

## *Christopher Tranchell (Paul Pitman).*

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The character of Paul Pitman became a regular as from Starvation in the first series. He was a likeable, carefree young man, who delighted in wearing his large hat and earrings. Despite his unorthodox appearance, he was an invaluable addition to the blossoming community, where his knowledge of agriculture was put to good use. Paul always had the greater well being of the community at heart, and it is no surprise that he lays down his life to save Jenny and her baby early on in the second series.

How did Chris get the part of Paul in Survivors? "It was through Gerald Blake, a director I'd worked with in rep. I'd worked with him in Lincoln for a couple of years at the end of the fifties, and it was only my third job since leaving drama school. After those two years he became a director and I went on with a Margate stage company and so I did a lot more theatre. I did do some television with an ITV company, as a Glaswegian teddyboy! Gerald had spoken to me about Survivors while they were setting it all up and invited me to have the part. My first TV part however was in Legend of Death which was a science fiction series about the minotaur."

Does Chris prefer television or the stage? "I prefer the theatre. I went to the Bristol Old Vic School because of the influence of the theatre that I'd been taken to as a kid. I was born in New Forest, and the family moved to Southampton during the war. We used to come up to visit relatives in North Finchley. My mother was the theatre fanatic, she was very keen on Shakespeare and she also loved ballet. My father wasn't particularly keen on the classical stuff but enjoyed thrillers. We'd be up in London for a week and we'd see a show every night and this was a huge influence on me as a kid. So I wanted to be a theatre actor after seeing all these shows and musicals in London! We were a rather introverted family and it seemed that acting was a rather good way of communicating. It's nice to know what you're going to say beforehand if you feel insecure. Real life is so much more frightening since you don't know what's going to happen! Actually, I think Survivors would have been better had there been more improvisation."

Did Chris enjoy, as many others, the beauty of Herefordshire? "Yes, and it was so exciting! Herefordshire was so beautiful and quiet with hardly ever a plane going overhead. I had worked in Worcester, just over the other side of the Malverns for about three years. I found a little cottage in a place called King's Land for my family. I was told that I could bring the children for a short holiday but they couldn't stay because the elderly couple who owned the cottage didn't want a family staying there all the time. But in the end they got on so well with the children that they agreed to let us stay on for a year, beyond in fact the time that I was working on Survivors."

Does Chris remember any discussions with Terry Dudley or the directors about the background to the character of Paul? "I remember talking to Terry Dudley and to Gerald Blake, one of the directors. The character was meant to have worked in the Post Office, in the loading bay of a station and drive a van for the Post Office. He was very much a drop-out however. He had been a hippy and was used to living the style of life that the others in the settlement were being forced to live. The idea was that he would be very resourceful because he had already experienced many of the problems for himself. He had a lot of know-how. They didn't really develop that theme very much unfortunately."

Paul's cowboy-style hat and hippy dress became very much his trademark during the series. Was Chris given a free-hand in choosing his outfit? "I got to choose what I was to wear, based upon what they wanted the character to be. They did say that they would pay for whatever I got! We tried to get a balance between what he would have had as a drop-out, the hat and the long hair for example, and what he would have picked up along the way. The boots, for example, were new and he had got them after the plague. I also had this sheepskin coat which I tried to break down a lot. I had looked for an old one but without luck. I did everything I could to make it look old including stamping on it but it still looked new!"

Why did Chris leave the series? "I asked to be written out as I had got very disappointed with the scripts. The series started out with such huge potential and given that the audience figures were there it seemed stupid that they weren't prepared to invest more time and energy into the stories. The series very early on had captured the imagination of the audience. For over a generation people had lived in the fear

and dread of nuclear war. An immediate parallel was drawn with the possibilities depicted in the series. It doesn't seem like such a threat today. I feel that it became rather like cowboys and Indians in the end. It felt like they were using any adventure theme without seriously thinking about the issues."

Was Chris happy with his final episode, Don Shaw's Greater Love which sees the death of Paul? "Yes, I thought my exit was rather glorious. I was very happy with it!"

Did Chris find it easy to get on with the others on set? "Yes, I think I got on well with everyone. Ian was a bit difficult. He was a really nice guy but he was quite difficult to work with as an actor because he was so protective of his image, wanting to look rather glamorous as if auditioning for the next James Bond. As the scripts were very pedestrian I put it to him that if we could develop a relationship, perhaps like Alias Smith and Jones, then it would make things more interesting. But I couldn't get him to bend at all. We didn't argue or anything and in fact we got on fine. I think that most of the directors would have allowed us to re-jig scenes - we did in any case-so I believe we could have had much better stories if he hadn't been so concerned about doing his own thing. Tom Baker, for instance, in Dr Who, constantly re-wrote scripts. He rather enjoyed it and was happy to take you along. He realised he had a responsibility to the show. He loved the idea of improvisation and changing the relationships and stamping it with his own sense of humour. Ian, however, I don't think understood that everything wasn't necessarily naturalistic. Even though it was a drama, a series must have its own style. I had this conversation with Ian about this but he wouldn't wear it. I think he thought I was talking gobbledygook."

Was Chris disappointed at the way in which the series progressed, perhaps not identifying and discussing the real issues? "Yes I was. It seemed that there was so much potential to make it as it might be like under those circumstances, but they just ditched the idea for the soap-opera type conflict which we could have had in any setting. It seemed a complete sell out when I had been given the image of something so different. I feel that the writers really missed the opportunity. They never really discussed the issues at all. I should add that by this time I had been working in the theatre for eight years, and had been used to working with material by dramatists like Arthur Miller and Ibsen, which was of the very highest quality. Sometimes it represented a lifetime's work! They could have broached what the plague had done to our lives and we would have to re-align ourselves. They didn't seriously think how people would be genuinely changed. Everybody would naturally become more philosophical and in fact more hippy. But one would definitely be different. They avoided people becoming different. I think that by the time the second series started out at Callow Hill it had already lost the ability to be something different. In a way, the first series location of Hampton Court provided another dimension. It seemed the right sort of anachronism to remind us all the time that they were beyond civilisation and were entering a New Age. I didn't see it as an action-adventure series at all. I had seen it much more with the potential of doing something quite extraordinarily philosophical. It could have been about real resourcefulness and getting back to nature in a way that was actually productive. It could have suggested to a society that was getting increasingly locked into city and consumer values a much more tangible or organic way of life. We should have explored a much more fundamental way of living and relationships. Relationships, in a world without the pressures of today, would develop in a way that would be much more thorough. In this kind of situation, where people don't have to meet deadlines and so on as we all do today, people's imagination takes on a much higher value. Many Irish people, for example, have retained this. They always have time and show much more imagination. I found it extraordinary that the writers didn't have enough imagination to take this up as a gift. Instead of that they wrote as if they had only been given an adventure series to write when in fact they were being given the challenge of something much more valuable. They were being given the challenge of writing about a society which was winding down into a much healthier society whereby human relationships became much more valuable again."

Was this Chris' first experience of working on location? "I had done some filming previously with Gerald Blake on the Isle of Wight. This was for The Legend of Death and we used Hovercrafts. But Survivors was the first time I had been involved in Outside Broadcast work."

Apart from Dr Who (Invasion of Time), what television work has Chris done in recent years? "As a result of working on Survivors I was asked to present Play School. What happened was that there was an episode of Survivors (Law and Order) in which I played the guitar and sang a Buddy Holly number. I suspect that because of that I received an invitation to be interviewed by the people who did Play School. At first I couldn't work it out because I hadn't written to them and it seemed to me to be so unusual for an actor to be asked to do something like that! So I went along and they asked me to do an audition. This would have been in 1976. I carried on doing it till 1984!"

Does Chris believe that there is a place today for a series like Survivors? "I think there is. There is a serious lack of variety today. There are plenty of sit-coms but not much that is adventurous. For a while television, like radio before it, was rather paternal in that it was trying to educate you. It was rather cosy and I suppose we felt that the BBC belonged to us. It is now a much more distant thing and doesn't mean so much to people. If I were asked to do a new series of Survivors I would be very interested. I don't have any bad memories of the series. I enjoyed it immensely."