

**A Question & answer session for:
Stephen Dudley – John Millen in Survivors.**

Oct – Dec 2004

**With many thanks to Sue Dudley (Stephen's wife)
And to Andy & Rich.**

Question: 1.

I'd like to know what Stephen remembers about the series 3 episode "Reunion" principally because this episode required him to act more than any other and also whether he missed Tanya Ronder as a playmate during the final series?

Thanks and best wishes.

Andy Priestner.

1. I was at that happy age when boys are not really interested in girls. I think that Tanya may have missed the bright lights whereas I was very happy in the countryside. With relatively small parts in series 3 the recording was more disjointed for us, and I am sorry to say that I have very little recollection of Tanya's successor (no offence). We were much more involved in the earlier series.

I always read the whole script, but it was really only seeing the rushes or the episode on transmission that the whole thing came together, because things were frequently recorded out of sequence depending on which location was being used and who was needed. I do remember, though, thinking how harrowing it would be to suddenly discover, having finished grieving, that the mother you thought was dead is alive, and that the displacement and sense of betrayal would be devastating. I suppose that people who are adopted have to face this.

To become a craftsman, one must first be a journeyman, and apart from knowing your words and your cues the basic job of the actor is to put himself in the shoes of his character. I thought at the time, and increasingly with hindsight how emotionally honest the moral and ethical dilemmas were which lay at the heart of Survivors. Euthanasia, murder, polygamy, power, barter: the series challenged so many of the fundamental assumptions about life and societies that we take for granted.

Question 2:

Do you have any memories of working on the two Doom watch episodes you did as a very young child - another series on which your father served as a producer ?

Were you allowed to look at the whole of the Survivors scripts in which you appeared - or was some of the content seen as 'too grown up' for young eyes? Did that mean you were allowed to watch the series as it was transmitted in 1975-77?

How much guidance did you and Tanya Ronder get on your performance from the different directors - either in rehearsal or on location?

What did you think about your performance in the series - either at the time or since?

Where did your compulsory school lessons take place while you were filming - on location, at the hotel where you were staying, or somewhere else?

What are some of your happiest memories from your time on Survivors?

From Rich Cross

2. I have very clear recollections of Waiting for a knighthood, not least because I have always had a passion for wargaming and model soldiers! In fact manufacturers were moving at the time toward "white metal" rather than lead for the soldiers, and reducing the toxicity of paint, but as ever the big business of the petrol manufacturers were very far behind.

We now take such things as lead free petrol, recycling, biological weapons, plastic eating viruses in our stride, and a conscience about the Environment is normal rather than cranky, but Doomwatch was very much ahead of its time. Tomorrow the Rat remains one of my favourite episodes, not only because my father wrote it, and both he and my mother appeared in it as well, but because it has a compelling theme. (My father drives the car that overturns and my mother pushes the pram and screams as the rat emerges from the WC. Ever since she has always kept the lid down, she claims it is something to do with feng shui, but I am not so sure)

Animals do evolve, and we are now inventing heuristic machines, but we are only stewards of creation, not lords of it. Scientific advances must come with moral ownership. Interestingly I heard recently that scientists were successfully experimenting with using rats in search and rescue situations, and to detect explosives in hazardous situations instead of dogs which require to be accompanied by their handler. Perhaps we are not so far away from Rattus Sapiens?

Yes, I was always allowed to watch - and Wednesdays at ten past eight were sacrosanct. Survivors was a very adult programme in the proper sense of the word. The violence was horrible, but there was no swearing. The violence depicted was very shocking, but not so much in its goryness (especially by modern standards) but because of its implication, and what stands out is that sense of dread in things like Lights of London, the injustice in Law and order, and particularly Charles's uncertain fate in Mad Dog.

The directing styles varied with the characters and eccentricities of the directors, but I felt that they were, to a man clear and courteous, and took the trouble to explain what was needed. This was particularly important in drafty rehearsal rooms at Acton with nothing more than tape on the floor to delineate the set that we would encounter in the studio. There was a powerful creative tension, which was mostly positive, but I found it difficult, then to understand why some of the actors spent so much time arguing with the directors and changing their words!

On the whole I had the greater respect for those players who drew their inspiration for character development within the framework of the existing dynamic, rather than tried (frustrated directors perhaps) to press themselves into the limelight. Looking now at the magnificently intense and focused performances from Lucy and Charles, this really

strikes home. Caroline and Ian have spoken elsewhere about this and perhaps it is an alpa personality thing: Garrick and Irving are reported to have been very difficult to work with!

Looking back, I was very proud to have been a part of the series, and I hope I lived up to the standards of what was actually a very talented company. The presence of the children gave a context of community and an added poignancy, and there was quite a lot of "Jenny and John react in horror/surprise/delight" Looking at the episodes thirty years on, I don't think I need to feel embarrassed, although as I get balder I do look on my hair with wistful regret!

Most of our lessons were sufficiently far away from the action to be quiet, but not so far away that we weren't there when we were needed. The Lady who taught us (Miss Darleston) was actually one of the two proprietors/headmistresses I have particularly fond memories of Hampton Court, the house crumbling and damp and full of places to explore and intriguing junk. It is the sort of house one might fantasise about having, and I remember meeting a chap when I was at Cambridge whose family had bought the place. (His name might have been Hughes)

The people who lived at Callow Hill were wonderful, and I retain that romantic ideal that stuffy people do of those with the courage to be unconventional. I was lucky enough to see a lamb being born there, and that is a very happy memory. Perhaps my being so impressed with the location catering has something to do with my subsequent career in Logistics in the Navy! Certainly food is central to morale, and there is nothing better than a Bacon sandwich and a nice cup of tea in the bitter cold while it is still dark. The battenburg cake at teatime was just a bonus. It wasn't always cold and muddy (just often). I remember glorious Spring days too, and the scent of wisteria (which I love) can still transport me back thirty years where one whole wall of what was I think a derelict orangery was smothered in the vine.

Question 3:

Could you tell us what Terry; your father was really like? To the fans of Survivors, he was very much the creator of seasons 2 & 3 of this series, but so very little is known about him. To my knowledge, in addition to Survivors, he was involved in Dr Who, Doomwatch & All creatures great & small. Any others?

I felt your finest hour was in REUNION, which was filmed very near Brecon. For a very young actor, who I understand was not too keen to be in it at all, I felt you performed particularly well in that episode. Would you agree with that?

Do you have a favourite TV programme? Either modern, or all time? Or both!

Would you happen to know where the locations were that were used in the episode MANHUNT were? According to BBC records, this episode was made 17th - 23rd Feb. 1977; you were in this episode trying to turn the starting handle of some old tractor in one scene.

Thanks, Bob Meade.

3. There's a question and a half! Terry Dudley, I think the best way I can answer questions about Terry is in the article: (Below)

Stephen Dudley's thoughts on Survivors

"It is a long time since I thought about Survivors, and I am pondering the interesting questions, which Bob has sent me. It was a privilege to be part of it and to work with some very fine actors. I think back to a rather interesting time in my childhood with great affection. In seeing again episodes that I have not seen since they were originally transmitted, the memories flood back. For security reasons I am not web enabled at work and will have to read (and post) when I am on leave.

I was delighted that there is still so much interest in what was a visionary programme for its time, and can still speak to us about the fragile veneer of civilisation that overlays our animal needs and the triumph of hope and humanity. I am constantly struck with the fact that the clothes may be dated but the issues and dilemmas are not. Perhaps some of the most memorable episodes (Four Horsemen, Corn Dolly, Law and Order, Manhunt, Law of the Jungle) challenge our assumptions and wrong foot us into listening to our prejudice only to prove us wrong.

I will see what I can add to this website in terms of memory and material, but reading the transcript Carolyn's interview made me really sad. Terry Dudley died in 1988 after a long and courageous struggle with cancer and since he cannot now speak for himself I should. Good manners preclude my making public his side of the story after so long, but I am sorry that Carolyn feels so bitter -I suppose that accepting disappointments philosophically is part of growing up.

Terry Dudley could be challenging and demanding, but he was tortured by a perfectionist's obsession with the art of Television Drama. If he occasionally frustrated writers and directors with a long screwdriver it was because he had vision, not because he lacked it. One of the great surprises to me in seeing the "making of sections now included with so many DVDs is just how "lean manned" the production team was for Survivors. Terry opined at the time (and I now understand) that Drama was a Cinderella by comparison with Sport and current affairs. One of my abiding memories of visiting the studio for a later show was watching a grey haired lady marching on the spot in a cat tray full of gravel to produce the sound of a marching firing squad. The big business of the "Soap" was still in its infancy. Under these circumstances, the word "useless" seems a trifle harsh for a man whose television credits included: The First Lady, Doomwatch, Z Cars, The Regiment, Secret Army, All Creatures Great and Small, Doctor Who, To Serve Them All My Days, and Flesh and Blood.

Carolyn's exact phrase "an arrogant old stick in the mud" is probably not inaccurate, but Terry started in the hard school of weekly rep. He worked then and later with some of the most impressive actors in the business including Dame Thora Hird (who spoke at his memorial service), Robert Hardy and Bill Fraser to name but three who weren't in *Survivors*. What he demanded from his actors is summed up in Hamlet's advice to the players in Act 3 sc ii. This remains pretty good advice after nearly four hundred years. The paradox is that the self-awareness of the actor which enables him or her to "hold as it were a mirror up to nature" must submerge his own ego in the interest of the piece. That there should be a protagonist, even a hero is what the author intended: if there is a palpable star, then there has been a failure, you can, as he put it "see the cogs".

Terry's understanding of his art was predicated on "the willing suspension of disbelief" and demanded that nothing should detract from the telling of the story. My recollection of being on set was that he honoured (and bollocked) all equally from the actors to the grips and gaffers because the magic that was being created required the contribution of all. He demanded of actors that they were sober, punctual, knew their words and minimised disruption and delay. I suppose that is what he would call "professionalism" and his relationship with all his colleagues depended on how professional he perceived them to be. Indeed I believe that this was as palpable to him as a physical blow, and he almost never watched or attended amateur productions for this reason. This philosophy I understand in some part: my father's great love and fascination (greater even than cricket), was music. He saw actors' creativity in a very narrow sphere, but with enormous impact; like instruments in an orchestra. Why is it better to play a piece of music with a Stradivarius than a tinker's fiddle? Because with greatness there is a synergy, an amplification of colour and depth and richness. Theatre is ephemeral, it is a magic created with the audience and lost in the instant of its creation. Television is not the poor man's film, because it has something of the theatre's intimacy and Aristotelian unities, but it is lasting and therefore unforgiving. That *Survivors* is still compelling with its dreary sets and miserable muddiness without spacemen, fashion or fast cars is because it is drama in the true sense. We care about what happens to the characters; that is the result of good writing, powerful acting and taut direction.

It is quite possible that Terry was miserable because burdened with his wife, son and dog on location he was precluded from the fun and frolics necessary to relieve the tension after packed and stressful days, but I don't think so. Away from location I can remember him leaving home in the small hours to gain extra time at the editing suite. I can remember how passionate he was about his art and how difficult he was to please. Perhaps he only really achieved happiness when his work was broadcast and he saw that it was good.

I suppose some of this goes to explain despite my real and abiding love of theatre and the big and little screens, why I had to make my way elsewhere: I knew that I could never be more than average as an actor. The creative urge is addictive and destructive - the elation of succeeding is heady, but the bitterness of failure is hard indeed. I can never now watch moving pictures without deconstructing the directing, the writing and the acting, but to be any good it has got to be as important as breathing. Inspired by the teamwork of the amateur productions in which I took part at school and participation in the Field Gun runs (based on those that used to be run at the Royal Tournament but with slightly lighter

equipment and fewer broken bones in deference to the anxieties of our parents), I determined to join the Royal Navy.

In almost a polar opposite to acting, the profession of arms (and particularly the role of the leader in it) depends on cheating a team composed of individuals who are entirely themselves and exceed their own limitations purely by virtue of being subsumed into the team. Lives depend on it. There are no prima donnas in a storm at sea. The good leader supports, develops and acts as mentor and springboard for his people; there is no need to stroke egos, cajole, or plead. I have served at sea in five ships, including the first Gulf war as well as staff jobs in Portsmouth and Whitehall.

Did I learn anything from being in Survivors? Certainly. I learnt quite what a deal of hard work from a great many people is needed to fill that black screen with something worth watching; I learnt about professionalism and I learnt something that I was later to learn is by way of being an unofficial motto of the Royal Marines: eat when you can, sleep when you can; any fool can be uncomfortable.”

Stephen Dudley, Oct 2004.