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Robert Grasmere Works with Many of Hollywood's Big Stars

Filming around the world ... and visiting Andover

Jim Connell, for the *Beacon*

The first part of this profile appeared in the July issue. If you missed it, visit AndoverBeacon.com/Grasmere.

Robert took summer courses at Hampshire College from Leacock and Pennebaker, “two of the most famous documentary film makers ever ... truly amazing teachers.” And, during the summers, circa 1970, he worked as a laborer in Colorado.

He produced a documentary on a local New London personality named Oscar Colby: “I used way too much zoom and made a lot of mistakes. Still, I did the whole project, and the film got me into New York University.” He studied film at NYU, but left to hitchhike around South America during some turbulent times there.

While there, he made friends with Sergio, who would later be instrumental in his first job overseas. Returning to the states, Robert enrolled in the California Institute for the Arts but was called back to Colombia by Sergio. Concerned about leaving three days before graduation, Robert was prompted by Sergio: “Do you want to study films or make films?”

Robert got the OK from his instructors, earned his masters degree in film, and got his first paying job abroad. “At that time, there was a lot of danger in Colombia from FARC.”

Robert, early in his career, would moonlight as Actor Liaison (among other jobs) for celebrities like Loretta Lynn and Lynn Anderson. “I remember Ginger Rogers (Fred Astaire’s dance partner) had 12 pieces of pink luggage. But it was the pinch on my bottom that I remember most about her.”

He worked in New York budgeting, organizing, and scheduling all aspects of television production with early TV journalist Eric Sevareid.

After his work with Sevareid, he was hired by an independent low-budget company that made slightly risqué TV programs. “There was some nudity, but in an innocent kind of way ... and it was pretty tame compared to what you see on HBO today.

“The producers sold the shows to the Playboy Channel at the beginning of the cable TV era. We did re-shoots for more nudity – which Playboy wanted. And over 100 episodes, I did everything from casting to scheduling, hiring the entire crew, and was head of production.

“There was a lot of video editing at that time ... when early digital techniques were being added to 38mm film making, and I was sort of at the cutting edge of that technology.”

Robert moved on to bigger productions: “A friend called from Paramount to offer me my first big-budget picture called *D.A.R.Y.L.*, a science-fiction film about artificial intelligence. Some-

times it would be big, corporate agencies that had the best digital equipment (like flight simulators at GE, from which I would get a security clearance). That film led to working with Arnold Schwarzenegger in *The Running Man* and later *Predator 2*.”

Robert really does know many of the celebrities in these films. For example, he was having a few beers with some old New London buds in Aspen, Colorado when Arnold Schwarzenegger just happened to walk by outside. Robert told his friends that he would go say hello, but they told him not to ... thinking he really didn’t know Arnold.

Despite the fact that it was very cold, Robert went outside without his coat. Arnold recognized him and gave him a big hug and, playfully scolding him, wrapped Robert’s scarf around him. Robert has had lunch with both Arnold and Maria, escorted Maria around the set, and met Arnold’s parents.

And, speaking of parents, he got his own parents, as extras, into a scene in Arnold’s *The Running Man*.

You might think that it’s only the stuntmen who get injured on film sets, but it’s happened several times to Robert. “I was working my way across a frozen river at a photo shoot when I slipped on the ice and dislocated one of my shoulders. There was also the time, during the filming of *The Mothman Prophecies*, when I demonstrated the things I wanted the stuntmen to do, but I slid into an iron railing and cracked a couple of ribs.”

When asked about his worst experiences, he said, “Well, getting dengue fever in Cambodia was really bad, but I think it was probably my getting very ill in Colombia, where the doctors quarantined the hospital thinking it was typhoid fever.

“A pilot was hired to fly me to Bogota. So we’re heading toward a mountain range, and I was really sick. Then I found out that the pilot had only 50 hours of flight time ... besides being absolutely drunk.

“Dense clouds gathered, and we couldn’t see anything – just flying blind in the clouds in the middle of the Andes. And I thought, ‘Great. I’m not gonna die from typhoid. I’m going to crash into a mountain!’”

Having worked on several movies with director Jon Carpenter, *Prince of Darkness*, a horror film featuring Alice Cooper, is one of Robert’s favorites. “I had an acting part in that one and had this great makeup and was killed two times in the movie. I was in the TV ad, and it was like an early meme (i.e. national catchphrase): ‘I’ve got a message for you ... and you’re not going to like it.’”

On *Clear and Present Danger* with Harrison Ford: “That, I think, was the
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