For

The Oral History Library

of

The Fashion Institute of Technology

BUD GRAYBILL

Hollywood Still Photographer

Interviews by

Robert L. Greene

with

Matthew Daniels
Q. This is Robert L. Greene. This, at least for the moment, is our last tape on the famous Hollywood photographers. It seems remarkably appropriate that one should end this with the photographer most noted for the shots that perhaps more people remember than the gallery shots—the famous portrait shots—because those were the shots that appeared in those endless movie magazines, with those wonderful titles: "Robert Taylor Barbecues at Last," "Hedy Lamarr is Just a Simple Soul," and those almost candid-like (although they were not candid, of course; they were obviously posed). But they have a quality of communicating less makeup, less role-playing, and more human relationships and more direct relationship to the environment and lifestyle the stars who were being photographed expressed. And that, in a strange way, is the real memory that I have. Because I used to fantasize about entering that particular world. The world of the actual gallery portraits, which were obviously totally posed and totally lit and totally supported by makeup and hair and everything else, was something one admired and one adored, but at no time—at least for me—did I ever identify that I was ever going to look like that or be a part of that world. But it was very easy to think of yourself joining Barbara Stanwyck and Robert Taylor at the barbecue. So the person that we're... After a lot of research to figure out who it was that probably was the key person that one should put on tape for the archives, it turns out to be
Bud Graybill. And Matthew, I've asked you to do as much re-
search on that as you can, to give us an introduction as to...
A. He's a very interesting man, and I know by the time
you interviews him...And I think you did that session with
John "Cabal," didn't you?
Q. Right.
A. That was the one you all did together. That was
really special.

He, again, was a survivor who had been around. He
got his start in Los Angeles back in the teens, when movies
were just beginning. He talks about being a paper boy. Some-
body...

He's a wonderful one to end up with, because he's
an anathema to the other photographers that you've done re-
search on. He came through the studios learning the business,
not the photography. And the only other one I can think of
that's similar to that is John Engstead, who came up through
publicity and got into photography, whereas all the others
were photographers from the beginning.

But Bud Graybill came along and learned it and was
in it for the business aspect of it. When he is asked, "What
was in your mind when you photographed the stars?" he said,
"Selling them." And so it's a studio mentality. However, as
you pointed out, he had that beautiful quality of really
catching them relaxed, around the barbecue, whether they had
a coterie of hairdressers and makeup artists around to take
care of them, he still got that "at-home" feeling, so he was there.

It's very interesting to notice that he ended his photography career in 1940. He went on and became an agent. And it was just because the movies were starting to change and he wasn't enjoying it, and so he left. He continued to work in the industry right on until his retirement in the late '60s, early '70s, but he was there only for the golden era. He was the photogravure photographer, and as you pointed out, he is one that probably more people recognize his photographs without recognizing his name. You know, a star will say, "Oh, Frank Powolny, George Hurrell, Laszlo Willinger," and yet they were probably photographed more by Bud Graybill, in these "at-homes" or between-the-scenes set shots. So, I think, if you're ready, we'll go ahead and run your tape of your interview.

Q. All right.

Thank you for asking me to call you Bud. I appreciate that. It makes it all so much more comfortable for both of us. And you must call me Robert L., because people who care about me do.

Bud, how did you get started at MGM?
A. I worked in different departments and made money. I worked as an extra, I worked as a print man, I worked on special effects and production and casting, in L.A. And I started in 1922 with a paper route there, when I was just a
kid. I sold papers to Mae Murray and Robert (?) when they were married. This goes back to...Oh, all the old timers. Before Ramon Navarro. Before Ben Hur.

Q. Before MGM.

A. Yes. For Triangle Studios. Lillian Tashman, oh, good golly. Eleanor Boardman, King Vidor, Jack Conway, a director. All these old timers. Then MGM came and I went in the front office in '24.

Q. Really.

A. I went in in '24, and I went in casting, the next summer. I was in school all this time. And when I entered UCLA, I still came back and worked during the summer to make enough in the sound department scraping wax to go to school all year. I was in economics and business administration...

Q. Nothing to do with photography.

A. No. While I was at school.....This is how it happened...
The senior photographer in our fraternity was graduating that year. So I was a pledge and I had to have an activity, so they said, "Take this camera and learn how to shoot pictures. So I shot pictures for four years of school, was editor of the yearbook, I took journalism and economics, business science. And when I graduated with the journalism, I went to MGM and, having worked there every summer, Strickling put me in publicity.

Q. When was that?

A. Nineteen-thirty-three. They all loved me. I was a
newsboy and...Hell, they'd give me 50¢ or $1 for a paper, and at Christmas time they'd all give me presents. It was great.

Q. Really?
A. I made more money as a news guy than I could working? I sold papers to all of them, and was doing very well.

Q. Garbo too?
A. No, not to Garbo. I photographed her, though, about 12 times at the (?) .. I never got to her.

Q. You mean...(?)
A. She was a spook, by my lights. She was a spook.

So, we finished school, and I went into publicity and wrote for three years, for the fourth estate, writing press books and stuff. On the publicity side, and I always...
Since I had four years of photography at school and I loved it, I'd go out Sunday shooting. In '36 he was able to get me a car...

Q. Who was?
A. Strickling. He was wonderful. Strickling put more people into business than any other publicist in the world. We had a party for him three years ago, and there were 170 people there, all of whom could lay their career upon him. Which is a wonderful thing to say. Actors, (?), the whole works, and the writers, etc., etc. So, he got me the car, and my first picture was a circus picture with Wally Beery and Jackie Cooper. No, not Jackie...Yes. It was Jackie Cooper.
And an 8" x 10" camera. Can you imagine doing action stuff with an 8" x 10" camera? On the set, with Wally Beery and Jackie Cooper. And I went to Sequoia with Jane Parker. A very beautiful picture called "Sequoia." And the "Lion and the Deer" came together at Malibu. And we went from that to another picture, another picture. Finally I had the publicity assignment, which was wonderful. I'd go on every set, every morning. I had to cover every set--"Romeo and Juliet," "A Tale of Two Cities," "Captains Courageous"--and shoot publicity stills. And I had the beautiful assignment of doing layouts, which... We had rotogravure in those days. I'd get eight stars--stars and their pets, stars in their cars, stars in their homes, stars in their swimming pools, stars and their favorite recipes, stars in (?), stars on the set playing, stars doing whatever--and I would send eight of these out through "Kisling," who was the man in publicity. He went around the country, and every week we'd get back 25-50 full page rotogravure pictures of eight stars doing the same thing. MGM (?)... Those were the days. I did seven years of that in the gallery. I was on every set, but I was in the gallery. I was based in the gallery, and I went on every set or to the homes.

Q. Obviously at any studio, any organization, there's always a hierarchy of talent and people have to work their way up, or work their way down, as the case may be. I have become increasingly aware that there was a handful of people
who took the great glamor shots, and there must have been an
army of people who were behind the scenes, doing the basic
menial work and supplying the press and the papers and the
publicity department with endless, endless pictures of...

Tell me, Bud. In the hierarchy...Enough time has
passed we can be perfectly honest I'm sure. Where did you
fit?
A. They would be on a production, and they would do
publicity and stills on that production and have a good (?)
set of stills when they finished. Then there was Clarence
Bull in the portrait gallery, Bob Coburn in the gallery, or
Jones.
Q. Ray Jones. Right. In the gallery.
A. Or "Poboni." Now, these were...Schaefer, at Paramount,
before he died. "Fraeker," before that. They were in the
gallery. Then we had publicity guys who worked out of the
gallery. And...
Q. That's sort of a cross breed between the set photog-
rapher and the gallery photographer...
A. A combination of both. Some days I'd shoot fashions
of Maureen O'Sullivan, next day I'd shoot portraits of Lana
Turner, and the next day I would do home sittings of Norma
Shearer, at her beach home, and the next day I would be on
the set shooting publicity...On all the sets...Picking up my
layouts. In other words, I was doing straight advertising
publicity....
A. I understand....
A. ...on all the pictures, rather than just one. Which was a magnificent assignment for seven years. I used my own initiative, my own imagination and layouts. Now, Virgil did it to a limited degree, but he was in the gallery. He was a gallery man. And if I were on a production, I would try to do five or six layouts. That would be comprehensive and go in a magazine. Of my own volition. In those days we would write out our still campaign....
Q. You had that much autonomy? Or was it just because you had the experience.
A. No, we had todo that and hand it in to Strickling.
Q. Oh, you all had to. It was really like...
A. The writer would put down his ideas. Like the famous one that "Wiles" wrote, that housewives don't live in a penthouse. And they don't. It's too high for them. And that was a story that he put down and he wrote and it got all kinds of coverage. I would write down boom, boom, boom, boom, what I would do for the picture. I had stars and their pets. Well, Ted Healy, it was a natural to have a skunk. So I rented a skunk. And Cable with the hunting dogs, with Harlow. That was a great picture. I got Norma Shearer with her rabbit. Strickling said, "How did you..." He stuttered. He said, "How did you get Sh-sh-sh-earer with her rabbit?" I said, "I asked her." You know, it's the famous old reporter's story. That's all I did. I sat outside their dressing rooms, and I'd
have a table, and we'd have all kinds of lunches there that they could sit down. I'd have Rainer sit down and have lunch there by her dressing room. I'd have Shearer. I'd get eight of those, and bingo. Or, at their homes, when they weren't working. When they were in the studio, naturally this was an easy way to do it.

Q. Bud, there have been so many rumors and so many stories about Norma as the grand dame of MGM. Was she difficult to work with? Did you find her difficult to work with because of her strabismus, that eye problem that she had? Or as a personality? Was she hard?

Q. You could just snap her like that?

A. I had her standing on her head, in the swimming pool.

Q. When?

A. In 1937.

Q. Really? And she said okay?

A. Yes. With her (?) .. We had her at the (?) night, and we went to Arrowhead with her to do a layout, and she came out early in the morning and had the Bible in her hand and was reading. A great big Bible. And she said, "All right Mr. Grimes and Mr. (?)..." She was always very (?)...With no Bud and Bill and so forth. So we shot some pictures there and we said, "Let's go down to the lake," so we went down to the lake and she was going to get into the canoe, and the lifeguard was there helping her get in the canoe. He spoiled the whoe (?) .. He laughed and said,
"Gee, this is funny. We were doing this with Shirley Temple last week." She listened to it, walked off and said, "I'll see you later, gentlemen." We never saw her the rest of the day.

Q. That's an interesting example of what can happen. And, in a way, if you think about it, you and I might laugh about that. I mean, the thought of having the same experience or the same shot as Shirley Temple, knowing full well that it would come out entirely different. But, I suppose the stars' protecting their positions was something that was typical of that world, and I'm not so sure that it doesn't happen in some areas today as well. But, I can't believe that that was typical of most of the stars. Was it?

A. The question that you ask can only be answered in the light of today. We had pros in those days. They were in the business. Mayer was in the business. "Mannix" was in the business. The stars were in the business. The feature players were in the business. To make pictures. And they weren't here to make a fast buck and run. They weren't here for making porno things. They weren't here for doing licentious pictures. They were here for entertainment and...It was a different world. To me, the '30s were the optimum years of the entire business. Because the came in '40, and after the war, it was still pretty good in the '40s and '50s, but it was gradually going down and down. Mayer was past the age where he could work and Dore Schary came in and started making "message" pictures. The
Warner brothers were getting old.

Q. Well, obviously... You must have faced the problem occasionally of the attitude of stars when you were given an assignment, let's say, for a magazine that wanted a cozy, at-home, in-the-kitchen-just-scramble-me-up-some-eggs-by-Norma Shearer. I suspect that she would refuse to do that. Would somebody like Barbara Stanwyck or Robert Taylor... 
A. Cooking eggs, flipping an egg up in the air and catching it. (?).. Shearer wouldn't. Eleanor Powell would do it.

Q. Yeah... Was that because it was their image, or because... 
A. It was the personality. Shearer was a little... I don't know how you... 
Q. First lady.
A. First lady. Yes, she had more stock than anybody in the whole business, because of Thalberg.

Q. Yes... But Crawford also... 
A. Crawford was wonderful. She'd be in the kitchen. She was a "man's man." Stanwyck was a "man's man."

Q. But, I mean, wouldn't the studio like shots of glamorous ladies in the kitchen?
A. As long as they looked neat, yes. She could have on a nice little dress, cooking breakfast, or setting the table. It wouldn't be menial work, but it would work in with the layout of her at home. And Crawford had a beautiful figure.
You'd take her out to her home in Brentwood, she'd be stripped down in this little suit, bathing suit, standing by the pool, or she'd be in the house this, that and the other thing. She was great.

Q. Bud, what was your objective. I mean, what was the goal, what would you, yourself, as a photographer....What did you want? What was the thing that you were getting at, when you photographed the stars?

A. Just as simple. Sell them to the public. Keep them in good order. We didn't show them in any inopportune way.

Q. Well, what do you mean by that? Like, looking foolish?

A. Well, scratching their butt, the way these magazine photographers do all the time. Or picking their nose. Or in some sloppy outfit. Or dirty or unkempt. Whenever you shot them they were well dressed. You had a hair dresser there and makeup. And an electrician...Emil Seberg was our electrician and grip. He had the light, and we'd always have a hairdresser and a makeup man. And they always had their own. And Crawford had her little 7777 car, you know, and Gable had his little car, and we did a hell of a nice layout. We always showed them nice. We never showed them...Like Colbert had her famous side this way, not this side. And Loretta Young, god bless her, "this side, not this side," because when you shot her this way there was a little bump here. A magnificent woman, Loretta Young. I just saw her the other evening. And Olivia de Havilland. A beautiful woman still.
Q. Loretta's ravishing isn't she?
A. Oh. Boy.

Q. Incredibly beautiful.
A. I did her for seven years, Loretta. And I was an agent for three years with Myron Selznick, and Olivia de Havilland was one of our finest. And she could send you right up through the roof any time you just looked at her.

Q. I suppose most people looking at a fan magazine with an at-home article would think that you just drove up the driveway and dropped in and snapped a few pictures and left. Obviously, from your description, these things could go on for days, couldn't they?
A. We'd go there for the whole day. I could go there sometimes five days a week. Six days in those days, when we worked Saturdays. I'd go out every day in a big black thing with Emil. Over to the house, with makeup and hairdresser and spend the day there. We'd have lunch there.

It's funny. Once...Bob Montgomery was a great guy but he was a little chintzy. "Bob Baer" was our lead man. He was our poster art man in the publicity. He would set these things up and say where we'd go tomorrow. He went out to Montgomery's one day, I was with him and Emil. So he invited "Bob Baer" in to have dinner, and we sat out there on our butts, waiting.

Q. Really.
A. You could write a good book without hurting anybody
and really have a very humorous book.

Q. A lot of politics going on? I mean...

A. If anyone got out of line, Mayer and "Mannix" and "Benny Thau," boom, boom, boom. You get down there and do it. It was a business. (?) was a pro, a wonderful guy. Judy Garland, Mickey Rooney, I knew them when they were this big...

Q. It's an interesting fact that actors who, very often because of real shyness, an inability to believe in themselves as people, often only come alive in the persona we admire and respect when they're playing a role; when they have the protection of acting out somebody else's persona. And I would think, from all the comments I've come across over the last year, plunging into this world of Hollywood photography, that there often were stars who were wonderful on camera, but felt very insecure and shy in front of the still camera. What about that Bud?

A. I think it was taken out of them. Because when a man came to the studio, like Taylor, first he went to William Burns to learn how to talk. Then he went to learn how to sing. And they went through all this. A training period. He went to the gym to build up his shoulders, because he was effeminate in appearance. He was a beautiful guy. When he came, he looked more like a girl. They worked with him in the gym until he came out with broad shoulders. He became a great horseman, and did great Westerns. But it was a
business in those days. The business of manufacturing stars. Eighty-five featured players and about 35 stars in those days. Fox was doing the same, Paramount the same, Warner's the same. Each studio would have their coterie of stars and feature players.

Q. It's easy... Or, in most cases it's easy, to look at a portrait done in a gallery and identify the photographer. After a while their signature becomes apparent. The Hurrell backlighting, the forward lighting of Ted Allen. You begin to... Like a painter, you begin to see how they use light and dark to achieve their portrait. But is there any way one can perceive that in terms of the still photographers, from the different studios for instance. I mean, was there a difference if you were an MGM still photographer, or Paramount, or if you worked for Herbert Yates on poverty row, or whatever it was called.

A. No, basically the same. The personality would come through. But you would have your Rembrandt lighting, with the little diamond (?) or the half light. It was the same with all the studios.

Q. The only star that I would call, for me, causing real grief and pain--and I can tell you exactly where I was the moment I heard that Jean Harlow had died--so I have a very special interest in her. Was it a special experience to work with Jean Harlow?

A. Harlow was magnificent. Harlow was like a sister,
and we used to swim up at Harlow's place. "Tom Robeson" was a cousin of Bill Powell's, when they were going together, so we'd go up and swim on a Saturday and she'd come out and make sandwiches. She was a wonderful gal. She was touted to be a hot (?) but she was a wonderful sweetheart. Twenty-six years young when she died. The fact that her mother was a Christian Scientist...

Q. But she never (?)...
A. No, she was sweet. She had a vapor trail of perfume when she walked by. All these people would go into orbit.

Q. It is interesting...If I had to break down in my own mind the hierarchy of people whom other people react to, I have to give the controversial award to George Hurrell. Almost everybody I've interviewed has very strong opinions about. Can I be as direct as to act you, what did you think of George Hurrell?
A. He went around the studios...After he left Metro, he had his own studio in Beverly Hills, and he had everybody. And they went to him, as they never went to Engstead. Engstead was the followup man. He was the photographer of the menopause, we used to call him.

Q. Right.

Bud, when we ("we" being John Cabal, you and I) were having tea, you mentioned that you didn't really do very much retouching on the at-home shots; that they were responsible, the stars were responsible for their own makeup and their own
hair and even what they wore. How did you control the fact that... Some of the shots that you've taken are exquisitely beautiful, and usually that is the result of some retouching. Was it light? What? What did you do?

A. I put my camera straight into the eyes and forced out all of this. You just see a halo here...

Q. But it's just a trick, isn't it, with Engstead. Anybody could have done that.

A. He had a way with women. He had a few feminine hormones in him, I think. Not too many of them, but just enough to... If you were to seek the top man (and this would be without envy) he would be number one. He was doing, 30 years ago in Esquire, what Playboy is doing today. He's a magnificent, imaginative photographer. And when he came back from New York, it made me sick. Everybody kicked him in the face.

Q. Bud, I don't want to frustrate you in any way in the freedom of your own free associations. But I do want to get back to the whole use of light. Did you have to set up anything when you worked outdoors?

A. An (?) here, with a reflector, which would give us the flat light that Johnny Engstead would use in the gallery. No difference at all. None whatsoever.

Q. You mean, the sun made no difference.

A. You'd have the sun behind you and that would be it. The gallery was no more than a key light or the fill light, and the back light for the sun. So, when you'd go out, you'd
always have the sun behind you, and you'd fill in with the reflector, which is flat light. And she would be made up anyway, and we'd then dark under her eyes like there'd be with makeup. And when she's standing on her head...Of course, it's a long shot, so it's not discernible.

Home sittings were very important at MGM. Probably next would be Paramount, speaking of those days, and seeing what was in print. At that time, we had 35 magazine photographers who were not in the studio circuit; not in the union. They would do theatre things and party things. Like, Jaime Fink (?) would go every night and cover nightclubs and things. That was one phase. That was one phase. The other phase was home sitting. The other phase would be production; on a production, shooting "Romeo and Juliet," and the other would be a publicity man in the gallery, doing the home layouts, the premieres, the special parties. We had a lot of political parties because Mayer was active in the Republican party. He'd have the Secretary of the Navy out there, and he'd have a thousand people. A great big horseshoe, on a stage. Beautifully done. And our job--(?) and I and Carpenter, in those days--was to go around and cover these people, with an old speed graflex.

Q. Was there much competition?
A. No, it was brotherly stuff. There was no reason to be competitive, because we were all on staff in those days. You would stay at one studio forever. You'd never go to Warner Brothers. It was only after the war we started to be
free lance. Since the war, I've been to every studio, and then some.

Q. As one talks about activity at the studio, one has the tendency to forget that this was a major business, and everybody had their own role to play and their own managers to report to in the old days; middle management who were responsible for reporting to upper management, who had the responsibility of reporting to Louis B. Mayer, for instance, at MGM, and then the Board of Directors--Nick Schenck and that crowd, in New York. I'm always interested in whether you just sort of floated around, or were there weekly conferences? I mean, for instance, did...Like a Madison Avenue office, did you have to go in and sit down at a weekly conference and figure out who was going to be doing what and where and why, and were there critiques? Tell me about that, Bud.

A. We'd have press conferences. Not necessarily critical, but ideas to come up. And we had a $10 prize every week for the best still of the week, at the studio. That wasn't competing with Warner Brothers, but it would keep you on your toes, because $10 then would be like $100 today.

Q. Bud, was it more prestigious to work in the gallery than it was, for instance, to be a still photographer?

A. The gallery would probably the ultimate, yes.

Q. Why? Because there was more money, or more prestige...

A. More prestige. And maybe working more intimately with the stars. And not being pampered by time on the set. Even
though we had time on the set, it was negligible. They would go maybe three pages a day, we would go in maybe five times. Maybe I'd shoot eight, or 10 or 12 8" X 10" stills. No, you were there, and you used their lighting, and sometimes you'd put in a little more light for the front light. But basically you'd do just what the scene was. Except when you're off stage over here, shooting them playing backgammon or whatever. Now, that was all yours, and it usually was fast. And then over here, on the stage, you'd have a gallery where if you had time you'd do portraits. But you would do the production here, offstage, over here.

Q. Was there much retouching done in those days?
A. Yes. In those days quite a bit on portraits, in particular. You look at them now and you kind of cringe. It's almost too much.

Q. Why?
A. Well, they would take everything out, you know.

Q. Idealized.
A. Yes. It would be beautiful on the color. Man, some of those (?), like that Ava Gardner thing. Beautifully retouched.

Q. Really. It's very difficult, retouching in color.
A. They don't do it anymore. They send everything out flat. That's why I mentioned to you just briefly: We're going to have back the "wampa" stars. We're gonna (?) 12 stars a year. We're gonna have a big thing on exhibits of the best
pictures of the year. So that there's more feeling for publicity. The writers in particular have gone down the drain. They're a bunch of bums today. And the photographers are just as big a bunch of bums.

Q. Bud, in developing a publicity shoot, give me an idea of how...what the process was? Did the direction come from publicity? Or, for instance, did you sit down and think it through yourself and plot it on your own?

A. I'll give you one. Parker. Cecilia Parker. Thanksgiving. I went out and bought a turkey, and she's walking down the street with the turkey. She goes over to the gallery. She puts the neck of the turkey on the chopping block with an axe. She can't do it. The next shot, you see her with the turkey at the table, having dinner with no turkey on the table. Another layout...

Q. Cecilia Parker plays (?)'s mother, and she's a nice, kindly, gentle woman.

A. She was in a picture here, and this layout went out and was in a magazine, and they gave the credit, and that was the whole sum and substance. Cecilia Parker, now working in Ooga Booga Pictures' "So and so," was showing...etc. Now, we had...What was the fellow's name? The reporter in "Viva Villa"...

Q. Oh, a marvelous actor. Not Chester Morris. Somebody like him. An actor like...

A. Well, you know who I mean.
Q. Marvelous guy. Lee Tracy.

A. Well, he was kicked out. A wonderful quote on that. He was drunk, and he was in the balcony and they were having a parade. "Lewd nude stewed. Peed on parade." That was the box in the recorder the next morning, and they had to get him out that night. Stu Irwin was the replacement.

Q. Ah, Stu Irwin. Were you there on that film?

A. No, no. I had Stu Irwin. I'm giving you an idea that I thought of. A double exposure thing. Stu Irwin riding a bike, and there on the handlebars is Stu Irwin riding. Stu Irwin opening the door of the car, and Stu Irwin getting in. Eight of those, and it went out as a layout, in 25 rotos. A million dollars worth of publicity that you couldn't buy.

An MGM photo by Graybill. That was the whole sum and substance. If we spent $1,400,000, we would have space on magazines (?) up to 120 a year, we would have space in magazines and the roto sections of newspapers you couldn't buy for $100 million. That was the whole star system.

Q. It's good to be reminded of the difference in the value of money. You made reference to the weekly $10 prize for the best still. You made reference to the fact that that would be the equivalent to $100 today. And you mentioned the value of the thing. For instance, the Stu Irwin shot, the double exposure, which was reproduced everywhere. Which is, of course, millions of dollars worth of free publicity. And, according to that valuation of money, you couldn't buy...No
studio would have that kind of budget to be able to apply to a specific star, or to a specific film. But, give me an example... Break it down for me what a shoot, an at-home shoot. You're going to visit Hedy Lamarr, to see what she does in her kitchen or in her pool, her bedroom... What does that cost?

A. Well, let's say we have five people. Now, this was on the still man's rate at that time, in 1940--$100 a week. Today it would be $500-600, you see. So $100 a piece, that's $500 it would cost for that day. And out of that day's production, we might get 24 nice color shots. We might get 24 nice portraits, two or three layouts of here. Or, a partial of one of the eight that I was talking about--stars with their pets--that we would fill in later. I might do her, "star and her pet, star and her car, star and her recipe," while I'm at her home, and I could come up with maybe then 1/8th of a layout. Then I'd go to another house and do the same, I'd have eight of them and I'd have ten layouts.

Q. I love your reference to the great Garbo as a "Spook." And that you only shot her through very long lenses. You weren't allowed to work with her? She didn't want to work with you? What was that all about?

A. I never contacted her. The closest thing I was to her was in an elevator once, when I didn't even recognize her.

Q. Bud, you mentioned that the gallery was the ultimate position as far as photography was concerned. Did those people in the gallery make more money than still photographers?
A. In those cases, he had everybody down because he was scale. In the case of Jones and Coburn, yes, and Hurrell. Hurrell at that time was getting $250 a sitting, which was the equivalent to $1,500 today. Ten poses, $250, @5 a pose. Today, that's nothing, as you know. But in those days--in the '30s and '40s (this was during the Depression, remember) ...And none of us ever felt anything. I never lost a day during the whole Depression. Never lost a paycheck. A hundred dollars, you could go to a store and buy all the food you needed for $10, for a week.

Q. Bud, if you were advising a young student, or a young photographer that...who wanted to work in the film business, what would you suggest would be the most important thing that they remember, in terms of who it is that they have to please?

A. Well, they had to please the star, or the person, or they would never want you back. And that was one of the things that you would strive to do: Try to please them, and when you had another picture...Let's say, Harlow would talk to them and Harlow would say, "Gee, I'd like to have Frankie Tanner." Frankie did her pictures, and he was a magnificent photographer. A little crippled boy, but a beautiful artist. Frankie Tanner was one of the finest in our business. We lost him about eight years ago. He died.

I did all of Wally Beery's. "Send me down Bud, Howard!" That's fine. For some reason I got along fine with
him, and I'd give him a carton of flash bulbs every month, almost like my gas bill. I saw his garage one day, he had about 50 boxes of flash bulbs. Never used him, but he liked them. He was a camera guy. He was a camera fiend. He had a dark room and he had all kinds of Leica equipment and big telephoto lenses. This was back in the '30s, when camera equipment was (?). You didn't see everybody with a camera.

Q. Did you develop your own prints?
A. I'll tell you a secret: I've never developed a negative, and I've never made a print. Isn't that horrible.

Q. It's interesting to me to realize that, in the old days, it was possible for a photographer to think through very seriously what his responsibility was, not only in terms of pleasing the star, as a personality--handling them, as the case may be--but also examining what the goals should be for the finished photographs, and, perhaps, if he took, oh, at the most, 3-5 pictures, three of them would be very usable and absolutely the right... the essence of what was to be achieved.

The techniques today seem to be very, very different. One, do you think that they're different? And, how do you feel about that?
A. Except now we have some idiots who do 35 rolls a day, of 36 exposures, on a TV show, where they need three pictures. "Life" started that. They would come in and they would shoot, shoot, shoot. What's her name? The "Life" Anyway, I had her one day on an Eleanor Powell show... It was
of
hi
li
th
wa
A.
wo
wh
at
Q.
an
A.
Q.
yo
ni
Th
wh
is
A.
Q.
in
A.
Q.
de:
th:

BUD GRAYBILL
Tape 1/Side 1 -

more than a day; it was about four days. She shot
and shot. I'm thinking of Louise now... It's Marga:
White.

Q. Yes, that's right.
A. Bing, bing, bing, bing, bing. Bing, bing
shot came out. That's all. That she used.

Q. Well, of course, there's no question the
picture magazines, starting of course with "Grayt"
and then there was "Look," and "Click" and "Pix,"
the prototypes that were established as a result
success of "Life." I was interested, Bud, for in:
was the opinion of the Hollywood photographers?
pleased?

A. Well, it was a good outlet. Because we
contributing to them. You go back to those early
trying to think of that magazine. It was a beaut
big like the... And it was local, in Hollywood. B
in size. I can't think of it.

Anyway, it was a great era. You had you
photographer, and then Ted Allen was in the smal
and I would be in the small gallery with him. I
every morning. Ted Allen would have his sittings
would have his. And later on, when Ted left and
Carpenter, who was working on production, went:
off and on. I left in '40 to join Myron Selznic:
business, because I had had my fling with photo:
I don't think it had anything to do with the photographers or even the fact that it was for the Fashion Institute. I think he just likes my lemon cake.

A. I think he must. I do have to comment: You mentioned about the voice quality. And it was very interesting for me. Now, you were with him so you have the visual image to go along with the voice. I've been...I visited with Ted Allen and Laszlow Willinger and Hurrell--a couple of others--so I have an image of an older gentleman to go along with the voice. This one startled me no end, because I thought this was a man of about 45-50. That voice is just right there, and I like to fantasize that it's because he really did what he wanted to do in the business, and he got out when he was tired of it and went into other things.

Q. Well, he did that, but also...He was...I felt very virile, a very vital, active person, and I think he liked the ladies a lot and had great success. Because he's a good looking man, and...But more important even than the looks, I think it has to do with his own sense of himself. He felt he was doing a good job, doing what he wanted to do, and went directly ahead to do it.

A. Absolutely.

Q. One of the interesting things, of course, that sort of seeped through this conversation with Bud--and the other photographers--what is the relationship between their photography, the fashion industry, the impact of fashion, from Hollywood
on the viewer. On the audience. On the world at large. And, of course, it was fascinating to realize, those gowns and hats and accessories that are used for the very formal portrait galleries that we're all familiar with--gallery shootings--had very little to do with what the average woman would identify with or wear. They were just gorgeous costumes that made the stars look even more beautiful. Although occasionally something like the Empress Eugenie hat, for instance, would take off and everybody, from your maid to the grand dame of the town, was wearing the Empress Eugenie hat, after Garbo wore one in a film and Adrian had put it together for her. But, I think that what comes through in terms of Bud's talk ... There's always that talk that we have while they're resting and going to the john (older people go to the john a lot), where little comments are made. And I think one of the things that he said that is very enlightening was that the at-home shots, where, for instance, an apron would be put on Bette Davis, when obviously the apron had never been worn, ever; the pot had never been used, the spoon had never seen the light of a kitchen sink--the audience watching this kitchen-at-home shot, where she was making fudge for her girl friends coming over later in the afternoon, would (?) the apron, for instance. So, if the apron had a new neckline, or a new use of ruffles, or a color relationship--whatever--that could affect the whole apron industry significantly, because people would go in and ask for the latest apron; the kind that Bette
Davis wears in her kitchen. I only used an apron as an example, but it was also clothes. It was the blouse that Barbara Stanwyck wore looking at her horses as she stood with Robert Taylor, examining where they were going to go next on their breeding program for studs. The...And things like that. I thought that Bud's comment that perhaps a greater influence by the still photographers who supplied those at-home pictures, even more than the still people on the sets, was not totally recognized by the studios themselves, or even by the fashion people. Because, when you think about it, you will realize, of course...Even I find myself remembering certain shots and things that made me feel that I knew the stars. It was not so much....See, gallery portraits make you admire them. The at-home portraits made....

(End of Side 1)

Q. Matthew Daniels, you've been very kind on these tapes, assisting and plunging in at various times......
A. It's been wonderful working with you.
Q. ....with interesting comments. I'm fully aware that when you showed me the outline for the projected Knopf book, I really was very interested. And I wonder now if I can prevail upon you--I'm turning the tables--rather than your helping me, I would like to interview you. At least, if you'd sort of go over those notes and that outline on the projected book, which really is a great summary of the contribution of the Hollywood photographer, and the sociological way in which
it evolved, and what was happening to society at the same
time that made the changes, where they went from their ex-
alted positions to sort of, who? Where nobody has any idea
who takes the pictures today at all.

So, rather than harry you with a lot of questions--
because we've certainly been through this together--why don't
you just chat about this?
A. I'd be glad to.
Q. It would be very good to have this on the record.
A. Do bear in mind that a lot of this is on scraps of
paper and I'll just sort of pick through them. And if I pause,
it's not Alzheimer's disease, it's just me looking for my notes,
or whatever. What I remember.

I'm anxious about the book. I think you'll be seeing
a lot of photography books through museums, through publishers,
and it's once again going through a renaissance that it did
about 15 years ago, when Hurrell was first rediscovered. So,
I know that different museums around the country are planning
on retrospectives and and traveling shows. And there's cer-
tainly enough material there for them to present. One of the
most startling facts that I came across was that in the 60
years that transpired between the start of Hollywood (from
1910 to 1970), there were more than 300 still photographers,
portrait photographers. I mean, that's a lot of craftsmen,
artists putting out work. And if 300 photographers each were
shooting say 12 pictures a day, six days a week in the golden
days, that's an enormous amount of material, and a lot of it
is lost. It's just not around for us anymore. So, what is highly prized, I think, and growing in value. You know, we tend to forget that, for instance, even movie film was scrapped after its first or second run, to have the silver taken out of it. I mean, that was the whole value of it. Nobody thought about preservation. The same thing with the portraits. They were done for a magazine, and once they were done, they got rid of them. Negs even. The ironic discovery has been the glass negs they used up until the very early '30s, because they've been preserved. They were put in boxes and put somewhere, and they didn't, they haven't crumpled and gone away. The early chromium negatives have, so... We're very grateful for those cumbersome 8" X 10"s.

One of the problems we have is identification. Prior to about 1916...

Q. ...Knowing who did what.
A. Exactly. They're not attributed, so we have these beautiful, gorgeous photographs, almost like "mortensons..."

Q. I've seen some of those, and my reaction to them has always been that they look like extraordinary paintings. They don't look like photographs at all.
A. Huh uh. And now we just don't know who did them.

Q. Because, part of the thing is the way they were posed. Because, obviously, the photographers drew upon their own sense of how to pose, and that came from landscape paintings and still-life paintings from museums. Because often you
look and you think, "But I've seen that." And actually you haven't seen that photograph, you've seen the concept.
A. Exactly. Exactly. But even for that period, this is unattributed, even up until...Actually right up until the '20s.

The studios, the producers, were having photographs taken so they could have something to show for what they were filming. I mean, they were churning a lot of films, you know. DeMille, in 1918 made 13 movies. So, it wasn't like today where you're in pre-production for five years, and then do the film, and it's three years before you do the next one.

Not only for the front office, not only for the backers, but you had to have those stills to get out to the magazines...Not so much to the magazines but to the newspapers to show what the local flicker was in the cinema. And then what happened was, they began to discover, as the star system developed, as the players became famous in their own right, they could guide the public's image. And none more noticeably than Mary Pickford, who was the perpetual sweetheart, and perpetually young by being photographed in young looking costumes.

And the one that I love (and this little tidbit came from a book called "The Day Before Hollywood)...In fact, John Cabal, who's also been influential with the retrospective on photographers...We discovered that there was a whole campaign done for Theda Bara. It was right after she played "The Vamp."
And literally, she would, in her private life, when she would go anywhere in public, people would shrink and faint from her, thinking she was some sort of a...

Q. A vampire.
A. ...a vampire going to suck the life out of them.

They were so incredible about these movies. The ad campaign that went out for Theda Bara showed her washing laundry with a little scrub bin; sitting at her writing desk in this ominous old Victorian writing room, but writing these....And the caption was always, "To my dear, lovable fans." You know. "I thank you for your loving concern."

Q. Were they trying to humanize her?
A. To humanize her. To make her not this vampire whatsoever. They were incredible shots, because so posed, and so out of character, on the other side of the spectrum, from the vamp. I mean, this was Theda Bara, with these heavily cold eyes and the black hair, trying to look like America's sweetheart, and it didn't work. It backfired eventually. So she was just stuck with the vamp.

Q. I've always been amused. Her original name was Theodosia Goodman.
A. Yes. It does sound like something Dylan Thomas would have come up with.

So, they found the power of the photograph very early, and, whereas you could shape the star with one, you could create moods with the other. And you'll find that in a lot of the
early photographs. They were "moody," as we say. Beautiful, almost painting-like photographs.

We mustn't kid ourselves. The fan magazines did start as soon as the films began. The motion picture started in 1911, which is about five minutes before the first movie came out. And they were there for fanatics. They were there to allow the people who went to the flickers (and there weren't that many in the beginning, but it was a craze that went quickly, so the more fans that were there...).

Q. We don't often remember that the word "fan" comes from the word "fanatic."
A. Yeah... I was listening to one of the interviews you did before, where you talked about "stills," where that comes from.

So, very quickly, the imitators came. The list of some of them are adorable: "Movie Life," "Movie Star Parade," "Photoplay" (which, of course, went on for some time), "Picture Play," "Screenland," "Screen Stars," "Screen Stories" (and this was all before "Silver Screen" and "Modern Screen" and all of those). The first two photographers who were relatively well know, who got their names out, were Evans and Witzell. It was Nelson Evans and Witzell. There was no first name, that was it. Just Cher and Witzell.

Q. And Garbo.
A. Actually, Nelson Evans was the photographer who worked with Theda Bara trying to humanize her, and failed.
But, nonetheless . . . "Vanity Fair" came about in 1914, and, of course, they had a lot of other photographs, from society and fashion. But they also played upon in movies...

Q. How?
A. The photographs appeared in "Vanity Fair." Whereas you had other magazines that were there only to provide photographs of the stars, suddenly, through "Vanity Fair," you began to see the movie star photograph shown in other magazines, as we see them now, today. Not everybody will go out and buy a film magazine. But a lot of people buy "People," and you will photographs taken specifically of stars or movies that appear in these other magazines. So, all of that happened . . . Really began around 1914-15.

There's a certain amount of . . . I don't want to say rumor . . . But you can assume a certain amount of capital went into forming these magazines, it came from the producers and the studios themselves. Of course, there was the unholy alliance down the line with William Randolph Hearst, and all that he had going on in "Cosmopolitan." But even in the first formative stages of these magazines, there's no proof that you can find that the producers were in there...

Q. Well, they certainly were completely willing to cooperate with them.
A. Absolutely.

Q. Supply them with pictures and I know that they made sets and interviews with stars quite accessible to the magazine.
For a very good reason. The thing we have to remember about public relations and publicity is that it only works if it works both ways. If everybody wins.

A. Oh, yeah. And also, the other thing is, in today's market, we think of hostile takeovers; the big corporate eating the... And that wasn't really what was happening. You'd have a small struggling magazine that decided it was going to be a fan magazine, and it would do what it could to get the photographs and the interviews with the stars. Then, suddenly, producers would be faced with hundreds of thousands of letters, demanding to know what Mary Pickford did in her private life. Then the producers needed to get this out.

Well, they couldn't do a mailing of their photographs. They would then start supplying, as you say, making it all accessible to the magazine. They would also provide them with photographers, free of charge. They would invest capital into the magazine. You know, perhaps move them into a better location. Do all sorts of things. So, it was a very friendly takeover that happened with a couple of these.

Q. The "flicks" produced the "flacks."

A. Very good. They also... There began, even that early, the alliances, the allegiances between certain studios and certain magazines. Because the publicity director of this studio would call up one of them, say "Movie Star Parade," and say, "Look, we'll give you all the exclusives on Rin Tin Tin if you'll give us front page when we need it, on... You
know...

Q. Trigger.
A. Yes, exactly. So...This is one of those moments of quiet when I'm searching...

Q. No problem. Take your time. I mean, we do appreciate what you're doing.

Perhaps I can trigger it by asking you a question. The...What you were doing was starting with the 60 years of active Hollywood photography, and so forth. After the unknown ones, you know--those nameless people who took those pictures--what was the beginning of the named personalities, for instance, in the studios?

A. How they became identified?

With Evans and Witzell, it was because they worked out of their own galleries, their own studios. So people began to know, who are the two photographers in town? Who takes studio photographs? Nelson Evans and Witzell. So, the name...Simply because they were the only two...were there. They also would publish their name along with the photograph, their photo credit.

Q. Was there status in having your picture taken by Evans and Witzell?

A. At that point, no. No. The status didn't really come about until the studios were back....A lot of that is bound up with the star system, because the photographers at that point needed work. And the studios needed publicity. So, it
just sort of went hand in hand. It wasn't building anything; it was just doing the job. Then, suddenly, when you have... When you are aware that millions of people, all over the world, will see a photograph of Mary Pickford, and you've got the exclusive contract, then you can start bartering on your fame of being the exclusive to a certain star. That's when it really started.

The...Along with that, at the same time, with...I guess this ties up even with Theda Bara, and certainly with Mary Pickford and the others...As the studios would grant exclusive interviews with the stars, and exclusive photo shoots, they also began to idealize their stars. They saw that the letters said, "We love it that Mary Pickford is so loving and kind and good to little children and animals," so they made sure that all of her photographs were kind and loving to little children and animals. And, of course, that just perpetuated the stereotype, up until mid-life she was still running around in pigtails. Or, Theda Bara trying to buck it.

Well, the public just didn't want it. They were scared, but they wanted to be scared by her. So they eventually realized and really pushed that, and made her dark and sleeping in a coffin, and all of those things. But that even went as far as the interviews. If they found...If Theodosia Goodman had lived a very boring life...They just enhanced the facts a bit and moved her to Transylvania...
Q. Well also, anything that deserves the word "glamor" also has to be reasonably inaccessible and somewhat mysterious. And I think as soon as you make something too familiar, you lose all of that value. I mean, as soon as stars stopped dressing for public appearances, when you began to see them in jeans and torn sneakers and the impact of their personal desire to separate themselves from.. As individuals from the roles that they played, it changed the whole relationship of the fan to the star.

A. Right. Well, also, come along about 1919-1920 is when the first studio gallery was formed. That was Famous Players-Lasky. Now, I'll throw in a quote from Laszlo Willinger right here, because it's very appropriate. As he pointed out, more people saw the stills than ever saw the movies. And that's probably when the producers began to realize that. You could see for free the photograph in a magazine or in a newspaper; you didn't have to go and see the movie. So, again, this pulling it in exclusivity, really trying to make it part and parcel.

Q. Also, I think something that people forget, because I remember talking to Laszlo about this, is that a movie was something that you paid an entrance fee. You sat, you saw the movie and you left. A still photograph in a magazine or a paper could be cut out by you, pinned up on your bulletin board, framed and hung in your home; or, it could be your bedroom fantasy. The very term that we are now so familiar
with--the earliest pin-up. In other words, you pinned up the picture that you cut out.

A. Exactly. Exactly. So, the studio...As I say, Famous Players-Lasky started producing their own pin-ups, knowing that people would see that little tag-line at the bottom--"From Famous Players-Lasky." By five years later, by 1925, MGM, all the major studios had gotten their own galleries.

The thing about these, though is, that when you look at them, they were just head shots. They were a room with lighting, probably a skylight with a backdrop, and the stars walked in, stood there--click--and walked out. And maybe you got a photographer who was going to do something over the shoulder, or that would be the germ of the idea that led to the whole photographic session. In the beginning it really was just a head shot to put that face out there in the newspaper. By the end of the gallery...By the end of the decade, rather, the galleries had enhanced themselves a little bit...

Q. At the end of the '20s.

A. At the end of the '20s, right. Just as we were breaking out of silents and breaking into sound, color is about to hit--"Becky Sharpe" had come along--so major changes were going on. Now, because all the studios have their own galleries, and it's not just photographers taking pictures, now they want us to develop a certain style. We're going to get the prop and the certain backdrop. Now they're going to start taking pictures on the set and thinking of them as portraits rather
than just still shots.

   It's also at this point the photographer...The photographer certainly had a major role in creating the gods and goddesses--the iconography--because one of the photographers you talked with...I tend to think it's probably Bud Graybill, because he's so point to point...He talks about the fact that they were retouched to death, and that you cringed looking at them in the early '30s. And yet, that is what we respond to. It's the fact that they are perfectly marbleized, poreless gods and...

Q. I think in fairness to our judgment about that, you have to recognize that Bud Graybill did not do any retouching. He wasn't a technician. He didn't use the dark room. He didn't do his own developing. And my experience has been that people often negate as unimportant the things that they can't or don't do. Because, theoretically, he's wrong. Nobody wants to see anybody with their pimples and too many freckles and so forth. What you wanted to see was the pure beauty that the gallery portrait photographers, with their retouching, were able to do. When you stop and think of Dietrich, Crawford, Garbo, those faces are unblemished. Incredible. And we know that in real life, in person, Crawford, for instance, was covered with freckles.

A. Yes. Well, also, as Eugene Ritchie pointed out, when you look at somebody for the first time, you don't take an inventory of this mole over there and the bags under the
eyes and the wrinkle over there. You see a face, you know. And the same thing a photograph. A photograph is going to give you that first overall composure you see when you see somebody. If you stop and sit and really stare at somebody, then you're going to start seeing what's going on on the face. But...Yes...I know about that ugly wart sitting on my cheek!

Q. That was unkind of me, I'm sorry.

A. I'm going to have it retouched out one of these days.

Now, '25-'26 is a pivotal point. Let me just stick with that for one second. It's been pointed out that because the photographers used 8" X 10" negatives, they would take their time to compose, get the lighting just right, take a shot, then do another one. Maybe three, maybe six photographs for a day. I know you commented earlier, when we were setting all this up, that you were surprised to hear that some of the photographers during this period were taking a lot of shots, rather than just a few composed. More like we...I mean, today it's no problem, because you've got an automatic camera and it shoots...It's got 36 exposures. Then it would have been a big deal but they did, and one of the things that I came across was that Ritchie himself, even as far back as 1923, would shoot one sitting, 100 exposures. I mean, this is incredible to me. In 1923, using the size of negs that they did, 100 exposures! Laszlow Willinger used to say it would be 3-4 pounds of negatives per sitting!

But, the one who got the change...Now we're going to
see the magic begin in the studios. It's Ruth Harriett Louise.

Q. Tell me about her.
A. There's not a lot to tell. She worked at MGM, right from the start. She's an enigma. There isn't a whole lot to be found out about her, and I know that somewhere we have yet to find that person who remembers her and can tell us about her; who is waiting to be interviewed. But that person hasn't been found.

She worked up...She was Garbo's exclusive photographer until Clarence Sinclair Bull came along. And she is the one (this is the history making pivot here), it was during the filming of "Flesh and the Devil," when Garbo and Gilbert had their famous kiss that sent America reeling, that the studio began to have demands for the kiss. That was the most famous shot, scene in the movie, and they wanted it. And they couldn't reproduce it from the film. So Ruth Harriett Louise asked Gilbert and Garbo to come into her studio, to get back into their costumes, to lie down on the floor, and do the kiss again. So, she was the first one to take a scene from a movie, put it into the gallery, recreate it, do it...Stylize it now--she can recreate the light however she wants; it won't be the exact same image from the movie but it will be so much like it that the public will buy it.

Q. Oh, sure.
A. And it will be idealized. So, with that is the birth
of the modern portrait gallery, where we recreate and idealize and stylize.

As far as stills...She...Because she worked only in the gallery, portrait gallery, these would have been considered portraits but they were portraits for specific movies. The first stills photographer that we can come across—Alfred Gondolfi—and he was actually a camera operator hired by Cecil B. DeMille, and that was in 1913, "The Squaw Man." Gondolfi shot all of the stills, and these are the first existing production shots that we have. That's why we credit him with being the first stills man. But he and DeMill worked together with lighting and shade, really trying to take away that flat sense, that two-dimensional and build a three-dimensional into it. And, as you pointed out before, the results are stunning...I'm trying to see what else is new...

DeMille. I'll stay with him for a while. He was so interested in photography. You know, his basis was, he claimed that when he was trying to envision films and set up lighting and so forth, a lot of it was based on Gustav Doret and the etchings. Because that had been his youth. Isn't it amazing how we carry the images of our youth...

Q. Oh, sure. We draw from whatever experience has taught us.

A. It's true. So, he would use those Doret sketches in the background and try to recreate them with the camera. He also worked with Carl Struss, the cinematographer, but
they also worked on some stills together. And somebody that
we don't know a lot of anymore--Edwin Barrahesser--That name
will crop up every now and then, but it's not one of the
better remembered. But those two, and I guess I'd have to
throw in Alvin Wyckoff too. The three of them working with
DeMille really changed the sense of taking the head shot,
at the same period with Harriett Louise changing the gallery.
These men were out there changing the stills into the production shot. It wasn't just a click, an image from the movie. It
was a whole production that gave an essence, a mood.
Q. And also was directly connected to the character
they played in the film.
A. Right. Right.
Q. The trick at that time...DeMille was smart enough
to recognize that you could, through one picture, communicate
the impact of the story. Today we call it "the high concept."
Of the story, from the picture. Is it the passion of these
two lovers? Is it the hatred of these two men? Is it the
rivalry between two people for one girl? All could be captured
in "a" picture.
A. Yes.
Q. And it was DeMille who first understood that.
A. He not only understood that, but once he realized,
once he realized that he did understand that, he took it
to the next step. Being the man who had his finger on the
pulse of America, as Joe Mankiewicz once put it; knowing
what pleased the public, he was out there to sell as much as he could. So, knowing that he could get that concept across in a photograph, he doubled his bet and hired two very reputable, two nationally well known photographers, so that not only would he have this beautiful image, but it would be an image taken by a photographer that everybody already knew.

So, here we have the birth of the photographer as the star. He hired for "The King of Kings" and "The Ten Commandments," Edward S. Curtis and William Mortensen, and Mortensen, for my money, is just one of those rare, rare artists. That's too limited for what he does, but it's the painted quality.

There's a quote here from Carl Struss, who was DeMille's cinematographer, and he says, "The majority of what we then called cameramen were not photographers. They knew nothing of lighting. They knew nothing of photography. It was all guess work. They came from all kinds of fields, they got in and they tinkered around with the camera, and they were called cameramen." So, as you found with the photographers you've interviewed, this is the birth of an art form. And they certainly made a beautiful birth.

Q. Well, they recognized the potential of a new form. After all, these were "motion" pictures, and the trick was to find ways to create beauty and the use of dark and light, and natural light in the sun. Most of the early movies were shot out in California because of the sun.

A. Sure.
Q. And the fact that they had long days and lots of space. And not a lot of people.
A. Well, one of the mistakes...Not mistakes, but one of the...You know, it's always through a problem that we come to our greatest growth period. As much as MGM needed to get the still of the kiss from Garbo and Gilbert out quick, so it was that, inadvertently, John Barrymore helped change photography on the next go-round.

Q. How?
A. Because in 1919, he...It wasn't the next go-round but it was... In 1919, he was told that he had to be photographed by James Abbe' for a play that he was in, and he refused to go to the studio. He said, "No, I am an actor. I act on stage, I'm going to be photographed on stage." And he was, because he was the star. And that had never been done before. It had always been done in a studio. So, whereas with films, in the early '20s, we have it going from the stage to the studio--which was the major breakthrough--for theatrical photography, it was going from the studio to the stage. And Abbe' would go on and move to Hollywood after that, and he became quite famous for that one photograph. And he worked with...Oh, God...Mary Pickford, Rudolph Valentino. And, of course, inadvertently, Natasha as well.

Q. Rambova?
A. Yes. Yes...

Q. Valentino's wife.
A. Yes. What's her real name?
Q. O'Hudnut. Something Hudnut.
A. Something Hudnut. Always something Hudnut. He also did some of Mack Sennett's bathing beauties, James Abbe'. Again, the thing that set him apart was the fact that he had a sense of lighting. And for him, that came from the theatre. Because the theatre is all about lighting as well. But he brought in something new. He used a mirror to reflect light onto the shadowy areas. So, whereas now it's quite acceptable, you're quite used to seeing a man standing with a reflector on the location shots, shining light up into the crevices in the neck, under the ear lobe, it was James Abbe' who first did that with a mirror. I imagine you must have gotten a wicked sunburn, getting the light directly....
Q. Or blinded.
A. Yes.

The...Here again, moving from the head shots out into more...Part of this was Ababe', who refused to do just a head and shoulder. He wanted to get the environment; to get a feeling of the figure with...where it was. So, therefore, it became important not just to have a backdrop, but to be shot either on location or on the set or in the home. And he did that.

He also had something that Hurrell would later pick up on, and that was to shoot either high or low with the camera. Keep the camera moving. Have a stationary subject,
but keep it going.

Let's see... Actually, Harriett Louise was another one. She didn't like just head shots. She liked to get the whole essence of what was...She liked full figures.

So, between lighting and moving the camera and using props, we now move into the early '30s and we get the epitome of the photographers, which was, of course, George Hurrell, probably the most recognizable for using the different qualities. He used light to create a design within the design. So fabric took on an extra dimension with the shadows that he created with it. Butterfly lighting. He used that... It was a spotlight with a butterfly shape under the subjects nose, which gave the face an added dimension. And there's a quote here that he has, and I think I'm going to throw it in, because it's very...It will help understand...

George said: "I always had an understanding of lighting and that's all I thought about when I was working with the person until I was ready to shoot. My style was somewhat different because I didn't light up the shadows. Publicity was on the photographers necks all the time, because the newspaper and magazine editors would holler about shadows, and in my manner I would say, 'Oh, to hell with the editors!' I wouldn't say it to their faces, mind you, but I would go on doing my same old thing. Black backgrounds. And if they didn't like black backgrounds, they could throw them in the trash cans. They had to wait until I was in the mood for a
white background. That's the way it worked, because I was an arrogant, egotistical bastard!"

Well, the arrogant, egotistical bastard won out because nobody remembers those magazine editors, but we all remember George Hurrell. And probably therein, you begin to understand that Ruth Harriett Louise, Hesser, Ritchie—a lot of these photographers—had a lot of sensitive, vulnerable look. That's what they presented. That softness was very sensitive. It made you think you really understood the subject. But Hurrell brought in a ruthlessness, and the ruthlessness underlying was sex. Which we really hadn't had before. We had had the heat, we'd had the romance, we'd had the lust, but Hurrell really brought in sex...

Q. A lot of what he did, it seems to me, was that by painting with light, he really created the darkness of the shadows, which offered central mystery. What you couldn't quite see was more stimulating in your...Because your imagination supplied what you felt the image was, or what the person was responding to. Don't you think so?

A. Absolutely. And there were more people responding to more stars too. So, he was in a position to really augment a major shift in photography. You have to realize, that between 1925 and 1940, movies had moved from the beginning to their apex and were starting to slack off again. I mean, in 1938, 80 million movies admissions every single week. That is 65% of the population at the time.
Q. That's amazing.
A. And now, the studios are lucky if they can draw in 15% of the population, in a year. This was 65% of the population, every week. So, those people had to be given pictures for each of those movies...
Q. Sure...Sure...
A. Fashion, clothing... As you've made the point so many times, clothing... The costuming departments were changing... When they would design a costume, it would then go in front of the camera to see how it looked on a particular star. It changed according to the body structure and the personality of the star. But then, suddenly, when it was there, in a photograph, it went out. It changed the whole face of the department stores.

The MGM of 1934, unfortunately, it's now MGM anymore. That beautiful old sound studio is now Lorimar Telepictures, or something. But in 1934, they had 23 sound stages over there. There were 117 acres at that time. Twenty-three sound stages! It was the world's largest film laboratory. They had... I mean... To me, you have to get some of these figures to understand what you're dealing with...
Q. Well, I think it's very important, and I'm glad you have that material.
A. There were 4,000 studio employees then. They had 61 feature stars, 17 directors, and 51 writers. It's no wonder they said they had more stars than there are in heaven. And,
a lot of that did go back to the old man; to Louis B. Mayer. I mean, he was out to be on top and stay on top. But, in the same vein, he didn't skip over the photographers. I mean, when we look back, the top photographers that we look at were from MGM. They were Clarence Sinclair Bull, Ruth Harriett Louise, Virgil Epjerk...This isn't one...You know, it's funny...You won't hear his last name. But on a couple of the interviews you've heard them talk about Virgil. That's this man. He was there from 1930 to 1967! George Hurrell, Ted Allen, Eric Carpenter and Laszlo Willinger. And then there were the other people. There was Bud Graybill and others who were the at-home photographers.

Within an eight year period...To tell you how photographed a star was now...We're beyond just portraits, we're beyond just head shots, we're beyond even just stills. Now we're into selling the glamor, the idea of the idol. Within eight years at Paramount, Carole Lombard had 1,700 different photographs published. Seventeen-hundred photographs. At one point, Robert Coburn, at Columbia, shot color portraits of Rita Hayworth for 19 different magazines in one day. That was to be on the cover of 19 magazines, and he shot them in one day. Can you think of anywhere that that would be happening today? For any star?

I'm going to throw out a few more names, because the other studios contributed enormously as far as the photographers they worked with, and here's some of the names: William
Cronin Weth, Irving Lippman, Whitey Schaefer (who was Bette Davis's personal favorite), Robert Coburn (who's just had a resurgence in the last couple of months, here in the United States), Max Monautry, Alex Kaley, Frank Powolny, Otto Dyer, Donald Binnel Keyes, Gene Ritchie, and Wayne Walley. There are also others at the lesser known studios: Roman Freulich at Republic, and Elmer Freier. And then you had, at RKO, Bachrach, who was in a class by himself. Ernest Bachrach. And at Warner's, Madison Lacy and Scotty Walberg. And these guys were great, because they started at the beginning, and they're still kickin. I mean, Scotty was taking photographs up until the late '70s even. Around the middle of the '30s we move from the big, cumbersome 8" X 10" portrait camera boxes into the smaller...Starting to bring in more 35mm. And because of that you were able to move with the flow, get the stars in more natural settings, get them in more...just more different poses.

Q. Well, it was less time of energy for them to hold the poses.
A. That's right. The censors helped shape photography of this period too.

Q. Oh, right. I hadn't thought about that.
A. Right.

Q. Of course they would.
A. They came about in the '30s, the early '30s, but it was.....
Q. Because I remember seeing a still of Carole Lombard, which was...I mean, it was porno, for God's sakes.
A. Well, not only that, it got ridiculous. So, because of the censors, a new type of photograph came into existence. It was actually based on shape rather than size. What you'd have is, you'd have...I'm going to use this example because it's a wonderful one. For the movie "It Had to be You," Cornell Wilde and Ginger Rogers had a two-shot; the two of them sitting on a little banquette. And Ginger's wearing a rather revealing dress. I mean, it shows her shoulders and her...
Q. Cleavage?
A. Thank you. And Cornell is embracing her from behind. Very loving embrace. But the problem with the photograph is not the cleavage, it's not the fact that they're kissing, it's not the fact that he's got his arm around her midriff. It's the fact that she's got her hand on his knee. And the censors would not let that go. So the photographer at the studio cut it from her midriff down. It changed the entire shape of the photograph. So to crop it to fit on a magazine page it had to be cut yet again. And now we get into from 8" X 10" to 5" by 7". And so we have the birth of a whole new style format. And that was...
Q. I'm trying to visualize what it really means. Can you articulate it?
A. Just as we're getting more portable, we're getting
more portable, we're getting more photographs being taken...
Photographs are starting to come down. There was a time
when 11" X 14" was the accepted size. And still, for an
art portrait, that would be the size that you would want.
Then the negatives became...8" X 10" negs. And your standard
shot of a photograph would be 81/2" X 11" or 8" X 10". Then,
suddenly, because these shots had to be cropped down to fit
other sizes, now we're down to 5" X 7" and eventually we're
going to get down to like we are today--the standard 3" X 5".
So you see the shrinking of it. And then, as the 35mm negative
comes in, that's going to fit with the 5" X 7" as well. The
8" X 10" glossy will reign forever, I'm sure.
Q. Can you state how this affected the actual shot?
The size. In other words, what did it do in terms of...
A. Oh, no. As far as the shot itself, it would just be
the censors. I mean, any of the photographers will say they
shot the bluest of the blue that they could to get in the
one that they really wanted. The censors would say, "No,
you can't do this and you can't do that, so they would get
as raunchy as they could on one side, so they could get in
the least of them, which is what they wanted in the first..
The other point, just on the size, is just the fact that
as that's going on, so photography itself is actually chang­
ing and the dimensions of it are changing.

Oh, I can tell you a wonderful little story about
DeMille. "The Greatest Show on Earth." Betty Hutton. George
White designing the costume for her. It was a little leotard.

It was...  

Q. Oona White?  
A. No. George White.  
Q. I don't think so.  
A. Well, we'll check my notes. Anyway. The costume designer her a little...It looks like a little one-piece bathing suit, with spaghetti straps, and she's going to go on the high wire with this. She comes out to have the costume checked on with the camera and stills and everything's fine, everything's beautiful. Suddenly DeMille cries out, "Stop! Destroy the negatives. Burn that film. We can't do that?" Why? The cleavage is fine, the breasts are covered, there's no navel showing, of course; it's one piece. He said, "I can see daylight between her legs. Because of the cut of the bathing suit, into the upper part of her thigh, there was a little bit of space from front to back where you could see through. Well, this was not acceptable. You couldn't have it, the censors would never let it through. This was 1951? By the time they did this? The costume designer takes Betty Hutton in the back and they're sewing on little feathers on her crotch, and little pieces of fur over here, trying to make little ruffles without destroying the line. And they come back and it looks like, you know, she's got a bird's nest upside down. That wouldn't do, it was just going to be distracting. She couldn't get her legs wrapped around the
swinging bar anyway, with all this fur and feathers and everything. So she came up with the idea, the thing that finally got it passed on the film and the photograph, and in the movie (this was the way you worked around the censors). She came out, she stood up, she crossed one leg in front of the other so that her thighs were tightly squeezed together, they took the photograph and it was fine. DeMille thought they had designed an entirely new costume for it. But, as simple as that. That was a whole day of production missed, for the sake of the censors.

Q. Oh, yes. It's amazing.

A. And, just before the photographers get off into the '50s, where it is more life and... Well, let's just stick with life. More documentary style photographs. Then you get into modern photography. Just to leave us off there. I think a fitting photographer to quote from is Frank Powolny, who did work with some of the more glamorous ladies of the...

Q. He did indeed.

A. Loretta Young being his favorite. But he also did shots of the Betty Grable pinup, and Carmen Miranda without her panties. I love this quote and I'll leave off with this: "The secret to taking good portraits was not to let the stars get confused. You didn't say, 'What do we do next?' Not with the stars. You kept right on doing as if you knew what you were doing. You had to gamble, because if they guessed you were out of ideas, they would say 'That's it,' and they'd walk.
Tj eu were gettomg tired and bored and you had to keep ahead of them, make them feel secure at all times, make them feel beautiful. Except for Loretta Young. I didn't have a special one whom I preferred or preferred me, just Loretta. One day I'd shoot Alice Faye, next it would be Gene Tierney. Some might ask for one or the other of us because they had a preference, but that didn't bother me one way or the other because I was more interested in taking good photographs.
A. Well, she talked about it, but she said quite frequently that she always liked the "bastards," as she put it; she didn't like... She said there were men after men after men trying to marry her. She said one time in New York there were three men—all of them rich—who, all at the same time, wanted to marry her. And all very nice people. And she just didn't want to get married, and she always had this thing for... I don't know ... Strays. People who were different, as I suppose she perceived herself as different.

A. That's very funny, Miss Browning, about the bastards. I know she... I have heard her refer to herself as a snob, quite often. Even when she was in the chorus, she hated dressing with other chorus girls because she was above them. And yet, in her snobbery, she could even be a snob about herself. She would say, "Here I am, this little girl from Kansas, being a snob about these wonderful women in New York."

But, to get back to the marriage issue: There were at least several opportunities where she had lots of men after her. That is true, isn't it?

A. Yes. She probably could have married any one of a dozen men. But she basically just hated marriage. She married Eddie Sutherland, and she was only married to him for a year. And then she married Darren Davies. And she said that wasn't real great. And after about six months, it was... It didn't really work out for her. And she just hated marriage. And the other thing...
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF THE
FASHION INDUSTRIES

Transcripts housed in Special Collections:

1. No photocopying without written permission from the oral author or his designee. The Director of the Library will furnish addresses; the reader must write for permissions.

2. Written permission is needed to cite or quote from a transcript for publication. The user must send the Library Director the pertinent pages of final draft; the Director will assist in obtaining the final permission. The form of citation normally used is: "The Reminiscences of ________, (dates), pages __________, in the Oral History Collection of The Fashion Institute of Technology."
No fees will be charged for published use. User is asked to furnish Oral History Program with a copy of the published work.

3. In order to see PERMISSION REQUIRED or CLOSED memoirs, the reader must obtain the written permission of the oral author or his designee. Contact the Library Director for addresses. The reader writes for permissions. Written permission if obtained must be presented when the reader visits.