/76—I mean, 11/3/76—and Christopher Newman Casey was named after my Uncle Newman, who was born 11/12/81. Then if you go over here to one of the relatives, Jesse Casey had—where is it? Here it is. Abner Casey, one of the sons who's John Casey, who had a son William and Peggy Casey. What was it? Peggy Casey had a daughter named Jane Lambton. She married this guy Lambton. And their children were Hannibal Clemons, Margaret Clemons and Longhorn Clemons, Mark Twain. So we're kin to Mark Twain right there. I think Christopher is the last Casey because when everybody gets married, they switch the names, you know? So everybody else has different names down here. It goes way down to here. Weldon. I know one of my grandfathers—which one was that? [inaudible 0:06:53] The second Levi. No, Jessie, I guess. Yeah, the Levi here lived in Missouri. His log cabin was a doghouse log cabin, and it's in display at Silver City, Missouri near Branson. He made railroad ties for the railroad. I think Missouri was the first state to pass a clearcut law because they cut down every tree in Missouri. You can see the log cabin there. One of my relatives started Caseyville, Illinois. There was another one called Casey, Illinois. Then one of his kids was governor of Illinois: Zadok Casey. My dad was born in Church, Texas. It says Comanche—Comanche County. After that they moved to Loraine,

Texas, where Papa farmed. Then they moved up to Whiteflat, Matador, and they're listed in the Matador Ranch. Stories I know about my grandfather was when he was in school in the fifth grade, it was cold and they had a potbelly stove. The teacher walked out, brought in a log, he opened the stove up, tried to put the log in it and it was too long, turned the log around, tried to put it in again, still too long. So he went outside and he cut both ends off the log. Papa quit school that day and said, "That man can't teach me anything." [DS laughs] Let's see. He was a cotton farmer, dry dirt farmer. In '56, the family got together and bought him an indoor toilet because we used to have to use the outhouse when we went up there for family reunions. Every year we'd go up there at Christmas and have a big reunion with all the family; twenty, thirty of us. Another story is when he went to school in Whiteflat at the school, Newman, and Ediese [?] [0:08:58] and my dad would have a lunch pail, and Miss Minnie Vixen [?] [0:09:02]. And they would go to school and eat the lunch. If they didn't bring the pail back, Papa would get a razor strop to them. So my dad would—be his day to carry the pail. Daddy would run ahead of them and set the pail down and run on to the house. And if ones of those kids didn't pick it up, they'd all get whipped so one of them carried it for him. Daddy was always a little lazy. When he was fourteen, he quit and went to Loraine and got a job at a drugstore because he didn't like picking cotton. But my grandfather and all my aunts and uncles picked cotton, and on my mother's side, my grandmother and my mother picked cotton. So luckily I've never had to pick cotton. [inaudible 0:09:50]

DS:
Okay.

[Pause in recording]

MC:
It's up there. But we'd go over to the Whiteflat store and they had an old Coca-Cola machine that took water. You had these glass bottles and you could put a dime in it and you'd have to slide this bottle down the water trough and then come over and pull real hard and it would—this thing would open it up. But it didn't have ice or refrigeration. It was just cold water circulating. You could get you a Nehi orange drink or grape or a root beer—what other kind of soda—cream soda, yeah, or you could get a Coke because it was a Coke machine. But Uncle Stuart and my dad told me that at the Whiteflat school—Quanah Parker in his grades used to camp there on the school grounds when they came through town. Matador's got a big arrow on the ground marking where Quanah Parker lived and roamed. You've seen those arrows, right?

DS:
In fact, they're being planted by a group that's from our building.

MC:

Oh really?

DS:

Yeah.

MC:

That's cool.

DS:

Yeah. Tai Kreidler, he heads up the Comanche Trail.

MC:

I wanted to tell a story. My dad and my Uncle Newman—Raymond Newman—rode the rails out to California, and they got jobs out there working in a drugstore or as carhops at the Pig Stand, which was located at Wilshire and Beverly. It's not there anymore but it was a brown restaurant where your cars pulled up. I remember Dad told me he—one morning Wiley Post and Will Rogers came in and had coffee before they were going to Santa Monica Airport just down the road, and that was the day—last day anybody saw him. They crashed. But then Newman said when he was riding down here on the rails, they stopped in Yuma, Arizona. It was like 120, and he'd been underneath that train for a couple hours. He was dying. He walked into town and there was a little café there that said, "Cool inside." And outside—the side of the café was a Model T engine on a big stand, and they had welded a—it had the radiator fan there, but they had taken a piece of metal and gone further out and put another fan backwards. And that engine was cranking and this other fan was blowing into a burlap bag in an open window, and above it they had a water hose. So that fan was blowing through the soaking wet burlap bag, and he said he walked in there and he thought he'd died and gone to heaven. That was the first air conditioner he ever saw. Another tale was when he was living in LA on Vermont. He was living with three or four other guys. He had some money saved up, and so the guys wouldn't take it—because everybody was always out of work—he hid it where nobody would see it. He woke up one morning and one of the guys was being nice and cooking biscuits in the oven, and that's where he'd hidden the money. [DS laughs] So he rushed in there and the money was crisp. Later on, Uncle Newman went in the Army and worked here at Camp Barkeley as a cook, then he got out, borrow three hundred dollars from his sister, Aunt Desi, and started a restaurant. My dad did the same thing in Wichita Falls. He moved there because the Nance's were there. And he started his work for his restaurant in '41. And Newman was still in the Army, but when he got out he started it too. Dad had eight restaurants, Newman had about thirteen, and they went into three specialty restaurants: The Barn Door, Little Red Barn, and the Ranch House. And later he built Old Abilene Town, which had the Stagecoach—Golden Stagecoach restaurant, which would—had five big alcoves with the governor's pictures on all of them and a big huge thing with all round

tables and fancy chairs, and a stage where we'd have old-time music or we'd show silent movies on the stage where people ate. Then upstairs he had a club. Each table was—one was a covered wagon, one was a surrey, you know, where you ate. They used to come out there and say, "Casey, make it rain." The two picture windows on either side of the club, he had put flood lights up. He had a water hose going to some pipe with holes in it. He had tape recorded a thunderstorm, and he had a microphone by the register and he'd push the tape recorder and turn on the water hose, and water would start dripping off the roof, it looked like, then he'd flash those flood lights when there was lightning on the tape recorder. It would look like it's raining and thundering and lightning. People loved seeing that. He made the whole thing up. But he—before he built Old Abilene Town, I think he toured every western town in the country. Even talked to Walter Knott about building it. But as long as his health held out, it was a great place. School buses used to stop and tour our museum. It had about a million and a half dollars stuffed in it. Old-time player pianos and big things that would take a tin roll of music, a big round record. And one of them played the violin, drums and piano. It played all three at once. But all that got burnt down; two bikers that lit the grass on fire. He only had seventy-five thousand insurance. We had Model T's and buckboards and covered wagons on the porch. It was two barracks buildings put together. It was full. All the Billy the Kid's guns, all old photography equipment, antique cameras and stuff, and all the old family heirlooms. Everything burned down. He had a heart attack that day, especially when the fire department unloaded a bulldozer to bulldoze it down and so it wouldn't set up again. We had to hold him back because he wanted to stop them. So the town sort of went sick and died. He was getting sick. They had an auction with the antique cars and everything else. They still made seventy-five thousand on that. Yeah. I guess, turn it off.

DS:
Okay.

[Pause in recording]

MC:
Another note about my uncle, Wester Newman Casey. They lived here at Old Abilene Town on Lytle Lake. He was the first house on the lake. On the weekends I learned how to swim, waterski and fish. We used to catch some big fish. I think he was two doors from Billie Sol Estes' house. Now the whole place is full of houses. I think they paid thirty-six thousand—

[Pause in recording]

MC:
Is it working?

DS:

It looked like it was stopped but it might've been my eyes, because now it's counting.

MC:

I wanted to say two valuable things Uncle Newman taught me. He said, "Never tell a man to do a job you're not willing to do yourself." And number two, "If a job is worth doing, it's worth doing well, whether you're cleaning a restroom or running a restaurant or doing a movie." So I always remembered those two things. I just headed a new story about me that they had in Compass Magazine. When I retired, they didn't have a Location Managers Guild yet. It's not Location Managers Guild International. We had a union, and we were part of the Teamsters, I guess. I was in that union and the Producers Guild of America, made that [?] as a still photographer. I was in Screen Actors and Screen Actresses Guild. But they called me up when they had this guild and invited me to join, and they wanted to see my life's story so I wrote it for them because when I started in the business, they didn't have a Location Managers Union even. Back then I was doing commercials. If you wanted to show the client pictures of the location we were going to film, you had to either shoot with a Polaroid—which I had a professional 180 Polaroid that shot shutter speeds, and F-stops and electronic flash—or you could shoot a motion picture film—5247—and take to a CFI [**Consolidated Film Industries**] lab. They would develop it and then they'd make it into slides, one line print slides, so you could show the clients the next day because they didn't have one-hour photo back then. It was like seven days for color and three days for black and white. So that's the way I used to show them. Later on when we got one-hour photo, we would take pictures and then we'd tape them together on a folder and make panoramics and whatever. But back in those days, you couldn't get them developed that quick so we did slides or Polaroids.

DS:

Take a breather you said?

MC:

Yeah.

DS:

Okay.

[Pause in recording]

DS:

Well, Mike, we've been talking about Location Management and all that. Tell us how you got out to California and got your start and built your way up to that.

MC:

Okay. Yeah, I was kidnapped and taken out there at an early age. Actually, my parents got divorced and I had to move out to California with my mother and grandmother. So I went to seventh grade out there, the eighth grade back in Wichita, the ninth, tenth, eleventh, twelfth out there. But every summer I'd come back to Abilene and work at Newman's restaurants as a dishwasher or a soda jerk. And then when he started building Old Abilene Town, I would go out there and work and help build the boardwalks, and during the summer we'd work on it. He sat down with a menu pad—placemat for a restaurant—and he drew the whole town and what he wanted: the world's tallest windmill and Indian village and a tank, mystery house that he built by his self where the ball rolls backwards and the water flows uphill. But a lot of that stuff didn't develop. We had a heck of a Western town. We used to have stagecoaches and I did gun fighting there and would fall off roofs or rob banks. We'd get some black powder in a napkin and shoot it with a blank gun and it'd smoke and smoke would come out of the bank. I built a water trough that I tarred and it leaked. My uncle went down and got a sheet tin insert for it. But we had a little plug in there and when the guy would shoot it, the guy behind the water trough would pull the plug and water would come out of the trough. I had the bank sign rigged where it would swing back and forth, and it had a nail so when somebody shot at the bank, the nail would come out the bank sign and it'd drop down and go back and forth. And we had a barrel—we had mousetrap and a tin can. They'd shoot it and we'd let the mousetrap go with a string and the can would fly off. So we'd do bank robberies or shootouts or stagecoach robberies. We'd fall of the two-story buildings on the porch and then roll and land on the caliche. When I got to Hollywood, I found out all those guys have stunt pads and footballs pads and elbow pads. They build a sand trap to fall in. They don't fall on caliche, but we did. We didn't know about that stuff. Anyway, I was doing that, and I graduated high school and my brother wanted me to start working extra. He was a producer doing commercials, so I went back there and got a job working extra in the movies. That was very boring, though. I was an ape in *Planet of the Apes*. I was on the *Gomer Pyre Show* and *Dr. Ben Casey* and *Dr. Kildare*, *Hogan's Heroes*, shows like that, and a couple of features: *WUSA* and *Zabriskie Point*. We made twenty-nine dollars and fifteen cents a day doing that. Then when I was at *Planet of the Apes*, they flew us out to the desert and we had on these rubber boots, felt uniforms, and rubber masks, and we're in the Mojave Desert at 130 degrees. Our boots were filling up with sweat and guys were fainting. So when we went on strike, all these apes are over in one corner of the set going, We no work. So they paid us a hundred a day hazard pay when we were out in the desert. So we got a little raise there. But sometimes you'd be on a set and the extras would just go back and play cards until it's time to go up, but I always sit and watch the cameraman and watch the lighting directors and learn something. So I really quit working extra and I got a job as a PA [**Personal Assistant**] at Tele-Video Productions, running stuff. They would shoot commercials and then one of the first thing would be break down the prints and send them to the TV stations. You used to send 16-millimeter, one-minute prints to the TV stations, so you had a big thousand-foot reel and you'd have to run it through a little plastic reel and break it off, tape it, stick it in a box and go to Tuscan or Phoenix or wherever, all the

TV. You didn't transmit it through the air then, it was 16-millimeter. We shot 35, but they reduced it to 16. And I got grandma the old sewing machine motor and pedal and I welded a 16 shaft on it. While the other lady was doing this big rewind, I'd sit there and tape the film to the little plastic reel, push my foot down and [imitates sound] and I'd do another one. So I didn't want to do it that slow. I used to figure out fast ways to do stuff. But later on he let me go scouting for locations for the commercials, and that's when we used the old cameras or slides. Then I started shooting some commercials on camera. I shot a commercial for America States Insurance. Frank Gretta [?] [0:24:17] was the director. Because I used to shoot—oh, before Tele-Video, I got a job at Encyclopedia Britannica Films doing educational films. And I shot those at 16 with another cameraman, Bud Botham, at San Jose. But I remember I was doing a shot of underwater welding and regular welding as a job training educational film. So I'm shooting this guy through a tank underwater. I think, Well, I've got this filter and all these lenses here. It couldn't hurt my eye. Bull. At night, it was like sandpaper. It was killing me. Burnt my eye a little bit. You never look at a weld. Anyway, back to Tele-Video. I started scouting and then I—like, shot a commercial for San Bose Coffee, where they wanted a map of the United States made out of coffee cups, and they wanted it steamy. So we're on a little stage with a sweep and we made the coffee cups out there, put a little bit of coffee, and he said, "We've got to get them all to smoke." So I had a special effects book and I saw when they were doing movies, the little battleships in the background sinking and it'd start smoking in the war films. It was called titanium tetrachloride. When it hits air or water it starts smoking. So they would freeze it, put it in those ships, then as it thawed it would start smoking. So I got a bottle of it from Hollywood Chemical, opened it up and poured two or three drops in each cup and they were smoking, then we started choking. I found out it's a toxic, corrosive liquid. So we had to get fans and air out the stage. I put the top back on and it broke. I put a wet rag and I took it down to the Hollywood Fire Department and I said, "How do I get rid of this?" They tried to look it up in their books. They said, We don't know, but get it the hell out of here. So on the way home, I through it in a vacant lot and smoke went all over the place. Then I did a San Bose commercial where it said, "Coffee a dime, all around the world." So we started with a black background, and I had a globe spinning on a turntable. We started on the Earth and space—no, I'm sorry. We started on the Earth, then we pulled back and see it's in space still spinning, and we pull back until it's the size of a dime, then I got a dime on a black background and I drilled a hole in the edge of it and put a drill underneath it with a drill press. It was backwards so it stuck the drill bit up here, put the dime on it, got the—the motors were spinning faster and faster, and then release the drill press. It went down, the dime kept spinning, and then a finger comes in and pulls the dime away. So that was the commercial. And I built all that stuff. Then they had another one where, "Coffee a dime, bottomless cup." So I built a part of a phony countertop, drilled a hole in the cup, put some tubing underneath it with a flow valve, and as the waitress poured the coffee, I adjusted the flow valve where it stayed full. She poured the whole bit of—poured her coffee in there. I did that for a commercial. Then I got to where I was being the assistant director on it, production manager, and Frank Gretta [0:27:49] left for someplace else and I became the production manager there.

Used to do bids for commercials and run the studio until it folded, then I started freelancing. Then while I was freelancing, somebody offered me a job on a feature called *Flatbed Annie & Sweetiepie*. [inaudible] [0:28:09] was the producer. And I got hired on there as the location assistant and the manager—location manager—was making 3.50 a week and I was making 4.50. He said, “How come you’re getting more than me?” I said, “I wouldn’t work for less.” After that I started doing TV shows. I was on *Cagney & Lacey* for five years and *240-Robert*, sheriff’s rescue show, for two years, *Sledgehammer* for a year. And then from *Cagney & Lacey* I moved over to *Hell Town*. I’d done three features with Robert Blake at Orion and Filmways, and he was doing a series. I also shot *Mice and Men* when he was in Texas. He had made me an associate producer on that. Then on *Hell Town*, I was the associate producer. You shot a show in seven days, then you had another show you’re shooting, then you had, like, four weeks to edit it, then four weeks for the next and the next one. So by the time they started airing, you had a few already made up. So we had four editors, and the head of post-production was Richard Belding. I had never known hardly what editing was because after we all, “Cut. Wrap,” I’d go into another show, so I never did post-production. The associate producer does that, though. He’s in charge of the looping, the music and all that stuff. And Richard Belding had worked at Universal Studios for twenty years as the post-production supervisor. And two of the editors had won Academy awards. So here I am, I’m forty, and here’s this guy, sixty-five, that knows everything and I’m his new boss. So I went in to Richard and I said, “Sir, I’m your new boss. What would you like me to do first?” [DS laughs] He said, “I like you.” He said, “Most of these darn kids come in here and try to tell me how to do stuff.” So he taught me about editing and how to split a line in a looping stage and how to do a film in retrospect, where to cut, when to cut, when to add music, when not to add music, when to soften it, raise it. I also was an associate on *Mice and Men*. *Mice and Men* we shot in Dallas. Robert Blake always wanted to redo the old black and white one. I drove around Dallas for four thousand miles before I found this hundred-year-old farmhouse overlooking the Trinity River. Below it was wheat fields, and there wasn’t a phone pole for 360 degrees. I called the office and said, “I found it.” So I called—we had to cut the wheat fields the old-fashioned way and put them in shocks. So we got a broadcast binder that would cut the wheat, tie a string around it, throw it out. Then we built hay wagons that after the wheat dried in the field, and the shocks, then they’d come along with a pitchfork, throw them in the hay wagon, then later we’d take it to the thresher. And we had a real, old pull tractor that had that huge wheel on the side and this huge forty-foot belt that ran to the thresher. Uncle Stuart Dixon, who grew up on the farm, he was our technical advisor. I’d call him, “What do I need to cut wheat? What’s a thresher?” So we had a real, running thresher and actually hay wagons and actually cut the wheat. The next guy that did *Mice and Men*, he said, “How’d you cut all that wheat? That’s expensive. That’s like four hundred per acre.” I said, “I cut a triangle by the road and that way you had three angles: this part of the triangle by the road, this part, and this part looking back at the thing.” So it looks like I cut twenty acres but I only cut four. That was how Bloomquist did it, an actual producer, and he’s the one that said, “That’s how you did it.” But that was fun. We rented about a couple of thousand dollars’ worth of props here in Abilene, my uncle’s place, and

took them out there. We built a windmill, a buck house. It was a fun movie to work on. Really enjoyed it. But also loved working on post-production and learning how all that goes. What else?

DS:

You mentioned *Cagney & Lacey* early. You had told me a story that came up during the production of that that you had a problem you had to remedy or something.

MC:

We had a lot of problems. It was New York but we were in LA. We rented an old brick building down in East LA by the train tracks. In LA, the crew could report to a studio, other than that they had to bus them, then they got a different rate and got mileage if you're out of the studio zone. So we made that a studio and the crew had to report there every day. So we saved a lot by not using stages because we shot the whole thing in that warehouse: upstairs were the apartments for the girls. But every once in a while a train'd come by and we'd just go have a coffee until the train passed. Because everybody said, [imitating voice] You can't shoot near a train track. Well, we did. Stan Neufeld thought of that. He was vice president of Warner Bros. Production; and a friend. It was his idea. But I was on there for five years, then I got bored with it and went over to—that's when I went to *Hell Town* to be the associate producer because Blake moved me up. I was doing another movie in LA. I think it was *Harlem Nights* where we had this old motel, so around it, the whole block, we had to take down the TV antennas and everything, then there were two ten-story buildings on one end of the block. In one of the scenes, the car comes over, hits a phone pole, the transformer falls and blows up, then they wanted the lights to go out. I'd already had an argument with the director about closing down Fifth Street in LA. I said, "You'll gridlock the city." "No. You can get one lane." So he shot it with one lane. I said, "Other directors would've shot the same scene with one lane." He griped about it but did it. Then he said, "Now, when we're filming this motel, I hope I get the street blocked in." I said, "Yeah, from six p.m. to midnight." He wanted—the stunt was going to happen—at eight o'clock they were going to hit the phone pole. He said, "I want every light in the city to go out." I said, "You want them to flicker first or just go out?" He said, "Flicker." So I owned the motel and houses on the other side of the street, and I owned the two ten-story buildings behind it. In other words, I already rented them and had control of them. So from that camera angle, you only saw three skyscrapers in LA. The ten-story buildings blocked out everything else. So I went to the engineers at those three buildings, paid them five hundred a piece. I said, "Eight o'clock I want you to go down and flicker your lights and then cut off the buildings." So eight o'clock, the stunt happened. And I had street lighting, too. The city street lights all went out, and at eight o'clock they flickered, the street lights went out, the buildings in front of me, they flickered and went out, the houses flickered and the three skyscrapers flickered and it looked like the whole—all of the [inaudible] [0:35:59]. He said, "How the hell did you do that?" I said, "It's what you wanted me to do, wasn't it?" He said, "You're really good. I want you on my next show." I said, "I wouldn't work for you. You're a jerk." [DS laughs] But for a year after I did *Cagney & Lacey*, I did TV, movies

and stuff in town and other small TV shows, like *Equal Justice* was the first show that Sarah Jessica Parker worked on, who is now a little famous. I raised my rate to where it overscale. People would call me up, "I want you to work for me.", "Well, I'm overscale." "Huh?" I said, "Yeah, I don't do it for scale." So they paid me a rate usually, but then—we were doing a show called *This Is the Life* or something with Universal. Mimi Leder was the director, and I knew her—nicknamed her Midnight Mimi because she shot so late. But she called me up from Universal and said, "Casey, I'm in the prep for three days. I've got four days left and I don't have a location, and I'm in trouble." So I went over to Universal. Annie House was the production manager. I said, "Well, I can get you out of trouble." Annie said, "Okay, great." I said, "I'm overscale.", "Universal doesn't pay overscale." I said, "Well, I don't need to be here.", "Okay, we'll get it." I said, "And I use an assistant.", "We don't ever use assistants." I said, "That's what I'm telling you." So I got an assistant. Took Mimi on a van ride with the head teamster and the art director, and that day I called in the locations on the phone because you've got to have three days' time to get the permits to shoot and block the streets. So the teamster driving got tired before the end of the day. He said, "Can you drive home?" I said, "Yeah." Anyway, I called in all the permits, and we found all locations in one day. All I had to do was get the permits and prep them. And then art department had to go out there and decorate it with stuff. So I'd run up, that month, a seven-hundred-dollar phone bill. I turned it in for my petty cash, and this lady who was head of the location department was mad I was there. She hired all the location managers for Universal. She said, "I have to know who you called and why." I went to Annie and I said, "I need another assistant.", "Huh?", "Just for a weekend." So I got Dianne Ketchum, I sat her at my desk. I said, "Here's my phone bill. Call every number there and find out why I called them and write it down." [Phone rings] So they had to pay her—they had to pay her a thousand dollars salary to pay my seven-hundred-dollar phone bill. [DS laughs] I got it. Then Lew Wasserman was head of Universal back then. This lady kept picking on me, the location lady, head of the location department. So I looked in the phone book, I found a Lew Wasserman in Burbank and I went over and talked to him about filming at his house and took him to lunch. On my expense account I said, "Lunch. Lew Wasserman." They never asked me another question because they thought I went out with the head of the company. [Laughter] That was funny. Oh, what else?

DS:

I want to back you up just a second. You mentioned *Harlem Nights*. We were talking about that. That's the one where you had to get the Bloods and the Crips together?

MC:

No, that was *Hell Town*, the series.

DS:

That was *Hell Town*? Okay.

MC:

Yeah. Robert Blake played this priest in East LA at an orphanage. The song said, "There's a preacher man down here in Hell Town. He's going to keep everything straight in Hell Town. Going to keep everybody straight, going to lead them to the Golden Gate in Hell Town." I wrote that. Sammy Davis sung it. But anyway—the producer got real mad at me because I wrote that. And also the Hell Town—when he came onto those burning letters—and Blake had asked us after the pilot, he said, "What kind of title should we get?" So I went home and got some cut-out wood letters, put rubber cement on them, lit them and took a still of it, and he liked it. The producer said, "You're really sucking up to him, aren't you?" I said, "No, I like creating stuff." But anyway, he wanted to do a show with the Bloods and the Crips, two gang members. They were about to fight and he breaks them up and keeps them from fighting. So at the end of the show, he had to whip one of the gang leaders. He always thought he was tough. But we got the Long Beach gang unit, and we got the Crips and Bloods and talked to them, then they'd thought it'd be a kick so they did it. First time we had the Crips there do some—seven guys were there and we had them back a week later and it was three different guys. I said, "Where's so-and-so, so-and-so and so-and-so?", "Oh, he's in jail for armed robbery," or, "He's in jail for assault with a deadly weapon. But I brought three other guys." The second time he also showed up with a brand new Ferrari. I said, "I guess we're paying you too much." We were paying them fifty a day. Then when we were shooting the second unit of both gangs over a bridge on the river, dividing the line in the center and they're about to meet and fight, and they got chains, and knives and stuff. They looked over at me and said, Casey, what if we just throw you off the bridge? What are you going to do? I said, "Well, I couldn't sign your checks. You wouldn't get paid." They said, "You're okay, honky. We ain't going to kill you today." But they were like mean little kids, you know? Down there, that's how they made money. As I said, if you lived in a gang area and you're ten, twelve years old on a bike, the gang'll say, "Hey, come here, kid. Go down to the end of the block and watch for the cops," because they're selling drugs and stuff. "And if you see any, come back. I'll give you fifty bucks." If the kid didn't want to do it, they'd just shoot him. So you joined the gang there whether you wanted to or not. In Watson, downtown LA, when you graduated high school, you'd get eight dollars an hour at McDonald's or you could make a hundred a day selling dope. What are you going to do? They don't have a life. They can't escape. There's no playgrounds or anything for them to do down there. There's no job training. So they stay down there. And they band together because they're really scared of society, and they can't make it out there. So there were really a bunch of little, afraid kids that killed people. It's really sad. Detroit, LA, New York, Chicago, they've all got that same problem, and they don't go in there and try to fix it with playgrounds, swimming pools, job training, after-school days, lunch meals. Some of the kids are hungry down there. They don't have food. It's sad. But yeah, I worked with the Bloods and the Crips. It was scary.

DS:

Well, we met at a reunion for *Leap of Faith*. Can you talk about what that was like?

MC:

Ralph Singleton was the producer, and he called me. Paramount had fired the other producer and Ralph and taken over, and the show was sort of in trouble, and the other location manager was a real good location manager but he works different. He had verbal contracts with everybody. And we were already—had a big, huge tent up on some of these properties without a written contract, and Ralph didn't like that. So he called me and I called two assistants to come help me: Steve Dawson and Michael Charsky. Then his assistant—the location guy that was in the hospital, his assistant was there. And they also hadn't found the main location where Liam Neeson lived, a two-story Victorian, and they've been scouting for four weeks. I told them, "You don't scout Texas on the ground." I rented a plane at Plainview Airport, got a Cessna, flew around and I found one in Tulia, where that artist lives in Tulia. Victorian. Still had the carbide lanterns in the house and the carbide generator that ran the whole house underneath the water tower. They must have been rich back then with gas lighting in that house. Anyway, I got all the locations signed. We had an agronomist from A&M there to distress the crops and make it look like a huge drought because it was supposed to be the driest part of the country in Texas and Plainview. It rained every week. So when we started shooting, we had to paint lawns brown, trees brown, crops brown. I had a sewer truck going around—septic tank truck going around pumping water out of the gutters. Low spots in the vacant lots. Then we had a crew throwing out floor service or drilling mud they called it—it was real fine, dusty—so that way when they drove down the street, it'd kick up dust. But it wasn't dusty that year. The bad thing is they used paraquat and Roundup. We sprayed Roundup on five miles of state highway to make it look bad. We sprayed some of the crops with paraquat, which is a defoliant that you use with cotton. It is now known to cause Parkinson's. So I got dumped with it when the crop—showing the crop duster where to spray it. It accidentally hit me and I had to take my clothes off, bathe and burn them. Two weeks later in Dallas I went to a doctor and I was like a nervous wreck. He said, "There's no antidote. Here, take all these tranquilizers. If you live through it, you live." But then three years later I got Parkinson's. And my grandfather and aunts and uncles that used to pick cotton, three or four of them got Parkinson's. It's now thought that you have a genetic predisposition for Parkinson's where they're environmentally triggered, and I got triggered. But there's nothing you can do about it. It's life.

DS:

The irony is—you had mentioned how you would never—had to pick cotton, but yet through your movie industry you still got the treatment.

MC:

Yeah, I got the bad end of it. We also had a scene where the star Liam Neeson claps his hands and butterflies fly up out of the ground. He's showing Debra Winger that. I asked Ralph who's doing the butterflies. He said, "I don't know, somebody they've hired from—did *Arachnophobia*. Why don't you check on him?" I did and he got fired from *Arachnophobia* for

being drunk, but he didn't do the show. So I told Ralph that and he said, "That's a problem." I said, "Yeah." I said, "Why don't you let me do the butterflies? I've never done that." He said, "Okay. Screw it up, you're fired." I said, "Fine." So I found a bug wrangler in LA that had worked on bug shows and didn't get fired. I flew him out. I called UT and I got an entomologist at the University of Texas to come up. We sat down and we figured out what to do, and we caught six thousand butterflies in Palo Duro Canyon. We rented a motel in Tulia near the location. It was one of those old motels that has the—cars could park next to the room, you know? So we put the butterflies in little glassine envelopes in the refrigerators there. It won't kill them, it'll just make them cold. Then the other kind of butterflies we put in big tents with mosquito netting. They were still—though it was too hot. They were dying on us so I put—I got some water coolers—evaporative coolers, those big window units, and put one in each stall where the nets were. Then they fed them sugar water and stuff. Then we got a bunch of little plastic boxes from Walmart with lids on them. The effects guy ran compressed air to each little box, a little tube, and when he does clap, clap, some guys pull off all the lids on the boxes and the effects hit the air a couple times and it scares them, and they flew away. I thought it was funny that we got some cold ones that when they're still cold, you put them on somebody's arm or something until they open their wings and it warms up; they don't fly. We got a shot where a line says, "Look, they like me." I thought, Yeah, they love Karen. That's how we caught them. We'd take rotten bananas and beer—stale beer—and mix them together and that was what—or if you found a dead animal they'd come to that. They didn't come to nice stuff. We also built a big net with phone poles, where after they released we could throw the net down and catch them again for take two. Funny thing was Steve Dawson was another location guy and he was over in Tulia talking to the city council about what we were going to do. He told them about the butterflies over at the hotel. Then as he left that night, he was going down the street and he saw a mosquito truck coming towards the hotel, and that would've killed all of them. So he stopped the truck and they quit spraying until we were through shooting. I thought that was funny. What else? Oh. We had two highway patrol from little towns in the area; DPS [**Department of Public Safety**] guys. We had six hundred extras in Groom at the big tent site. I was on the radio and I heard one guy say, "This lady can't get in her car. She locked her keys in it." So I went over there and they got a clothes hangar and they were trying to get in it. I popped my trunk open, got a Slim Jim, walked over there and opened the door. They said, How'd you learn to do that? I said, "I'm from California." Then the next time they called—somebody had broken into a lady's car. So I went over there, "Is anything missing?", "Only thing missing is your garage door opener." Why would they take that?" I said, "Is she in Amarillo right now?" "No, she's here." Is your husband home?" "No." I said, "Is your address in your glove box?" She said yeah. I said, "You better call somebody to go to your house and watch it because they could go over there with that opener and click and rob your house." The cops said, "How do you know that?" I said, "I told you guys, I'm from LA." That was two funny things that happened over there. What else? Oh, when we sprayed five miles of Interstate 25 brown. The director had a shot of Steve Martin and his pickup and he wanted him to do dialogue while they're driving down the road. So it was

a four-lane so he could put a camera car next to the pickup truck or tow it. He told me, he said, "Go over there and find a mile of the smoothest of that five miles and tell me where it is." So I did and I came back. He said, "Well, where is it?" I said, "Well, you go to where this farmer's plowing this field and you're good clear up to where you see those cows grazing." He said, "I'm shooting this next week. How do you know the cows are still there and that guy's still plowing the field in a week?" I said, "Well, I also wrote down the mile markers for you." He said, "[whispers] Are you shitting me?" It was a joke, see. I liked to fool him.

DS:

You also had to do that—make a road, that four-lane you had to make.

MC:

Yeah. We had a shot a scene of the end of the movie where it's supposed to be raining on the truck as he's going towards the sunset. He shot an east-west road and, as you know, the wind usually comes from the north and it blew the rain back into the camera and didn't hardly hit the truck, so we had to reshoot it in Claude. He said, "Give me an east-west road where the wind blows the other way." I said, "Well, that'd be a little hard. See all those trees leaning this direction? That's why, because the wind always blows out of the north." So I got him a north-south road and it fills all the sunset from the camera angle. He said, "But I've got to have a four-lane because I've got to put the camera car over here—crane, camera crane." I said, "Well, we'll just build a road over there." He said, "What?" I said, "We'll put a road in the bar ditch, put caliche there, roll it, put some crushed gravel—granite on it so it'll be real smooth." He said, "You can do that?" I said, "Yeah. I've done it before." So we built a road and he shot it and was happy, then we took the road out. When I was doing *Texas*, I did the same thing. We were shooting at the *Lonesome Dove* set for this miniseries, *Texas*. We had to move after we shot there a week to these—like, marshes that were about three miles north. It'd been raining and I tried to get to the marsh area and I got stuck in my four-wheel drive. So I told him, "We've got to build a road there." The production manager was from LA. He's the one I told you that he got out to open a gate and closed it then climbed over it. Yeah. But anyway, I said, "We've got to build a road.", "What's that going to cost?", "Twenty-eight, twenty-five thousand." He said, "I don't have that in the budget." I said, "What's it cost to shoot a day? About fifty grand a day?" "Yeah." I said, "Well, you can sit here for two days while the road dries out or you can build a road." We built a road. From then on—*Courage Under Fire*, we had this helicopter scene of a helicopter flying through the canyons in Desert Storm. [Coughs] Meg Ryan was supposed to be the pilot. She's scared to fly. So we got a low-bed eighteen wheeler truck and we put a mock-up helicopter on the truck and we had hydraulics where it would lean back and forth. It twelve-foot wide so the crew and the lights and the camera could walk around. We built a road of caliche and then crushed granite. So the guy with the truck drove around the canyons, and the copter tilted and from the camera angle it looks like she was flying. So we built a road there, too. [DS laughs] Oh, another funny thing on *Courage Under Fire*. We were filming this Desert Storm and we

were doing helicopter lands out at Red Sands, and then we were going to come back to Indian Cliffs Ranch and build—and shoot the crashed helicopter on this hill. It snowed January first, January second—I mean, at first they were filming out at that location. They were going to move back the next day and the production manager calls me, “There’s snow on the ground. We didn’t have snow in the Desert. We’ve got to get rid of it by tomorrow.” I said, “Okay.” So I called the guy that owned the ranch and got all the laborers we could, and I called a propane company and told them to send me out twenty propane tanks and all of the weed and asphalt burners they got. Then I called the fire department and asked for a five-thousand-dollar—five-thousand-gallon tanker truck, because there were big cliffs there. So the fire department came out and they ran the water hose through their six-hundred-pound-per-inch pump back into the tanker and it heated up the water, the pressure from the pump. Then around the copter I had guys with those propane torches melting the snow, and then in the background they were throwing dirt on the snow with shovels. Then the fire guys wiped—wash off the cliffs so there wasn’t any snow. So just before dark I called the production manager back and said, “Well, you can shoot there now.” He said, “How much that cost?” I said, “You said a minute ago you didn’t care what it cost.” I said, “I don’t know, twenty, twenty-five thousand probably.” He said, “Oh.” I said, “Well, you can shoot tomorrow.” [DS laughs] That was fun. I remember we were shooting *Pancho Barnes*. She was a 1930s race plane pilot. Flew with Amelia Earhart. The right stuff. She’s got that little farm and the bar next to Edwards Air Force Base out in the desert with pretty girls that were there. All the airmen would come over there. Chuck Yeager went there. Oh, we were shooting this Victorian in Forney, Texas where she had lived when she was a little girl. It was supposed to be on the beach. We were in Forney. So we built a fence and a little gazebo and a walkway. We shot all the scenes towards the house, and then we went out to the beach in Brazoria, Texas, and they brought the little fence, the gazebo and the walkway. We get on this side, and we’d already seen her walking towards this and then we cut and she’s walking through it towards the beach. So in the picture she walks out of the house to the beach. It’s a cutting piece, see? But we were filming where she’d been captured by these bandits and she was going to do a horse race with these Mexican bandits. We had oil field workers flying over our heads out to the oil fields out in the ocean. The director came to me and he said, “You’ve got to stop those helicopters. They didn’t have those in 1920. I can’t shoot with that.” We’re doing a six-million-dollar TV show and I thought, I’m going to stop the copters, tell Exxon to quit work? I went into town and went to bar, had lunch—club and had lunch, then I asked the bartender, I said, “When do the crews quit flying out there?” He said, “About three.” So I slowly drove back to the set and walked up to the director at three o’clock. I said, “I’ve got them stopped.” He said, “Good.” Directors are like that. They want the whole world to stop and they think their movie’s the most important film that anybody’s ever done, and everybody should stop what they’re doing. What else? When I was doing *8 Seconds*, we were shooting Lane Frost as a little kid on a ranch, and he was riding a sheep instead of a bull when he was little. The director wanted in the background—he said, “Can we get some cows in the background?” This was the guy that did *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *Rocky*. I said, “Yeah. The rancher and I can get some cubes—a couple of bags of cubes and

carry them out there and the cows will come over.” He said, “Good.” So we went over there with the cubes, laid down and started feeding the cows, and hoped they wouldn’t step on us. He calls on me on the radio, “That’s too many cows. Can you get rid of some of them?” I said, “No.” Idiot. And later on we were shooting—oh, he—they got married in a Baptist church, so he wanted a shot of the church. So I found some nice churches around and asked them could they shoot. Lane Frost got married when she was pregnant, so the Baptists didn’t want that. So I—he had picked out one of the churches and I said—I asked them and they said no. “Just lie to them. Say they were on the script.” “I don’t do that. I’ll find you another church.” And he was sort of mad about that, but that’s Hollywood. “Just lie. What do they know?” So I found another church. And then when we shot the rodeo scenes, we had to make the arena smaller, so I took porta fence and T-bar and I cut the arena in half and then doubled the fence, then put T-bar down there and took it to forty-five and wire. Those bulls would come out and they’d hit that fence, bend it. That night I’d have to—we cut holes in the fence for camera positions with a cutting tool thing—torch. That night I’d have them re-weld it. The next day we’d do it again. The director was on one camera low down, and I had each body safetied to the cameras. I was standing by him and the bull came right at him. I grabbed him and pulled him back because it’d hit the camera and broke the lens. He said, “You tore my silk shirt.” I said, “I saved your damn eye.” And then when we were filming a hang up, laying on the bull and getting hung up: his hand won’t come lose. We were filming that with a stunt cowboy, like—they were all bull riders. The guy actually got his hand stuck and by the time we got him lose, he broke his arm. So I had an ambulance standing by. I was the safety officer. As a location manager, you have to do security, you have to have police for traffic control and guarding the set at night, and you have to be the safety officer. You’ve got to have stand-by ambulance, paramedics, and if you’re over an hour from a hospital, I usually make them get me an ER paramedic that can do drugs and stuff, and a line to the emergency room, because you want to make sure if it’s that far away you’d get a helicopter out there where he can actually treat the guy on the way to the hospital. So we do that anytime you’re away from that “golden hour” they call it. Anyway, put him in the ambulance and they took him to the hospital. The director says, “Okay, let’s try that again.” I said, “No.” “What? Who are you?” I said, “I’m the safety officer, location manager, and you ain’t doing that till the ambulance gets back. Shoot something else.” Oh he was pissed. He was mad. “You know who I am?”, “Yeah, you’re the director and I’m the safety officer.” He didn’t—he waited and then the next time we shot it the bull stepped on a guy’s leg and broke it in three places. So if the ambulance hadn’t been there, it would’ve been a lot of trouble. But he never said, “Thanks for waiting.” They do that. I remember on *Texas*, Spelling wanted me to be the safety officer. We had props and special effects and stunts. In the AMPTP manual, the safety manual of the Association of Motion Pictures and TV Producers, it’s got all sorts of rules about that. If the director yells, “Action” and the effects guy or the stunt guy or the weapons masters hasn’t said okay yet, the director could be liable. He’s the director. So I said, “You don’t yell, ‘Action’ until the effects guy says it’s okay or the stunt guy or the weapons master. Once they say it’s okay, then you can yell, ‘Action’ but not until. Otherwise you could be liable.” He called Spelling’s

lawyers. They flew out the next day. They made the producer read the same thing. And all I'd done is paraphrase the real book. Oh, he was mad at me. That's why he let me do that stunt. I kept bugging him to do a stunt. He set up his stunt, and he blew up a plate of salsa in my face, had me back and a pot hit me in the head and had me back up into a post, spewed wood at me, then I had a little trigger in my finger and I had a blood pack here. Finally he said—and then you pull the trigger and your blood sack blows up and then you die. But he did that to get back at me.

DS:

Weren't you also—because of your background, weren't you chosen to ride a horse in a scene or something.

MC:

Oh yeah. It was real early when I was doing commercials. I'd just come out there. I was making twenty-five a day as a PA at Tele-Video, and we did a commercial for Armor Chili—Texas chili; Vasquez Rocks. And they hired one of the Barrymore's to be the bad guy. And the scene was good guys in white hats, the posse, are chasing this bad guy in a black hat. The dialogue is, "Armor Chili, when you don't have time to stop and eat," or, "When you've got to eat on the run," I think it said. So in the scene he goes by this Dallas—again and that's the old chuckwagon supposed to be worked on *Daniel Boone*—and he reaches down and grabs a bowl of chili and he's eating it on the run while the posse's chasing him. So this guy couldn't ride. He got on a horse and he was holding by the reins, he made the horse's mouth bleed, he couldn't start it, he couldn't stop it. So everybody said, "Well, Casey's from Texas. Put him on a horse. He can ride." They assumed if you're from Texas you ride a horse to school. So luckily I could ride, and I got on a horse, took it over the hill, did a little cowboying and came back, and they had me in these close so I did all the longshots. Then for the close-ups, they put the guy on my convertible and bounce him up and down with their hands while the camera was shooting him. The camera was in the front passenger seat, and they were shooting him eating the chili and riding. But I was making twenty-five a day, and I got 365 dollars a day. It was more money than I ever made in my life, and I didn't even have to fall off the horse. That was cool. But yeah, that was funny. They think if you're from Texas you must ride a horse every day. What else?

DS:

How are we doing for time? You said we have that.

MC:

I don't know what time it is. 5:46, okay. That's good. Is it still running?

DS:

Yes sir.

MC:

Turn it off for a second, I guess.

[Pause in recording]

MC:

It was on just then.

DS:

Oh no, no. It was off, but you'd asked me to turn it off so I was waiting for you to give me the okay.

MC:

What it's like to have Parkinson's. Well, I had a bad back and a bad leg, and I—my back was hurting and then my leg starting shaking, then one arm started shaking so we realized it wasn't my back. It was getting Parkinson's. We went to a neurologist and they figured out I had Parkinson's. I couldn't work in the movies anymore because they don't like to see people walking around with canes. You rarely see a guy on a movie crew with wheelchair, you know? So they don't want to see you shake, they don't want to hire you, so suddenly you're out of work. You didn't know anything else to do, and until you get your meds and stuff, you can't do much. So I applied for disability and didn't get it. As I said, I was raising Chris, Russell and Lloyd and two friends of his, and my landlord gave me a trailer to live in. I went from 140-thousand-dollar house, four bedrooms, three baths, and a three-car garage on the river with cows and pecan trees to a trailer. Yeah. Then the house I bought for my wife to live in, she lost because she wouldn't work, so she dropped Christopher on my door, my son, then I raised those three boys through high school. But after about a year I got disability. But I'd gone twice and they turned me down each time; ninety days. Social security hires the state of Texas to investigate you. And the guy—it was—the state has got a budget. If he goes over budget he gets fired. So they turn down everybody. Doesn't matter if you're dying of cancer in a hospital. If you don't make it to that meeting, you don't get it. In fact, a friend of mine just died and they had a meeting, three weeks after he died, with the judge. The judge granted it for him from four years ago. So I had gone twice and got turned down. Cyrus Job [?] [1:09:08], a new Joe Dial [?] [1:09:09], who used to be a film commissioner here in this state—and Joe's father for the Securities and Exchange Commission in Washington. He had been appointed for that by Phil Ryan—the senator Paul Ryan—no, not Paul Ryan, but—oh, he was with Billy Hutchinson, the other guy. He's retired now. Anyway, Joe Dial's [1:09:37] called, the senator who calls Social Security, and suddenly I'm seeing the judge in two weeks instead of a year. They got me another lawyer who does Social Security, and my lawyer in Bastrop said, "You probably won't get it." This lawyer said, "You'll get it." I said, "Two weeks this guy's going to play God." He said, "Well, I'm going to Moses and part the water." So we went there with witnesses and all the

medical reports and everything. We walked in and the judge said, "I've got rotary club in fifteen minutes. What's this about?", "He has Parkinson's.", "Is everything okay?", "Yeah, everything's perfect.", "All right, granted." But these agencies that help people get their disability—they're people dying in the hospital that can't make it to the court so they don't get it, and they want to turn them down. They don't want to spend all that money. But luckily, with friends and pull, I got it. But once I got it, I got pills and then you've got to adjust to pills. If you take too many you get shaky. If you don't take enough you get shaky. It affects your walking, your speech, your swallowing. Has mental problems, too, with your thinking. Your executive functions aren't as good. I've got Stage 3 now and it keeps going downhill. You keep getting weaker. Eventually you'll be in a wheelchair. But hopefully it's—not be in one for a few years, because I like going places and seeing things. I like doing. But yeah, I can't snow ski anymore or waterski anymore, go on long trips, especially with my heart problems. Maybe you just can't do what you did before, but you try to do as much as you can, and I think you try to live as hard as you can live as long as you can live, or otherwise you might as well go ahead and die. So I believe in living life to its fullest and then—I'd rather die hiking in the mountains or going down to the beach than die at a house. I guess it's affected me quite a bit. I've got a good neurologist now that keeps me from shaking, mostly. When I get tired at night I start stumbling. In the mornings I'll stumble until my pills start kicking in.

DS:

Yeah. Well, just today—I mean, you know your body so well. When we were out walking you knew it was time for you to take a break.

MC:

Yeah. Forgot to bring my pills. I'm dumb. "I've got to go rest," I said, then I realized if I went home and took two Parkinson's pills, a quick-acting and a time-acting—it's carbidopa and levodopa. When I first got it, I started out with herbs: passionflower drops—ten of them would stop your shaking—and milk thistle and evening primrose and stuff. Then I went to anticholinergics, which is, like, an old treatment for Parkinson's. And after that dopamine agonist. Then after that I had to go to the carbidopa and levodopa. They think maybe—I mean, it replaces the function of the cells you've lost, but you don't get Parkinson's until you lose 80 percent of your dopamine cells. Then the agonist stimulates the cells—stimulate—simulate dopamine. Then the carbidopa and levodopa actually replaces the dopamine. But in the meantime, the dopamine cells in your brain are still dying off, so you get more off times as you get older. You'll be on, you're fine, you don't shake, then you get off and look like Michael J. Fox. He shakes, though, because I think he had that stem cell implant in his brain. If you don't have enough dopamine your cells start producing it but they don't stop. So they had to figure out a way to stop it because when they get too many of them, you're don't like that too [?] [1:13:53]. I don't know. Hopefully they'll find a genetic cure for it one day, I hope.

DS:

At what speed has the—has the medical knowledge progressed since you've had it? Have they gotten—has the treatment gotten better quicker or has it just been—

MC:

It's better, but it hasn't—there's no miraculous cures or anything. It's just slowly getting better because they fine-tune the meds that you take now, but they haven't come up with any, like, brilliant new meds. So it's still—you're treating the symptoms, you're not curing anything, and the symptoms slowly get worse and worse and worse. Yeah, I think they tried the stem cell stuff and they've got something that goes in your brain and shocks or kills the parts of the brain that make you shake, but it also changes your personality. You know, I might want to kill you right now, and without that I don't. So I don't want anybody to touch my brain until they can cure it. And they'll probably be able to cure it with DNA something or stem cells or something, eventually, but they haven't yet. But yeah, I miss hiking and going on long trips. I can go for about two hours then I have to get out, rest or walk around the truck or something. I've got a motorhome so I can go in the back and sleep. If I take it to Dallas, it takes me two days to get up there. If I take it to El Paso, about three days. If I drive to Dallas in the car it's a day. But I still have to get out every two hours and sort of stretch and rest and take my pills. It's a pain, but not as bad if I'm dying of cancer, you know? Still alive. I don't know. I just thank God I'm alive and can do this and talk to you and take pictures. I wish I could go snow skiing but I can't. Water skiing, no.

DS:

Early on—I'm going to switch back to doing some of the interview stuff. Early on you were talking about your dad and your uncle both starting restaurants. Could you get a little bit more into that, as far as the names of the places, where they were, how they expanded and so forth?

MC:

Well, they went out to Hollywood and became—LA and became car hops and worked at those drugstores, then they came back here. Uncle Newman got in the Army. He was at Fort Barkeley here and was a cook. My dad didn't get in the Army, but he was working for a clothing store or something, and then Dad decided to try a hamburger stand. He borrowed three hundred dollars and opened up the first little stand on Brooks Street in 1941. He started selling Triple AAA Root Beer, and that's why it's Casey's Triple AAA Drive-Ins. And he had the Big Boy Burger before Big Boy was ever born. But Big Boy later sued him and they couldn't use the name again because he had it copyrighted: Bob's Big Boy. Dad was good at finding a location and running it. My uncle was a cook so he was a good chef, had good kitchen help and chefs and stuff. My mother was a waitress and ran one of the restaurants. Casey's wife, Honey, was a—ran the restaurants, too. Casey was—my Uncle Casey was head of the Texas Restaurant Association at one time. Then my Aunt Honey was president of it also. It's a good business if you want to

marry it, but you can't just walk away from it. You've got to be there seven days a week, if it's open that long. Casey—Uncle Newman came up with steak fingers. He was trying to figure out what the car hops could serve in a basket besides hamburgers. They came up with fried chicken, then they came up with steak fingers. You cut chicken fried steak into strips, breaded them, fried them and gave five dollars for whoever named them. Some waitress said, "Steak fingers." And now you can find them all over but Uncle Newman invented them.

DS:

I haven't heard that before.

MC:

Yeah. It was a fun business. I wish somebody'd write down all the names that we used to use—soda jerks, car hops—to make orders. For some reason we had codes. Instead of saying, "A hamburger," we'd say, "An HB with everything on it." You ordered a "Waco", it's a Dr. Pepper, because it was made in Waco. "Stretched one" is a Coke. Why? I don't know. "Draw one" is a cup of coffee. "Two for the city" means the cops are out there and you want two free coffees. I think a "black cow" is a chocolate milk. We had all sorts of codes that they would say instead of just what they wanted. I guess it was quicker and it caught on with everybody. Back then I was making fifty cents an hour, I think.

DS:

Are those—any of those restaurants still open or did they go out of business?

MC:

No, not here. Dad's are all closed and Newman's are all closed now. Abilene Town was the last one to close. Aunt Honey rented it to somebody and they torched it before she could insure it. Now she's selling the property off. At that one drive-in we had on Butternut here in town—it was a circle drive-in. We showed silent movies there years ago, then when we got Old Abilene Town he bought silent movies and we showed them from the balcony and had them go down to the stage. Otherwise we'd have rinky-dink piano player, banjo, or sometimes a band up there, singers. We always had some kind of entertainment. Once we did a gunfight in the dining room. We sat down at this table and started playing cards. Then somebody'd cheat and the other guy would shoot him. Indoors we used .22 blanks, not .357 or .45's. They were too loud. We'd shoot the guy and then they'd come arrest him or something. But one time we were in an argument and Uncle Newman came in and everybody knew him. He greets everybody at the door there. We started bad-mouthing him, "Get away or I'll shoot you." We was arguing back and forth. A couple of customers came up, "Mr. Casey, you need some help?" [DS laughs] They were going to throw us out. They thought we were real. That was funny. Oh I'm getting tired now. Cut it off for a second.

DS:

Do you want to take a break? Because it's probably—what—

MC:

Let's see. I'm supposed to be there at 6:15.

End of Recording



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