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Hollywood Costume Designer

EDITH HEAD

Discussion By

ROBERT L. GREENE

(and unidentified associates)
Q. This is Robert L. Green, preparing an oral history on Edith Head, Hollywood's most famous costume designer, who left us a few years ago. We've gathered a group of people who, for various reasons, had contact with her life, got some material, interviewed her, known people who worked with her, etc. And out of this we're going to reconstruct Miss Head and her role in relationship to costuming people for films. It will give anyone approaching this material a sense of (1) how costuming has really done, and how Miss Head functioned with the longest career in Hollywood than any other fashion designer. And, what was she like as a person? What was her relationship to some of the stars, because we are talking about the golden age of Hollywood.

I will start off by telling you this: That through a series of circumstances--because I was a major force in the world of men's fashion and the most articulate member of that particular group--I did, in the '60s and '70s, an extraordinary amount of television work because it was the height of the talk shows and the material I dealt with was related to the so-called "peacock revolution," the change in attitudes, the change in values in men's relationship to clothes. Out of this came one of those strange experiences that lead to Hollywood.

I got a call one day from a producer who simply said to me, "Listen, we have a problem and your name has come up as
a possible solution.

"What is the problem?"

"We are shooting a film. We have done two days of shooting, we have seen two days of rushes, our star says that he knows nothing about fashion, nothing about clothes, but he does know that the clothes that have been assigned to him in this film are not the clothes that the character would wear." And he said, "I know somebody who would know what that man would wear, and you are that somebody. We are in trouble. We need you immediately."

The movie was "The Thomas Crown Affair," the star was Steve McQueen. The reason that McQueen reacted that strongly was that he had never played anything but his usual motorcycle-riding character or his Western characters, and suddenly he was a Boston Brahmin. It was a stretch and a change of direction, and he was to play a man of a leading Boston family, with long lineage and long history and impeccable taste. And... It's interesting... They had hired a major tailoring firm out here which had very expensive men's clothes. And in those days (and this was... I've forgotten the year but whatever it was... '60-something), they had... They were charging at that time $1,500 for a suit. You know. When you could have had a suit made by "Brioni" for $104. You know. So that... But the clothes were Hollywood-expensive clothes, not Boston. And the fabrics were screamed pinky rings and expense accounts, not old money. That money was so new and still smelly and wet.
Anyway, I knew nothing about what one should ask in terms of a fee for this kind of thing. I also found it frightening. Because, how do you do this, you know? Particularly in the pressure of immediacy. Anyway, I decided it was an interesting opportunity and so, anyway, I named a figure—which was outrageously large, thinking that maybe this will protect me and I won't have to do it, I could always use it as a credit and say, "Well, they asked me and couldn't afford me"--and the guy said, "Fine, fine. Just get out here."

So, I did. Now, the first person I called after I hung up from him was Edith Head. I had not met her up to that time. I was certainly aware of her. But I didn't find it terribly difficult to get to her. You know. I called the studio and they asked me what it was in reference to and I told her and she got on the phone and said, "Oh, I'm a fan of yours. I know your work very well, what's the problem?" And I told her, and there was a great, marvelous silence, and she said, "I'm going to ask you a direct question," and the question was: "Do you plan to move to Hollywood? Do you plan to enter this field?" And I said, "Oh, no, no. I'm under contract to a magazine. I've got another five years on my contract. This was just one of those fluke things that come up. And to me it will be an extraordinary experience. It will also give me great fodder for other television appearances and I can do an article on it, and so on and so forth." And she said, "Fine, I will help you."

And just to start this off (because what she told me was...She said, "You must realize, wardrobe in film has a
three-year life. If you design something that is too far to the left or the right of present clothes, you will discover that the shelf life of the film will make your clothes laughable. So, what you have to do is figure, where are lapels now, where were they two or three years ago, where do you expect that they'll be two years from now? But you must now go too far.

Then she gave me one other clue. She said, "Keep it as simple as you can. You don't want it to interfere with the film. You don't want people walking out and humming costumes (which I thought was terrific)." And she said, "Find your focal point." And she said, "And when you get out here, call me and you can take me to lunch." And she hung up and I thought, Oh that was terrific, and then I thought, what did she say? Where do I go from there?

But I latched on to the "find me a focal point," and what I did was to lie down and put my hands behind my head, and I thought, what is the immediate thing that I think about when I think about Steve McQueen? And the immediate thing was his eyes. and I decided that the thing that I should do was do a wardrobe for him which would have all the accessories the color of the eyes. And everything else (because I grew up in Boston) would be classic clothes. You know. The pin stripe suit, for the banker's conference. The grey-flannel suit for ordinary wear. Etc. And the one thing that I did that was daring (it started a whole trend)...Because I was fashion director of "Playboy," and because we were the most powerful force in

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menswear, the technicians, the fibre houses, the fabric houses--
everybody--pursued me. Because if I liked something and said,
"Well, you make it up in such-and-such and I'll photograph
it," it was an assurance of success.

I don't know whether you remember something called
"the wet look," which was a synthetic which managed to look as
if you had just come out of the water. And they showed me a
piece of fabric, and the color range was fascinating because they
were all almost day-glow colors. And I said, "Well, listen, I'm
off to Hollywood and I've got to do this and I've got to do that,
I'll get back to you later." While I was doing clothes and going
over the script, there is a moment in that movie where it's a
long shot, because they're spying on him. He's at the beach
and they're way up, you know, at Malibu, on a hill. And I thought,
"Well, what is it you could see?" You can't see grey or black
or... And I suddenly remembered that fabric and I called New York
and I said, "I want a simple, classical, zip-up jacket. Go buy
an early MacGregor jacket at Brooks Brothers and do it in your
fabric and send it out to me." And that's the thing that's in
the movie. And that started a whole trend. A whole big thing.
Which shows you the impact that Hollywood can have, in terms
of the... And there was no mention of the jacket. It was the
only time in the entire movie that he wasn't in grey or navy
or black.

Q. And was it the color of his eyes?

A. No, but it was California orange.
Q. Anyway...So...Let's sort of pursue this. I know that you have some things you wanted to tell me.
A. Well, what want to do is to throw out that I think the essence of Edith Head that people had in their minds was incorrect: That she was sort of enigmatic and unapproachable.
What she was was very serious about her work, and she hid somewhat behind dark glasses and a non-smiling demeanor simply because she had trouble with her teeth. Her teeth had not come in--the incisors next to the front teeth--so that as a cover she rarely smiled--until...And I've forgot which movie star, took her in hand and said, "You're coming to see my dentist." It was after that that she even allowed a flicker of emotion. But I think that all was in concert with her idea of keeping very low key, back burner. The clothes she wore at all of the fittings for the stars were very classic and very quiet. She didn't want to steal focus, as you mentioned.

I think if you ask me a few questions I might be able to zero in on something specific....

Q. One of the things that I learned about her was that the glasses, for instance--the big glasses--was an attempt to create an identity. She did not think of herself as a very attractive woman and, as a matter of fact, she wasn't a very attractive woman. Certainly not in the world of the great beauties that she was dressing. And, incidentally, June, that was Barbara Stanwyck that took her to the dentist.
A. Ah, yes.
Q. And whom she... Everybody who knows Barbara calls her "Missy," such a sort of dirndl-girlish name for this woman from "Double Indemnity!"

But, nevertheless, that's the nature of the stars. But, I think... I think you also have to understand, going back to her earliest relationship to school, you know.... Edith Head got her first job by using other people's sketches. Did you know this?

A. Absolutely.

A. Yes.

Q. Oh, you know about that?

A. Yes.

A. Larry "Chancellor." She was working as a teacher of foreign languages in La Jolla and making very little money. And at the time saw an ad in the Los Angeles Times for a sketch artist at Paramount. And was studying figure drawing in the evenings at Otis Parsons, and decided that she was going to apply for the job. And she wasn't a terribly good figure artist, and she borrowed the sketches of her classmates and took them all in as if it were all her portfolio....

Q. They must have thought she was a genius, working in so many styles!

A. All these different directions...

Q. And what happened?

A. And they hired her, because she was so versatile!

A. And she handled it beautifully by saying, "This is
some of the work that we do at our school." Which is comparable to walking past the library and looking at all the books and saying, "Have you read all these?" and he answers, "Some of them twice."

A. You're right. You're so right about the trademark, because she... Not only the glasses. The bangs. That actually started out as a Louise Brooks look. Very early. Who was then a star at the studios. And then she adapted the bangs and cut the sides up very short, and always dressed in a beige or white--off-white--suit clothes. Very nondescript. And insisted that she dress that way so that she would not be detracting from the glamor of the people she was dressing. And the color she was putting them into.

A. But apparently in private life she really went berserk, and her Mexican heritage came to the fore and she could be quite flamboyant at home. Very colorful clothes.

Q. I think that's kind of marvelous...

A. A double life.

Q. That probably is very much... And rather typical of corporate America; people who conform to the dress code of whatever it is... And then.....Well, you know, it also supports that funny world of our aristocracy, which is really based upon money in this country... The whole Palm Beach crowd. All of those people who would be appalled to go to a business conference in anything but grey, and... I mean, when you think of Lily Pulitzer, who dominated the Palm Beach scene with her mad print dresses
and print pants, so that men were wearing those pants, all over the place!

Well, back to Edith Head.

A. The same thing, incidentally, was true of deMille, and Edith Head did a lot of pictures... The first one was "The Golden Bed," for DeMille in, I think '38, maybe. And... Or no, it could have been...

Q. I think it would have been earlier than that...

A. Twenty-three. Could it have been that early?

Q. Yes.

A. But at his home in Paradise, after doing "The Volga Boatmen," he was taken by Russian dress, and everybody who came to his home had to put on... It was waiting for them in the closet of their guest room... A Russian cossack shirt. And they all had to wear them. Some were gold and some were red, depending on your station. They were always required. And he wore one too. At all the dinner parties...

Q. Did he give them to the women to wear as well?

A. I don't know if the women wore them or not. All the men visitors had to wear them.

A. She wasn't keen on DeMille. He was never quite her cup of tea.

A. Well, do you know she won an Academy Award for "Samson and Delilah," working for DeMille, and she was nominated in "The Ten Commandments," and "The Greatest Show on Earth," which were both DeMille epics. But personally, no. She thought he was
totally tasteless, and vulgar and hopeless.

Q. It was interesting, because in the period of time that I...I must have had what? Twenty lunches with her. Because every time I would come to Hollywood I would call and say, "I'm coming out, would you lunch with me?" and she always did. And we appeared on the "Merv Griffin Show" five or six times together, and her role in relationship to me was fascinating, because it was like a courtesan. I mean, I would speak and she would just sort of hang on every word, and it gave me the wrong impression of what Edith was really like until I said one day to her (and this is a real tipoff of what the lady was all about), that I was hosting a series of lectures in New York but I would like very much if she would come and give one of those lectures. But, inasmuch as there was no budget because, again, it was a non-profit school, could we tie it in with Vogue patterns (whom she designed for), or somebody who would be picking up her expenses. And I'd be very happy to give a party and, you know--take her to dinner and all that kind of thing--and she said that was fine and she agreed to come. And then I made the fatal mistake. Because to make friends comfortable, whom I asked to do this (and sometimes they would say, Oh, Robert, I'm fine one-on-one but I'm not getting up in front of a large audience, could you help me, could you be there, etc. And I developed a technique for saying, why don't we just do this as a television show? In other words, I will simply introduce you as it if were on the television show as a host, and then I'll ask you a question and we'll chat and the audience will be the sort of voyeurs
who will listen in).

Well, you know, other people--from Cardin up or down--said, "Oh, (French), that's wonderful, that's easy, that's terrific;" and Beverly Sills and I did that together and had...You know...Nobody wanted to leave. We were there three and a half hours. Just carrying on with questions and answers...

A. People love that.
Q. It was terrific.

Well, Edith took exception. Edith...I....She was going to Washington first--Washington, D.C.--and Nina Hyde, who is still the fashion editor of the "Washington Post," was an old and dear friend (because I had lived in Washington, that's where my fashion career started)--Nina called me and said, "I thought you said Edith Head was a great friend of yours." And I said, "Well, I assumed she was. She's always been very charming and very helpful. And she said, "Well, don't plan on her giving that talk because she's not going to do it. She told me 'How dare I suggest that she was incapable of getting up in front of an audience?'"

Now, I realize this was Edith in her advanced years, and one of the significant things about her was that, you know, until she died nobody knew how old she was. It was really one of the great mysteries of the world. It was like .. (?) .. when you asked her the question (because I asked the first time I talked with her, because I was curious), and she said, "Age
is a state of mind."
A. I love it. Or, "Can you keep a secret? Well, so can I." Actually, I think she was well into her eighties. But, be that as it may....
A. She was born in 1898. Which means she was eighty-one when she died.
Q. Well, who knows if that isn't, in the Hollywood sense, stealing a few years here and there.
A. I think the official birthdate before that was something like 1908. So she got away with a few years there.
Q. Well, I suppose she was right in a funny way.
A. What was the outcome of her....What was her reaction....
Q. You mean to...She didn't do it.
A. Well, you know she was a school teacher. And being a school teacher I suppose she felt she could very well address an audience.
A. And yet, when Art Linkletter invited her to first be on his "House Party," which I grew up with. Our lifeline in this village in Saskatchewan where I grew up was the radio and we would, with ear pressed to a dying battery radio, I would hear Art Linkletter asking Edith Head to-tell the ladies in the radio audience how to pull themselves together. She was quite forthright about it, and she would come along...You know, it was in the style of, "Oh, darling..." Under the belt, and then she would...I don't know quite what it was, but it was the idea that just with a touch of rickrack you could pull the
whole mess together. But she really at first was very loathe to do it, she was nervous, but after time went by she really rose to the occasion because she was quite a celebrity in her own right, on radio...

A. That was one of the reasons she retained a contract. She had a long-term contract, first at Paramount pictures, for years, and then at Universal. Because she was great publicity and they kept her under contract for that very reason.

A. Well, women love to be told how to make themselves look better.

A. To harken back to the Steve McQueen thing, there was a remark that she made that she was required to leave the room when Steve McQueen so much as changed his pants. Whereas when she was dressing Marlon Brando, you know, he'd take everything off and put everything on right in front of her.

A. Well, she did contend that men in general were much more modest and shy than women.

Q. I think that would probably be very true in terms of the Hollywood star types, to begin with. Because the illusion is so much more meaningful, perhaps, than the reality.

A. Oh, yeah.

Q. But also, it was an age. You know, we forget that Edith started in the '20s. She was the only person who had five decades of active work in the studios. But when you think of the golden years of Hollywood and the kind of men who were the
major stars, you're talking about people who were brought up to believe showing any part of your genitals was just about the worst thing you could do.

A. It was a different time. Although Mae West, whom she adored—she loved Mae West—What she said about Mae West was that Mae West knew what worked for her and never veered. "If it works, don't fix it." And people might have thought of Mae West as having been immodest, but she really wasn't. It was just an illusion that she was trying to create.

A. Well, the first time she met Mae West (I loved reading about that), she said she walked in...And Edith Head describes in glowing detail exactly what she was wearing; how the neckline was cut down practically to her naval and the curves were not tight like movie costumes but soft around every curve and very delicately belted and sashayed here, and Mae sort of pranced out and turned slightly and Edith cooed and then Mae said, "Honey, this is the Mae West look."

She also had those horrible censors to contend with in those days...["Oh, please!!"] and the naval was actually considered lewd. So what did she do? She stuck a pearl in it.

A. Not so much for men, but the women had to have them filled with rhinestones. It was ever thus! The double standard.

Q. Well, of course, that plants a seed in my head. What we should do...The next category in this whole archive thing is something about the effect of the censors and what happened...

A/ Well, sure, because you can go all the way back, starting
with DeMille, and you get leniency to the point of lewdity, and then you begin...
A. Well, she had a rose...She had a rose that, if the cleavage was a little too low and the censor started screaming about it, she would go stick a rose in the woman's cleavage. Just..."Oh, now they won't see it," and yet it drew perfect attention to it at the same time.
Q. Speaking of roses and speaking of attention (and we'll get into that later), but you know she wasn't above being really miffed when Princess Grace selected Helen Rose to do her wedding gown.
A. Oh, she was crushed, yes. She really thought she was one of the most elegant of the actresses. Although in private life she was very relaxed, Grace Kelly. She loved her posture you know, and the white gloves. Edith Head, I think, was very much imbued with the idea of women being ladies, in the end. She liked that.
Q. My reading of her (the reference being the various things she said at various lunches) was that she manifested all of those insecurities that you find in people who come from, for the want of a better term, ordinary backgrounds. And had an enormous amount of respect for anyone who came from the so-called more acceptable or aristocratic background. And yet, when you push, American rich having backgrounds are essentially just money backgrounds. This country isn't old enough to have a true aristocracy, if you think about it in those terms. And
certainly Grace Kelly wasn't. I mean, Daddy Jack was a brick-layer!

A. Sure. I do have to inject one note on the wedding gown, though, about whether it was Grace choosing or not. Because in the trashy James "Botta" biography of Grace, he does say that the whole setup of the wedding was such a political juxtaposition between MGM trying to get the rights for the newsreel coverage and the family not wanting to put up too much money but having to do a certain amount of the dowry, and then the aristocracy and royalty wanting a certain amount, so that it was MGM who came in and really made a deal. "We'll do this, we'll do this, we'll do this," and we're going to give you the wedding gown because we want to know what it's going to look like."

A. And Rose was under contract to....

A. So it was really that. And I mean, his description was that she was sort of pushed into all of it. Now, whether that's true or not only she...

Q. It probably is.

A. It seemed right...

Q. I do know that Edith told me that she did the "going away" suit.

A. Which probably would have been her choice, Grace's choice.

Q. Well, I said to Edith at that time, I said, "Darling, we all know about last acts," the thing you remember. That's
the last moment..."Oh, I think you're absolutely right. It's marvelous. Everybody will...That's the last thing everybody will see, our Grace..."

A. But, of course, she maintained (and rightly so) that costume designers were not designers at all, and one of the things that I can quote is something that she said which was that, "We are not one-shot..." Rather, "We are one-shot artists who stick to the script, dressing a certain star for a certain role at a certain year and season. What influence we have on world styles is not from the fashion but from the star who wears it, and from the audience that may idealize her." And I think she pretty well stuck to that.

A. Well, basically, to sum it, I mean, she said, "We're not creators, we're re-creators," and she was extremely (?).. about the release date. Which she said earlier about the shelf-life, where the clothing was going to go. And for the women it was something to be frantic about, and the... There was... To go back to some of the stars that she had worked with...

When she was dressing Bette Davis in "All About Eve," in that great gown that Bette Davis wears when she's on the staircase, the set was all ready, it was the first day of shooting and Davis was getting into costume, and they had made the gown wrong and it was too tight on the shoulders. It simply didn't fit. And Edith Head was frantic at the people who built it. And, you know, they were all ready to shoot and everything. I mean, they would have lost the day's shooting and everything.
And Bette Davis said, "Oh, I'll fix that," and she took the gown and just hung it down on both sides.

A. Off the shoulders.

A. Off the shoulders, and wore it that way. Because it was so tight it didn't drop but it fit over the edges of the shoulders.

A. The scene on the staircase was saved!

A. It saved Edith Head!

A. Did you know her mentor (or tormentor, as the case may be), Travis Bampton.

Q. Yes, as a matter of fact...

A. Howard Greer?

Q. Well, I have to tell you...Travis Bampton...It's interesting that you bring this up, after I knew him...Travis Bampton was the design assistant in New York City to a woman named Madame Frances. Madame Frances's basic career was that she was the most brilliant corseteer in New York. My mother was a Ziegfield girl. Mr. Ziegfield insisted that all the girls be corseted by Madame Frances, because Madame Frances understood how to figure-fault, create supports.

A. De-bone, as the case may be...

Q. De-bone, add-bone, or whatever. And...Because you are talking about...When I refer to my mother, you are talking about the Follies of 1916 and 1918.

A. She was a Ziegfield Chorus Girl!

Q. And, of course, the whole look at that time was much more zoftique and much fuller than it was later.
Okay. Now, I was born in 1917. My mother, when she left the Follies, went on to become the number one model in this country, and then the number one model in Europe, and never did anything but just clothes. And marry men. She had five children, she had five husbands. And...But I remember her coming back from a sensational fashion show in Paris, where Sciaparelli made her number one model, and the whole world was at both of their feet, as it were, and she came back and said, "I have to get to Madame Frances immediately," because things were...You know, whatever they were wearing out...

Now, by that time I was like ten, and I can remember it, as though it were yesterday, hand-in-hand, going to Madame Frances, and my biggest association was that the smell was divine. The scents were all garden scents, and the women were quite beautiful, but the assistant was Travis Bampton, and they didn't know what to do with me. Because there I was, I was this 10 year old, and they said, and Madame Travis said, "Travis, amuse little Robert," and I sat on Travis Bampton's lap, and he did sort of hand puppet tricks with me, and so forth and so on and jiggled me...

A. Are you sure you weren't (?) ...

Q. Well, it was interesting. Because years later, when I ran into him out here in Hollywood, he said, "You seem very familiar," and I couldn't resist and I said, "You've been very familiar!"

Anyway, that's the story about Travis Bampton. But
I think Travis Bampton was one of the great designers.
A. So did she, so did she. And when he left... I think he left for a couple of reasons, not the least of which was the drink had been (?) his life...
Q. He was a self-destructive man, yes...
A. It was Geer who hired her, and I think that they were onto her extra drawings very quickly. Because when she started drawing she was very stiff and could sort of only... had sort of a very limited style that she was drawing in. But they loved her aplomb at doing it. They had to hire her.
Q. Her chutzpah.
A. She won her first Academy Award for "The Heiress," is that not so? And that was interesting, because it was a very sort of subtle situation in that show. Olivia de Havilland had to start off looking ill at ease, which was in itself a feat to accomplish, because Olivia de Havilland...
Q. Plain.
A. Yes, quite plain. And things a little ill-fitting or a little overdone, trying to please the father, the tyrant. But in the end, when she comes into her own, and has to have that strength, she rises to the occasion in every way, and apparently appears beautiful and is beautifully dressed. But it was not a flambouyant thing, and I think that's what struck her. The year before she assumed she was going to win the award for something much more flashy. I've forgotten what it was. And she
didn't. But when she won the award next year, and wasn't expected to, for "The Heiress," she realized that the sine qua non was that the costumes had to be in keeping with the character; they didn't have to stand on their own, as such. And that was the essence of the idea of the award.

A. Well, she had minored in psychology....

A. It stood her in good stead...

A. ...and it really was about being a psychologist.

And how do you bring out the psychology, the dramatics of a scene?

Q. I think it also explained her long life in the trade, because costume designers, apart from their talent, really have to be clinicians. You are dealing with....

A. Temperamental...

Q. ...neurotic stars. You're dealing with fear, aging stars, you're dealing with every conceivable tension, and the expectancy that the clothes will take away the wrinkles is...

A. God, if it were so!

Q. And she was very politic.

A. Continuously politic.

Q. Well, there were real tranverses made. Elizabeth Taylor, to this day....

A. What was it she said about Elizabeth Taylor? "She likes any color as long as it's violet?"

Q. But I'm trying to remember what the event was....

Elizabeth Taylor was being honored, and there was an event in
New York—a fashion/charity thing—all too-too haute couture was there from all over the world. And I remember I took a table, so whatever it was it was important enough...You know... You did that...And the table was next to Halston's table, and Liz Taylor was Halston's guest...

A. Whatever became of Halston?

Q. That's another story. Talk about self-destructive... And Head was being honored....No, Head was being honored. That was it, and Liz Taylor was going to do the presentation. And she...It was fascinating to watch, because I...In watching Liz Taylor, who at that point was at the height of her fat and she looked awful. I mean, she really looked dreadful. And tasteless. And she had a dress that was cut up to her hip. And you were talking about mutton thighs! I mean, you know. And I kept thinking, oh, it's such an extraordinary gift to be born with that kind of beauty. You know? How could you let yourself go that far? I mean, I can certainly understand maturing, and all the things that we all do. But, I mean, to the point where you're gross? And when I watched her with Edith Head, and I watched Edith with her, and there was a real transference situation. I mean, it was mama.

A. Oh...This is off the subject and back to you, June, but on "The Heiress," the picture she had lost out on the year before was "The Emperor Waltz," and ironically, it was "Joan of Arc" that won, with those perfect, perfect battle scarred uniforms that showed not a dint or a dent.
But, I just came across one of my notes about your feelings about "The Heiress," and she said that it was possibly the most perfect picture she had ever done.

Q. Why was that?

A. She said, if you take out the dialogue and the sound and view it as a silent movie, you can tell the story just by watching the costumes.

A. That through-line, yes. And the set decoration, too. Exquisitely.

A. Yes. And she said that had to be why she was given the Oscar for it. She said, as you said, there were other prettier gowns and flashier, but it was...The award that year was given for the costumes that advanced the story, not necessarily for the most beautiful clothes.

A. Don't you think that holds true too, now? That that's how they award the Oscars for costumes?

Q. I doubt it. I doubt it only because I think that you're talking about a whole other period. We're talking about a period now in which style has become the dominant force, as opposed to fashion, you see. And style feeds on individuality and it feeds on the unexpected, and I think it—would be more likely that somebody who could create costumes for a movie that really grabbed you and really gave you a feeling that this was extraordinarily special would be more likely to win. All you have to do is look at the desperate attempts of the stars, the way they dress at the Academy Awards...It is...You know...
But also...Costumes...You'd be hard put right now, other than "Tribea," who's pretty much doing things for television, to name a costumer.

A. I was going to say, who are the leading lights now?

Q. And that's the reason. Because, you see, the '60s produced clothes off the rack...

A. They started going to the department stores instead of the custom made at the studio. It was much cheaper.

Q. People have asked me...I left in '74, the fashion business as such, because I said a very simple truth. I said when fashion reaches the stage where any length, any width, any fabric, any color is acceptable, we're no longer talking about fashion, we're just talking about wardrobe. And I said there is no basis of authority unless you can dictate; unless you can say this is in, that's out, this is right, this is wrong. We're now living in a society in which everything is considered right and everything goes. And I said there really isn't any place...I will devote the rest of my career to the field of style, and I will do it in areas, probably, other than fashion.

That was the last, you know, "New York Times" interview. And I moved into the whole field of interior design, where at least the same forces that you could have dealt with in fashion were operating. In other words, you could say "that's a tacky chair," or this or that; you could say it goes, or somebody will love it.

There's always levels that anybody will identify,
and I think once that clothes in movies were pretty much being bought off the rack, you were also dealing with, in a strange way, an extraordinary return to the original clothes of the movies. The original clothes in film...

A. You had to bring your own...

A. You brought your own out of your own trunk.

Q. Which meant that the gals that worked the most often had the largest wardrobes.

A. Truly? Well, see, I got my first role in a feature film, and I was thrilled to death and they said, "Show up on such and such a date and bring three dresses." So much for the glamor of Hollywood. Bring your own dress.

Q. And, of course, men, you see, men... Many years after they were established costume designers... After Adrian was at MGM, after Travis Bampton was firmly established at Paramount—you know, all these people did not deal with men's clothes until, I think, I think it was Darryl Zanuck who saw the rushes of a film and said, "What is that guy wearing?"

Here was, you know, because it is interesting to recognize that we have lived in a society (and we still do) in which women will accept an invitation to a cocktail party—and go have their hair done, go have their nails done and carefully select the dress and, if it's in a colder climate, pick the fur, pick the jewels. And then Harry, the husband, says, "Okay, ya ready ta go, let's go," and he could be in a sports jacket and a sweater and any thing else and nobody ever questions
it. The women have never been in a position to say, "I won't go if you're going to wear...dress that way." And that still pretty much exists. A certain designer recognized, you know, that this is terrible. That man should be such and such and such and such, and that was even, when you think of it, McQueen's point; that he didn't know what was wrong with the clothes, he just knew that the character would not wear those clothes. I said to him when I talked to him, "Do you have a concept, an idea that you'd like to pursue?" And he said, "Hell, I don't know anything about clothes? I just don't feel right." He said, "It can't be right." And he said, "Bring your wardrobe."

A. He had the insight to know. And, of course, the other end of the spectrum are the actresses who say, "Well, never mind if it's in period as long as I look cute." Of which, I am one. I mean, let's get your priorities in order.

No, truly. The idea of trying to look your best, whether it has anything to do or not with the script, is really should be anathema to real actors. And I don't know how much say at this juncture the so called costume designers in a film have. I think they have to all pay homage...

Q. Going back to DeMille, Head told me—that DeMille said to her one day, "I don't want to hear any nonsense about period." He said, "All I want...I want to see bosoms, I want to see butts, I want to see legs." He said, "I want luxury. I want luxury. Nobody comes to the movies to see what's in their apartment. It's fantasy." And you see, that's always been really my basic
argument; about Hollywood and...

A. Well, at first it had nothing to do with the real world. But you probably wanted it to...

A. But he was such... I mean, the reason... She must have been driven crazy by him just because of that. In his pre-production he would spend three years going to Europe and pulling books out of libraries to show you exactly what they wore and who are the experts on this? Show me and get all the experts together, and then come back and say exactly that. He's had his playtime; now it's time to go back to his class and get the designers to do it. And he doesn't care as long as there's some semblance of the basis of reality.

Q. Well, see, the thing I think eventually will be done (and maybe if I live long enough I will do it myself) is somebody has got to produce a book that outlines MGM medieval, for instance.

A. MGM medieval!

Q. Well, it is not what was worn in medieval days, but it's what impacted the world as to what was worn in medieval days. I mean, it was "Ivanhoe," it was Robert Taylor and Elizabeth Taylor and that whole group and the way they would dress that made us all believe that...

A. That that's the way it was.

Q. ... that's the way it was. And that is equally true about many other areas. I mean, certainly the whole Bible! I mean, all of the Biblical epics. I mean, apart from language...
we can get hysterical with some of the dialogue! But the outfits...

A. I always wanted to be one of those ladies down at the well with the goats. DeMille made it all look so lovely, but you know that had no sanitation, that they couldn't wash anything, and that homespun was...

Q. Well, Edith told me that Hedy Lamarr's dress in...

What was it?

A. "Samson and Delilah."

Q. That DeMille came in one day and said, "Edith, I gotta figure out a way of deducting some of the stuff at my place. And I've got a lot of peacocks. Do something with peacocks."

A. Oh, he kept peacocks up at Paradise Ranch.

A. She made that magnificent robe.


A. She hated that cape. She said it was probably that damn cape that won her the Academy Award, but she hated it.

Q. And Hedy Lamarr really looked magnificent in anything.

A. Well, one thing was that DeMille kept drumming into her that he wanted no leftovers. It all had to be new. DeMille never re-used anything from one movie to another. And she didn't want to use the peacocks, but he wanted the peacocks so it was Head to head...sort of...And she had her people go up there...But then the slap in the face...The real reason why,
I think, she hated it, was after it came out, DeMille kept going, "I'm the one that came up with the idea for that. They were peacocks from my ranch, that's my cape." Of course it wasn't she...

A. It's my Oscar.

A. Yes, exactly. She said, "I did the damn thing, and then won the Academy Award for it and it still given credit for him for it."

A. Just to digress: I think actually I was looking at... What was it? It was one of the later films that he did that actually had some footage from the first "Ten Commandments" set.

A. So he re-used a few things.

A. That dress, though, must have been very special to him, because I know John Cavell, the film historian, when he first... He was the first outsider to go...

(End of Side 1)

A. ...but John was given free reign to go through the house, and he went through and looked at all the books and the "buckwin" drawings. And then he went upstairs and started going through the bedrooms, and he went to Mrs. DeMille's bedroom and that was very clear. The closets were all done and the clothes were packed away. And he went into C.B.'s room and started going through the many closets, and there were all his clothes, his director's clothes, and then he opened up another closet, and there was a plastic bag hanging between two suits
and he opened it up, opened up the plastic bag and there was the peacock cape from "Samson and Delilah."

Q. Oh, I think that's a marvelous story!
A. Yes.

Q. I didn't know that at all.
A. And so it had been kept completely aside from any other costumes, there in his private closet.

A. I never saw that movie, did you?
A. It was actually Cleopatra. He used the chario footage from "Cleopatra" that had been used in the first "Ten Commandments." The Egyptian chariot.

A. A lot of the stars used to want to buy the wardrobe that they wore in the films, but were rarely allowed to do so because they were really recycled. The stars would wear, and then the also-rans, and then the extras. They were made over so they rarely used them...

Q. Yes, there are actual dresses that you can track down to like five different pictures, going from the original star down to... Not so much feature players but stars of B pictures. You know, the next level of picture. Then the feature player. Then you'd see it on a dress extra. And then you'd see it on somebody who was lower than a dress extra.

A. In a crowd scene.

Q. In a crowd scene. Exactly. "Help yourself. Pull out something from this rack." Well, it's kind of wonderful, you know.
A. And now they're in Western costume.
Q. Well, one of the things, of course, that I do remember. I once did an interview with her for a Boston show that PBS... We did a thing called "At Home With," and I went to talk with her. And she did say something interesting about the fact that almost every actress would arrive at a pre-production meeting with her... Once they were assigned to the film and she was assigned to the film, and she said, almost to a person, they would walk in and say, "Now, let me get this straight. I don't wear..."
A. And "I hate this" and "I don't like grey," "Put me in a bateau," they had pre-conceived. They thought they knew more about how they should look than she did.
Q. Yeah. And one of the things that... One of the delicious stories that she told me... I said, "Well, how did you combat that?" And she said, "I just took all the Oscars and put them on one shelf and I sat them in front of that shelf. And she said that was the most intimidating thing in the world. Yes. She was nominated for what, ten?
A. No. Thirty-four.
Q. Thirty-four. She got eight?
A. She won eight.
Q. My God, it was almost as though... I think "The Sting" was the last one.
A. That was the last picture she worked on, wasn't it?
A. No. "Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid." Which was a perfect
circle, because she re-designed for him the same dress she had
designed for Barbara Stanwyck in "Double Indemnity." So he
could...Steve Martin could appear as...
A. With Barbara Stanwyck.
Q. Well, that was the last show that she and I talked
about. We did.....Rudi Gernreich, Edith Head and myself, did a
two-hour Merv Griffin show, and I had just come back from Paris
and saw the new Cardin menswear collection, which was rather bril-
liant. And that was the hook that we did this whole thing. And
then Edith described that she had been assigned to do the men's
wardrobe...This kind of thing...And I remember saying that, well,
considering that 7/8 of men's manufacturer's have done nothing
but copy the clothes that were worn by Cooper or Robert Montgom-
ery, William Powell, etc., etc., it's not a very difficult as-
signment; it seems to me that what you do is go back, just walk
down to Hollywood Boulevard and buy some of those films. It's
true. You've got the whole thing made. And then I laughingly
said, "Just keep your focus, dear." That kind of thing.

But she did say once that Rita Hayworth came in to
do a movie, and she expected...
A. ...a great furor, and she's very quiet and calm,
yes, and disinterested. Until the actual moment came for the
fittings and then she was very aware and very interested. But
the ones that she most expected to be difficult turned out not
to be so. That's often the case. I'm trying to think....
A. She was very clear in saying that the men she worked
with were usually a dream. And she said, "Here Paul Newman, I think you should wear this for this scene in 'The Sting'," and he'd say, "Oh, yeah, well..." And she'd say, "Does it fell all right?" and as long as... 

Q. I can tell you an interesting story...

A. Do.

Q. Joanne Woodward, who, as we all know, is Mrs. Paul Newman, and I were on a local New York television show. She was doing a pitch for, fund raising for a ballet company which she was trying to help, and I was just being me, as usual. And it all went very well, and she had her driver and limousine waiting and she said, "Can I drop you?" and I was a consultant at that point to Tiffany's, so I said, "I'm off to Tiffany's for a meeting, can you drop me there?" and she said, "Absolutely." On the way she said, "Would it be terribly..." She said, "What do you do at Tiffany's?" I explained that I was a consultant and that we were re-organizing the image of gift-buying and so on and so forth. Anyway. Well, she said, "Oh, I'm sure if Tiffany's hires you you're very expensive and I really can't do that but I'd really appreciate it enormously if you'd help." And I said doing what? And she said, "Well, it isn't generally known but Paul is color blind, and he doesn't know...He has to be guarded as he leaves the house."

A. Constant surveillance.

Q. Absolutely. And I said, "Well, you know, there is something you can do," and she said, "What?" And I said, "You can code the clothes." And she said, "Would you do that?" So I
I did. I said, "We'll do it as a Christmas present." And so, I indeed went and... He had a lovely wardrobe, nicely done. And most of it was from movies. They just said, "Keep it," and so I just did: A-suit, A-tie, A-you know. We coded everything.

A. Oh, that's so nice of you to have done that.

Q. Oh, I loved doing it.

A. He must be eternally grateful.

Q. It's like... An I saw him at an Academy Award party at Polly Bergen's, just a couple of years ago, and he came in looking really great, you know. And somebody said, "Paul, that's a wonderful tie."

A. And he deferred to you.

Q. And he turned to me and said, "It worked."

At the time I said to her I don't think we should talk about this. Because it'll affect people going to see him. I mean, color blindness, by the time it's told to the tenth person, it becomes, "Did you know that Paul Newman is blind?"

A. Bing Crosby was color blind as well.

Q. Yes. Well... But I think there's another reason... Larry, you mentioned that Edith pointed out that the men were just "poppets." But you know, that's true. I once said that it is extraordinary to watch men in a department store, or at a tailoring establishment.

A. They don't have the confidence.

Q. None whatsoever. They become little boys.

A. Kids. My husband drives me nuts.
Q. They become little boys because...Well, that's an interesting comment in terms of the way clothes are selected generally, in this country. Most men's...When you're a little boy Mommy takes you to the little boys' department and selects what she wants you to wear, and if she has any kind of skill at all, she makes you believe that you're making some of the decision, but most women don't even bother doing that. And I've watched people in department stores--sales people--actually ignore the man standing there, and address the woman, and say, "No, we don't look good in brown." I just love that!

But, it is...It explains that men, generally speaking...The only person I ever really watched at a fitting, who was just the opposite, and somewhere in the files there is an article that I wrote for "Town and Country" on Cary Grant being fitted for a camel's hair coat at "Brioni of Rome," before "Brioni of Rome" was even known by anybody, and that's how it became known as a matter of fact.

I was in Europe and Henry "Sell," the editor of "Town and Country," as I was literally leaving my house to make the plane, said to me, "I want some pieces from Europe. You have carte blanche, write whatever you like." And I happened to have checked into the Excelsior in Rome there was Cary Grant coming down in the elevator, and I said, "Good evening, Mr. Grant," and he was very sweet, and he just turned and...You know...Mock surprise. "Oh, good evening. Do you know me, do we know each other?" And I thought....
A. How do you know me...

Q. Ha...Fan, a fan, fan...Anyway, I followed him. I literally followed him, you know, a hundred yards away and I followed him. And he turned into this little tailoring place and it was obviously a place where you could go buy something, so I went in to buy something. And the place was about as big as this library that we're in right now, a relatively small area. And I listened, and finally I said to him, "I can't go on doing this. I have to tell you why I'm here. Would you object?"

"I don't think so," he said. "Could I see the article?"

And I said, "Well, I can't do that as a condition, because then I won't enjoy writing it. But I'll be very happy to show it to you, but I'm not going to change anything." You know. And he said, "Why do you want to do it?" And I said, "Because I think this is such a problem in the world, about men ignoring the joy of wearing good clothes." And that did it. He simply said, "You write it." And that's.....

A. Cary Grant brings up a perfect dichotomy in the outfitting of men and women in films. You made the point earlier that men usually (?) . . . their own. He was one. In "To Catch a Thief" he wore his own wardrobe. And yet, for one sequence he had to have six duplicates of the same suit, and he bought them. I'm sure he was very well reimbursed, but he, nonetheless, bought them. However, Princess.... Grace Kelly, in "To Catch a Thief," the ball gown, was so expensive to make the first time they could not make a duplicate, so any small stain or rumple
or anything, production shut down completely until it was repaired. And yet, you know, to me, it's appalling to think that you would say to the star of the film, "Go out and get yourself six of those." You know...

A. By the way, Edith Head's favorite movie, where she made...she said was "To Catch a Thief."

Q. Well, I'll tell you an Edith Head story, which I adore, about that movie.

She told me...I commented that it was interesting that the ascot, which works only if men can carry it off...

A. Yes!

Q. I have always said, if you put on an ascot and the first person that you see says, "What happened?"

A. ...forget it!

Q. Well, you're absolutely right, June. But I was thinking in terms of...I mean, 'if it looks as if it's a bandage!.... Whatever...

Now, here's the story. The story is that there's a sequence in "To Catch a Thief" in which Grant had selected a scarf that he was going to wear as an ascot. It was one that he had selected. Somehow or other it had a stain, and it was to be cleaned. Well, it went to the wrong cleaner. You know what can happen, and it shrunk. And when Grant went to do the ascot, it wasn't long enough any longer...You know, it doesn't take much to change that dimension...And he solved it (and, of course, again, started a whole trend) by...All he did was to put it
around his neck and cross it over. You know...just...and stuff it in his sweater.

Well. I went to a preview of that and rushed home, got out a sweater, crossed it over...It works...And appeared the next day at the office (it wouldn't have made any difference what the weather was, I was going to wear that sweater), and it was true. But you see, you were dealing with a man who had a real interest in clothes. You know. Really.

A. He had great savoir faire.

Q. And a great, extraordinary identification with it.

A. What about Adolph Menjou? Was he really the...

Q. Well, I think...I have to be honest...Because I knew his politics...And I loathed his politics...

A. Absolutely.

Q. I found it very difficult sometimes to be...

A. Was he very right wing?

A. Oh! I mean...He was so right wing he was totally wrong wing. Anyway, my feeling about him...He did make some wonderful statements. And actually, Edith Head said to me one day that there was merit in Menjou's theory that you should both wear a belt and "braces," as he called them, which were suspenders, at the same time. There is a point. There is a point if you're being...If I were shooting...If I were appearing in a film, and I knew that absolutely the way my trousers hung would be captured forever, you know, I'm not so sure I wouldn't want to do both, because they serve different purposes. You know.
And...Because...If you have suspenders that allows the line to really float around your body. And, by the same token, the belt allows it to be pulled in to the body. So that the combination is interesting.

Well, I think with Menjou and fashion, it was that he was very much the gentleman and was very meticulous. There was an anal, retentive quality to everything he did...

A. No, there was never a studied careless look at him.

Q. No. It was all very formal. And, of course, in a world of...See, we always forget that for both the men and the women in Hollywood, a great percentage of the stars were very, very ordinary people. They were, in American terms, our lower, middle class. And, you know, they were elevator operator girls, and they were waitresses and there were guys who were rodeo riders. People of that nature. They were not...They might have had the look...

A. Don't put your'daughter on the stage. Of course.

Q. And...With the result that taste was something that they had to learn.

A. You know who was the perfect one was Joan Crawford. The shop worn girl come up through the ranks to become the highest, most glamorous--in that sense...

Q. What was Edith's relationship to Joan Crawford?

A. She never once designed a costume for her for a film. And yet, Joan Crawford knew the power of Edith Head so that she would always have her influence in her private wardrobe. And
all through the '50s, Edith Head was her only designer. She designed all of her clothes.

Q. Really! Her personal clothes.
A. All her personal clothes. For parties, for....whatever.
Q. Why did she never design for her in film?
A. Different studio probably.
A. Claudette Colbert never had Edith Head design either.
A. Oh, I didn't know that. I know that Claudette Colbert thought her waist was too thick and her neck was too short...
And, God knows it was!

What were her redeeming features?

Q. She was a fine comedienne.
A. She was good.
A. But...The other thing though...The actors and actresses that came into films from the stage had a very different kind of understanding about how a costume must work. And they understood, I think, in fittings, the durability and the practicality of how one moved and felt and what it would do for your character.

Bette Davis was in a fitting in Edith Head's fitting room one day, and suddenly threw herself onto the floor in the dress that was being fitted, and Edith Head screamed, and thought she had stuck her with a pin or something. And she said, "No, not at all. In this scene I'm required to fall down on the floor. I want to see how this dress is going to feel when I do that, and how I'll be able to recover and what effect
it will have. In the scene. And Bette Davis, of course, had been a stage actress, and was very cagey too.

A. mae West even did that, coming from the stage. I know that when she'd go for a fitting, Head said that she would act like the scene in the dress, just to make sure she could do it. Or, if it was a scene that had a song, she would sing in the dress to make sure that she didn't split anything!

Q. Very important.

A. That's a stage actress. Because a film actress probably wouldn't even, necessarily, having only been schooled in film acting, probably wouldn't necessarily think of that.

Q. Well, also, the durability, you see. If you were in a hit show, you...

A. You've got to wear that costume every night. And twice on matinees.

Q. Which brings up another interesting thing, in relationship to...This is' something that I told Edith Head. We were lunching at the Beverly Wilshire, and I was asked by Judy Holiday to take a look at the clothes for "Laurette," a play that, unfortunately...She became ill and couldn't complete...And there's an interesting story about that. Because Edith was talking about the impact of clothes and how you can...We were talking about Adrian and Adrian's relationship to Garbo and his great ability to get along with Garbo, because he treated her from the body out with the assumption of great elegance and great special quality, and most credible underclothes.
The most...rarest "Valencon" lace and so forth and so on. And fortunately for him, Thalberg understood the process; understood that if you feel the diamonds are real, it makes a difference. You'll behave differently.

A. He must have been a great producer, Irving Thalberg.

Q. You know what I think he was? I think he was a perceptive, wonderfully bright, young-enough-to-be-identified-with the current world at that particular time, ambitious enough to identify with the class above himself (thus, the word of Scott Fitzgerald opened up for him), and he was a class act. And even his marriage to Norma Shearer who, in terms of the studio (whether it was real or not was unimportant), but that profile and that manner and the fact that she came from Canada...She was the great lady! And we always forget that, you know, all of these people were Jewish. Mayer was Jewish, Thalberg was Jewish, and anybody in the '20s who was Jewish, unless you were...What?...

A. There is nothing to think of...No...It's true...

Q. Not much, you know. There's not much in terms of more than one generation. And with the result that, just as we see an increasing problem in terms of mixed marriages today, or sending kids for nose jobs, or sending kids to schools where they are essentially restricted, you know, hoping that that will eliminate the taint, was very much part of that kind of thing.

And so the lady, being a lady...

You mentioned Joan Crawford before. Talk about self-invention! I mean, this is the most extraordinary person. And
nobody has really caught it yet. In terms of what this woman was all about.

A. What really went on there...

Q. The determination to learn how to play the piano, because... But, do you know Norma Shearer did exactly the same thing? Are you aware of that?

Shearer had a part to play in which she was supposed to play the piano, and she didn't know how to play the piano, and she said to Irving Thalberg, "Get me the best teacher you can," and they got her some major pianist, you know, who came in, and she learned how to play the... It was a rhapsody... She never learned how to play anything else but she learned how to play that, and played it perfectly. She played it perfectly. And it was... forming the role... It's not that funny country singer, what's his name? The one that stutters....?

A. Mel "Gerbis."

Q. Who stutters... You can't say two words to him, personally, and then he sings a song... Not at all... An example of it, because the identity is protected. You know. That kind of thing.

But Head... We sat there and talked about "Laurette," and I said, "Well, the extraordinary thing was that it just coincided with that rise of vintage clothing." Remember when that all happened. And I went out looking for... I saw the blouse that Judy was going to wear in the First Act and I said to her, "It's wrong, it's all wrong. It's a blouse that would have been
worn by a secretary, not an actress. And I said we've got to find the right thing. And I went out to Vintage Clothing and found the blouse, and if you want to see it, it's in that picture. We are in my library, in Hollywood, and there is a portrait of Judy--one of the last portraits taken--and it was to be the poster for the playbill cover for "Laurette." And I found this gentle blouse with just a little...You know...And that did it. And the lovely little story about this is that I didn't have this picture, and when I came out here, Stephanie Powers, who's an old friend (I worked as a consultant on "Hart to Hart"), said, "Can I bring a friend to dinner?" and I said, "Oh, sure," and the friend was Roddy McDowell, who, amongst his many talents is a fine photographer. And he kept saying, "Oh, I remember a wonderful experience I had," and he told the story of photographing Judy and saying,"Where did you get that perfect blouse?" And she said, "My dear, dear, dear friend Robert L. found it for me in a vintage shop," and he...He didn't say a word to me that evening about it. What he did was to say that he knew the two ladies that I knew so well--both Vivien Leigh and Judy--and....

A. And he sent you the picture.

Q. And he went to his files....It took a month...Negatives, you know. He found it and he sent it to me. And it was a wonderful moment. I opened it up and burst into tears!

But, it was a lovely kind of cry. That kind of thing.

A. But we've digressed here. You were in the middle of
a story about Edith Head.

Q. Well, it had to do with the impact of clothing and style. Because when Judy Holliday was in "Born Yesterday," on Broadway, and of course it was a defining performance, and in a strange, almost metaphysical way, she knew that that had to be her movie. And Harry Cohn...

A. God bless him.

Q. ...who was the head of Columbia pictures, walked into her dressing room after seeing "Born Yesterday," and said, "Kid, you'll never get the movie. I'm sorry. You're never gonna get it." Smoking his cigar. Almost broke her heart. Turned around...You could hear him going down the corridor saying, "She's a fat Jewish broad, it won't work on film."

Now, like three years pass. Judy is still in the show, because the show refuses not to be a hit. And she is living through, and I am living through with her, these telephone calls: "They're testing Jean Arthur, they're testing Rita Hayworth, they're testing Gloria Grahame." You name it, they tested everybody in the world, from Kim Novak up or down. And, of course, Cohn was smart enough to look at those tests (he had paid a million dollars for the rights to that, which was unheard of at that time), and finally, finally called Judy and said, "I'm coming to New York, I wanta take you to dinner, I've got something to talk to you about."

Well. You've got to realize this came after Kate Hepburn, making this all happen....Do you know the story?
A. No!
Q. Oh, it's such a story...
A. She saw the show...
Q. Kate...Judy called me and said, "Guess who's coming to the show." Now, she had very few people that she really deeply admired, because she was very discriminating, very perceptive, and she cut through all the crap. But she adored Kate Hepburn, and said, you know, that nobody understands how big that talent it. That kind of thing. And she said, "Guess who's coming. Kate Hepburn! I'm petrified!" And she said, "I'm not good at this," you know, backstage, and she said...I was in Washington...She said, "Can you come in?" And I said, "Of course." And so I flew in and went to the theatre. And Kate Hepburn indeed was there and she came backstage and she came...You know...She was a woman who parts waters...She just...whew...everybody from the doorman was just-gaga...There were no crowds backstage but there it was. And she swept in and she simply said, "You're a comic genius, a comic genius. The best thing that's every happened to Broadway!" And she went on and on and on. And she doesn't have conversations, she declares and declaims. And she was just about reading to leave, and I spoke up and said, "I'm taking the liberty of saying ths, one, because of the remarkable things you've just said to Miss Holliday. And also because I love her, and I think it's a shame that she's apparently been locked out of doing this film. Because no one's going to be able to do it properly. Nobody. And I wonder whether, in your
vaulted position, maybe you can do something about it." And she stared at me and she simply said, "What a good friend." And went out.

And what she did do, within a week, was to call Garson Kanin, who was writing "Adam's Rib," and said, "I want you to tailor..." and then called Judy and said, "You have a gamble here. It's a real gamble. This is not the starring part. I am the star of this movie. But, if you want to do it, it will show them your presence on the screen, and if I...Unless I miss my judgment, the audiences will love you."

A. The bigger "but" on that was when they finally filmed it and she was playing Doris Atinger, the woman who tried to murder her husband, they came to the scene where Hepburn interviews her in jail, as her lawyer, and they just turn the camera on and Hepburn literally pulled back out of the scene and let her go, and it's one of those extraordinary "all-in-ones" where she just goes, goes, goes, and Hepburn will do nothing to get into the scene, she just lets her have the whole...I think it's about eight minutes...

Q. Yes, it is.
A. About eight or 10 minutes...

Q. The other lovely story about that movie is that the costume designer came by to show Judy sketches of what she was going to wear and Judy (who, in her personal wardrobe, had no personal judgment whatsoever. I mean, she shouldn't be allowed...)...
A. Early tacky...

Q. But she had, like many professionals, the judgment to understand that this is not what this girl, or this woman, would wear. And again she called me in and said, "What'll I do?" and I said, "Where's the woman from?" And she said, "She's from Brooklyn." And I said, "Why don't we go to Brooklyn to the neighborhood and buy something?" And that's what we did.

A. Simple.

Q. That's what we did. We went to Lohman's. And I said, "What we do is you, you point out some woman you think is like the woman you're going to play, and let's see what she buys." And that's literally what we did. She saw a woman, and she said, "That's her." And we followed and that woman bought a blouse and a funny hat with little flowers in it," and I looked and I thought... Oh, well! And we bought it, and that's what she wears in the movie. And everybody commented on it.

But again, going back to Edith Head and the impact of clothes, it did relate to Judy because Judy said to me, "Harry Cohn is coming in. What do I do?" And I said, "He said that you were a fat Jewish broad. What you're going to do is make him realize that he's a fat Jewish whatever." I said, "So, you are going to be very much the lady. You're going to be the opposite of Billie Dawn," and I called Madame "Potoff" at "Maximillian Vern's" and said, "Darling, I need a little favor. You know the black mink with the Fisher collar? I want to borrow it." And she said, "You're shooting...?" And I said,
"In a manner of speaking."

Anyway. We borrowed that. I went to "Mambochet... Mambochet." I said, "Mam, you have to help," and he had done... He had done the clothes... the wardrobe for "Born Yesterday," and I said, "She needs a simple black suit. She needs one of your simple black suits, and I'm going to go to Van Cleef & Arpels and borrow some pearls--real pearls--and that's exactly what we did. We put the real pearls on, with the "Mambochet" suit, and I said, "Judy, don't wear the fur coat. You don't know how to wear fur. Just put it over... Think of it as a bathrobe, put it over your shoulders (?)... and just let it... And when you get into the restaurant, just do this... You know expensive that fur is? Just drop it." I said, "Harry Cohn will start talking differently to you," and I said, "And I want you to wear beautiful glasses. Because you really can't see, you know. So why don't you just wear a pair of glasses. Studios glasses. That's you're not afraid to be... That you are this..."

That's exactly what happened. Now, I will give you the reverse of this. Because this has been written in various books.

The reverse of this is when Judy (and it shows you again the power of clothes), when Judy was tapped to appear before the Senate for the House Unamerican Activities Commission, obviously she was terrified--I mean everybody was, it was the McCarthy period--I lived in Washington. She called me and said,
"Can I stay with you?" Because, "If I go to a hotel it's going to be murder in terms of the press and everything else."

And I said, "The way to do this is to come in on the latest plane, the last plane from New York, which leaves at midnight. You'll get here at 1:30, something of that nature, and I'll get a friend with a car. No limousine. We'll just drive up... Just dress the way you normally do. Nobody will recognize you. Wear your old, beatup leather jacket." And we had a conference the next morning, and I said, "Do you remember the Harry Cohn thing?" I said, "Well, play it the opposite way now. The opposite way. Because the Senate, if you played it the Harry Cohn way, you will be arrested, or something else ridiculous will happen to you. You have to be Billie Dawn. Billie Dawn in the first act. Again." You know. It becomes a joke. This is a threat? Are you kidding?

Well, she almost died. She must have died. And she had not brought a wardrobe... She had a nice, simple little dress and so forth. But I watched her put on that dress and then kind of shrug her body into it, and changed the way the dress was. And she just went to the Hill and charmed the hell out of these guys. She'd say, "And what do you do Senator?"

A. Is this how you're making a living?

Q. And, you know... "And where is... Excuse me... the bathroom?" That kind of thing. Everybody kept referring to her as "little lady." And they apparently said, "Now you just run along now." Nothing happened. Absolutely nothing happened.
So, again, it was a matter of wardrobe, manner, and so forth and so on. And I'm telling Edith this story and she, of course, brilliantly turned it around and said to me, "Well, that's exactly what we do. All you did was to read the script." Yeah! She said, "All you did was read the script." And I realized she was absolutely right. Because what I said, "What is the situation?"

A. Did you ever meet Edith Head's husband?

Q. Once.

A. He was a set designer was he?

A. Was he? I don't know anything about him. "Guillard E. Hyman?"

Q. I met him once...Just "How do you do" kind of thing. She kept her life pretty private.

A. Very private.

A. Well, you know, that goes back to something we all talked about at the very beginning; about...I think you made the point of her always wearing black, and when she was in a fitting it was never...

Q. Beige.

A. Beige. Whatever. It was never her, it was the star. She did all that, and yet she did have the signature bangs and the glasses. There had to be...There was something about her that was as star-oriented as the stars she was designing, because...You know, you look at her signature, and you can see it is designed for signing autographs--the strokes across...
A. For signing all those drawings.
A. That's true...And even the thing about her age. I came across a note that said her response to that, whenever it came up, was that she had been born in San Bernardino, and she said that the county records were burned in a fire. But no! The other side of that is nobody went to San Bernardino to check. Until she died. And there they were.
Q. Tell a big enough lie, honey....
A. That's right. And they'll believe it.
A. But what you said about signing the sketches...Another note that I came across was that once she got to Universal she didn't design anymore. Did you find anything about that?
Q. I thought she did. Very much so design.
A. She had other people do her designs at Universal. Had you read that?
A. Oh? And signed her name? I think...I think I vaguely remember something like that. What I do remember is that she was at Paramount for so many years, and on the day that she left, it was rather ignominious, in that nothing was said. Nobody marked the moment. She just sort of crept away.
Q. Yes. But...I worked for "Playboy" for 20 years and nobody even said goodbye. No gold watches...And the odd thing is...Part of it is valid, in the sense that the attitude was "We paid you very well, you did your job, it's over." You know. The goodbye only has meaning if you care about the people. If you don't care about the people, and they don't really care
about you, then that's it.
A. Are there any... Is there a museum or anything that has sketches, her...?
Q. Well, you see, this industry is strange in that it has never...
A. Well, the costume collection at L.A. County art museum has some sketches of hers, they're having that wonderful show....
A. Yes, a Hollywood retrospective...
Q. Yes, except I hate the way it's presented.
A. I didn't see it...
A. Oh, you walk through it and it's kind of a laby-rinthe...
A. Now, back to the what... Sublime? She did do Elvis Presley, didn't she?
Q. Yeah.
A. Uh huh.
A. And Barbara Stanwyck. One of her old favorites. In fact, she commented about it. She for the first time had to confront dungarees. Because it was an Elvis Presley movie...
A. If anyone could wear them...
A. .... Barbara Stanwyck could.
Q. She was in the movie with Elvis Presley. What was it?
A. I can't remember which one it was.
A. They were all eminently forgettable, I think. She
deplored women wearing anything like capris, and pedal pushers...
A. But she wore...She started wearing dungarees...Because she had a very small bottom, she said, and they fit her very well.

She made another remark about bottoms. She said, "Most women in this country could have themselves photographed walking out of department stores probably wouldn't wear half the things they just bought."

Q. Well, it's like looking in three-way mirrors. If you look at yourself from the side, forget it.

I asked her about sex one time. I mean, I said to her, "Who taught you the most about sex in terms of costuming?" I wasn't going to pry into her personal life. And she said, "Mae West." And I said, "Why?" and she said, "Well..." She said a very telling thing. She said, "Honey, I like fabrics. I can feel'em." Something like that.

A. You made that very apt statement about how we don't know any designers today, film wise, and that's all based on that whole period where it was just off the rack. But you know, she was designing all the way through there. Through that period, Edith was still hard at work. And, in fact, she did once even say that, because the budgets had been slashed for fashion. You brought your own jeans, and everybody was in jeans anyway, no matter if it was old or new. That all the designers were just going out to the stores to buy clothes. But she did say that she never did that. She would design them and mount them on the stars
themselves. So, that in itself is quite unique for that period.

A. There was another designer at Paramount... They were going to dress a crowd scene of kids who had to wear jeans, and... This wasn't Edith Head, but it was one of her associates. And she said, "I only build my own clothes," and they said, "Well, I'm sorry, but the budget is going to call for you to go out and buy denims for everybody." She went out and bought the denims, had all the stitching taken out and restitched them.

A. I suppose one of her greatest claims to fame was that she designed (invented, if you will) the sarong for Dorothy Lamour, which, along with the rest, is history.

Q. Yes. You see, it's interesting... Now there's an example where the impact wasn't the star.

A. I agree.

Q. Yeah. It was... You know. It's the oldest bit in the world. If you... It isn't like building a better mouse trap. It is, if you create something that satisfies an existing need, rather than trying to create a need, you're almost doomed to success. And I think the sarong was a good example of that. It was a minimal use of fabric in a period in which women felt they could wear it; they could really get away with this. And the interesting thing about the sarong was, it worked whether you were flat chested or full breasted.

A. Yes. It covered a multitude of sins.

Q. And that's one of the reasons it was so effective. I mean, I don't wish to minimize or denigrate Dorothy, who was
exquisite at that particular time with a wonderful body. And was always sort of a regular gal. She was an example of...
She was an elevator operator at Marshall Fields. Somebody went up in the elevator, and she came down a star.
A. Edith Head designed a sarong thereafter for every single one of her movies, ad nauseum, until finally Dorothy Lamour rebelled and said, "No more."
Q. I want some clothes.
Speaking of clothes...Oh, no. That was another designer.
A. I was just thinking...We had talked before about whether she had difficulty with women or men. She once said it wasn't human beings she had difficulty with at all, it was the animals. When she was working for DeMille she had to design a blanket for the elephants, and she designed it out of leaves and boughs and all natural things, and the elephants saw, you know, dinner! And just ate it!
A. There went the props for that film!
A. Even in "The Lady Eve," which, to me, has got her most gorgeous classical designs of all...I mean, that wedding gown that Barbara Stanwyck wears is exquisite...
Q. All the clothes in "Lady Eve" are clothes that have been recycled, stolen...Because the designs are totally classical. Stanwyck never looked better...
A. Never. But it is an application of the script. That's a perfect example, because...The sexiest scene to me that was
ever put on film is between Henry Fonda and Barbara Stanwyck, where she has him put her shoe on. She breaks the heel on her shoe and she asks him down to her stateroom. She says, "You pick out the pair you want me to wear, and he goes in and he picks out some trashy, "Fredrick's of Hollywood" little fru-fru, and she has him do it. And you do...You can feel your own body heat rising and she's down there, pulling her skirts up and apart, and you see this shoe going onto her foot, and he's sweating under the collar, but it's all about the costume itself. You can't help but stare at her dress, because he's right there, he's right at her cleavage, he's right at the hemline of her skirt, and there's this shoe going on. The whole scene is about the costume. And yet it is about sex, because of the way it's played.

A. She preferred, in doing period things, being able to reform the women's bodies. Because suddenly she could make them sexy where they weren't. She could put corsets on. If they had a bad bottom, she could hide it with a bustle.

A. Edith, where are you now that I need you?

A. There were many ways that she would literally reform the silhouette. I mean, as opposed to designing something with ruffles that would suggest a different psychology about a silhouette or a character. She could literally get in and really do it. And she loved...She was a great success in the period films that she did, particularly.

Q. I remember something that she told me that I thought
was very keen. She said that often a star that was powerful enough (these are lady stars) could break all the rules and still succeed. For instance (I asked for an example), she said that Clara Bow, after all, was a star when most clothes just hung straight down...

A. You put a belt on that person...

Q. And Clara Bow would belt:...No matter what it was, she would belt it. As a matter of fact, somebody told me a wonderful story about the fact that she...They had a fight with her because she wanted to wear ankle socks with everything, Clara Bow, and there was a formal scene, in a formal gown, and she arrived with her ankle socks, and they literally had to sort of pull them off her.

But, I discovered something in later years, in terms of costuming, that Ginger Rogers...At RKO, the studio had one person who had the costume sketch, was placed outside the dressing room, and when she came out....

(End of Tape 1)

A. I think one of the best things about Edith Head was that she always....She kept learning. She wasn't sort of etched in marble, or sunk in cement, which is my metaphor for...Nevertheless....She would constantly refer to people in situations from which she had learned something. For instance, she said, "From Carole Lombard, I learned an entirely different lesson." Which was: "Here was an exciting woman with a casual elegance and the ability to stimulate fashion. And I realized for the
A. Harlow was also one of the examples Edith Head used in talking about the lack of nudity. Or, drawing attention to sex, to different parts of the body, as sex. She said that one of the most unimaginative things she could think of was a room full of naked people. Because how would we, one, notice each other. And two, how would we remember each other, unless we had clothes to remember each other...Stop that...But, she used Harlow as an example. That, you know, it was about how it hung, it was the fabric as it fell on this curve. You know...open exactly to the right point, here, and then...

Q. Well, I think one of the extraordinary things about the Harlow costumes is that there was at least three movies in which she wore bathrobes that had no belt....

A. Or a negligee underneath...

Q. ...and she was naked underneath.....

A. Yes.

Q. And, interestingly, enough, when I became aware of this, I practiced this. I wanted to see whether it was real or not, and it is real. You can wear a bathrobe, and you can catch it just when it's going to open. You know. You can do that. You get up and you catch it just before you get a flash. That kind of thing. But you see, the whole relationship to stars and their attitudes toward the clothes that they wear sometimes becomes a whole other problem. I remember a wonderful story....

I was at a dinner...My mind is traveling.....At a dinner in this town at Ouida Rathbone's, the wife of Basil
Rathbone, and it was an elegant dinner party and marvelous people. And there was a great story told about Tallulah, who was a great friend of mine. And it was when she was doing "Lifeboat," and, if you remember, there was only one scene. I mean only one set—a big tank with the lifeboat—and Tallulah was not so young when she did "Lifeboat." She was, you know, in her middle years. And, of course, there were the waves and she was constantly drenched in one scene to another. And at one point she went to towel off and she apparently took off her underpants, because they were soaking wet and apparently bothering her. And she towelled herself off and then went back into the scene. And when they were watching the rushes, it was quite apparent that when she climbed into the boat...There was evidence that there was no question that she was a woman, and Mr. Hitchcock, who was producing the movie, was asked about this, and he said, "It has nothing to do with me. I'm the producer. That belongs, I would think, first in the hands of the costume designer, secondly in the hands of makeup, lastly hairdressing."

You know, you've talked about her relationship to Cecil B. DeMille. It's interesting...I've always felt about Edith that she was, like many of us, wonderfully talented, wonderfully this—all these things that we know about her—but she was also a very sensitive person. And that deep underneath she wanted to be stroked as well as anyone does. And she did complain bitterly that DeMille did not do that. And, Larry, you mentioned that she wasn't thrilled with working with
DeMille.....

A. Oh, yeah... He would put her... Sit her down... She'd go to a story conference or something... A design conference, at his home, and he had this... You know, being of the school of David Belasco, had this office that was gargantuan and Victorian. He would sit her down, and he had a special spotlight. He did this with just about everybody who came into the house. And the spotlight would go on her...

A. And blind her...

A. Yeah. And finally, she had been to enough conferences that it didn't bother her anymore. And being the self-determined kind of woman that she was, she was able to deal with it. But, no, he did not treat her kindly.

A. That's so arrogant.

A. But there was a remark that he made at one point about... That he had looked at some sketches that she had done and said something very offhandedly, like, "I think my four year old daughter could do as well as these. Let me see something else."

A. Can you imagine?

Q. Well, I know she told me she once said to him, "You never compliment me on my sketches," and he said, "You wouldn't be working with me if I didn't think your work was good." Which is... That's very...

A. You wouldn't be here if I didn't love you.

But she had great endurance...
What was she, 5' 1"?

Yes. Very tiny. And yet her idea of the record for endurance went to Marlene Dietrich, who once stood eight hours and 10 minutes for a single fitting.

Well, Edith had to be there too.

Yes, but I'm sure she had assistants falling by the wayside too.

To think that, through all of the years that she really did dress most of the greats, that there were a few gaps. She never got to dress Marilyn Monroe and was sorry for that. She always thought Marilyn Monroe looked uncomfortable in the way she was dressed. If she'd had a chance she might have put her somewhat more at ease.

Well, she looked pretty great in "The Seven Year Itch."

Yeah, she looked all right.

I was at a party in New York at Sam and Grayson Halls, and Hedy Lamarr (this was just a couple of years ago) appeared out of...You know...the woodwork, looking quite beautiful...

That face!

That face. And quite lush. And she told me...The conversation went to Hollywood......We were talking about costumes, because Grayson Hall had gotten an Academy Award nomination for playing the spinster schoolteacher in "Night of the Iguana," and it was such a...Grayson, who dressed in Galanos
American beauty.

A. She pulled it off.
Q. She is so thin that the bones just stick out.
A. I love that look.
A. And the other part of it is that Audrey Hepburn has the largest foot!
A. Has she?
Q. She has big feet, that lady. And Edith, I think, understood completely that it wouldn't make any difference.
And, of course, it didn't make any difference, you see. In the early days of Hollywood, Hepburn wouldn't even have been hired. She wouldn't have been hired. It would have been, "She's a scrawny..." You know. That was...Harry Cohne, looking at Judy Holliday and not seeing the brilliant performance and seeing something that...
A. Am I wrong, or was it Gloria Swanson who wore size two and a half?
Q. Gloria had...Yes....You realize you're sitting in Gloria's dining room.
A. Yes. Just imagine how many shoes she could get in her closet!
A. We mentioned....I just came across a note...We mentioned Claudette Colbert before; about why she had never worked with her. And she said that it was because when Travis left, at Paramount, a lot of the actresses there did not want any replacement, much less this woman who didn't know anything.
And Claudette she said was the ringleader of all of them. She
said the one thing that really hurt her the most was that she
never once gave her a chance, ever, to design for her. As
though she had made up her mind and she just wouldn't...

But, on the same note, she said the most difficult
actress she ever worked with was Nancy Carroll, who hated the
dress so much she ripped it off in the dressing room and stamped
it with her feet.

Q. Really!?
A. Yes.
Q. Leave it to Nancy.
A. The way Edith puts it, you have to put... is... When
asked, "Who is the most difficult actress you ever worked with?"
and she said, "She's dead!"

Q. We've been talking about recycling. Now, you know,
you think of recycling as going into the (?)... But did you
know that the gold gown—the famous gold gown—from "To Catch
a Thief" became, at the request of the producer, Hal Wallis,
for his wife...
A. Martha Hyer.
Q. ...Martha Hyer to wear in the movie...
A. Gold lame wasn't it?
Q. It was (?)... and gorgeous. And what did she do
with that? She told me...
A. Melted it down...
Q. But, the original dress there were birds... Remember
the birds? There were birds at the shoulder and birds in her... Well, she took off the birds and then she added roses, and she narrowed the skirt and then, of course, had to enlarge the dress a bit, because Martha was a little more voluptuous than Grace.

A. Added rickrack and called it a day.

Q. It's interesting, because Shelley Winters was in that movie too. It was "Wives and Lovers," and Shelley Winters was in it. And I remember Winters saying that she, when she saw who was in the film, and saw Edith's sketches for Martha, who was married... She later married Hal Wallis, but maybe she was just living with him at that time, maybe she was the love of his life.... Shelley Winters said that she went on the crash diet of her life....

A. Yes. Determined...

Q. .... Determined that she was not going to be outdone by...

A. Edith Head had an interesting remark about Shelley Winters. She said that Shelley Winters was basically a woman who did not care about her figure, but had this incredible face. An incredible face. Porcelain like. Skin.

A. Really? I never quite...

A. And accentuated... Edith had accentuated the face, and always dressed her in dark and... You know... She also made an interesting observation in saying that the camera automatically adds ten pounds to a person...
A. Do you think that's so?
Q. Yes, I do think it's so. I think, of course, you see... You have to realize about Edith another thing: She was so organized, in the sense that she was her own best P.R. person, she was her own best manager. She understood that the way to remain on top in terms of costume designing was that you had to be the person who was dressing the rising, hottest new star. That's really what she wanted...
A. Keep her eye out for the main chance.
Q. She wanted to dress Marilyn, you know, and her way of doing that would be to spread the word that Marilyn never really had the right clothes.
A. Well, that's a cue she probably learned from DeMille.
Q. Oh, sure. Well, it's survival. It's a territorial-survival thing. But the thing was, when she did it for herself. Most people...
A. Well, it was like her saying to you, "You're not coming out here and you're not going to work here..."
Q. Absolutely. And the implication was that if you do do that, you're life will not be happy, whatever it may be. But...
A. Edith once commented that she was very grateful for her early days as a schoolteacher because that was the attitude she always took with the stars in the dressing room. She'd make little cooing sounds. Because... One afternoon, you know, Elizabeth Taylor would want to have more showing in her cleavage, and
Ingrid Bergman would blush deeply from the fact that it wasn't surrounding her neck.

A. Speaking about cleavage, I believe Edith designed the dress in which Elizabeth Taylor appeared to give an award at the Academy...The first time she gave an award at the Academy Awards, and that started the whole trend of the movie stars arriving at the Academy Awards in this very decolletage gowns...

A. She was also very cagey in really staying away from Hollywood unless it was business.

A. She never got caught up in that scene.

A. Absolutely. They never went to Hollywood parties. They lived a very private kind of life, with their own friends who were not in the Hollywood crowd.

A. But she loved to travel, she read a great deal, and she felt it was crucial to travel to get insight into the way people really dressed in those locales.

A. That's funny, because she once said that she was a combination of a magician and a psychologist. She was a magician in the sense of creating an illusion with costume, and she was a psychologist in persuading the actors to get into the illusions. She didn't design for them, but with them.

A. She went to Russia on location and said that was the most exciting time of all. When they did "The Bluebird."

Q. Yes, you said before that she never stopped learning. And I suppose if one were to ask anyone who's aging and seems
to retain an interest in everything, what the real secret is, and the real secret is curiosity. If you still...It's people who stop caring...In other words, people who...They've experienced it all. I'm convinced that if you feel that, you trigger the mind to trigger the body that it's over.

A. You're absolutely right.

Q. I remember, I talked with her about...I was approached by a New York manufacturer who said, "Well, you are the fashion director of 'Playboy.' It would be terrific (and we would be very happy to pay you an enormous fee) if you could design for us a collection of pajamas. Playboy-sex-bedroom, nighttime...You know. Alll that." And for obvious kinds of contract reasons it was a conflict of interest, I couldn't do it. But I remember the next time I was out here having lunch with Edith I said to her, "Have you ever done lingerie?" In other words, what are the rules? And she told me that she did a movie for Lana Turner and Lana Turner...I guess it was when Edith was at Paramount, and Lana Turner didn't work for Paramount except for a couple of times in her entire career and went there to do a movie because they promised her an extensive Edith Head wardrobe. And, of course, in those days, when they made that kind of promise, the hook was, you keep the wardrobe.

A. Yes.

Q. And the character and the script called for two nightgowns. And Head said that if you're going to do a super duper glamor nightgown, you have to start by making a clinging
foundation garment exactly the color of the star's skin, but exactly. And she said you have to work with the chemists and the dyers, so that the foundation garment absolutely cannot be distinguished from the body itself. And she said, "It takes a lot of fittings and some very intricate dressmaking, because the truth of the matter is you can't have a wrinkle. Otherwise, you're implying that the star has a wrinkle on her body, you know. Oh, God!

And she said then, for any lace gown, you have to use two layers of what they call "supple," which is that sheer material that...God knows...has rescued them all. And what she did was to take, to keep Lana happy--because it had to be something that Lana would want--was that she took the kind of re-embroidered "Alanson" lace that you find in bridal gowns, and use that.

A. Is that how your pajamas came out?

Q. No, I answered that guy by finally saying, "In the world that I live in, work in, function in, one doesn't wear pajamas!"

A. You know, she lived on five and a half acres up in Coldwater and had a hacienda. Really an old style hacienda. Here again, using...Really incorporating the era and the period of Southern California. And she wanted to keep the house as much like it was in its original days. And all the rooms opened onto this incredible courtyard, and there were deer that ran around. It was all kept very pristine.
Q. Yeah, that's sort of interesting that she would do that, you know. But again, that's the privacy. That's the moving away from... But we did talk about that... She asked me if I spent all my time with the fashion people in New York and I said I tried to avoid it. For one thing, it's dangerous. And she said, "What do you mean by that?" And I said, you know, familiarity does breed contempt, there's no question about it. And those of us who... The... I said that, of course, the difficulty is that if you get too close to people with whom you have to work on a judgmental level, on a critic's level, on a selective level, (1) if you make a transference, then your judgment is weakened. If they become family you feel a responsibility or you're guilt ridden because you can't do it. If you inadvertently let drop some bit of information that perhaps should not be in the hands of the person you're talking to, you're in trouble on that basis. You do something unfair. I said I thought it was very dangerous. I said the only person I ever became really friendly with was Bill Blass, and that was essentially because we had such a different set of values in terms of our social life. We were... And we learned that and we only spent time alone. He didn't like my parties, I didn't like his.

A. Yes, business and pleasure don't often mix too well. It's wise to distance yourself somewhat.

Q. Well, I think she particularly felt it because, although she never said it, you got the feeling was that all that
cooing noise and that endless flattery--endless complimenting of the stars and endless...

A. It begins to pale...

Q. There must be a point where you want to vent...

The last of the elegant spenders was serving our guests water.

A. She loved, of course, the glamor of the '30s, and then in the '50s she felt that glamor came into it (?)...

But it was that group of actors that came in the '60s, the ones that sort of were exponents of the Method, so to speak. And Eva Marie Saint, who really were interested only in the piece, in the part, and didn't want to get carried away with the trappings. She had to be very discreet in the way she approached them. I think she won over Eva Marie Saint somehow by dressing her beautifully without her really noticing it, and then Eva Marie Saint sort of took a look and said, "Wow, I can look beautiful, or good, and still be a good actress. The two are not mutually exclusive." But it took a lot of dancing on Edith's part...

Q. Well, you know, it's interesting...I did a consultant thing for Pepsi Cola and they wanted to make...It was when Joan was Mrs. Alfred Steele, and they wanted to give her an image of a great (?) lady, because they found that the movie star image...

A. Didn't go down well in a corporate...?

Q. Well, no. No. It went down well. The problem was that she wanted to support Alfred, and she wanted...She had ambitions
to be the president of that company. And so she went to her agency and simply said to the agency, "What can we do about this?" About the image change.

Anyway, I was hired to come up with an idea that would somehow represent her as Mrs. Alfred Steele. And I decided that perhaps a combination of the two was perhaps the thing to do and I was concerned about her doing it in New York, because the New York critics are rough and tough, and the fact that she was a movie star wasn't going to mean a damn thing to them. And you have to realize, she was 5'4". Everybody thinks of Crawford as being this enormous woman. She was really quite small. And of course at this point she was already in her late 50s. And, you know, the whole role had changed and the whole thing had changed.

Anyway, I decided...I came up with an idea which was that we move the venue to Washington, D.C., where her position as an international force—as Pepsi Cola was an international force—could operate on the basis that she was a star known all over the world, the drink was swallowed all over the world. And Washington was the one city in this country that had representatives from all over the world because of the embassies. And I said we should do an embassy ball, and I came up with the idea that if we called it the Embassy Tiara Ball, we could get the major jewelers of the world to give us, lend us their copies of the major tiaras that they had made....

A. Brilliant, inspired.

Q. ...and that if we took the tiaras and gave them to
the designers and said, "This is the tiara, this is the person who is going to wear it—the French ambassador's wife or a French movie star—in the case of Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Steele, whom you may better know as Joan Crawford. . . ." And I decided she should wear the Van Cleef & Arpels copy of Josephine's tiara. And she loved it. She loved it.

Now, the thing that was fascinating about her was that with all of the experience that she had, in relationship to clothes and everything else, she felt so insecure that at the dress rehearsal, when we were just doing the runthrough, you know, to be sure that everybody understood everything they had to do, she brought the most extraordinary boxes of real jewels. And I had to almost fight with her, saying that the whole reason that I decided to do a tiara ball was that ladies who wore these tiaras were ladies who created careers for men. Josephine, obviously: . . .

A. The throne, yes...
Q. And I went through the whole list. And I said, "That's the reason, . . . and the reason is the tiaras are the most extraordinary frame to the face. And if you wear anything else, you're taking away from it." And I said, "So trust me, and trust yourself . . ."

A. More is less.
Q. Trust yourself. But I have to tell you, it was a dazzling evening. It was a dazzling evening. And, of course, I saved her for the very last. And there were beautiful women, and famous women, one after the other, representing their
countries--and the tiaras and the designers--and I got everybody new dresses...I mean, I had a marvelous time just watching them come out, they were just wonderful. But I can say without question that the person that absolutely stole that entire evening and demonstrated what a real star is...This woman, who backstage was a bundle of nerves...She was saying, "Where is he, where is he, I want him." I was out commentating the show! This kind of thing. And all these hysterics going on backstage. She came out on her cue and....It was magic. And I remember myself gasping at how she looked and how she got that audience in the palm of her hand immediately. And in this extraordinary dress, swept down...

A. Had Head designed the dress? Who designed the dress.
Q. Head.
A. Head did design it.
Q. Oh, yes. Of course. Because Head had designed her...
The first dress that Joan wore when she was an Academy Award presenter...

A. The black and the white? That's an interesting story. Joan Crawford was determined to appear as the epitome, but she was sort of neck and neck with another actress...I don't know, they never gave the name...who was very secretive about what she was going to wear at the presentation. Joan Crawford was on last. However, no one could find out what this other actress was going to wear. Joan Crawford wanted to wear white, or black, depending on what the other actress wore. So, they solved the problem: Edith Head made two dresses. She made one in white and
one in black, and they had the dresses waiting backstage while the ever-so- secretive actress went on. She went on in white, from the other side, and at the last minute they jumped Joan into hers and she came on smashingly at the end, in black.

Q. Do you know the story behind why it was to be black or white?
A. No.

Q. Ah! I do! One of the... Of course, the great personalities of Hollywood whom women adored... Great stars... The great director, Mr. George Cukor.

A. She loved designing for Cukor.

Q. And Joan adored Cukor as well, and she thought that she would be presenting the award to George for his work on "My Fair Lady." And, if you remember, the big scene in "My Fair Lady" was the black and the white Ascot Races. And it was Joan's idea...

You see, Joan was another person, like Edith (that's why they got along), who was her best manager. She invented herself... I remember...

A. She competed with herself.

Q. When I went to talk to her about this ball... The thing that was fascinating was that, you know, everybody assumed, as a matter of fact, that George would get the award, and I'm not so sure that he did.

A. I don't know either.

Q. But anyway... That was the reason for the black and...
A. I think Edith Head, despite...

Q. Oh, as a matter of fact, he did get it. I remember, because I just had a flash of memory of Crawford standing there in the black dress and truly being totally emotional about presenting the award...

A. Oh. To George Cukor. That was the idea of the whole...

The high point of the evening...

Q. I'll tell a great story on myself in terms of Joan Crawford.

First I get a call from the agency...At the meeting after all, I cannot do anything unless Miss Crawford approves of me. And so I am told that Miss Crawford will receive me at her New York apartment, and I arrive, and it's a triplex apartment...

A. Which, I understand, was covered in plastic.

Q. Covered in plastic, and white. Everything was white. And I arrived (and this is a great story that I tell on myself), because I knew everything was white and I...At that point in my life I wore a great deal of black because my hair was going grey and white at that time and it was a perfect color to go with that. And I had pulled myself together with...You know...just whatever...And I arrived and the maid said to me, "Will you remove your shoes, Mr. Green?" I removed the shoes and there facing me is the right hand big toe sticking out of my sock.

Anyway...Where was I?
A. Your toe! Call a toe truck!
Q. Well, the thing that saved me in one sense and ruined me in another was that I had to mentally say to myself, "Well, there's nothing you can do about it so don't call attention to it." But, the carpeting was so thick that I sort of sank into it, but also, you begin to walk like a drunk. At least I couldn't manage, so I kind of waddled across the room. And there was Joan Crawford, with her back to me, clutching the fireplace.

Now, the first thing that happened to me was "She has had her legs cut off." She looked so small...I thought...You know...And with that...We've all seen Loretta Young enter rooms in the late...Well, Joan Crawford has obviously practiced turning around from the fireplace. It was brilliant. She spun around and said, "How do you do, I'm Joan Crawford." And I thought, "Oh, my God, we're in for..." Something.

But, when I outlined what I had in mind, she got it right away, and she said, "I would like...If we pursue this and this all works, I would like Miss Head to do my costume," and I said oh that would be fabulous, and I said, "Do you think she'll do it?" Because we were not paying these designers. I said, "We can't pay anyone because if we pay anyone then the others will hear, and I'm going to argue that this is a charity, a fund raising thing and we're going to raise funds for children all over the world. And I had selected dyslexia. And I said, "You need your own disease." You know, I said, "And I think
dyslexia is a handicap that in a way, judging by your background, is not incomparable to the fact that you had to rise by your own bootstraps." Because people who are dyslexic have a really terrible time and they really have to...And nobody's doing it. And I said, "Our goal here, as you know, is...We ought to be able to talk honestly to one another, because if we can't...I mean, I don't want to spend all my time playing clinic," and so forth and so on. And she liked that. She was very direct. But I was curious as to what she would wear to receive me.

A. What did she wear?
Q. Would she wear a peignoir? Would she wear...No, it was a business suit. It was a business suit. This was a business apartment...

A. Shoulders?
Q. Oh, yes...
A. A charity business suit.
Q. Did Edith Head design the dress she had on?
A. Yes, and the dress was beautiful. It was beautiful.

But all her dresses were beautiful.

Q. ...We had something like...We counted them...We had something like 49 guards, because the jewelers had...

A. What year was this?
Q. Oh...?
A. Yesterday. All right. Did you raise enough money?
Q. Yes, for the time we raised a great deal of money.
A. That's wonderful.
A. Well, the question on the tip of my tongue is, did she discover your toe?

Q. Yes.

A. What did she say?

Q. You're the only one who's asked. I'd forgotten about the toe. I had gotten so into the whole thing, you know, and I remember sitting there and thinking to myself, shouldn't I say something to her about the pleasure she's given me? That kind of thing. And I said to her (and yet I didn't want to play fan because that makes her play star), and I was trying to find a line that would make this work, and I said, "I guess the thing that I remember most effectively, and the image I will live with always, is you, with all the beautiful clothes that you've worn in films (and I can't think of any other actress who has worn more beautiful clothes), the thing that I remember most is what you looked like as you turned in 'Johnny Guitar,'" and she beamed! Because, you see, it was just jodphurs, black jodphurs. But she had gotten her body absolutely to the point where... It was extraordinary. It was extraordinary. Because, you know, she wasn't young when she made those movies. I forget how...But she was in the '20s...

A. That's right.

Q. As you understand, and I will identify the people who have been talking through this conversation about Edith. And I will add, also, the filmography, the awards and other material, but for the moment, because we have done hours of
this, and I think all the people who have contributed have been very gracious with their energy and their time...

So, let's close out... And June, you mentioned that you had a wonderful exit line?

A. Well, I think she did. It's of course a complete non sequiter, but just to throw it in... I think about Edith Head... There seemed to be an undefined sexuality in that she gave a look that decried anything that was specifically feminine, not to say that she was masculine in aspect. But, the fact is that she did have an eye. I think at one juncture she said, "There are still a few men I'd like to undress."

(End Tape 2)

Q. This is Robert L. Greene. I must have done, oh, perhaps, I think eleven television shows with Edith Head, six panel experiences at universities with Edith Head, and, oh, 14-15 lunches with Edith Head. All of which were done rather seriously in terms of talking about the problems of designing and costuming for film, particularly. And when we decided to do this history of Miss Head, it occurred to me that I should dig out all my notes and see what I could pull together and just talk about her. Because there's no question that Edith Head's story is about as fascinating as the history of the film industry itself. Because in one way, she was there. She helped shape the Hollywood we know today. Travis Bampton once said about her that she outlasted all of us, and it was quite true,
as a matter of fact. But, it was fascinating because I found that she had that rare quality of being a great diplomat, a corporate person to the extent that she was not above plotting, planning, backstabbing to achieve her own position, and she knew which buttons to push. And, of course, that always creates its own problems, because it creates the problem of the kind of person who, indeed, leaves a path of enemies as well. So, as you wander around Hollywood talking about Edith Head, you don't get total "wasn't she marvelous" and "wasn't she divine," and there are lots of people who didn't have an enormous amount of respect for her. But, it's...I think...a well known fact that she is a person who managed to get rid of Travis Bampton.

Now, by the same token, one has to understand that Travis was self-destructive; that he was a drunk, and irresponsible. But she also managed to move in and encourage him to not worry about not showing up or not delivering the sketches on time, or keeping an appointment with a star; that she took it all upon herself under the guise of her devotion to duty. When, it seems to me--from everything that I felt about her--that it was just that she knew that that was the way to get that job.

There's something that I found in my notes that might amuse you, and that is that when she first started to work out in Hollywood, she never smiled, and everybody talked about how serious she was. But there was a real reason. Two of her front teeth had never grown in. The ones on each side of
the middle tooth, and they left a very conspicuous gap in
her mouth. And she was always, I think, teased and taunted
as a child for being toothless, and she had two little funny
pointed teeth in front.

Her husband once told me that when she was a child
she really was hurt very badly by kids calling her "beaver." As she grew up and began to have a career, she simply decided
the thing to do was not to smile at all, so she didn't. And
she disciplined herself: very serious and horn rimmed glasses
and deadpan all the time. Until she met Barbara Stanwyck, who,
in her own very direct way, said, "Well, why don't you have the
damn teeth fixed?" And she made her get into a car and go to a
dentist to have her teeth fixed.

Well, that was the period of course where, after she
had the teeth in, she went through a short period in which she
never stopped smiling.

I remember asking Edith about how she got started
and how it all happened, in terms of Hollywood itself, and she
explained that when you're... You know, when you're a young girl
with no training at all and you go in for your first job as a
sketch artist, you don't start off dressing stars. You go out
in the work room, you hand pins to the seamstress, you roll
fabrics, you sharpen pencils, you do anything, as a matter of
fact. Anything that you're told to do. You do sketches if the
designers have sketches to do, or you paint if you know how to
paint. She said she knew how to paint so she was painting polka
dots on six foot butterfly wings for a fantasy scene in "Peter Pan." The year was 1924. Well, the next day she was taken off polka dots and given some small sketches to copy on silk.

She began to add her own special touches to these things, more out of boredom than anything else but nobody seemed to object. So every once in a while she'd sneak in what she considered one of her own original designs, and that's essentially how she got started.

She was very fortunate in one sense, and that was that most of the people who were costume designers in Hollywood at that time were men, and two of the top people were Travis Bampton and Howard Greer. And they kind of got a kick out of her, because she had so outrageously conned her way into the studios by using sketches of other people and claiming them as her own, that... And then admitting it... So there was that kind of, just chutzpah.

Bampton and Greer used to take her to all their fittings, and very soon she was accepted as part of the team in the fitting room, which, of course, always included the head fitter and the wardrobe girl. Sometimes she explained that she just watched and took notes, and neither Howard nor Travis took her very seriously. They never had any feeling that she would be a threat to them. As very often is the case, I suppose, with any boss and some sub-assistant. They were very secure in their own careers, because they were enormously talented men. And I guess you'd have to be very grateful to be under the tutelage of two masters such as Travis Bampton and Howard Greer.
I remember over lunch in the Beverly Wilshire Hotel dining room I sort of pushed her to the wall, saying, "What I want to know is what the first major project was that you ever did." And stuck in a book of mine I found all the notes on that lunch, and one of the things she told me about was that her first major project came in 1924. She was asked by Cecil B. DeMille to design the candy bowl sequence in a movie called "The Golden Bed." Well, she was delighted, of course, to be given the opportunity to be working on one of DeMille's great extravaganzas.

The script actually called for life size candy cane and chocolate bar women, and Edith took the script literally. She ordered lollipop "beards," peppermint stick fingernails and chocolate drop necklaces. She used real candy as often as possible. But she forgot one simple truth, and that was that those very high-powered klieg lights would turn her and the set and the costumes into a gooey, sticky mess.

Howard Greer was terribly embarrassed, and again, Edith was ready to quit the business. But Greer, and Claire West... Claire West was DeMille's longtime designer... They both plunged in to save the scene, and Edith's first attempt as a major designer.

Somewhere in the middle of lunch she started to laugh and said that one of her funniest experiences was that in 1926, DeMille's office invited her again to contribute to the design of a movie, an early assignment. It was a scene in
something called "The Wanderer," in 1926, I believe. And she was assigned to dress up the leading elephant in a very exaggerated DeMille manner. And Edith designed garlands of colorful wreaths to decorate the waist and the ankles of this enormously voluptuous beast. Well, what she didn't know, of course, was that elephants just love to eat fruit and flowers. So, no sooner was the animal costumed than it devoured its fruit and floral ornaments. It held the picture up for hours, and that relentless elephant just kept on eating. As far as he was concerned it was a delicious smorgasbord.

She was terribly humiliated by this experience, and everybody of course laughed, thinking it was a big hoot and a joke. But it was obvious to me as we talked that she was almost reliving the experience, as we were having our lunch. But she did declare that they made her realize that she would never leave herself open to such a kind of ridicule again.

I guess if Edith Head had to give credit to anybody for what she really did learn, that has made her so formidable, it was from Travis Bampton. Now, Travis was very charming, very slick, very personable, and he really understood how to talk to the stars. He had gotten his training in New York with Madame Frances, who was a designer of corsets mostly, and lingerie and so forth, to all the Ziegfeld stars and all the Broadway stars. And, you know, you have to make those women feel absolutely beautiful in the clothes. And Edith did agree that she had learned everything from Travis. And, of course, he
kept giving her responsibility on movies that he did. For instance, if Marlene Dietrich was the leading lady, he would do those clothes, and he'd assign her to do the other women characters. Which, of course, was great training. And he would go over them and edit them. And what a marvelous way to learn.

I recall asking her what was perhaps one of those moments she had to stand up against a star, and she did tell me a marvelous story about Clara Bow (this was one of the earliest big stars). She was the "It" girl. And had flaming red hair and a bee stung pout and an hour glass figure, something that the audiences absolutely adored in the 1920s. And we all know about the classic movie, "Wings," and Clara Bow was, of course, to play a wartime nurse in the air force. Which meant, of course, that she had to wear an army uniform in most of the scenes. And armed forces uniforms had to be authentic.

Well, Clara didn't care about rules. She wanted a belt to cinch in the boxy uniform and to flaunt her curves. And Edith insisted there could be no belt, and it really went all the way to the top and fortunately for Edith, the producer and the director backed her up. It created, unfortunately, a hostility between Clara and Edith, because Clara Bow was convinced that somehow or other Edith didn't want her to look sexy.

To prove her point (because I had discussed with Edith the sort of things we were going to cover—her early period in Hollywood—she had brought with her a photograph and showed it to me. And the inscription was delicious, because
it was from Clara Bow (and I must say she did look fabulous in that picture, just full of energy and full of youth and excitement and a lot of sexuality), but the inscription said, "To Edith, with love. But why don't you put your goddamned belts around your waist where they belong?"

Edith and Clara actually became friends, in a movie called "The Saturday Night Kid," which was Clara Bow's second talkie, made in 1929. Edith was assigned to do her clothes, but it was the beginning of the end for Bow. Her acting style and her voice and sound didn't mesh, and her popularity started to slip.

Now, Edith remembers the film, not because of Clara's clothes, but because she did a bias cut satin dress for a slim brunette who had a bit part in the film. The girl did go on to become a major star. She was just a second stringer in those days. Until Howard Hughes convinced her to bleach her hair and she became a major star within a year. Her name: Jean Harlow.

The thing to mark down right now in terms of fashion research is that the dress Edith made for Harlow was actually an adaptation of the French coutourier, Madeleine "Vionnaise"' latest design. No one had used the sexy bias cut in an entire gown before "Vionnaise." But, let's face it, it took Hollywood to turn the look into a classic. The "slit dress." Harlow wore it, Lombard popularized Bampton's version. Dietrich slinked around in one. It became the uniform of the sex symbols.

In looking through my own files I found a pad that
had a lead that fascinated me. It simply said, "Edith Head, Stock Market Crash, and How it Changed Fashion in Hollywood."

I went over the notes and I've broken it down. What it amounted to was, when the Stock Market failed in 1929, so did the hems. But, unfortunately, Hollywood's films, which had been shooting and were now being cut, in post-production and were being released, were caught with their skirts up. The daytime dresses in fashion fell to a point somewhere between mid-calf and ankle. The waist began to show up again, shoulders were more defined. Now, the world was giving all due credit to the likes of Chanel and Sciaparelli and Lanvin. And, of course, the Hollywood designers were cursing them.

Now, the men who ran the studios knew that any sudden change in fashion meant that movies ready for release were going to look dated. They made very feeble attempts to call the films current, but, you know, a discriminating public wasn't about to be bilked. They paid their 25¢ (at that time) and they wanted to see the latest.

Now, the moguls resolved that the only way to resolve such a haute catastrophe was to make a serious attempt to establish Hollywood, not Paris, as the fashion trend setter. Official word went out to all costume heads of all of the studios, that they were to produce original designs. There was to be no more buying from French couture houses, the goal was to make Hollywood the fashion capital of the world and to do it immediately.
The publicity departments went to work immediately, promoting A picture as a fashion extravaganza. John Engstead, the best known studio photographer in Hollywood at that time, staged major fashion photo sessions with the stars at Paramount, and those glossy pictures were supplied to major newspapers and magazines all over the states. Press releases accompanied them, promoting the designers as the most creative fashion minds in the world.

Now, a lot of those gowns were just done expressly for promotion and they never ended up in films at all. If the stars were, for instance, hot on the social circuit, studio designers were asked to fashion personal wardrobes too. Courting the fashion editors and the gossip columnists became a studio publicity department's major preoccupation. This was all (and understand this) to establish a new, chic image for Hollywood.

It didn't take too long before the public began to rely on the movies for fashion guidance. The movie magazines had as much fashion input and impact and "Vogue" and "Harper's Bazaar."

What, of course, fascinated me was the recognition that...You know...Early motion pictures were pure escapism and certainly unreal. Sometimes the clothes seemed totally ridiculous. You had a poor working girl going to work wearing sable, fantastically dressed...Well, nobody took it seriously. Everybody just sort of dismissed it and said, "Oh, well, that's just
Hollywood." And the audiences liked it.

Edith Head did a lot of the Mae West clothing, and I remember asking her what Mae West had first said to her, or did she talk? You know, the way she talked in films. And she said that...Well, it was very consistent. The first time she went to see her, she went to see her in her very big Hollywood apartment, which was all white and terribly Mae West in terms of the extravagance. And she said she stood there and she was the sexiest thing that anybody ever saw at that hour of the day. I asked her what she was wearing and she said she was wearing a long, tight white dress cut down to the naval, her bosom thrust out seductively. All of her contours were splendidly outlined in this soft, clinging gown that looked like it belonged to a bordello queen. And before she even introduced herself, she simply said, "This is the Mae West look."

I asked her if...Mae West wrote her own scripts and thus was responsible for the great witticisms and dialogue that is endlessly quoted, and I wondered if she was as powerful in her direction of the costumes that she wore. And Edith said that actually she was terribly nice, and she sat down and explained what she considered the Mae West image was. She said, "I'm a lady, but most of all I'm a sexy female. The black velvet and diamonds type. I want my clothes loose enough to prove I'm a lady, but tight enough to show'em I'm a woman." And she had a philosophy (and it's not a bad one for all of us to remember): If you've found a magic that does something for you, honey, stick
to it, never change it.

It's interesting that Edith Head's first on-screen costume design credit was for the Mae West film, "She Done Him Wrong." And you remember the co-star was Cary Grant as the salvation army young man, and Head didn't design it; they just took a salvation army uniform from the wardrobe stock.

I had been struck, personally, in watching the Mae West films, as to how tight the garlands were, and I wondered if she could sit or move or how that all worked.

Well, it's interesting, because, as you know, the gowns were essentially a version of Victorian style gowns. If you think about it, Mae's legs were covered up, her breasts were covered. And the covering fit like a second skin. Well. There weren't any rules about how tight a costume could be.

The gowns, I discovered, were usually made in duplicate, with one slightly larger than the other. Now, that was for use in scenes were she was seated or reclining. The tighter version was reserved for standing and walking. That answered my question. Mae West didn't wear corsets or brassieres with the gowns. They were so tight they shaped her without foundations. The dresses all had bones so they would stay up, but that was it.

Now here's an interesting thing for a designer to know, who's doing things for the stage or for the film. Mae West set a pattern: When she came in for fittings, and she understood the importance of the fittings, she actually would
act out the scene that the dress was going to be used in, to be sure it was right. For instance, if she was going to have to sing a song, she'd belt out the song right in the fitting room.

It's so interesting when you think about Mae West's fashions. That look never worked for anybody else. It's true, if you think. Never, in the entire history of film, did anybody make a Mae West dress for anyone but Mae. And people didn't want to look like her either. They admired her, but mostly people wanted to look like Garbo or Dietrich or Crawford.

Mae, of course, was a victim of censorship. Because, when you think about that, it was very crazy in that period, because you could show a girl in the shortest, little, abbreviated underclothes as long as they looked like they were sports-wear. But if they had lace on them, we couldn't show them because they were then considered underwear. Lace was sexier than no lace. The naval, for instance, was something that you never showed. Edith Head told me they used to stick pearls in navals with glue. Sometimes they'd have a whole row of dancers with jewels in their navals. And it was only applied to women's navals. I don't think there was any censorship with male bellybuttons. I've never understood the discrimination.

"She Done Him Wrong" was...appeared on the screen in 1933, and that's when we all first saw the "costumes by Edith Head." And you have to realize that she never stopped. She told me that she learned more from Travis Bampton by watching him
dress Carole Lombard than anything she'd ever done before or even since.

Paramount gave her the B pictures to do, and she did the best that she could, producing them in the same what she called the Bampton style. She'd even learned to mimic his sketching style. And that was part of the planning and plot to get rid of him.

I asked Edith about the sarong. She lifted her eyes to the heavens (Oh, the sarong again!) but I wanted to know how it happened and how she got into it, and here's the truth, here's the story in my notes, that she told me:

Adolph Zukor, who was then head of Paramount pictures, had been trying to cast the lead in a movie called "Girl of the Jungle." It seemed that he had tested more than 200 girls, and the whole thing had gotten out of hand. It was sort of an on-going beauty contest.

Now, Dorothy Lamour, who had been a elevator operator in Marshall Fields, took a screen test and she had waist length hair. She let down her hair, stuck a flower in it, and she got the part. He also knew he could get her for $200 a week, which was peanuts in those days, for any good actress.

Now, Dottie was very excited about getting the role until she found out that the only costume she'd be wearing was a sarong. The first sarong that Edith made for Dottie was of a very authentic Malaysian cotton, accurate right down to its uneven weave and its island print. It was also rather ugly.
The fabric didn't drape very well, making Dottie look like she was wearing a flower print sack. If it was tied tight she was uncomfortable, and if it didn't, she looked awful. Edith Head decided to hell with the cotton fabrics and she used satin crepe, and she had it screened in exactly the native print she wanted. It draped beautifully and created the voluptuous look. When Zukor saw how beautiful Dorothy looked in her full makeup and costume, he changed the name of the movie. It went from "Girl of the Jungle" to "Jungle Girl," and finally to "Jungle Princess," which was a rather high compliment to Dorothy.

Edith, taking the sarong experience to heart, had learned how to wrap a sarong from some native of the islands living in Hollywood, and she told a very funny story about "Jungle Princess." I guess the co-star was Ray Milland, and Dorothy was to do her first big scene in a tropical stream. It was actually a small wooden pool on one of the smaller sound stages. And all of a sudden she screamed and the sarong floated to the surface along with the bust pads that they had stuffed into the suit to make her look fuller. Milland was hysterical with laughter. Dorothy grabbed for the cloth and wrapped herself up, I suppose, as best she could, and Edith Head learned a very important lesson; that all the authentic sarong wrapping techniques meant nothing. From then on she sewed Miss Lamour into every sarong that she wore.

I think it's equally important for the purposes
quickly spread the word that Edith had conspired to force Bampton out. Word had it that Hopper got the story straight from Bampton, and thus Edith's good fortune was met with mixed emotions. For, really, none of the stars wanted to see Bampton out.

Well, I'm sure there was some truth in all of that, but the truth was, also, that Bampton was a lush, Edith had covered for him for years, and, you know, eventually that sort of thing just collapses of its own weight. So, all we know is that Edith remained, Travis Bampton destroyed himself, and Edith went on for years and years and years after that.

It was also typical, because you see, when Travis left Paramount in 1938, Edith became head of the department. There was no fanfare, no dramatic transition, popping of champagne corks, no raise in salary. She had been working six days a week, 15 hours a day, and she continued this routine. Since she had been Bampton's chief assistant, it was just assumed that now she was the chief designer. No formal announcement was made by the studio until the fall of 1938. In the meanwhile, she just moved into Bampton's big, beautiful, super elegant office, and inherited his most popular and most difficult star--Claudette Colbert.

To put it simply, Colbert didn't like Edith Head. I always felt that she couldn't adjust to the fact that Edith was now the chief designer; to her she was just Travis's funny little assistant who didn't smile. At one of those wonderful
coast panel discussions, where Edith and I drove back to Hollywood together in the limousine that had been sent to pick us up by UCLA, I dared to ask her about Charles Head, who, obviously, was her first husband. Because her name was Edith Head. And I knew very little about him and there was practically nothing that you could find out from research.

Well, it seems that, of course, he was part of her private world and she maintained a rather strict silence about anything that she did after hours. When I interviewed John Engstead and asked him about Charles Head, he told me that he was very quiet. He really didn't want to be any part of Edith's life in Hollywood. He just didn't fit in. And the two of them began to lead very separate lives. He retreated to booze and Edith to work. It became apparent to all of Hollywood that when she socialized she socialized without Charles. That was fine. I guess it was easier than trying to ignore or explain away his drunken stupors. It was easier than driving him home and drag his dead weight up the stairs of their "Dohaney" Drive apartment. I've talked to a lot of people who said they couldn't understand why she stuck with Charles so many years, because she didn't seem to love him and they wondered, of course, whether it was just a matter of being duty bound.

However, in 1938 (you realize this is also the year she becomes chief designer at Paramount), put off by one or two too many of his drunken binges, she just gave up and divorced him. It's interesting that...She always felt sort of duty about
him. And when he needed money she gave it to him, and she's carried his name, of course, forever. And years later, when he lay dying, she was the one that went to his bedside and stayed.

Now, she had a longtime friend. It's a funny name. Wiard. Middle name Boppo. Last name Ihnen. Now, they had been great friends for a long time. He became the other man in her life during the last years of her marriage to Head. Everyone called this man with the odd name Bill, and he was a very respected and acclaimed art director on the staff at Paramount. And for years they had a very strong platonic friendship. They talked very seriously about the importance of visuals and the relationship of the visual effect and the psychology of visuals on film, and they would communicate about how costumes were part of the visual images. Well...And...They really talked a lot. It wasn't until 1940 that suddenly everybody became aware that they were more than platonic friends. Because in September, they got married.

When Edith talked about him it was with great warmth and she claimed that he was a very sentimental man and had a strong sense of being the man of the house, and she rather liked that. It was important for him to feel that he was in charge. And she also admitted to me at that point that it was very important for her to feel that she was being taken care of. And I guess what really worked was that he was able to accept her career. There really weren't a lot of men in 1940,
you know, who would want their lady to be that strong a career person. And it certainly would not be easy being married to Edith Head, Costume Designer, with the demands on the time and talents made on such a person.

I talked to a lot of different people about whom they thought made Edith anxious. You know. Who she thought was threatening in terms of design talent, and almost everybody agreed that the one person that she really admitted to having pangs of feelings of inadequacy was Adrian. You know. If you look at the difference between the whimsical munchkins in the "Wizard of Oz" to watching Garbo slink across the screen in one of his perfectly engineered gowns of sequined silk or simple satin, you began to realize how enormously talented Adrian was. It's true, Edith may have felt inadequate, but nobody else suspected that. She really was the producer-director's dream. She kept within budgets and she produced costumes that perfectly suited the stars and the scripts. But, Adrian was still the film costume master. Edith was in a different league. Lots of people felt that one of the problems with Adrian's costumes in the latter part of his career was that they became the all-important thing; their life on the screen, rather than that they might or might not make the star look the best. I always felt that that was a bit of bitchy jealousy, but it is true that he had unlimited budgets, and in 1940, when directors began to have budget problems, for lots of reasons, they began to put demands on Adrian. For instance, the studio told him to
dress Garbo more like the ordinary American woman, to make her less aloof. And he was presented with budgets and told that he would have to adhere to them. These cutbacks, of course, didn't allow for the all-out glamor that had become his trademark. The corporations were beginning to make themselves known, and Adrian's power was being taken away quickly.

Well, when he left MGM and opened up his own couture salon, Edith could now relax, and she could proceed, free from Adrian's shadow. And it's interesting, because the first big opportunity she had for, you know, a fashion picture, came in 1940 when Barbara Stanwyck was cast in the lead of Preston Sturges's "The Lady Eve." It's fascinating to look at the clothes, even today, because they still stand up.

Stanwyck's wardrobe was Edith Head's greatest achievement up to that point. The designer helped turn the actress into an instant sex symbol and a trend setter. If I remember correctly, there were 25 changes, and each one of them was a statement of advanced 1941 fashion, and each one of those pieces had been created in early 1940. Stanwyck herself said, "I was never a clothes horse, but I did feel like one in the picture 'The Lady Eve.' Edith made the most beautiful clothes I had ever worn, and every change was spectacular."

One of the things, of course, with costume designers that they, and Edith particularly, had to face was the figure problems that might be brought to bear because of the nature of the actress's form. And Stanwyck was no exception. She
possessed what some designers considered to be a real problem; that is, a long waist and a comparatively low rear end. By widening the waist bands in the front of her gowns and narrowing them slightly in the back, Edith put her in straight skirts (something that other designers were afraid to do because they thought she might look too heavy in the seat). Since Stanwyck wasn't the least bit heavy, what Edith Head did was to take advantage of her long waist to create an optical illusion; that her derriere was just as perfectly placed as any other star's.

One of the lessons to be learned about designing for characters is to recognize that certain images automatically trigger in the mind other images. For instance, in "Lady Eve," you know, she plays essentially a two part role, one being that she is just a tough gambler con lady, and the other that she is a lady of noble birth. Now, if you hadn't seen the first part of the picture, you wouldn't recognize who the elegant lady was. There was almost a complete metamorphosis. In the first half of the picture she's one person and in the second half she's another. And it wasn't just a change of costume. She walked differently, she stood differently, and I once talked to Stanwyck about this and she said she wasn't conscious of it, but apparently it just simply evolved. The clothes did part of it. There were very sharp contrasts for the gambler role—black on white, all black, all white—the attempt was to make her appear just a little coarse. Much richer and much more
luxurious fabrics were selected when she was supposed to be of noble birth. And then different colorations were used, to show up more subtly in black and white. All the sequins and the glitter were left to the lady gambler.

I think Edith Head told me one time that she did, oh, most of Stanwyck's costuming, because...It came from this picture, because Stanwyck was so thrilled with the idea of having been a screen fashion sensation that every contract that she had, no matter what studio she was working for included the fact that Edith Head had to design her clothes.

I remember asking Edith one time which of the stars might have irritated her. And it's as though it happened just five minutes ago, because she was eating a shrimp salad, and she stopped and looked up and, you know, the eyes really closed tightly, and she said, "Well, the most insensitive bitch that I ever remember was Paulette Goddard."

(End of Side 5)

Goddard would parade through the sewing room with a little cigar box filled with jewels. Precious jewels, that Charles had given to her. And she'd pass it around, temptingly showing it to the seamstresses, and they earned about $32 a week. The only comment that Edith Head made was that, "Well, I did her wardrobe for 'The Cat and the Canary' and the 'Ghostbreakers,' but I don't remember her clothes at all. I just remember her tormenting my staff with that damn cigar box full of jewels." And then she finally said, "I think she ended up being better
known for her jewels than for her acting."

Almost for purely selfish reasons, I asked Edith about Veronica Lake, because I had always enjoyed her performances, but always had the feeling that the camera must be doing a lot of the work. And Edith explained that Veronica Lake came to Paramount sort of as a child-woman cut out to be a star. She had very slight stature and a baby face, which made her a very unlikely pinup candidate, until Wally Westmore, the supervisor of Paramount's makeup and hair department, asked her to take off her beret one day, and out came tumbling this extraordinary, gorgeous hair. He shaped it, parted it on the side and let it fall vampishly, covering one eye. Well, Edith now had the responsibility to turn Veronica Lake's size three body into something that at least looked voluptuous enough to live up to that hairstyle. Once she got started talking about Veronica I couldn't stop her. She said that her figure problems seemed insurmountable, and she was short, like Edith, and very tiny, "possibly the smallest normal adult I had ever seen. Her waist was the smallest in Hollywood--20 3/4 inches." That was 5 1/2" smaller than the average waist, far from a designer's dream, like Dietrich or Lombard. Yet, everyone was telling Edith to make her into a sex symbol.

She had a good bust, but because of the anti-cleavage rule of the Hays office at that time, which was the censorship board, it couldn't be shown. So she had to be very, very careful in terms of whatever costume she wore.
I asked about fabrics: What do you do if somebody is that tiny? And Edith said that the fabrics she used on Veronica's clothes always had some type of vertical interest because horizontal lines, she felt, would shorten her. She divided necklines that called attention to her bust without actually exposing it, and she played it for the fact that she had big breasts, which made her seem like a larger woman. It was interesting that the first film that Veronica Lake did was something called "Sullivan's Travels," in 1941, and Edith did a great job. She dressed her in gold lame' and beaded gowns. She was very sultry and an immediate hit. She was also, hmmn, very pregnant at that time.

Well, how do you photograph a girl who's pregnant, I asked? Edith said, "Well, what you do is, she can stand behind the piano, she can carry a large muff, and you can assume it's a winter picture. Or; what was most successful for Veronica, she can carry a huge fan."

It's interesting to realize that Veronica's hairstyle did not sweep...Or did, I'm sorry...Did sweep the nation but her fashions did not. She never became a strong fashion influence. And it was hard, because by 1949, eight years later, she was totally finished.

One of the marvelous things, talking to Edith Head, was that you realize you are dealing with a designer who was part of the whole scene from DeMille's days straight through, and all of the greats. And I asked her what about Ingrid Bergman.
And she bubbled forth the information that it was late in August of 1942 that Bergman came to Paramount, two days after she finished "Casablanca" at Warner Brothers, to do Ernest Hemingway's "For Whom the Bell Tolls." It was interesting that she got the part after they saw the dailies on Vera Zorina, who was one of the George Ballanchine wives. But after Sam Ward saw the first few dailies, he demanded that Bergman replace Zorina, and Bergman at that time was under contract to David O. Selznick.

I asked Edith her first impressions of Bergman and she said she was a very imposing woman. In those days she weighed about 135 pounds and wore a size 14. She might have taken a smaller size but she was very tall--almost 6 feet--and demanded a large cut. Her feet, however, were size 7 and seemed rather small considering her overall presence. Well, I sort of giggled as we talked about it, because my memory of "For Whom the Bell Tolls" is that it was the Spanish Civil War and so I raised the question of que est'ce que fashion? And this is what Edith told me: That the scenes, of course, call for nothing but dirty old pants and shirts. Ingrid herself had said that she wasn't interested in clothes and suggested that they just use something from wardrobe stock, and they rummaged around and nothing turned up in the woman's wardrobe stock; it was all too clamorous and all too fluffy and beautiful and extravagant and elegant. So they went over to the men's wardrobe and found things to fit her. She was very
happy. However, when Selznick found out about it he was furious. He announced to Edith that in no uncertain terms... He wanted a brand new pair of pants and a shirt for Ingrid. So, all they could do was order new clothes, which were then bleached and redyed to look as old and worn as the original costume had.

Edith volunteered herself that, of course, the next film that she did with Ingrid also was not a fashion picture, because it was "The Bells of St. Mary's" in 1945, with Bing Crosby, and she knew how she could look. Because, if you remember, in "Casablanca," Orry-Kellys did the costumes, and she was terribly chic and rather elegant. And suddenly, of course, Bergman was playing a nun and there wasn't much Edith could do with the costume. The Catholic church was very particular when it came to fictionalized accounts of its clergy, so Edith was, by necessity, painstakingly accurate in dressing Bergman, Bing Crosby and Barry Fitzgerald. It's interesting that that particular period of motion pictures, accuracy was becoming of prime concern (unless you were working on a silly film like the "Road" comedies). It's interesting that Edith said that when she first started in films, anybody might have redesigned a nun's costume, just to be amusing. But in this particular period, the '40s, they discovered that the public was more interested in details. If you did something wrong, you got letters, especially from students.

Well, I asked her what she did and she said she wasn't about to trifle with the Catholic church, so she went
to a parish and the priest gave her a book on habits. Ingrid's particular order was very rigid, and she copied the drawings of the robes line for line and produced them for her role. That, as she said, was the least fashion she ever did in any film at all.

When I first arrived in Hollywood, the first big star that I met was Ingrid Bergman. At that time she was shooting "Notorious," so, of course, I was terribly interested to ask Edith about the clothes for that particular film. And she said that, for such a big woman, Ingrid was a joy to dress. And in this script she was able to do evening clothes, sports clothes, street clothes, the whole gamut. And I asked her if Hitchcock got involved and she said absolutely, that he was very specific about the costumes for his leading ladies, and he spoke a designer's language. Even though, interestingly enough, he didn't know the first thing about clothes. He specified colors in the script if they were important. If he wanted a skirt, for instance, that brushed a desk as a woman walked by, he spelled that out too. He repeated, oh, over and over again that the clothes must not be a focal point; that Bergman, in "Notorious," had to be a believable secret agent.

Well, that was a tricky job, according to Edith, because her clothes couldn't be smart in the ordinary sense, they had to avoid the fussy and to avoid the extreme, and yet they had to be right for her. I asked what was the first scene she did, and she said it was the party scene, where Bergman
meets Cary Grant for the first time, and she dressed Ingrid in a zebra skin print blouse with the midriff exposed. In a black and white film, the eye is immediately attracted to the stark contrast of black and white, since other colors become varying shades of grey. Visually, she became the most important woman in the room. In other dramatic scenes, she was dressed either in pure white or solid black. And true to Hitchcock's forms, these colors reflected her mood. And I asked about jewelry, and she said throughout the film she wore very demure, covered up costumes and very little jewelry. To be glamorous, some women need accessories--jewels, furs, feathers, silly hats--all the things that Ingrid Bergman hated. She looks absolutely marvelous in plain things--a smock or a blouse and skirt or a tailored dressing gown. She must have simplicity, skillful design, practically no ornamentation. It's almost as though Bergman's elegance was a very subtle quality. And I asked Edith to sum up what the experience was, in costuming Ingrid Bergman, and she said, "For any costume designer, an Ingrid Bergman picture was a total education in restraint."

One of the films that I thought was an enormous challenge for any costume designer was "The Major and the Minor," made in 1942, starring Ginger Rogers. Now, in '42, Rogers was already 31 years old, and the part called for Edith to design costumes that would allow Rogers to transform herself, first into a 12 year old girl, and then back into a middle class working woman. But this all had to be done on the screen, with
the audience watching. And Edith told me that this involved a lot of conferencing with Wally Westmore, because both the make-up and the clothes had to be believable for both of these characters. And they finally decided that... Once they decided what the working girl look had to be, then they could ease into the little girl look. And apparently what they did, for instance, was Ginger appeared first in a simply belted blouse that could be quickly unbelted into a low slung middy clause; a knee length plaid skirt that could be hiked up above her knees easily; stockings that could be crumpled down to look like anklets, and a wide brimmed hat that looked extremely ingenue, with two blonde pig-tails hanging out. Ginger made the transformation perfectly, and the movie was a big hit.

One of the most expensive costumes in the history of Hollywood was the famous "mink dress," as it was called, that Ginger Rogers wore in "Lady in the Dark," in the dream sequence. But there's always been a lot of discussion about it, so I asked Edith what the true story was, because people have said she didn't design it, she did design it, and I simply said to her, "What's the real story?"

Well, what she said, if I remember correctly she started off by saying, "Actually, it wasn't a mink dress." She picked that up immediately, and said, "It was a mink overskirt, which was lined with sequins, worn over a matching sequin body suit. There was also a mink bolero and muff, and it cost about $35,000 to make, in those days," and obviously today you
couldn't make it without limitless wardrobe budgets. And it was Mitch Leisen--Mitchell Leisen--who directed the movie, and he's the one who told her exactly what he wanted. But, he had originally requested that the mink skirt be lined with faux rubies and emeralds, but when that huge expanse of mink was backed with stones, Ginger couldn't even lift it, let alone dance in it. That's how they relined the skirt with very light sequins, and they did it in a paisley pattern, if I remember correctly, and it moved.

It's interesting that there was no...You see...Everybody forgets that there were no Oscars for costume design in 1944, when "Lady in the Dark" was done because it was such a lavish wardrobe, done for the film, because Rogers plays fashion editor for the world's greatest fashion magazine in the film itself. The assumption has always been by everybody that Edith would have won another award for that.

I recall on a television show--I believe it was "The Merv Griffin Show"--I asked Edith if anybody had ever attacked her for her own wardrobe, and I think she thought I was referring to a specific incident. I wasn't; it was just one of those questions you throw out, trying to keep the conversation going in the direction that you want it. I was the guest co-host at that particular time. And she plunged into a whole discussion of the fact that Hedda Hopper (who really hated her, because Hopper was a great fan, and a great friend and buddy, of Travis Bampton and was convinced that Edith had railroaded him out of
his job), and long before Mr. Blackwell used to have her own worst-dressed list, and she named Edith on it, and it was very shattering for Edith, because Hedda was read by everybody in the industry, and suddenly here is one of the major costume designers being attacked for being badly dressed. She based it on the fact that Head always wore tailored jackets and boring shirts teamed with equally boring skirts. It didn't impress Hedda that most of those outfits were different ones. But the overall look was similar, and it's true, because when I pushed Edith to the point of simply saying, "Well, why did you do that? Why did you have no color?" Well, she said (and I found my notes on this) that she never used color in the room in which she worked, or in her office or fitting rooms, and "I never wear color myself, I mean never. I wear beige or occasionally grey, my favorite shade of grey is a beigy grey, or white or black. When I stand behind a glamorous star who is fitting a glamorous dress, I don't want to be an eye catcher; I want the actress to concentrate on themselves. Any distraction, such as pictures on the wall, a reflection of me in a very fashionable, brightly colored dress, would only take their eye away from their own image. I play down how I can look. An actor must be totally absorbed with how he or she appears."

It should be noted that Edith became terribly aware of the power of publicity; that if she made herself a publicly known figure, then it would insure an avenue of work for her, wither it be on television or a column or articles or books
or whatever might happen to her costume design career, or whatever might happen to the movie industry itself. And she went about it in a very organized way. She was a smart person in that sense. And it's interesting, because she did a series of radio broadcasts, and I found a tape of one of the radio broadcasts, and I couldn't make sense of all of it, but here is essentially what's said in part of it: If you have a large bust, do not wear clothes so tight that you suggest a sausage. The larger a bust, the more it will fall. This means that your waist line should be lowered, that you should favor a V-neckline rather than a round or oval cut; that you should invest in a good brassiere, and that you should avoid fabrics that catch the light or cling too tightly. On the other hand, if you're flatter than you wish you were, raise your waist line, nip in your clothes at this point. Wear soft fullness at the bust. Remember, there's nothing wrong with bust pads. It's very stupid to pretend that there are no such things.

At one point I asked her if the movement qualities of an actor might affect design, meaning that, you know, there are people who throw their arms around or walk with very la steps. And she immediately smiled and said that that was one of the telling points of her initial meetings with Bette Davis. They became enormous friends. Because she said she (Davis) is especially long stride. It was always terribly important that her skirt did not inhibit the way she walked. You can never put her in a tight, straight skirt without adding
to make it maneuverable.

One of the inevitable questions (and we did a whole show on this) was what was the impact of Christian Dior's 1947 "new look," which dominated the fashion of the world? And what effect did it have on movies? And Edith said, you know, there was no question that costumes had to be remade for a number of films that were in production, but they couldn't do anything about the ones that were already in the can. And she said that she learned her lesson the hard way. Because after he brought out the "new look," every film that she had done in the past few months looked like something from the "bread lines" (that's what she said). With each screening, she was reminded (and vowed) that she would never get caught by a fashion trend again, and she became (there's no question about it) a confirmed fence sitter. If skirts became very full, she widened hers very gradually. If lengths were at the ankle, hers were mid-calf. The result has been that if you look at her films, it's very difficult to date them. Some of the designs are as wearable today as they were in the late '40s.

If you recall, I told you that there wasn't an award for costume design at the Oscars until... The first award was given out in 1949, and you can be damn sure that Edith was behind the group that organized themselves to push the Academy into establishing that award.

I do adore Edith Head for being totally honest about the first award. She was absolutely convinced that she was
going to get it. She couldn't believe that anybody else would be in the running because (1), she...If nothing else, longevity. She'd been designing for all those years and certainly had done major movies and gotten awards for fashion costume and design. And it's...A big production that she had done that year was "The Emperor Waltz," and she went, completely convinced that the first award would be hers. So much so that she was telling me that she asked her husband, Bill, whether she should take off her glasses or leave them on. And he suggested that she'd better leave them on because she couldn't see without them. And secondly, he said, "You really aren't Edith Head to the public without them." Which, if you think about it, is quite true. You always think of her with those big, enormous, outsized, black-framed glasses. I asked her what she wore to the Academy Awards when she expected to win that night, and she said she was in a very pencil slim, high-necked black faille gown, embroidered in tiny gold and silver elephants, with their trunks up for good luck. It was a conversation piece, as she intended it to be. Her hair was pulled back as high and tight as she could get it, her bangs were perfect, her makeup was camera-ready. Elizabeth Taylor was only 17 when she presented that first award for Best Costuming, and she was beautiful as anyone had ever imagined her to be. I asked her what Elizabeth was wearing, and she said she was dressed in a full length gown with a six foot hoop skirt wreathed in forget-me-nots. And she sort of flounced up to the podium. Edith said, "Oh, I could feel myself getting so tense."
And suddenly the announcement was made, and when the envelope was opened and the winner was "Karinska and Dorothy Jeakins" for "Joan of Arc..." I asked her if she had given in to expressing her feelings. She said no, that she was in shock, but just smiled and applauded and stared ahead, and as far as she knew nobody knew how terribly and deeply disappointed she was.

I suppose those of us who have devoted so much of our lives to the professional world of fashion have key moments that stand out in our lives. And one of them was the first time that I saw "The Heirs," because, apart from the fact that I adored the Henry James story and I loved the casting of it--Olivia de Havilland and Montgomery Clift, who were absolutely marvelous--I thought it was one of the best uses of costuming I had ever seen; to advance the characters in a movie. As a matter of fact, I played it over and over again when cassettes came out, and I advise anyone who is in costume design or who's seriously interested in dressing stars for any reason--any dramatic use of clothes as the language which forwards a career--because (or character), because, this was a perfect example of it. Let me try to explain what I mean.

The film takes place in two distinct costume periods, first in the Victorian period, when women wore crinolines, and then the Edwardian, when they wore bustles. And Edith went off to the Brooklyn Museum because Willie Wyler, the famous director, had a great sensitivity. He was probably one of the few directors who was acutely aware of the way clothes can advance a story line.
and help to change a character. And Willie took the time to discuss with Edith the character's personality changes and how best to indicate these changes through clothes. In the beginning of the film she's a rather dowdy spinster and her clothes are simple, befitting her lot in life. She isn't the kind of woman who appeals to men; even her meticulous hairdo reflects how uptight she is. Then after she meets Montgomery Clift, she chooses a ball gown which is too overdone and makes her look foolish. When her lewd new love leaves her, she becomes embittered and her clothes are dark, severely tailored and matronly. At the end, as her suitor returns, and she's ready to get revenge, she becomes an exceedingly confident, exciting woman wearing a gown totally unlike the costume she wore earlier. For the first time her clothes make her look breathtaking. If there had been no sound, you could have just watched the costume changes and you would have understood the characters and what was really happening to her. They really are marvelously done. And Edith did explain that, for instance, that it was quite obvious that Catherine Sloper, the character's name, was slightly clumsy, slightly awkward. You have the feeling that she wasn't quite put together. She dropped things. She had a terrible inferiority complex, and her father tormented her by telling her how beautiful her mother was, how immaculate Catherine looked. She goes to the party in a red dress, a scarlet dress, and says, "This was my mother's favorite color," and the father rather cruelly replies, "Your mother dominated the color," implying
that she looked horrible in it. And the way Edith handled this was, it was obvious that the father of Catherine Sloper was a wealthy man. Therefore, she couldn't use inexpensive or ugly clothes, because that wouldn't be appropriate. She had to wear clothes of the finest quality. So rather than give Olivia a perfect fit, Edith made things purposely gap or wrinkle in the wrong place. She'd cut a collar too high, or a sleeve a bit too short. When Olivia wore a shawl, they discussed how she should carry it to imply her subtle fears. She rarely let a shawl sit comfortably on her shoulders. Instead the grasped it, fiddled with it. If her dress had ruffles, it had a few too many ruffles, combined with too much ribbon and a bit too much lace, reflecting her somewhat naive and totally unsophisticated taste. All these details remain precisely accurate to their period.

Now, you have to realize that the Academy Award in costume design is given for the best costumes that advance a story, not necessarily for the most beautiful clothes. These costumes in this particular picture were not necessarily... They weren't the most beautiful clothes that Edith Head had ever designed, but they were the best suited to the script.

Well, it's interesting: According to Edith, as prepared as she was for an Oscar for "The Emperor Waltz," which she didn't get, she was terribly unprepared to win for "The Heiress." The only time I ever heard Edith giggle was the time she told me this story, and she said Bob Hope was the Master
of Ceremonies that night that she won her first award. He led her up on the stage. Then, when he realized that she was totally speechless, he covered for her by saying "Edith says thank you." The next day people were calling her up to tell her her response was charming, and I asked her how she felt about it and she said, "Totally ridiculous."

It's interesting. Edith Head was married to (?) known as Bill, for 30 years, and he died in 1979. And she died in '81, in 1981, and she was at that point 82 years of age. She was always very cautious about her age. Wouldn't be (?) about it. But according to all records, she was 82, and she died October 24, 1981 of "undisclosed causes." They never released the cause at the hospital in Los Angeles. Actually, she was just a few days short of her 83rd birthday. She had been in and out of the hospital for most of that year with difficulty with her eyes and anemia and she'd been suffering from exhaustion. Her last picture was "Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid," with Steve Martin at Universal. It's interesting to recognize that Edith won eight Academy Awards and was nominated for 34 Oscars during her long career as Hollywood's most celebrated costume designer. I always felt that, of course, if there had been a costume award before 1948, which was then given in '49, she would have had many more Oscars on her list.

It should be remembered that Edith was the first woman ever appointed head designer for a major studio, and her overriding principle of design was very simple: That all clothes
must suit the story and be subordinate to it.

She was actually October 23rd, I think, in 1898....

It occurred to me that perhaps we should have on record that Edith wore...I'm sorry....After "The Heiress" she won subsequent Oscars for the black and white films "All About Eve," 1950; "A Place in the Sun," 1951; "Roman Holiday," 1953; "Sabrina," 1954, and "The Facts of Life," 1960. And for color pictures, "Sam and Delilah," 1950 and "The Sting" in 1973. And the nominations in both black and white and color categories came for: "The Emperor Waltz," "Carrie," "The Greatest Show on Earth," "The Rose Tattoo," "To Catch a Thief," "The Ten Commandments," "The Proud and the Profane," "Funny Face," "The Buccaneer," "The Five Pennies," "Career," "Pepe," "Pocket Full of Miracles," "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance," "A New Kind of Love," "Love With the Proper Stranger," "Wives and Lovers," "A House is Not a Home," "What a Way to Go," "The Slender Thread," "Inside Daisy Clover," "The Oscar," "Sweet Charity," "Airport," "The Man Who Would be King," and "Airport '77." And I guess the public never would have known her as much as they did but for her amazing record of appearances on Art Linkletter's "House Party" on both radio and TV, where she would give advice to women in the audience about attire. And, of course, she wrote a syndicated fashion advice column for newspapers and, through the 1950s, was the official fashion consultant for the Academy Award telecast. It was an extraordinary career and she may not have been the most original
designer, but she certainly was the most active one and perhaps the most significant one as far as the major stars were concerned.
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