

This is a complete transcript of the oral history interview with **Maxwell A. Kerr (CN 211, T1)** for the Billy Graham Center Archives. No spoken words which were recorded are omitted. In a very few cases, the transcribers could not understand what was said, in which case [unclear] was inserted. Also, grunts and verbal hesitations such as “ah” or “um” are usually omitted. Readers of this transcript should remember that this is a transcript of spoken English, which follows a different rhythm and even rule than written English.

. . . Three dots indicate an interruption or break in the train of thought within the sentence of the speaker.

. . . . Four dots indicate what the transcriber believes to be the end of an incomplete sentence.

( ) Word in parentheses are asides made by the speaker.

[ ] Words in brackets are comments made by the transcriber.

This transcript was created by Wayne D. Weber and Evan Koehn and was completed in May 2004.

**Please note:** This oral history interview expresses the personal memories and opinions of the interviewee and does not necessarily represent the views or policies of the Billy Graham Center Archives or Wheaton College.



**Collection 211, Tape 1. Oral history interview with Maxwell A. Kerr by Galen R. Wilson on April 7, 1982.**

**WILSON:** This is April the 6<sup>th</sup> 1982. We're here at the Billy Graham Center Archives with Max Kerr or Karr?

**KERR:** Kerr.

**WILSON:** Kerr.

**KERR:** Karr is the Scotch and Kerr is the Irish. I came from...my grandparents came from County Antrim, Ireland, so it's Kerr.

**WILSON:** All right. Kerr. And we're going to talk with him about his work in the film industry of the evangelical world, particularly with [C.O.] Baptista Films. Now the first thing I'd like to ask you about is...is your personal history: your background, your birth, your parents, your family, where you grew up and your early interest in films, etc.

**KERR:** Okay. I was born on January 1, 1912. A very cold January 1<sup>st</sup>. The doctor had to wade his way through the snow drifts to get in [and] help deliver me. And I was named Maxwell after the old Maxwell automobile. I really was because my parents had been saving to buy a runabout Maxwell and I came along and blew their bankroll. And they said I was going to be a runabout anyway, so I had to be their Maxwell. [Wilson laughs] And that's exactly how I got my name.

**WILSON:** Now were you born in Michigan?

**KERR:** Yes, I was. In...in Lenawee County on a farm. And I was not a Christian until I was married, about twenty-six. And we were, both my wife and I were born again under the ministry of Carl McIntire in Collingsworth, New Jersey.

**WILSON:** Indeed. Now were you in school there?

**KERR:** No, no, I was a young engineer.

**WILSON:** Or you were at his church?

**KERR:** No, I was a young engineer, just hired at RCA [Radio Corporation of America] and just married. And we decided we better start our married life by going to church. We went down the street looking for a church and here's a young man all dressed up in white linen, a nice summer afternoon, and he smiled and greeted up very nicely. And we thought he must be the head usher so we'll follow him into church. And suddenly appeared on the platform preaching, that was Carl McIntire.

**WILSON:** Oh.

**KERR:** And....

**WILSON:** Now, year would that have been?

**KERR:** That would be 1937.

**WILSON:** That was right after his break with the Presbyterian Church.

**KERR:** No, just before...just before. We were in the old stone church and that fall they made it plain very plainly that he and others on trial before New Jersey Synod or the New Jersey Presbytery, I guess, Presbyterian Church, USA. And that he made plain to us that he was the only one that really had to vacate the church. But he...he...those who believed in the position he had taken and that the Independent Board of Presbyterian Foreign Missions had taken were...would be interested in following him out because they were going out to set up a tent and build a new tabernacle. Yes, they had to give up the old building. He had to go out. The people didn't have to, they could stay. Now there were about twelve hundred people in that final audience that night and he had the benediction out on the lawn. There were eleven hundred fifty people out on the lawn and forty-seven left in the church. We went out and worshiped in a tent from...and then later the tabernacle was built.

**WILSON:** Now, did the church property remain with the Presbyterian church?

**KERR:** Yes, that was the rule [unclear] was the denomination, it did not belong to the people who furnished and bought it. It belonged to the Presbytery. And that's one of the things in the Bible Presbyterian church that made sure of that Bible Presbyterian people, [the] local congregation, had control of their own property and could not be taken away by any presbytery, much like the Baptist.

**WILSON:** Now, are you folks members of the Bible Presbyterian...?

**KERR:** We were. Born again in that denomination. We were members of it for some years. But I being an engineer moved around considerably and we couldn't always find a Bible Presbyterian church. We were always hunting for a Bible believing, Bible teaching church and it was various denominations. In fact...we have five children, three of them are missionaries and one is a pastor. And every one of them, the missionary children, are under a different board. And the pastor is under [laughs] a different denomination. So....

**WILSON:** Well, now have you kept up with Dr. McIntire's ministry over the years?

**KERR:** We did for quite a while but I sort of felt the he got a little too political and a little too...a little too critical of other parts of the Evangelical community. And we didn't really pursue it that much in later years.

**WILSON:** What about his...what about his style?



**KERR:** Of delivery and his doctrine?

**WILSON:** What...what attracted you to him in the first place?

**KERR:** Well, in the first place most people know him through *The Christian Beacon*....

**WILSON:** Right.

**KERR:** ...which was his spokes-piece...for his fighting the issues.

**WILSON:** Right.

**KERR:** But personally, and in the pulpit, he was a really great Bible expositor and a very kind-hearted man. And that's what really won [us] to him. And his...his elders, for instance, were very patient with us in explaining points we didn't understand about the Bible and about the Christian life and the way of salvation and why salvation was necessary. And that really convinced us. Now we'd had witnesses before, now I went...it says here [list of interview questions Kerr had been given] where did I get my education? Well, I'm a graduate of Michigan State University in engineering and....

**WILSON:** In Lansing?

**KERR:** Yes. And during my junior year I roomed with Paul Deconing [sp?] in his senior year. Now Paul Deconing has significance in that he and another man were drowned on Lake Superior or Lake Michigan during a storm at the end of a summer camp where he was a...one of the counselors. And at Trinity Church in East Lansing, Michigan, they have a chapel named in his honor. But Paul was the one who really was most effective in witnessing to me because we would study till wee small hours of the morning to keep up with our studies and I was working outside to help earn my way through. I'd be dog tired and he would be too and I'd tumble into bed but he would get down on his...he'd read his Bible and get down on his knees and pray and I said, "How does he get the strength for that, what...what makes him do that when we're so tired." And that really had a decided influence on me. And he would witness to me and seek to try to get me to go to his church. But my parents died when I was young. My father when I was seven, my mother when I was twelve, and I was raised by an aunt and uncle in high school. And every time, ever since I was seventeen I was out on my own, earning my own way including getting through college. Well, it didn't lead to a Christian life until all these later years. But I...I say Paul Deconing was the one who was primary witness to me, in leading me to the Lord. Now we've had...I've had interest in films ever since [I was] a little boy. Now I...my interest in contact with the film industry, both exhibiting and equipment design, and motion picture production and various facets of it goes back over fifty years. Now, I'll give you a little idea of what that means. I can remember as a little boy going to the county fair and seeing a tent where they were showing these newfangled movies. And I was more interested in the equipment and the projection operation than I was in the picture. So I wanted to go to the outside of the tent where they were projecting through a hole in the flap and here was a booth on top of a truck, and here was a man hand-cranking a motion picture projector with a 35mm roll of film at the top and a bag for collecting the film at the bottom, no take-up reel.



**WILSON:** Wow.

**KERR:** And off to the side was a gasoline driven generator to run the arc light for showing the picture. And that was the earliest contact I remember with motion pictures.

**WILSON:** Now about what year would that have been?

**KERR:** That would have been about 1918 or '19. And that was nitrate film. If it ever caught on fire it'd been a terrible fire [laughs].

**WILSON:** Oh boy. [Kerr laughs] Now this would have been secular....

**KERR:** Yes.

**WILSON:** ...film.

**KERR:** Yes. And then later, in later years when I was in high school, [rubs against microphone] and I began...continued my interest and there was a little theater in Brooklyn, Michigan, I remember learning how to run that projector, and being so interested in watching the machinery go around. I can remember when I helped install the first sound equipment that theater had, and there was sound on disc, the old Vitaphone system. And that would have been about 1929. And the...the large turn table, sixteen inch disks, was geared directly to the projector and they were both driven by a common motor. Now, in order to set up a reel for projection you first had to set the disk in position and put the needle in a little lead in groove with an arrowhead that went through the spot where you set down the needle. And you went over the projector and threaded the film until you came to a "start frame" marked "start" and it had to be right in the gate, otherwise everything wouldn't be synchronized. And if anybody had broken the film and spliced it without putting an equivalent frames of black film, you were in trouble because it threw off the synchronization. If during the playing of the record the needle jumped a groove, you were in trouble. And sometimes some very comical things happened, like a dialogue between a man and a woman who jumped a groove, and the man's lips moving a woman's voice and a woman's lips moving a man's voice, very comical in a very serious scene. Sometimes we had to stop, rewind and start all over again. Now this didn't last too long because sound on film finally got to the point where everybody had to adopt. It was good enough then in quality to use. That must have been in the early 1930s.

**WILSON:** Now, what kind of sound was in *The Jazz Singer*?

**KERR:** That was sound on record.

**WILSON:** Okay.

**KERR:** That was Al Jolson. That was the first sound motion picture. And I can remember that little theater in Brooklyn, in the beginning they had silent features, and once in a while a sound short...a sound-type short, maybe one or two reel short with sound. That was our introduction to sound motion pictures. It goes back that far. Now talking about disks, and disk recording. Those



big sixteen inch transcriptions for motion pictures were later adopted by the broadcast industry and where those transcriptions were used for so many years in radio broadcasting. And [bumps microphone] I can remember during recording work. When I went to college I worked for the buildings and grounds department, and did recording work, for them among other things. And we had a disk recorder. I'll make a little comparison for you, those days, 78 rpm (the old 78 rpm records), ninety-six lines to the inch. And in recent years, in connection with one work in development I also had responsibility for a thing called a documenter, which recorded continuously everything that a radio station puts out, for legal protection purposes. And I recorded on one...on both sides of a thin nine inch disk at 2 rpm and 750 lines an inch. Twelve hours on a side or twenty-four hours total. And that's just a little insight into disk recording. But Christian influences? Not only Paul Deconing, but others. I told you about the elders in particular at the Bible Presbyterian Church in Collingswood. I remember one man who was a carpenter, and he had big gnarled hands, hard-working man, but he knew his Bible and he patiently would answer the questions and explain very carefully. And he had a decided influence on me. Now, when we come to Baptista Films, [pauses] after I was born again in 1937, being interested in motion pictures and feeling that they could be effective in spreading the gospel, I looked around at various kinds of films that were being offered in that area. Most of them, from most of the companies, would do what I call...they'd stop at the point of expediency. They wouldn't give the full gospel, they wouldn't commit themselves to the salvation message, and they wouldn't always be true to the Bible. And I could detect that and it bothered me. But I found out that the Baptista films really were true to the Bible. They had a lot of technical flaws. They had a number of acting and technical needs, that needed to be met....

**WILSON:** How many companies were there at that period of time that were producing...

**KERR:** Not...not...

**WILSON:** ...Christian films?

**KERR:** Not too many, but....

**WILSON:** Who were some of them?

**KERR:** Well, Cathedral Films was one of them, and I'm trying to think of some of the others. I don't know whether Family Films was going then or not. But there weren't too many. But Baptista really was a pioneer in the gospel film field. I remember in...we own now, most of the Baptista Films, including the originals.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh. Now "we" means you and Mrs. Kerr?

**KERR:** Yes, Ada-Max Audio Visual, as we call ourselves. She's Ada and I'm Max. But anyway, we got those because they were about to be thrown out of the building, because nobody would take them and work with them.

**WILSON:** Now is the building in Wheaton, you said?

**KERR:** In Wheaton.

**WILSON:** Where was that building?

**KERR:** That was located down near the electric line, way down near on West side of the city, and I've forgotten the name of the str...Sunnyside Avenue, I believe it is. And that's where we moved out from Chicago. I first became connected officially with Baptista Films when they were in a building in Chicago. And I'd come to the point of feeling that they needed technical help of the kind I could give and the gospel message was there. And it was worth doing a little missionary work of my own and so I left my engineering job. We also had relatives in Michigan, my wife's father was ill, we needed to be closer to them. So I came and my salary went in half. [laughs] Nevertheless we were able to straighten out their equipment and get much better sound recording and other things that were needed. Now, along the way, not only did we record and do work on new films, but we did quite a bit of re-editing and building new soundtracks for some of the older films. And that produced a number of...of improvements in the films and gave a number of them a new lease on life.

**WILSON:** Now how do you do a new soundtrack, for a....

**KERR:** For an older film?

**WILSON:** Yeah, I mean, if you're...how can you do it without the voices of the people?

**KERR:** Well, I'll give an example. *The Man Who Forgot God* [Collection 225, F34].

**WILSON:** Okay.

**KERR:** It was one of their best evangelistic films. It was about thirty minutes long and it had fourteen character voices in it. Mostly...and some of it was straight narration, some of it was lip sync acting and so forth. It had its sound track, who's quality was not good because they were using a home-made recorder. They didn't have the professional 16mm recorders then that they have now. I say, "home-made," they'd been developed in Chicago at Baptista and some others. It had some distortions in it.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh. Now what year would that have originally been produced?

**KERR:** I'm trying to remember. That would have been produced about 1944...45. [1943] And when I came there, it was a popular [rubs against microphone] film, but people didn't like the distortion and the soundtrack. And I felt we could reconstruct that whole thing. And we did. I in fact, my voice is on there as one of the characters. They always gave me the nasty parts! [laughs] But in any event, we post-lip-synched every voice, it's called looping in the motion picture field. And you make the dialogue up in logical loops from the script, and you set...you get your people up and you get them in...you have a head phone on so they're listening to the old dialogue. And they get in step with it, and you'd coach them on how to get the emphasis and if it's a walking shot they've got to move up and down, jar their voice a little as they walk and the other things to get

natural sounds in the voice. And you go round and round the loop. Finally when they're good enough you start recording and somewhere in one of those loops you'll find what your after, so that's what you edit into a new voice track. Then you may have to edit an entirely new (and usually do) an entirely new music and sound effects track. And all these sound effects have to be carefully synchronized to action in the film. They have to be natural,...

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** ...and build it up very carefully. Then you mix the two together and make a composite and from that you can make what we call a printing negative of the new soundtrack. Now you then take the old film, and you may have done a little re-editing on it to get the pace up to where it ought to be and the timing where it ought to be. And from that you can make new release prints. Now that was done on several films. Talking about sound effects, and the important part they play, I think the most important application of sound effects is in animated films. Now I'll use one example, of which you already have a copy in your library, and that's *Higher Flight*. [Collection 225, FS18] Little airplanes, and things that fly around and talk and do things, and we had to build every single bit of that up artificially. The voices, the sound effects, the music. Now Doug Fisher, who was an organist, worked up the music track and played it on a Hammond organ that used to be down in the...down in the studio there, for that kind of purpose.

**WILSON:** Now how do you...you said build it up artificially, how do you mean arti....

**KERR:** You build it up section by section, along the...and I remember, if you want to know who the voice of the littlest airplane is, the little propeller driven airplane?

**WILSON:** Sure!

**KERR:** Alright, that is Marge Cannon.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** She's the sister of Edi...Edith Story.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** And she had a childlike quality of voice that we were after, so we used her for the little airplane's voice. [Laughs] And I remember the airplane had to have a propeller driven noise.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** And so I rigged up a little cardboard propeller, and I had to have some noise out of it, so I used...I...a little propeller, and I used a little piece of cardboard I rubbed against it and I would control the speed of it electrically, a little electric motor driven. You had to synchronize all that, with the loop action of the motion that you see on the screen. I remember certain places



where...well, we had the jet plane. There's a jet and there's the little propeller driven plane, and the jet plane is always kind of boisterously leading the other one in escapades [laughs].

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** And they go out one night and they have to fly down into the city and they finally fly into a building and down through the basement and up through a hallway. Well, the natural thing you would hear in a building is some reverberant sound, as compared with outside sound, that's quite different.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** So you have to add that artificially, you have to add all of those things, and anticipate them from the scene and build them up. And having li...I remember one place, he had to hurry back and get it on the shelf before his master came in, the young boy who owned him, and built him. So he flew back on the shelf and skidded to a stop along on his nose. Well, how do you get a skidding sound that's comical?

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** You experiment...the thing that finally worked was skidding the end of an eraser on a pencil along a glass plate after you'd wet the plate a little so it would stutter. And that made the kind of sound we were after. And they had a little model airplane they built up with a gasoline engine. And he...he tries his first flight, and it...it goes up in the air and flies and starts spitting, and balking, and finally stalls and crashes and burns.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** Now, how do you build up all of those sounds? Well I remember we got...I think Jimmy Baptista (who was the son of Mr. Baptista) and one of his friends to come over with their model airplanes and we ran a mike card out the window and they ran that little airplane motor [Wilson laughs] various ways until I got what I wanted. And then we edit that into the soundtrack to make the stuttering and things where we want them.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** Now how do you get the sound of the crash and the flames? Well, we finally found out that we could take a strawberry box and smash it into something that sounded like a little airplane crashing.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** And then the flames, you take ordinary cellophane and crinkle it around near the microphone, and there's the flame noise [laughs]. So you do these sort of things to build up those

things in a natural way. And the more completely you build up sound effects like that, the more realistic the animation becomes.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** It's very important to animated pictures.

**WILSON:** Now, did you do similar types of things with *The Pilgrim's Progress*? [Collection 225, F48]

**KERR:** Yes, yes. Although at that time they...I was new, and they were afraid to turn me loose and let me do all that I wanted to do [laughs]. It wasn't till later years when we owned the picture and it was redone that we were able to add many of the sound effects that we wanted.

**WILSON:** What...what kind of sound effects...

**KERR:** Well,

**WILSON:** ...went on that, and how did you achieve them?

**KERR:** I remember where Pilgrim and [pauses] Pliable. Pliable's eager he just joined Pilgrim and he's eager to go, and they rush off and fall right into the Slough of Despond,...

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** ...a big splash, a big muddy slough. Well, it's easy enough to make splash noises and experiment around until and you get the sound you want. You rerec...you record and rerecord and reverse different kind of splash sounds and then you pick out the ones that sound like what you ought to use. And I've forgotten some of the other effects. [Pauses] We had the...originally had to have a voice of Apollyon, a deep roaring voice,...

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** ...which we had. They changed that later but originally we brought a man who had a deep voice and would roar, and we...we got him to roar the port out, the part out and then we slowed down the tape, and rerecorded it so that it'd be even deeper pitch and matched it up to the film. And so there are a whole variety of tricks that you could use to get sometimes comical, but in this case very natural sounding sound effects.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** Now if you want to hear some of the best sound effect work I've seen from a gospel group, or Christian group, look at some of the later Tell-N-See audio visual, which are filmstrips with sound on tape. But they really did a lot with the sound effects...

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** ...in those and the music. Now a little bit about Baptista Films. Mr. Baptista was a pioneer, and I think it's also fair to say that he was a self-centered pioneer in that it had to be his idea. You didn't get too far with another idea unless you could [rubs against microphone] persuade him that it was partly his or that it was worth trying. And I use an example, the fact that in...we had been making sermon films.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** And his idea was that all you had to do was have the pastor stand up and preach the sermon and that was it, you didn't need much illustration [rubs against microphone]. And I can....

**WILSON:** You mean like with one camera?

**KERR:** Yes, well it was two, to get a variety...

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** ...of shots. But always a talking half-length view or a talking head and things like that, which is one of the common mistakes made in videotaping today. You focus on the person but you never get around to showing some of the things he's talking about,...

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** ...the illustrations he talks about. Well, I felt we had to do much more and so did the others. Because it was a motion picture media and we should have a lot more freedom to do, and ought to do, much more than you can do just from a pastor peaching from the pulpit.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** One of the reasons you do that is to relieve the eye situation. Because if you hold the same view for too long the eye becomes fatigued, and they lose interest. So, how to get variety? Well, some of the sermons they were dramatizing, in their voices and their monologue some of the things that happened to them in their evangelistic efforts. And I remember one example was Dr. Bill Rice and he was telling about an airplane ride that he had, and what an escapade it was, in getting to an engagement. So we got some shots, close-up shots of people in airplanes, and tried to reenact for the camera, something to go along with his dialogue. And then other times, he talked about talking to somebody at an evangelistic meeting and the questions they would ask and his answers and so forth. So we would get him and somebody representative of the other person to lip synch their visual actions to his voice telling about the story.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** Now we did that in another way in another film, *Charge That to My Account*, [Collection 225, V5] which is on the book of Philemon by...and used Dr. Ironside. And he had such a very good monologue on what it must have been like. I imagine particularly...I remember particularly how he really dramatized the return of the runaway slave to the house of Philemon and his wife. And a young preacher named Marcipus [sp?] who was in the house. And he did it so well, and he went through the kind of little discussion that might have gone on between Philemon and the runaway slave returning with a letter from Paul. Now his wife is talking about where they should they put him, and...and what should they do, and Philemon say, well, look what Paul says, he wants us to treat him like we would Paul, so we've gotta put him up in the guest room. [Laughs] And I'd had the idea from a secular motion picture series I'd seen years ago, the Pete Smith series. In which he'd used to do that. He'd insert his voice, lip-sync to some of the characters on the screen.

**WILSON:** Oh, right.

**KERR:** And I thought, well let's do that in reverse, we'll get the characters to lip-sync to...to Dr. Ironside's voice. And so that's what we did. And we got the character's costumes and so forth, we hunted for a house on the west side of Wheaton, beyond the railroad track, that had some [train passes by] Eastern type architect, pillars, and we plot...hunted for camera angles that would keep out the telephone lines and any of the modern features [Wilson laughs] and certainly any automobiles. You had to shoot and...and keep it ancient. And then we hid a loud speaker in the bushes up near the actors, actresses and we had loops of film. We'd go around and round until they could mimic, and do...go through the actions. We'd coach them in their actions, we'd film it loop by loop. And you edit that together.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** And it gives you the dramatization that was needed. And again in modern videotaping, one of the common mistakes by Christians and others in going into motion picture or videotaping is they think all you have to do is film the person doing what they normally do,...

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** ...stand up and talk. It makes a very poor motion picture or video tape.

**WILSON:** Dull one.

**KERR:** You've got to do more than that, you've got to do much, much more than that.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** It's been tried in education, and many other fields and it's almost always failed [rubs against microphone]. So, one of the things to remember is, reenact and dramatize and film what (or videotape) what they're talking about.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** Not them, but what they're talking about. And what kind of interrelation they might have. And redramatize...

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** ...it with good characters and so forth.

**WILSON:** Was Mr. Baptista often dragging his feet on things like this, or...

**KERR:** Well, it took a lot of persuasion to get him...

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** ...to let us to do it...let us do it. He wanted to have a very simple set up so he could get these pastors in. Many of them came to Wheaton College to the chapel to speak. They'd...they'd come to him, and "I've got a real good sermon I want to get it on film," and he would listen, and first thing you know we were making a film without knowing anything about what they were going to do. That was another thing that I almost got in trouble on, I said, "If we only knew something beforehand, about what they were going to talk about and...and the kind of illustrations they were going to use, we could get much better camera angles, and much better inserts shot afterward against that." He didn't think that was necessary. But we did, and I remember one film, where we had a little incident in witnessing we were dramatizing. And the evangelist was trying to persuade two men to listen to him, and the gospel. And I was one of the men, who was acting the part of the...the...we were supposed to be waiting at a train platform, for a train. So we went over here to the inter-urban station and got all set up for it, we worked out the scene, and I went over and the cameraman had the camera all set up. And I looked in the viewfinder, it had us in the viewfinder but nothing else! Not a bit of evidence of any train station. So I asked him why did we go over there to film it. You've got to pay attention to the background,...

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** ...and so forth, and put...put it in for a purpose,...

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** ...make a natural setting of it, such as people might expect. So there are a lot of little details that you have to do. Now we did a fair amount of that kind of work. We did a pioneering work on a very low budget.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** We always were pressed for funds.

**WILSON:** How low is low?

**KERR:** Well, if I remember right, my salary was seventy-five dollars a month or something like that or maybe...or maybe it was seventy-five dollars a week before I got done. But that was one of the highest salaries there.

**WILSON:** Now, what...what time frame are we talking about?

**KERR:** This would have been in the 194...40s, '47 to '49. And I remember [rubs against microphone] that some of the animators and others weren't getting that much.

**WILSON:** You mean the fellows who drew the animation?

**KERR:** And they had a full...one of the first full-fledged animation departments in any Christian film organization.

**WILSON:** Why would an animator work for Mr. Baptista with those wages when he could go out to Hollywood and do...?

**KERR:** Well, the same reason I left to go to an engineering job, and went to half salary.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** Because they needed the help and they really wanted the gospel in the films, and we felt that the films had an important role to play. Now I'll show you another example of how important they were in that way. We had formed, in the company there, a gospel team, about five of us. And we would go out with a little program, which included some of their films, and our own witness, and our own testimony, and then a salvation appeal. And we were being received in various churches and various groups. Well, along the way a young lady came and wanted to work at Baptista Films.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** It turns out that she went to a Mennonite church in Chicago, with a young pastor who was dead set against films in any way. He just wouldn't have a film in his church for any reason, he said. It was of the devil.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** And there was an older pastor, who had retired...tired, and he said,...

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** ...“Well, now wait a minute, let's check it out and see.”

**WILSON:** An older Mennonite pastor?

**KERR:** Older Mennonite pastor who had retired from that church. So they came out and checked this out officially,...

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** ...for the young lady and her...her mother. And the older pastor gave us a clean bill of slate, and the young lady came to work for us. Well, she got so enthusiastic about the film and the work and this gospel team that she wanted to have our team in their church. And this immediately was a conflict for the young Mennonite pastor. He said, "I don't want them in the auditorium for any reason, and they're not going to have anything to do with those films." Well, they finally persuaded him to let us have a service on a Friday evening in their basement. Well, the young people advertised it like mad. Well it turned out there was a street gang of boys in the neighborhood, and they saw this advertisement and they thought they'd go to it just for a lark.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** And it really was a street gang. And we showed two or three films, we had our testimonies, we had some music and we gave our salvation appeal, and fourteen of those young people came forward. So many that we didn't know quite know how to handle it. There were three young ladies from Moody Bible Institute who were there, who came up and helped us. I think we would have been [laughs] swamped. But afterward the young pastor was so sure the films couldn't be that useful. He said. "We're going to have a confirmation class, we're going to check them out to see whether this is really real or not. Whether their salvation and acceptance of the gospel is real or not, accepting Christ as Lord and Savior."

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** So he went through that a whole rigmarole with them for several weeks and twelve of them came through beautifully. And then he was so convinced that it was real, that he came back to us and apologized and wanted to have us in a public service and a public apology in his auditorium. And we said, "No, the gospel had been...done it's work, and we were blessed by it and so forth, and there's no point in doing the other work." But this shows how dead set some pastors were...

**WILSON:** Sure.

**KERR:** ...against any part of the motion picture industry in their church.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** And I could remember an eastern pastor, an older pastor who was determined that he would not have any kind of a film in his church.

**WILSON:** One question here. Where...where exactly was this Mennonite church?

**KERR:** I've forgotten where it was in Chicago, but it was in downtown Chicago.

**WILSON:** In the inner city?

**KERR:** Not way downtown, but about halfway into the city.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh. Okay.

**KERR:** But now in...in Chester, Pennsylvania, there was an older pastor who had a very successful summer Bible program for young people, and...and Sunday School lessons and so forth, of the type they had originated, but he was dead set against motion pictures in any form. But I had the privilege of showing him in his office one of the Baptista films. And I sat in back of him and watched his face and his reactions during the showing and I watched him do an about-face during that showing...

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** ...and really decide maybe they could be used and they were useful. And...and really, it was quite an encouragement to me and I thought, well it was worthwhile for several of us, as we were doing to make the sacrifices to keep this organization going,...

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** ...and try to get the quality into it that was needed also.

**WILSON:** How...how had Mr. Baptista gotten started, do you ...

**KERR:** Well actually,...

**WILSON:** ...do you know that?

**KERR:** ...yes. Originally he had been an exporter of pianos and DeVry motion picture equipment, and he'd built up an export build...business. And he'd come from a South American country, I've forgotten which one. Ecuador, something like that. And one of the ways of understanding Mr. Baptista is to understand the macho attitude of the...

**WILSON:** The Latin America.

**KERR:** ...Latin American. And it was very much bred into him. And that's why he was determined that he was going to be the authority and decide what was done or what wasn't in each case. But nevertheless, he got...he sold pianos by mail. Now that's a hard job to do, but he did it. [Laughs] He built up an export business. And then he got connected with DeVry Corporation, the portable 35mm projectors. He got interested in the motion picture things, and he began to build educational films.



**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** For instance he produced for the Chicago schools some Spanish language training films.

**WILSON:** Now that would have been a long time ago?

**KERR:** Yes it would. And in fact I have one of them. And I've given it to the archives. And it's called *Buenos Dies, Carmelita*. [Collection 225, F6] Go look that up, and that's one of the Spanish language training films produced by Baptista for the Chicago...

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** ...School Board. Well....

**WILSON:** Now, does that predate Baptista Films, per se?

**KERR:** Predates the gospel films.

**WILSON:** Okay.

**KERR:** But he built up [rubs against microphone] the film producing business when he was a Christian and he was such an earnest Christian, and he was a real soul winner, he really was. That he gradually convinced himself that he should go into the gospel film making business. And he tried a trial balloon film. And I think the title of it is [pauses] let's see, the *Story of a Fountain Pen*. [Collection 225, F52] And a very simple illustration of the fountain pen with the gospel related to it. And I've forgotten who told the story, or whether he did or someone else. But that was probably one of the original gospel films. Perhaps the original one.

**WILSON:** Now this is "small g" gospel films,...

**KERR:** Yes.

**WILSON:** ... not to be confused with the company called Gospel Films.

**KERR:** Yes, that's right [rubs against microphone].

**WILSON:** Okay.

**KERR:** When I say gospel films...evangelical Christian films.

**WILSON:** Okay. What was the date on *Story of a Fountain Pen*?

**KERR:** About 1940. Now another thing that happened...even earlier, I'm not sure, maybe 1939. But one of the things that really exasperated him...he had built up a gospel film business [pauses] and it was beginning to thrive and he needed projectors. He use to sell projectors to people. And

one of the ways he would sell projectors to Christians was to give them a discount on the projector if they bought some of the films along with it. He'd like to give them a package price.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** So, then, along came World War II and the federal government was rationing everything and they said, "No more projectors to Christian organizations, we've got to have them all for the military." Even businesses couldn't get them like you would. And...and he was being cut off on sources of film for making motion pictures and so forth. So it made him so exasperated that he prayed about it he and he said, "The Lord led him to feel, well we're going to develop our own projector and we're not going to be tied to someone else supplying us with projectors." And that was the beginning of the Miracle Sound Motion Picture Projector. Now I was an engineer at RCA [Radio Corporation of America] at the time but was helping him at a distance in various ways.

**WILSON:** Now this was New Jersey that you were...

**KERR:** Yes.

**WILSON:** ...still living?

**KERR:** And I...an engineer had come from Bell and Howell, a very good engineer, Steven Platt. And was a cracker-jack of a mechanical engineer. And he had ideas and Mr. Baptista provided...got funding one way or the other and they set up a development shop. This was still in Chicago and Steven Platt developed the projector and it had a unusual feature. It had a sprocket type intermittent, not the usual claw type. And a very quiet type intermittent and fast pull down time, so that the net result was more light to the screen than most any other projector on the market at the time and a quieter operation and fewer parts. And it was really an advance design of projector but it had to have sound equipment. Well, I in my attic in New Jersey designed a sound system.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** And also in later years when I was here helped develop a stabilizing method that gave further improvement in the stability of the travel of the film so that you get high fidelity sound out of it.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** So then there was a Miracle I and Miracle II Projector and they almost hand-made quite a few of those and sold them. And I still have one. I have a Miracle II and I had Miracle I but I sold it to...for low cost to a group in California who are pioneering church planting and mission...church...I've forgotten the name of it, but in anyway it sits on display in their office today because the man knew about that projector and wanted one of them.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh. How long were those produced?

**KERR:** Well, let's see. The first one came out [pauses] let's see I came to Baptista in December 1946. They were just about ready to go then. So the Miracle I came out in the early part of 1947. Maybe a little earlier I don't just remember. It will tell in some of their *Hitherto Hath the Lord Led Us* booklets [Collection 225, box 1, folders 5-7] that he use to put out yearly. And then after they got a number of Miracle I's out later the design was improved and Miracle II was brought out. Now some time later when the motion projectors were so costly to build that way they couldn't keep on and it was robbing funds from the film production. A number of us felt that the big emergency in getting projectors was over. He ought to just sell that design to companies that wanted to buy it, including Bell and Howell, but he wouldn't sell. He should have sold that and concentrated on film production of the gospel type because very few producers were then able to do what he and the group were able to do. He couldn't see it that way and he hung on too long and finally sold it to a small company that didn't do well with it. But...

**WILSON:** By selling you mean he sold the patent?

**KERR:** Sold the patents [rubs against microphone] and the design and the machinery for producing the critical parts and so forth. They produced a few projectors and they wouldn't listen to what the requirements were on the criticality of the sprocket driver [?] and the intermittent for instance and tried to cheapen it and so forth and it just didn't work out.

**WILSON:** What company was that, do you remember?

**KERR:** I don't right now. But they're...they moved from here to Florida afterwards. I could look it up but I don't remember the name now. Sometime later, I've forgotten, it must have been in the '50s somewhere [pauses] after I have left Baptista Films...in '49 I left Baptista Films to teach at Wheaton College. Now one of the reasons I came was I felt that in a college such as this they should have some advance work in motion picture and audio visual production.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** They had a basic class for education majors, which was primarily how to use the hardware and what to do with it.

**WILSON:** How to thread the machine.

**KERR:** Yes, but I felt [rubs against microphone] that they needed to know something about producing these,...

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** ...because I felt that Christian college ought to be in the producing end of some of these things. Some of the students ought to be trained in it.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** I guess I was before my time. It fell on deaf ears. I never was able to do much about that in the college here.

**WILSON:** Whose ears in particular were deaf?

**KERR:** Dr. [V. Raymond] Edman's [president of Wheaton College] for one [laughs] and Dean [John] Fadenrecht for another. And it was just too soon, too early for them.

**WILSON:** Do you remember particular interviews you had with them trying to get it across...

**KERR:** Well...

**WILSON:** ...and their reception of it?

**KERR:** Yes, I do. I remember putting on my application and it just got brushed off.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** But they did want somebody to teach in the physics department and so I became an instructor there. And I remember one other...because I was teaching part-time and still working at Baptista part-time, I came first as a visiting instructor with a limited number of credit hours. Then when I cut loose from Baptista and was teaching full-time and moved up to fourteen credit hours of teaching they still listed me as a visiting instructor. And I kept thinking. "When do I stop being a visiting instructor [laughs] and become full-time." But that's an incident. But in any event now in later years at Baptista Films the motion picture production costs and the projector production costs were so high that they had to abandon that kind of work. They went to the filmstrip.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** But they had an animation department that understood action and dynamics so well and the sound department too. They adopted a form of filmstrip that required a lot more frames and a lot more action shots in the frames than the usual filmstrip. And they were very expert on the sound track. You see that in the Tel-N-See productions. And in the action shot choices.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** And the first one had an average of one picture every three seconds.

**WILSON:** Oh, my.

**KERR:** And they have copies of those today.

**WILSON:** Now, what...about what year did...did Baptista quit producing motion pictures and go to the....

**KERR:** I suspect it was about 1955...

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** ...or between '55 and '60, I'm not sure of the date. Edith Story probably could tell you. But in any event, they decided that they were going to have what I call an odd ball size filmstrip, in that they found out they could adapt motion picture printer, which they owned, and print filmstrips in what we call double frames, double sixteen.

**WILSON:** Okay.

**KERR:** And if you...and Tom Cannon...I mean Jim Cannon...

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** ...was also a cameraman for them and later formed his own company and that name Double Sixteen...

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** ...came from that original filmstrip.

**WILSON:** Now, is he related to Marjorie who is the little airplane?

**KERR:** Jim Cannon's wife is Marjorie.

**WILSON:** Okay, okay. [Kerr laughs] I'm with you.

**KERR:** Okay. So they had developed the projector and the filmstrip. They didn't have cameras. Well, I discovered a camera that was made over in...outside of Paris, France. That...by using upside down by persuading the manufacturer to advance two frames instead of three frames we could shoot filmstrips instead of individual film slides such as he was having people do.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** They were cutting them up and mounting them in slides afterward over there but we persuaded him, Baptista did, and with my help, so that we could advance two frames at a time and take a new picture and have it as a continuous filmstrip. And it would work in the projectors that they had developed and it could be printed on a motion picture printer. And it was a useful idea except in the market place it required a special projector. And the projector design was not that good and the light output was not that good from the smaller frame for larger audiences. And they had heat bulging and focusing problems, so that I think the projector design and the projector difficulties really helped to sink that effort. But they produced some remarkably good ones. And I have them [rubs against microphone] today including the original slides and tapes which were made and we're reworking them and reediting and putting them out with a study guide, in the form of program learning build in, and we'll have them out starting in September of this year, some of



them. They are going to be much more useful and in a standard form that people are used to today. 35mm filmstrips with cassette sound and automatic signals.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** Now they had such rapid fire action some places that you could not keep up with it manually.

**WILSON:** Oh.

**KERR:** You had to have an automatic system. And yet in the reediting, I've got it so arranged finally so you can, by being on your toes and following the cues that we give, do it manually and yet on the cassette tapes that we're going to release, you'll have both also the common signals systems also on the tapes. So either type of automatic equipment including the Dukane or the separate signal on the second tract systems and all work from the same cassette. Also we're...we've tested these ideas out on real audiences, we have sectionalized the filmstrips into sections with stopping points for review and questions and discussion along the way. This is a principle that comes straight out of programmed learning. So that will be a useful idea. Now Mr. Baptista, members of Mr. Baptista and his family [rubs against microphone] [reading from list of questions] Jimmy Baptista was the younger son, was always interested in airplanes. And later...and he went to engineering school and graduated in mechanical engineering. But in the 1952 [1950] revival here at Wheaton College on campus the 38 hour revival, Jimmy Baptista really dedicated himself to the Lord. And then he went into the Moody Bible Institute missionary aviation and radio training program. And really came into that work. [rubs against microphone] And he was first located in Central and South America. And I remember...he was so active in missionary aviation at the time [January 1956] the five young men were beheaded by the Auca [Huaorani] Indians, he was part one of the people that helped fly in and assemble the army helicopters...helicopter to go in and try to get the bodies out and find out what happened [tape skips] get the bodies out. Later he was also in New Guinea, Papua New Guinea, when the son Nelson Rockefeller disappeared [1961]...

**WILSON:** Oh, yeah!

**KERR:** ...and he helped hunt for him.

**WILSON:** Now, did he...was he associated with Mission Aviation Fellowship?

**KERR:** Yes, he was.

**WILSON:** Okay.

**KERR:** Not Mission Aviation Fellowship. Jungle Aviation and Radio Service which is an arm on Wycliffe translators now.

**WILSON:** Oh, okay, right.

**KERR:** Waxhaw [North Carolina, location of JAARS, formerly know as Jungle Aviation and Radio Service]

**WILSON:** JAARS

**KERR:** Yeah.

**WILSON:** Yes.

**KERR:** North Carolina [rubs against microphone]. Now in another incident with...directly related to Jimmy and to me. In Jimmy's work, mission aviation and radio. Remember that was the training course and still is...Moody Bible Institute has, aviation and radio. The need was apparent for missionaries who had to go back into the jungle and be on station, they had to have radio contact, regular periodic time. They had to have a very battery efficient radio. Well, transistors were just coming into play and I was at the Navy Department, Bureau of Ships and had been very active in the transistors field and receiving all kinds of development reports and trying to steer our branch in how we should integrate those into our usages onboard naval ships.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** We were living in Al...in...just outside of Falls Church, Virginia. Well, Jimmy and I knew each other from Baptista Film days. I knew what he was doing. He had a need in a...their field had a need in...they needed a very efficient transceiver. So Jimmy came to our house and stayed for a week and between us, we designed transceivers. And Jimmy built about twenty-eight of them. Very battery efficient transceivers with a wavelength and compactness and battery power savings that they needed. Now Bob Baptista, during the time I was teaching here, I think he was athletics coach, track...track coach here. If I understand correctly now he is vice-president at Trinity College [Illinois?]

**WILSON:** He was recently president of another college wasn't he?

**KERR:** President of Taylor University...

**WILSON:** Taylor.

**KERR:** ...in Upland, Indiana. That's a little history of the family. But if you want to know a little bit about the early life of Jimmy Baptista, look at the film *Higher Flight* [Collection 225, FS18]. The one I was telling you about with the character voices. Because much of that story is based on some things they observed and noticed in Jimmy Baptista's life.

**WILSON:** You mean "they" his parents?

**KERR:** No, people in the Baptista Film organization, in particular...

**WILSON:** Oh!

**KERR:** ...the animation camera operator. [Laughs] And among the other things that they did is build their own animation camera. Was two levels of oper...background and foreground scenes and animation in between. Advanced ideas that even [Walt] Disney was only really developing at that time...that we did a number of advanced thing.

**WILSON:** You mentioned in a letter once of a fellow who had done animation for Baptista that did go Hollywood [California].

**KERR:** Yes,...

**WILSON:** Now who was that?

**KERR:** he went to Disney. I can't remember his name but I think Edith Story would. But I can remember that one of the things that the animation people did, and we use to do it too. We would get Disney films and study them in the editing setup, see exactly how they did things. Then we developed some techniques, [rubs against microphone] they developed some techniques of their own. And this man went with some examples of his work including some in *Higher Flight* and was immediately hired by the Disney Studios. And later we thought we saw some evidence of some of his work in some of the films [laughs].

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** Some of the innovations that maybe we had a hand in developing. Another innovation that later became a standard practice in the motion picture industry that I've had a hand in. I told you about having to rebuild soundtracks, close lip-sync. Now one of the requirements the Baptista Film organization was that everybody including the actors had to be Christians, born-again Christians.

**WILSON:** Oh!

**KERR:** You could not have professional actors who were not Christians. That meant you had amateur actors. And the acting might not be that professional but the sincerity was there. [Wilson laughs] And you could believe...

**WILSON:** All right.

**KERR:** ...what the actors were doing because even they might be awkward in the flow of doing it it was still from the heart not just from the head. Well one of the problems in post lip-sync was get them started with their voice acting at the start of the phrase. You go around and around on how to get started exactly when the person speaks on the screen.

**WILSON:** Well, now are you talking about the person who...

**KERR:** Well, you've got an image.

**WILSON:** ...you're talking about the actor...



**KERR:** Well.

**WILSON:** ...doing the voice?

**KERR:** Voice actor is what we call post lip-sync or looping. Where you record new sound to go with already photographed live action.

**WILSON:** Okay. But, are you using the same person?

**KERR:** Yes.

**WILSON:** Okay.

**KERR:** Usually...sometimes...no, not necessarily, you can use entirely different people. But in any event, how you get them started exactly at the beginning of the sound. This was the common problem in the whole industry for that operation. Well I devised a way of putting a diagonal scratch on the film...certain advance of the soundtrack that all laid out on the stick and we could make these loops up with the scratch in and what you saw on the screen was a little white line that walked this way across the screen and when it hit the right hand border start speaking. It would be in the exact starting point for the sound. And I saw that later in television and on a motion picture that celebrated many of the older films and how they did it.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** And that was the adopted by the motion picture industry as a standard way of cuing in the actors. And I taught that idea to Teacher Dubbing Company in New York City in the 1950s. And I have the letters to prove it, including their "thank yous" for it. [Laughs] Now there is another one that came out now when I worked at RCA as a young engineer. One of the things that brought me in contact with Baptista Films was the... 'cause I was assigned to work on the RCA motion projectors, sixteen millimeter, in engineering. And there again we had a problem in which, again, I can say I had first, now it was a technical thing. But one of the problems in setting up a motion picture projector and getting everything aligned up with the sound is to get the sound optics in accurate focus. So you get good sharp, crisp sound. They're having trouble with that in the factory and the amplifiers with extra sensitivity would come through out of focus. They had enough volume, but it wouldn't be clear, and so forth. And so we had to have a new test method and I devised a way of taking what we called high frequency sound focusing film and reversing part of it so the emulsion was on the other side. As it went around the loop you'd have one side and the other coming scanning it and being scanned by the sound optics. And the prob...then the problem was to get it so you had equal signals from both sides.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** And then by having two frequencies and having a differential allowed differential in signal levels between the two we could bring it to a very refined focus and be sure of it. That also became a standard in the motion picture field. [Laughs] So there's another first for you. We had to

do a lot of things...improvise in the Baptista Films. Let's take *Pilgrims Progress*, which was to be a serious drama type thing with human characters, animated characters to simulate human beings. And you can't have the comics and comical things happening like you do in the comical cartoons. See you had to have natural actions. Now when they started animating they tried to do that strictly by looking at their mirrors and working out and animating it but it was coming out jerky and so forth. You'll notice that in the first part of *Pilgrims Progress* particularly on Pliable. So soon we've got to have a better answer. So the answer that came out was you film the thing in live action first with people roughly costumed you're going through the actions and lip-syncing their mouth movements and everything to the prerecorded voices. Then you project that as a background projection on a sheet of thin paper like a second sheet in typewriting. Then the animator animates over that cell by cell to...

**WILSON:** Oh!

**KERR:** ...get the natural actions and the amount of movement that you can...have to have between each one is determined...sometimes a given cell would serve for two or four frames because there was very little movement or if it was a stationary thing for quite a few frames. And, so that's the way they would get natural live action. And the other thing in animation work was you would build cell actions up on top of each other. You might have the body in a stationary position and one would be on background cell with the arms and feet and other things moving around doing all kinds of things. So you'd build those up separately and that's...that's the part that had the motion on.

**WILSON:** How many individual frames would have been involved...I mean how many individual sketches?

**KERR:** Cells?

**WILSON:** Yes.

**KERR:** Well, let's take *Pilgrims Progress* for instance. It's fifty-five minute film as released, now it's about a forty minute film because we reedited and reorganized, but in the original production there are three hundred background scenes. These are done on cardboard and moved to a certain rate on the background stage of the animation camera. While their walking by...the cells are being in one place, but the background is moving.

**WILSON:** Okay.

**KERR:** Now, the individual cells that had to be animated. First they're sketched by the artist in pencil sketches on these tissue sheets and then they're inked by the tracers and inkers on transparent cells in black ink outline. Then they're colored by the color dobbers who paint on the background in the various colors required of the costumes. It took a hundred thousand cells and three hundred backgrounds [laughs] and four and half years of work.

**WILSON:** I'll bet.

**KERR:** Along with the other work [laughs].

**WILSON:** No wonder animation is so hard to get done.

**KERR:** Exactly so. It's such an expensive process now. It's such a long winded process. Very few times could you have normal serious animated films, like they had in the older days. They tried all kinds of things including computer control and everything else to reduce that but they haven't really gotten a successful system yet. Now I told you a little bit about some of the technical things we went through [pauses] and how we got refinements and quality and so forth by hard work. I once figured out in the way we did things originally...and we had no magnetic recording, by the way. We had to go through something like twenty-three transformations from the original sound to the reproduced sound. And all kinds of things could happen along the way. And you had to guard at every point to bring it through with some quality. And it was a real battle in the early days. When magnetic film came along and magnetic recordings that straightened things out considerably and helped so much to improve the quality.

**WILSON:** Now, you've already told us that you left Baptista to teach.

**KERR:** Uh-huh.

**WILSON:** What...what became of Baptista after that?

**KERR:** Well, I told you about their...their motion picture production and their projector becoming too expensive and they had to scale down and they went to the Tel-N-See filmstrip system. And I told you about the part I played in getting them connected with the right camera. And they...they developed their own style of synchronizing. Originally they had mechanical synchronizing and they had a new frame every three seconds, straight mechanical synchronizing. Later they had to get...they had to move away from that and get the inaudible signal synchronizing so you could change frames when you needed to, not at fixed intervals. But they did very good animation work and a lot of dynamics in it, very good sound tracks. Some of the best actions I've ever seen. And I'm going to be demonstrating a little of that tomorrow in the communications class that I'm being a guest lecturer in here in the graduate school [Wheaton College]. So if you want to see some of it, come down tomorrow morning [laughs].

**WILSON:** All right [Kerr laughs].

**KERR:** You'll see a bit of *David and Goliath*. [Collection 225, FS10]

**WILSON:** Great.

**KERR:** See the battle between David and Goliath. And people tell me (it's happened repeatedly, it happens with Baptista Films) with such dramatic action and good use of sound and extra things, they think they are seeing a motion picture.

**WILSON:** So, the filmstrip?

**KERR:** Yes.

**WILSON:** I'm going to turn this tape over.

**KERR:** Okay.

[break in interview]

**KERR:** Now we're still continuing on the situation in Baptista Films and I should mention one thing which I think is absolutely unique that happened while we were there. I told you that we had formed a gospel team, about five or six of us. We'd go out to churches with the films, we'd go out with a Miracle Projector and we...we would do our own witnessing and our own evangelizing with the help of the films. But considering...

**WILSON:** Now who was on that films...or teams?

**KERR:** Well, [rubs against microphone] a young [unclear] I think Marg Story Cannon was one, I think...I think maybe Edith. I don't remember who all. But in any...and Dale Mannier [sp?] was one he was film editor and he did voice narration, some voice acting. In fact he is the new voice on *The Man Who Forgot God* [laughs] that we lip-synced in. But [rubs against microphone] consider something. We went out with a film which had been developed and produced in Baptista Films organization. It even been developed...printed and developed in their own equipment, not sent out to an outside lab. It was shown on a projector of their own design by employees who were...worked there and formed a gospel team. It was just about a whole closed circuit [rubs against microphone]. I don't know of any other organization that could say that. And then one more little thing that came along in later years...did you know that Ken Anderson got his start in motion pictures through Baptista Films?

**WILSON:** No, I didn't.

**KERR:** And...and his original film, *Captured By the Indians*, [Collection 225, F9] produced in Muskegon [Michigan] with probably Jim Cannon as cameraman, was done under Baptista sponsorship. Also *That Kid Buck*, the second film, and that out of that came Gospel Films of which Ken Anderson was originally a part, and later split off and formed his own company? There's another pioneer in the field...another start for somebody in the field. One of the biggest things that Baptista Films [rubs against microphone] did for us was inspire us and train us in that field. It was really a training ground, as well as an encouragement for the use of films in evangelistic fields. Now, Baptista produced a film in which he foresaw the kind of things that motion picture would do in the gospel field. And he narrates that and tells his vision for what can be done through that. And you have a copy of that in your library, C. O. Baptista's Message [Collection 225, F8].

**WILSON:** Right.

**KERR:** And that's worth looking at. And that was about 1940.

**WILSON:** Oh, he produced that at the beginning of his...okay.

**KERR:** And...so I feel grateful to him for inspiring us and training a number of people and giving them the inspiration to work in that area.

**WILSON:** Now why did...why did Baptista Films fold?

**KERR:** Why did they fold? [Rubs against microphone] I'm going to have to say this carefully and I may be wrong in some of the points so please forgive me if I...

**WILSON:** We'll...we'll take it as opinion then.

**KERR:** Alright, personal opinion, [rubs against microphone] long distance observation, what I have heard. Mr. Baptista was running into debt because the costs were mounting and the film...motion picture film rentals [rubs against microphone] and sales were dwindling, and he had sunk too much money into the production of the projector. It was draining finances from the company. And he got to the point of borrowing people...money from people on promissory notes that said "we will pay on demand" and pay a certain interest. But he...only way he would finally pay on demand was borrowing more money, the way the government operates now [laughs]. Our own government. And finally it was just too much for him. And I really think, I've been told, that he died a brokenhearted man partly because of that.

**WILSON:** Well, did...did Baptista Films file bankruptcy?

**KERR:** No, a man by the name of Herbert Taylor, who'd gotten interested in the work along with him, became a member of their board, was elected the new president after Mr. Baptista went to be with the Lord. When he examined the books, looked into the assets, and by the way he used to be a claim adjuster for Prudential Life Insurance.

**WILSON:** Now is the Herbert Taylor of Chicago?

**KERR:** Well, he lived in Wheaton but he worked in Chicago and may have lived elsewhere before that.

**WILSON:** Oh, Club Aluminum.

**KERR:** No.

**WILSON:** Okay.

**KERR:** No, a different Herbert Taylor. He was the grandson of the founder of China Inland Mission.

**WILSON:** Oh, [James] Hudson Taylor.

**KERR:** Hudson Taylor.

**WILSON:** Okay.

**KERR:** He came [rubs against microphone] into the company and then discovered all these debts and they were sizable. And he called the creditors together and told them the situation and said, "You can try to sell off the assets but you won't realize much on the dollar, maybe ten cents on the dollar or you can let it...it would be quite a disgrace on the company and you can handle it whatever way you want." Now, some creditors did seize things. For instance, Mr. Baptista's home was taken away from him and...

**WILSON:** While he was still living?

**KERR:** Yes. And he and Mrs. Baptista had to live in the building for a while since their home was just taken for debts own...owed.

**WILSON:** Now...now who...who did that? Do you remember?

**KERR:** I don't know but some...

**WILSON:** Which creditor?

**KERR:** No, I don't...I don't know what creditor but it was some of the commercial creditors, I think to seize what assets they could to realize on their debts. There are others...but finally there was no bankruptcy filing. There was a time when Mr. Taylor would help people like me, was trying to get the films back in circulation under somebody else's auspices. I can remember when we packed them all up in a cabinet, had them all indexed and everything, and sent them down to Ken Anderson Films but after some trials and efforts they decided they could not do anything with them. I don't know who they had repack them and send them up here but they came back and got tossed in a jumble mess in a room in the...in the building. Now the building in the meantime had been bought by another company, and they had allowed one room to be used for storing these things, including a lot of the hardware that went with the Tel-N-See projectors.

**WILSON:** Just out of the goodness of their heart?

**KERR:** Well, because Mr. Taylor persuaded them, I guess, to do it. And in the mean time we were all trying to see if someone wouldn't take this over. Now I was working on the space program down in Florida at that time. This was about in 1965 or '66 [pauses] '67, I don't know where, somewhere along there.

**WILSON:** Down in Cape Canaveral?

**KERR:** Yes. And I've been helping at a distance, as I could, and I was still interested in those films. We're convinced something ought to be done to save them. And finally the company that owned the new build...the building said, "You've either got to get them out in ten days or we're

going to haul them out to the dump. We've given you all the time we're going to give you." So Herbert Taylor got on the phone and called me and said, "We've got to do something, the man means business. I don't know what to do with them, I've done everything I could do." So I got some vacation time and my wife and son came up and we rescued those films [laughs]. And that's what really saved them.

**WILSON:** And took them to Michigan?

**KERR:** Yes. Now that's the reason you have *Pilgrims Progress* today and that's the reason we hope to get some of them in circulation. For instance, right now, there are about three that look like possibilities. One of them is *Charge That to My Account* and other things that we have on Dr. Harry Ironside [pastor of Moody Church], including an expansion on background, [rubs against microphone] stemming largely from a book, a new book published in about 1981 written by Schuyler [E. Schuyler English] I believe it is and published by Loizeaux Brothers, who were his exclusive publishers. And he has a daughter and daughter-in-law living in Indianapolis [rubs against microphone] and we've been in touch and we're trying to see what we can do for expanding the story about Dr. Ironside and his background, bringing in maybe a section on *Soul Winning Experiences* which he's in or *Five Minutes to Live* [Collection 225, F17] which he's in, or *Under Marching Orders* [Collection 225, F57] some portion of it in flashbacks. Then finally saying, "Well let see what he did with the sermon. Give him a book of the Bible and bring in the story of Philemon, the book of Philemon, *Charge That to My Account*." And [rubs against microphone] we think that it could be a real testimony for Dr. Ironside and his role in evangelism and preaching. And at the same time get that film back in front of people. Because it was his a soul winning film and still is. Another one we've thought about and hope to do something with was *Songs of Fanny Crosby* [Collection 225, F70] featuring George Beverly Shea.

**WILSON:** Ah, yes.

**KERR:** Now there is a new film [rubs against microphone] that's supposed to be released sometime pretty soon by Wide World Films...World Wide Films.

**WILSON:** World...World Wide Pictures.

**KERR:** World Wide Pictures. And it's featuring George Beverly Shea and his music. And they, with my permission, are using some scenes from *Songs of Fanny Crosby* in it. And I had thought to expanding *Songs of Fanny Crosby* to include much more of a testimony and background on Fanny Crosby at the front end and to end up with this film at the conclusion. *The Man Who Forgot God*, we would like to do that in a different way following a suggestion that came from young people at New Tribes Bible Institute in Jackson. [Michigan] We showed it there in the chapel and asked them, "Well what would you do if you had this film? Well, I'd like to see it used again." They said, "Well it's a good film, it has a good message," but of course it was old style. I said, "Well, it's over thirty years old." And they said, "Well, why don't you use it as a flashback for the missionary couple on their return from the field after thirty years." And so we're working on that idea and we have footage from various missionary films [unclear] and we hope to set up an interview style where they're being interviewed and questions asked, "Well, was it worthwhile to

go to the mission field? What did you accomplish? And what kinds of things go on in the mission field and...and why don't you leave the people alone, why do they need the gospel?" And so, the common questions that come from people today, we could answer in that way. That's...in new color film in an interview style with a missionary couple returned from the field after thirty years of service. Then you could say, "But I almost didn't go, I almost forgot God, let me tell you about it." Then we could flashback to the old film.

**WILSON:** Would you be able to get some of the same actors and actresses you think?

**KERR:** Well, I don't....

**WILSON:** That's a long shot.

**KERR:** I know where the voices are. I...I think Edith Story knew who actually did it but you wouldn't necessarily because after thirty years you could costume somebody to look enough like...

**WILSON:** Oh, yeah.

**KERR:** ...to do it. But I know where the voice...I'm still trying to track down Dale Mannier [sp?] again. [Laughs] But he would be the voice I'd want to use. But it looks like a good possibility. Now here's something to think about and ponder right here in the communication department because I've been talking to Myrna...

**WILSON:** Grant.

**KERR:** ...Grant [instructor in the communication department of Wheaton College] a little about funding some of the graduate students to work on some of these ideas. See what they could do with them in scripting and in planning how to do it. And if you ever had a television video setup for interviews and so forth right here, we could do much of the work right here.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** And it would be a project in reediting and the reorganizing of...of the film. It would be a project you could do. Now there are two or three films which could be handled that way and you have prints in your archives. And just the editing down of existing films would be an exercise that would teach them a lot about pacing films, timing, editing techniques [train passes by].

**WILSON:** Describe briefly for me your career after you left Baptista?

**KERR:** Well...

**WILSON:** And that's been thirty years higher now.



**KERR:** Yes. Let's see, [rubs against microphone] I taught at Wheaton College for two years, I believe, in there. Finally got to the point that we had young children, I couldn't get along any longer on a reduced salary of a half whatever...

**WILSON:** Of a visiting instructor?

**KERR:** [Laughs] ...of a visiting instructor. And I had to go back into engineering. Now, the Navy Department Bureau of Ships wanted me there, so I went there and then later I found out I wasn't going to get too far without being a member of the inner circle, which means you had to be veteran or...or an officer [laughs] in the military to get any place. And at my own boss' suggestion and with his help, because he said I was entitled to an advance but couldn't get it against the hierarchy, we went to another company. In this case I think we went to Perk [sp.?] and Elmer Corporation. And I had to learn all about optics and electro optics, became the manager of product development in a new division...in a new section of electro optics division. So, then I've learned in the motion picture field and in the audio visual field and electronics, electro mechanics, acoustics. In going to Perk and Elmer, I had to learn a lot about optics and electro optics and because of military [unclear] a lot about human factors. And later educational technology. People in General Electric were establishing a new section and wanted somebody to have responsibility for advanced concepts in system planning. It was a temptation I couldn't resist. [Laughs] So I moved over to there for a while. And then when that effort, which was overhead, while they're getting started, an expensive overhead, it was attached to a department that was losing money and the department had to cut back so we got cut out. They just couldn't [rubs against microphone] afford it until we could get on our feet. But the space program was starting up and they needed people in Florida on the space program. So I ended up in Florida on the Apollo Saturn program as part of the General Electric Apollo systems department. Now a little highlight of how knowhow in the motion picture field paid off there. [Rubs against microphone] I headed a group that had responsibility for the night lighting for night launches and night fueling and all kinds of lighting tasks for [there] on the space port...specialized. For instance how do you get lighting to buildings for the testing what we call hyperbolic fuels that are highly explosive and any spark of any kind would just set off a tremendous blast. And how do you get...and even the so-called explosion proof housings won't work because hydrogen gas which [unclear] will go right through both [unclear] both housing.

**WILSON:** Uh-huh.

**KERR:** Well one thing is you put glass bricks inside of the wall and shine you light through there on mirrors. Tilt the mirrors around until you get it where you want it. The light's on the outside of the building and you always put the light...the light fixtures on the outside of the building and form spotlights and floodlights, sho...shine it through windows and then reflect it around, sealed windows. And then power required for that lighting for night launch was so great...the demand for the lighting level was so great from the photograph people, that we would run out of substation at the launch site in order power it. It was just a greater demand that they even had...could supply for sixteen seconds during launch. But how to overcome that problem? One of the things we looked at was the idea of getting World War II submarines into the...the submarine base nearby and pipe...and converting from their batter power over into AC to get over to the search lights or even to DC, 'cause that's what they run on for a few seconds at the time of the launch. So a power pack

of a tremendous dimensions but I knew enough about films [rubs against microphone) and film types so I went and tracked down the photographers...what led to this demand for this higher lighting level. I knew enough about films so I thought they could get everything they needed at one-half the lighting level which they were demanding. And I won my case by knowing films and motion picture photography and film types and the quality that you get from them well enough to go and do battle with them on their own ground and win. And that saved on that one task 1.3 million dollars. And I received an award called the One In a Thousand award from the Missile and Space Division, one of the people that received that award because of that savings.

**WILSON:** And a check for 1.3 million?

**KERR:** No, sir. [Wilson laughs] My wife and I got a trip to Philadelphia, a nice banquet with other company officials and I got a certificate and she got one of the first battery operated carving knives that the company made. I thought she [Wilson laughs] made out better than I did. [Laughs] I'd much rather have the carving knife. [Laughs] In any event, we had a nice trip. That was just one event. Again, when I was in the Navy Department Bureau of Ships...when I left Wheaton College I went to the Bureau of Ships. I was in the acoustics section of the interior control...fire control...interior communication fire control and general compass branch. What a long term. [Wilson laughs] But, anyway, we had a...all kinds of things to do with audio and acoustics voice communications on board ship and elsewhere. We had some real tough nut problems, but also on the way my boss got the assignment and I did work (he got the raise in grade and I did work) of acoustics in air research coordination for the whole Department of Defense. [Rubs against microphone] One of the exercises we had to go through was to go once a year to the Pentagon and sit us in an acoustics and air subcommittee, with representatives from the Air Force and from the Army and...and others and pass judgement on what proposed projects should receive funding. Projects proposed three years in advance of where we then were, in other words call the shots.

**WILSON:** Right.

**KERR:** Where the best bets should be. Now I can remember going to one of those meetings and...my boss couldn't go. He had the title but he sent me, [laughs] and I had to represent the Navy branch [train passing in background] on this and the acoustics and air coordination function. Well, there was an Air Force colonel there and they had a scheme which they were going to put a million and a half dollars into. And they were going to fly balloons. The University of Michigan was going to get one contract, [unclear] they were going to communicate by voice from way up in the sky from a plane flying at 600 miles an hour, I've forgotten how many...about one mile up. And they had to cover an area on the ground about one mile square for one minutes, that was the goal. Well it may have been more than a mile, I can't remember. But anyway I did some calculations. And I had a background from previous experience at RCA in developing an unusual item. We developed fog signals which are super powered loudspeakers with battery operated vibrators, no tubes or anything just a tremendous amount of power turned loose for notes and loudspeakers. And we had learned some things from the Coast Guard Lighthouse Service about long-distance acoustic signaling. All kinds of things happen in the air, like fog banks and thermo-layers and all things, that distort the sound waves and garble them and bend them and do all kinds of crazy things, so you cannot transmit over those distances with any reliability. And if you want to prove that to yourself, listen to a jet plane or propeller driven plane as it flies over and notice the wobbly and garbling and

changing in tone quality of the sound effect. Well, at the source it's constant. So I stood there and said, "I don't care how much money you sink into it it isn't going to work. You're just pouring your money down a rat hole." And he bristled. He said, "You...you prove that young man or I'm going to have you out of that job." So I went back to my boss and said, "I better write up a report to document this. I'm really going to go after it." Well I was able to document it. And we scaled it back to a hundred fifty thousand dollars on some efforts that would work over some distances...that would work [laughs]. So, I think I earned my way [laughs].

**WILSON:** I think so. I wanted to ask you just in passing here [rubs against microphone] what...what would be your assessment of the Christian film industry as opposed to the secular film industry in terms of...of its innovation, its...its efforts at using a medium wisely and well and.... What...what could the Christian film industry have benefitted by adopting some secular ideas and vice versa?

**KERR:** Well it has been done, and there's certain companies that have done [that]. They've used professional actors and the professional actors have done a good job. And...and many professional actors now are Christians. Some...and Wide World...World Wide Pictures is a good example of a good way to do that. But something that I think has happened in the whole industry, and I heard about it the other day, the whole industry is really liking it to a dinosaur. And that the...and if motion picture way of presenting things is really having a difficult go of it these days because the cost of silver makes the prints high. It's hard to pull people out into the secular theaters, get them out of their homes, the television is too easy turn to. It's the cost of supplying what they...entertainment and things right in their own homes, why should they go out to a motion picture house, whether it's a Christian film. Why should they go to a church on Sunday night and see a film presented in an unprofessional way, maybe, with a dinky projector and poor sound, poor projection.

**WILSON:** On a bed sheet.

**KERR:** Not quite on a bed sheet but an inadequate scene.

**WILSON:** Well,...well I mean...yeah okay.

**KERR:** Okay. [Rubs against microphone] So what...what is the situation? I think it is on a decline, a rapid decline and I think both the secular field and the Christian field are more or less saturated with films now. Now, one of the things that's built up that the Christians have hope in and I guess certainly in the secular field does is the video tape in the home and the video tape on cable TV. And there's some things happening there. But one warning that I would give to anybody that gets into Christian film work or Christian video tape work, do not get caught up in the glamor and the razzle-dazzle of the thing and let that obscure the real purpose of the films in...in spreading the gospel and making it plain to people and in motivating people to come to Christ as Lord and Savior. And I've seen that happen in several Christian film making organizations. That's why I said earlier when I was hunting...when I was the first Christian...first a Christian, hunting for films that really tell the whole gospel story, very few of them would. They would stop at what I would call the point of expediency. If it went any further it would offend somebody in the liberal side of the

Christian community or we wouldn't get all the audience we needed to support the thing and the world wouldn't accept it.

**WILSON:** Can you remember any specifics where people got caught up in what you say, "the razzle-dazzle?"

**KERR:** Well, I'm one of the people that did in the beginning. And I've seen...and I've seen it happen in other companies or individuals. I'm going to think. [Pauses] Yes, and I think some young film makers have done it all over again today.

**WILSON:** Can...can you remember?

**KERR:** I don't like to name...I don't like to name names.

**WILSON:** You don't have to name names but if you can remember...

**KERR:** Well, all right.

**WILSON:** ...a...a...a situation-type thing...

**KERR:** All right I think...

**WILSON:** ...to explain things?

**KERR:** ...something happened in [pauses] Bill Bright's organization. [Campus Crusade for Christ] The films...some films that some of his people made. I remember one example, where the beginning of the film had some real catchy, jazzy type music and they'd inner-cut the film-jump cuts one right after the other and it was just horrible. They were so fascinate with jump cutting in rhythm to the music that they over did it. And I think where they will exaggerate a situation and dramatize it in such a way that it looks like their main end is just to be dramatic, and it may be missing the main point.

**WILSON:** Okay.

**KERR:** And manipulating the emotions. Now, it is so easy to [unclear] dramatization in the film media or in the video media to manipulate people's emotions. Now that is something I don't think we ought to be doing in Christian circles. Now, that's one of the main reasons why in later years I turned to the filmstrip and the cassette tape. And learned not only...it has an automatic break [train whistle] in it. You can't overdramatize 'cause they're still pictures. You don't have...

**WILSON:** Right.

**KERR:** ...the dynamics that you can have in the other dramatic impact...

**WILSON:** Sure.

**KERR:** ...but you can have a much more powerful teaching, training impact [train passes in background] And that's the main reason I emphasize. Not just because it's the lower cost media, but because if it's used properly and programmed properly and with participation from the audience. You got a very powerful teaching, training tool. More powerful than the equivalent in a motion or video tape.

**WILSON:** That's very interesting, I wouldn't have thought that on my own.

**KERR:** Most people don't. [Wilson laughs] Most people get so caught up and I'll give you some examples right out of the motion picture industry. And I belong to the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers for over twenty-five years and saw this at close range and participated with people in it. Now, there are educational film producers particularly in universities. [Rubs against microphone] I'm thinking of one in the University of Iowa and one in California, UCLA [University of California at Los Angeles] and others. And we use to get together at the national conventions and sort of get to a restaurant and talk things over and say, almost universally we would say, "We can not get the people in this organization who are in the entertainment field to recognize the difference between the entertainment film and the training teaching film and the techniques used in the way you do things. And one of the other things that happens...the motion picture is an expensive media. And you're urged on all the time, "Keep the story moving, move along, get to the end of things." Well that's fine for a dramatic things, in fact if you move fast enough, you can cover up a lot of things that you would...wouldn't like or would see the flaws in...

**WILSON:** Uh huh.

**KERR:** ...it if you had the time to watch them. But in the educational process, you need a media where you can go at the learners pace...

**WILSON:** Uh huh.

**KERR:** ...and you cannot do that with a fixed pace device like a motion picture or a video tape. You cannot naturally stop and halt and adjust pace to suit the learner...

**WILSON:** Uh huh.

**KERR:** ...or have quiz sections along the way easily and naturally as you can with a filmstrip...

**WILSON:** Uh huh.

**KERR:** ...You're going to hear some of that tomorrow in my lecture...on Thursday rather [unclear] lecture [laughs].

**WILSON:** Okey dokey. Well, I thank you very much...



**KERR:** Okay.

**WILSON:** ...for coming and talking with us.

**KERR:** We've...we've filled enough tape here, I think [laughs].

**WILSON:** So this is fantastic and I really appreciate your willingness to do it for us.

**KERR:** Okay.

**END OF TAPE**

