EDITING MAILER: A CONVERSATION WITH JAN WELT AND LANA JOKEL

MICHAEL CHAIKEN

IN SEPTEMBER 2008, THREE OF NORMAN MAILER'S FILMS were deposited in The Harvard Film Archive in Cambridge, Massachusetts. For six months, I assisted in the archiving of these films, Mailer's "sixties trilogy," *Wild 90* (1967), *Beyond the Law* (1968) and *Maidstone* (1968–70). The Norman Mailer Estate and Harvard University together have endeavored to preserve these important films. As I analyzed these cinematic materials, what immediately struck me was how much of a collaborative effort these films had been, evinced by countless notes affixed to film cans, coded in the private language of like-minded artists.

When I spoke to Mailer about his films in 2005, he was quick to dismiss the notion that these films were anything but a collective effort: "My editors Jan Welt and Lana Jokel were vastly more skillful at frame to frame cutting than I could ever be. They were both immensely talented and I turned over entire sequences to them. I built the structure of the films myself, for better or worse, working with them as closely as any Hollywood film director would." In early 2010, Criterion will release these films in a DVD boxed set, digitally restored from source material. In helping Criterion prepare this collection, I had the opportunity to speak at length with Mailer's two main film collaborators, Jan Welt and Lana Jokel. I spoke to Jan Welt by phone on the evening of June 15, 2009 as he is currently living in Anchorage, Alaska. My conversation with Lana Jokel took place in her New York apartment over a period of many months, concluding on July 21, 2009. What follows are our conversations over their recollections of working with Mailer during one of the most productive periods in his career, an experience that led to Jan and Lana emerging as filmmakers in their own right.

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JAN WELT

Chaiken: Where are you from originally and how did you become interested in film?

Welt: I'm from Albany, New York and became interested in film through my father who was an avid amateur photographer. He was an attorney but photography was his passion so there were always cameras around me growing up. Certainly that had an influence, but my decision to pursue filmmaking as a career came after I had taken a course in cinematography during my senior year at Syracuse University. To get some money together after graduation, I went to work for a year in Albany at Capitol City Broadcasting and from there I enrolled in NYU Graduate School to get my MFA in film.

Chaiken: What were you majoring in at Syracuse?

Welt: Theater.

Chaiken: Were you training to become an actor or were you hoping to write for the stage?

Welt: Both. Although I was primarily interested in cinema, I thought having a solid grounding in writing and acting would be good preparation for my MFA. I've always thought of myself as a utility outfielder. Haig Manoogian, my mentor at NYU, who incidentally was also Martin Scorsese's mentor, held the view that if you want to keep your head above the curbstone in this business, then you better learn how to do everything. Write, produce, direct, shoot, edit. I think he was absolutely right about that.

Chaiken: What year did you enter NYU?

Welt: I graduated from Syracuse in 1964 so I must have been at NYU in late 1965 or early 1966.

Chaiken: Who were you studying under at NYU?

Welt: Haig Manoogian was largely it at that point. Also Calder Willingham, who wrote the screenplay for *One Eyed Jacks* (1961) and *The Graduate* (1967). And of course Shirley Clarke, who was my editing instructor. She gave me my first job as assistant editor on a twelve-screen film she was working on called *Man in Polar Regions* (1967). Graham Ferguson, who went on to invent

IMAX, shot most of that film. It screened at the World's Fair in Montreal in 1967.

Chaiken: Working with Shirley Clarke, were the films of the New American Cinema an influence?

Welt: In the mid-sixties, I lived with my wife on St. Mark's Place, directly across from the Bridge Cinema where the New American Cinema was exploding. It was literally ground zero for all of that stuff and I was constantly over there seeing new work by Clarke, John Cassavetes, Jonas Mekas and others. When we first moved to the neighborhood, it was this quiet little Polish-Ukranian community and it seemed like within a week of arriving it became this epicenter of culture known as the East Village. It was an amazing time to be there; a constant flutter of activity that one couldn't help but be inspired by.

Chaiken: Were you making your own films at this point?

Welt: In school I was making films one after another either on my own or shooting and editing for other people. NYU was a hotbed of activity and collaboration. For my thesis film, I directed a *verité* documentary about Frank O'Connor, the Democratic candidate running against Nelson Rockefeller in New York's 1966 gubernatorial election. At the time, O'Connor was the District Attorney of NY and it seemed as if Rockefeller was the most hated man in the entire world. But thanks to these extraordinary political commercials he ran, Rockefeller won the election. If you were living in New York at the time, Rockefeller's 'fish in the Hudson River' ads were unforgettable. His campaign essentially portrayed the Hudson as one giant septic tank that, if elected, Rockefeller was going to clean up. These ads were effective, brilliantly so, and started a new wave of political commercials. At the outset of the campaign, it seemed like there was no way he could win, but by the end it was a landslide for him. So, I took all the footage I shot of O'Connor and made a film of my own that was shown on New York's Channel 13.

Chaiken: Making a *verité* documentary in 1966, I imagine that you were well aware of what D.A. Pennebaker and The Maysles Brothers were also doing at the time . . .

Welt: They were the giants whose shoulders I climbed up on. In fact, just before graduation, I was offered a job at Leacock-Pennebaker Films. The

funny thing was right before that happened, I had shot this film about the rematch between Jose Torres and Dick Tiger. The film was called *Split Decision* (1967) and was directed by Jon Ostriker. We were shooting in Torres' hotel room when in walks Norman Mailer. That's where I met him for the first time. I remember Norman being fascinated by the French Éclair 16mm camera I was using. So, when I went to Pennebaker's a few months later, there's Norman trying to cut *Wild 90* (1967). The first job Pennebaker gave me was helping Norman cut his film.

Chaiken: How far along was he?

Welt: Before I got there Mark Woodcock, another filmmaker working with Leacock-Pennebaker, was helping Norman to synch the *Wild 90* rushes. It was around this time that everyone in the offices took off for San Francisco to make a film on the Monterey Pop Festival. Mark helped Norman synch the footage and I seem to remember there already being a very rough assemblage of the takes Norman wanted to use. Over the next several months, Norman and I worked to clean up the rough cut.

Chaiken: Not having any formal training, how were Norman's instincts as an editor?

Welt: From the outset he was highly capable of transferring his sense of editing the written word over to film. It really wasn't all that difficult for him and came somewhat naturally as I think it does for most people who've grown up watching movies. Just by watching films, almost by osmosis, you arrive at some basic notion of the rhythm and language of film editing. On *Wild 90*, unlike the films that followed, I was essentially an extra pair of hands. He would come into Pennebaker's studio and review the material on the Steenbeck. He would make decisions on what to cut and would leave me detailed notes. I'd take over from there and implement whatever it was he wanted. It was all pretty straightforward. *Wild 90* was shot in real time, so that dictated the order of events. Also, there was only one camera, so whatever footage Norman ended up with was what we had to work with. Unlike the other films, just in terms of shots, there weren't a huge amount of options. It was cut, more or less, slate to slate based on the rolls Norman liked best.

Chaiken: Was Norman a patient supervising editor? What was the dynamic like that developed between the two of you?

Welt: Needless to say, Norman was an extraordinarily complex guy. Enormously warm hearted and loyal, though I would sometimes see him fly into a rage with people he felt were insulting to him. I remember watching David McMulllin, a Wall St. guy who ran Leacock-Pennebaker Films, once trying to negotiate a deal with him. They got into this argument, over what I don't remember exactly, but it got more and more vituperative until finally Norman went into this ferocious Texas drawl that so startled David that the negotiation immediately went in Norman's favor. Almost instantly, he could become this whole other person entirely. In terms of our relationship, I honored him, he honored me and we always got along … unless there was a major fuck up of some sort. Don't forget Norman produced these films with his own money, so any fuck up was going to be a costly one. But, in the years we worked together, things rarely ever went in that direction.

Chaiken: *Wild 90* is notorious for its muffled sound. Unless you are in a closed setting and can hear what's being said, it can make for a distressing viewing experience. What happened?

Welt: The sound was our Achilles' heel. It was complicated by two factors. Our soundman was Bob Neuwirth who was a folkie, boyfriend to Edie Sedgwick and Bob Dylan's road manager at the time. You can see him running around *Don't Look Back* (1967), the famous Dylan documentary Pennebaker directed. Neuwirth wasn't trained to do this kind of thing, so sometimes he'd have the mic pointed in the wrong direction. The other factor, the one that ultimately did the film in, was the optical soundtrack used on the 16mm projection prints. Optical soundtracks are terrible under any circumstances. The original Nagra sound reels Neuwirth recorded weren't so bad, but when it was mixed down to optical, we lost so much of the sound that it left us with an inaudible mess. I was agitating for putting on subtitles, but it never happened. After the premiere at the New Cinema Playhouse, Norman took out a full page ad in the *New York Times* offering anyone their money back if they didn't like the film. Guess what happened . . .

Chaiken: How were you being paid? Did Norman have you on a salary?

Welt: Initially, I was being paid by Leacock-Pennebaker, then Norman, myself, Buzz Farber and Mickey Knox formed our own production and distribution company, Supreme Mix, Inc. This was during the *Beyond the Law* (1968) period when I was pretty much left alone to do my thing while Nor-

man was off working on *The Armies of the Night*. I would do the edits and he would come into the studio a couple days a week. We'd look over material, confer and then I'd keep going. I was taking a salary from Supreme Mix, whose very existence was thanks to Norman's investment in it. We had great ambitions for the company. Had the films been more successful we probably would have been able to realize some of them.

Chaiken: By the time *Wild 90* premiered, you were already editing *Beyond the Law*, which you also helped shoot. What can you remember about the shoot and was there an immediate sense that *Beyond the Law* was a significant advance on *Wild 90*?

Welt: When *Wild 90* failed to reach any kind of audience it was dispiriting, but since the film was a bit of a lark to begin with we got over it pretty quickly. With *Beyond the Law* it all got more serious. More cameras, better sound and a host of talented players. Norman was wise about shooting. The *sine qua non* of a no budget film is to have only one location. For *Beyond the Law* that location became the tenth floor of 56 W 45th St., the same building where Leacock-Pennebaker had their offices. They were on the ninth floor, so we moved lights to the vacant floor above them. That became our police station. It was me, Nick Proferes, D.A. Pennebaker and this guy we hijacked into shooting for us, Richard Leiterman, who was part of a BBC crew making a documentary on Norman at the time. It was right around this time that Lana Jokel signed on as my assistant editor. We had one editing suite at Leacock-Pennebaker since the rest of the studio was entirely devoted to *Monterey Pop* (1968).

Chaiken: The editing of *Beyond the Law* follows a different kind of strategy than *Wild 90*. Can you talk about how the structure of that film developed?

Welt: *Wild 90* was essentially cut flash frame to flash frame with complete, or almost complete, takes from a single camera. Much of what was used in *Beyond the Law* was also single camera stuff, but we had many more options since some of the scenes had two, even three, cameras on them. We could pick the best angle or cross cut between the two if we wanted to capture a particular expression or a certain action. We had three crews in different rooms, so with *Beyond* you have all of this stuff happening simultaneously. That helped to dictate the parallel structure of the film. We tried to give a sense that all of the scenes were happening in real time over a single eve-

ning when in fact it was shot over several evenings. The parallel structure of the film was determined as much by the shooting as it was by the editing. As Norman says to his troops in *Maidstone*, 'you find out the nature of your attack, by attacking' and that's essentially how these films were made since there wasn't any kind of script or storyboard to follow. In that sense, these films were conceived and edited almost like a *verité* documentary would be. You'd shoot and shoot and shoot, and then with the material you had you'd make sense of it all in the editing room.

Chaiken: Do you recall any specific instructions Norman gave to you as a cameramen on *Beyond the Law*?

Welt: There were none whatsoever. It was all based on happenstance and spontaneity. He set up the situation and you followed it as a documentarian would. Of course, in the editing room all that changed and Norman came in with a lot of ideas and instructions. I specifically remember him wanting me to do this very elaborate title sequence for *Beyond the Law*. The way he envisioned it I just couldn't fathom, so, as I often did, I went ahead and did it the way I wanted to do it—the cityscape in time lapse with the titles overtop. I remember showing it to him and afterwards he was dead silent. Finally, he says, 'This is the first time I've ever been double crossed, but it's great. Leave it. I love it.'

Chaiken: By all accounts, *Beyond the Law* received a somewhat mixed response after its premiere at the 1968 New York Film Festival.

Welt: Yeah, except for Vincent Canby who wrote that great piece about it in the *New York Times*. After the New York Film Festival, there was a short run of the film at a theatre in mid-town, but it disappeared fairly quickly after that except for the college circuit where it continued to play.

Chaiken: Didn't Barney Rosset's Grove Press Films take over distribution from Supreme Mix at a certain point?

Welt: They did. Mainly because they already had a built in audience for the kind of films they distributed. They were far more organized, had their own catalog, and were able to reach more people. Particularly on the college and film society circuit which was their bread and butter. For the same reasons, New Line Cinema eventually ended up with *Maidstone* (1968–1970). Bob Shaye, who at that time was essentially working out of his apartment on

15th St. and 2nd Ave., took *Maidstone* and helped distribute it to college campuses. Bob started New Line Cinema after picking up a print of *Reefer Madness* (1936) and distributing it to college film societies. They soon became a great distributor of political, avant-garde and foreign films. Way out stuff by Jean-Luc Godard, Peter Watkins and us.

Chaiken: When did you first hear about Norman's idea for *Maidstone*?

Welt: After we finished *Beyond the Law*, I was twiddling my thumbs on salary. Then it all just started. Norman told me he wanted to make a movie about a film director who had become so popular that he was going to run for President of the United States. This was right after Robert Kennedy's assassination in June 1968. Next thing I know, I'm in East Hampton making this crazy movie with what seemed liked hundreds of others dedicated to the same crazy movie.

Chaiken: How much footage do you estimate was shot on *Maidstone*?

Welt: It was something close to 250,000 feet on 400 foot rolls of color reversal film.

Chaiken: What do you remember about the shoot?

Welt: The absolute chaos. All of the cameramen were mobile chess pieces. I was initially assigned to follow Rip and his group, The Cashbox, but when nothing was happening with them I decided I would go look for better targets of opportunity and just start shooting anything that moved. I can remember having lunch at Barney Rosset's East Hampton estate when his wife came running into the living room screaming 'There's a dead baby floating face down in the swimming pool!' So Jose Torres runs out and discovers it's not a baby, but actor Hervé Villechaize. He'd drank himself into a stupor and was floating face down in the Rosset's pool. They were able to resuscitate him, but still had to take him to the hospital. It was quite an ordeal as he nearly drowned to death.

Chaiken: Were you around for the fight between Norman and Rip?

Welt: Shooting had essentially wrapped by the time Rip attacked Norman. All the groups had broken up and people were now just waiting to go home. I remember I was with Buzz Farber and Nina Schulman, my sound person throughout the shoot. We'd all gone to the beach for the day. Coming back

I caught the tail end of the fight and immediately went for my camera. There were actually four cameras on the fight. Aside from my own there was Leacock, Pennebaker and Daniel Kramer, a still photographer, who you can see at one point trying to break Norman and Rip apart. When the film was edited I primarily used Pennebaker's roll as an unbroken take. We tried a few different approaches, though in the end we found using the long take was best.

Chaiken: In *Maidstone*, Norman appears adamant that he is not going to include any of the fight footage in the film. Was there ever any serious consideration of not using it?

Welt: Norman needed a bit of convincing, but he quickly came around after he saw how well it worked with the rest of the film. How could one exclude a roll as priceless as that from a film that essentially had no ending? It terms of structure, it had to be in there. It gave the film this whole other dimension and made it much more affecting.

Chaiken: Was there any indication beforehand that Rip was going to attack Norman in the way that he did?

Welt: Well, you'll remember that Rip pulls out a derringer during the Grand Assassination Ball scene. The intent there was that he would take Kingsley out if no one had gotten to him first. That much was discussed beforehand, only it never came off. Rip shows Norman the gun and that's it. I think Rip was stewing a bit over the failure of that scene so he came up with this whole other approach. I honestly don't think he intended to seriously hurt Norman, but the fact that it turned out the way it did, with Norman coming up into the down stroke of the hammer blow, was unfortunate for the both of them, but it certainly made for great cinema. I still contend that Rip saved the picture.

Chaiken: Was *Maidstone* edited at Leacock-Pennebaker?

Welt: By the time we got to edit *Maidstone* we had moved out of Leacock-Pennebaker to an upstairs office in the same building. *Maidstone* cinematographers Nick Proferes and Jim Desmond had started their own company, Proferes-Desmond Films, and that's where we worked. It was around this time that I was doing interim work as an editor on Michael Wadleigh's *Woodstock* (1970). Working on that film, I had come up against the KEM

editing table, which gave you the ability to have three screens going simultaneously. Pretty sophisticated stuff for 1969 … the KEM dictated the tri-panel look of *Woodstock*. I was pretty astonished by them as an editing system and suggested to Norman that we buy a couple and make some extra money by renting them out. So we did and that's how *Maidstone* was edited, on a KEM with three screens going simultaneously. It was a very convenient way for us to handle that much material.

Chaiken: Did you watch all the rushes with Norman?

Welt: Yes, we looked at all the rushes together. It took nearly two months. We were absolutely meticulous about it. One had to be because there was so much material—it was the only way to stay above water and not drown in the footage.

Chaiken: How did the film begin to take shape?

Welt: The rushes would talk to you. There were some shots that just stood out. You'd grab those and put them onto a separate reel of 'keeps' until finally, from that morass of 30 plus hours of footage, we ended up with a $3\frac{1}{2}$ hour 'keeps' reel. Lana, Norman and I worked on that material for quite some time, putting together a rough cut just shy of three hours. I always thought that cut was the best version of the film.

Chaiken: What can you tell me about the original version?

Welt: Unfortunately, the differences between the two versions have all receded into the distant fog of memory. There was a lot more exposition and more interactions between Norman and Rip. I also remember the original dream sequence being sensational. I'd spent many hours working on it before Norman came in and started playing with it. He would sometimes get on the editing table and vigorously start cutting and splicing. With Norman, sometimes a little knowledge was a dangerous thing.

Chaiken: Did you make a dupe print of the long version?

Welt: No, I don't think I ever did. I certainly agitated for it to be done, but unfortunately it never happened. That version is probably lost forever. I know we never kept the original edit of the dream sequence, which was something I took utter pride in because it flowed so nicely. It had a much

more lyrical feel than what we ended up with. I remember Norman apologizing to me since he thought he'd ruined it.

Chaiken: What made you decide to cut the film down?

Welt: It was really just the pragmatics of making it viable for a commercial audience, though once Norman got into it there was no stopping him. It was a very meticulous process of elimination, but also a difficult one because we all thought there was so much great stuff in the 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours.

Chaiken: Did you attend the premiere of *Maidstone*?

Welt: I don't think I was at the first public screening, but I was almost certainly at the Whitney Museum of Art premiere. A great success. We all thought we had a big hit on our hands.

Chaiken: When *Maidstone* didn't hit, was there a sense of . . .

Welt: Finality? Yes. Financially, it was ruinous for Norman. There was also this shared sense of bewilderment that the film never really caught on as we all thought and hoped it would. In any event, I made it clear to Norman that I had to move on, although we remained close friends. We lived four or five blocks away from each other in Brooklyn Heights and would often meet for lunch. We also did *Beyond the Law (Blue)* (1970) together.

Chaiken: What brought that about? Before I saw the footage, I had thought *Blue* was done shortly after the original version, when, in fact, it was shot almost two years later in the summer of 1970. Norman was still thinking about the film all that time?

Welt: He always felt that *Beyond the Law* needed a stronger ending and wanted to get back to it. *Blue* was shot very quickly with my Éclair 16mm camera, on black and white reversal stock, over an evening in actress Lee Roscoe's Manhattan apartment. The only major difference between the two versions is in the final reel where, in a rage of passion, Pope goes mad and kills his mistress played by Roscoe. I also tinted the opening title sequence blue, otherwise the two versions are identical. I edited *Blue* and thought it turned out pretty good, though afterwards Norman had second thoughts. I don't think it ever really screened. We showed it once to invited guests at the Rizzoli Store in New York and I think that was it. It's been permanently shelved.

Chaiken: Where did you end up after working with Norman?

Welt: The next project I worked on after *Maidstone*, oddly enough, was something for Allen Funt. I came in at the tail end and did some clean up work on his film *What Do you Say to a Naked Lady?* (1970) which would go on to outgross *Diamonds Are Forever* (1971). Funt was contracted to make another film with United Artists, so I stayed on and shot and edited *Money Talks* (1972), a nice film that has totally disappeared. I was still with Funt for a couple of years after that and worked with him on *The New Candid Camera* (1974) for CBS. I was also writing my own scripts and hoping to get one produced. I remember at one point, this was maybe a year or two after *Maidstone*, Norman got the idea that he wanted to produce a porno film. This was right around the time *Deep Throat* (1972) and *Behind the Green Door* (1972) were breaking all kinds of box office records and porn was becoming chic, mainstream and profitable. I wasn't doing much of anything so I rounded up some cohorts—Peter Locke, who now owns the Castle Studio Complex in Romania, Nina Schulman and Harvey Greenstein. For a couple of weeks we sat around the screening room of Supreme Mix tossing ideas back and forth, though in the end nothing ever came of it. Norman wanted me to not only write the script, but to also direct this thing. Finally, I put all of my notes together and came up with a screenplay titled 'It's a Business Doing Pleasure With You.' I still have it kicking around and not so long ago rewrote it as a mafia comedy.

Chaiken: What can you tell me about the *City Blues* project?

Welt: That came later—about 1976 or so. It was all happenstance. This guy in New Jersey had gotten in touch with me to try to sell me on a screenplay. I read it and thought it was pretty good. It was a short, gritty, screenplay about a relationship between a cop and a prostitute, but it needed a lot of work so I expanded it into a feature length film. Norman worked on it with me as did Terry Southern. Simultaneous to all of this, I get a telephone call and this gravelly voice on the other end says, 'Jan, this is Nicholas Ray and I'd like you to look at this footage I have. I want to talk to you about editing it.' I had enormous respect for Ray, so I went to see him. It was this project he was working on with his students at Binghampton, a very experimental, multi-screen, autobiographical film. I said to him 'Nick, I just finished a film like this … ,' meaning *Maidstone*, 'but I have this script ….' So I gave him the

script of *City Blues* and, along with Norman and Norris Mailer, showed him *Beyond the Law*. Ray was planning a move back to NY and became interested in the script and in working on it with me. Little did I know that he was a drowning man and would grab at anything that came his way. But he was Nick Ray, a hero figure of sorts, so I went along with it. The film was to star Rip Torn and Marilyn Chambers, both of whom I had worked with previously.

Chaiken: When did you work with Marilyn Chambers? Presumably, you were behind the camera . . .

Welt: It's a good story. Sean Cunningham, who would go on to make *Friday the 13th* (1979), was directing this film for American International Pictures called *Together* (1971). Wes Craven, the *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) guy, was his assistant editor and they were casting this thing out of Proferes-Desmond offices. I'll never forget the day Chambers, this beautiful eighteen-year-old blonde, first came to the studio. Almost immediately she was accosted by Buzz Farber in the elevator. He couldn't resist and was all over her from the moment she walked in. Turns out Chambers was the daughter of Sean's next door neighbor, literally the girl next door. He asked her parents' permission to film her for a nude diving sequence and amazingly, you might say alarmingly, they said 'yes' to having their daughter appear in what was essentially a soft-core exploitation film. At the time, her name was still Marilyn Briggs and our friend Roger Murphy, one of the cameramen on *Monterey Pop*, shot this amazing footage of her repeatedly diving into a pool. It was like Reifenstahl's *Olympia* (1936), only better, and I was dying to edit it, which I eventually did on top of narrating the entire film. So, when *City Blues* started to come together, I introduced Marilyn to Nick Ray. Even after all the notoriety of *Behind the Green Door* he didn't know who she was, but he certainly knew Rip having directed him years before in *King of Kings* (1961).

Chaiken: Was any of *City Blues* ever shot?

Welt: Hollywood was a lot smarter than I was, they knew Nick Ray couldn't muster up another picture. The budget was $1.5 million and I raised half the money, about $750,000, under a tax shelter. Shortly after, they passed a law in New York getting rid of the shelter, so the money immediately disappeared. Nevertheless, Rip and I persevered. We recast the thing with Amy

Wright as his co-star and I raised another $250,000. Milton Moses Ginsburg, a good friend who worked with Rip previously in *Coming Apart* (1969), took over as director. As soon as we started shooting, the Teamsters came down on us like a ton of bricks. We were doing this as an indie venture, totally outside Union regulations and that's what ultimately eviscerated us. We got half the picture shot, but all the material is gone because I was never able to pay the lab bill.

Chaiken: How soon after that did you move to Alaska and what precipitated the move?

Welt: Twenty five years of living in NY and LA is what did it. I was here back in the 60s when I was working on the Shirley Clarke film. I made a vow then that I'd return one day. It was the landscape that I found so astonishing. 650,000 people in a place twice the size of Texas. Yet there is this extraordinary cohesiveness among the people living here. Even in a place like Anchorage where I'm living now, which has a population of 250,000, it still feels like a small town. I was able to start my own production company here called Iceman Cinema and am currently the Media Director for the Alaskan Native Tribal Health Consortium, the second highest public employer in Alaska, who provide free health care to every Alaskan native. As media director, I've been making documentaries and commercials on environmental and health issues. I also was able to make a feature film called *Florida* (2005), set entirely in Florida but shot entirely in Alaska. My first digitally shot and edited feature.

Chaiken: Is there much of a film scene in Alaska? How many films a year are shot there?

Welt: Alaska is more theater centric than film, but we have a guild called the Alaskan Film Group which has been essentially moribund for the last twelve or thirteen years because of the inroads Vancouver British Columbia have made to get productions to shoot there. There is no reason for any feature films to come to Alaska as long as there is Vancouver, B.C. However, the Alaskan Film Group finally agitated and got passed a bill that becomes law on June 18, 2009 that places Alaska among the top five states in the nation for a tax rebate for any productions that come here. A rebate of something like 42% of the total budget, which could be a huge incentive for producers. So,

we'll see how all that goes. In the meantime, I'll continue to do my thing regardless.

Chaiken: Do you feel the films you made with Norman hold up and what would you say you gained most from working with him?

Welt: For me, *Beyond the Law* is the one that stands best on its own. I also think *Beyond the Law (Blue)* was an improvement on the original; the dom-fem's murder providing a more fitting finality. *Wild 90* is, well, *Wild 90* … one of the first attempts to use *verité* techniques to make a narrative film. Perhaps when the DVD comes out, Criterion might consider subtitling it so it can be more easily comprehended. Norman said that, like fine wine, *Maidstone* would require time to mature. I haven't seen it in twenty years, so maybe it has. As for my take-away—what can I say; I loved the guy. I've certainly never run into another person as uniquely brilliant as he was. I learned to pay full-attention all the time from his example, save when he was toasted, which only happened after-hours. I can recall three times he came into the office with a blackened eye from some scuffle at Elaine's restaurant. The world is a smaller place without him.

LANA JOKEL

Chaiken: Where are you from originally?

Jokel: I was born in Shanghai to Chinese parents. Raised in Brazil, educated there in a British prep school, before attending a Catholic nuns college in America.

Chaiken: How long have you lived in New York?

Jokel: I arrived in 1967 around the time I first went to work for Leacock-Pennebaker Films. I was a language major and spent my junior year in Paris. After college, I went to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts School. At the time, I was married to a Harvard graduate student and came to New York shortly after my divorce when I was still in my 20s.

Chaiken: Were you always interested in making films?

Jokel: No, not at all. I became involved with film by chance after meeting D.A. Pennebaker at Max's Kansas City. I asked him what he did and he told me he made documentary films. I remember saying to him, 'Docu-

mentary films?' So, he invited me to the studio and showed me *Don't Look Back* (1967), the film he had just finished on Bob Dylan, and also *Primary* (1960), a film he worked on about John F. Kennedy. I was totally mesmerized by these and became interested in learning how they were made. Soon after, Pennebaker offered me a $75 a week job and promised to train me as an editor. It was too good an opportunity to pass up, especially because I am a visually oriented person and not good with words! So, I took the job and was very glad I did because at the time they were just getting back all of this fantastic footage from the Monterey Pop festival. We would all sit in the studio until 2 or 3 in the morning just watching the rushes. Synching the footage of *Monterey Pop* (1968) is how I started in film. I met Mailer shortly after and became involved with the editing of *Beyond the Law* (1968).

Chaiken: Was it difficult to jump right into something like that?

Jokel: Only at first. I was very much a novice and totally intimated by Norman's 'Rat Pack.' This was the sixties with everyone running around in miniskirts and you had Buzz Farber, Jose Torres and Mickey Knox running around the studio hitting on all the young girls. You can imagine what that work environment was like. I can remember, just to keep people away, I put a sign outside my door that said 'Please do not disturb. Editor working.' When I work, I am completely focused so those guys breathing down my neck wouldn't do. Norman was good about it. He protected me in a way and told those guys to cool it.

Chaiken: Was there an immediate sense of how good the *Beyond the Law* footage was?

Jokel: We knew after looking at the rushes that we had performances that were raw, gritty and true to life. In that respect, I think *Beyond the Law* is more successful than *Maidstone* (1968–1970). In *Beyond the Law*, you had good friends working together who knew each other intimately and understood how to push buttons to generate real emotion. The people Norman chose really got inside these characters. All of that immediately came through watching the rushes.

Chaiken: Did *Beyond the Law* go through many successive edits?

Jokel: *Beyond the Law* found its proper rhythm early on and Norman took care not to overcut it. By the time we got to *Maidstone*, he had become obsessed with editing.

Chaiken: Do you feel that hurt the film?

Jokel: For my taste, *Maidstone* is overcut. You have all these levels of fantasy and reality, where Norman's personal life is mixed up with the life of this director. You get all of these different sides of Norman Mailer; the writer, the father, the husband and the friend mixed up with his fantasy of running for president and his fantasies of becoming a serious film director which, as an editor, I found totally fascinating. I set out with Jan and Norman to weave all of this, like a tapestry, but during the course of the weaving I think some of the threads got lost. Looking back now, I can understand why the critics were so hard on certain aspects of the film. I can remember editing the scene where he is casting and says to one of the girls 'You have beautiful eyes, but your lips are too thin.' In the context of the film and the character Norman is playing it comes across demeaning. Remember, this was right at the beginning of the Feminist movement. One never sees any of Norman's vulnerability in the film until the very end in that incredible scene with Rip. For me, that one scene changes the entire mood of the film.

Chaiken: Were you involved in the *Maidstone* shoot?

Jokel: No, because every summer I'd go home to see my family in Brazil. Norman asked me to be in it and I remember telling him that I was very shy and wouldn't be good in front of the camera, though I'd love to be part of the editing team. He said 'Great. I'll wait for you to come back.' When I returned to New York in the fall the film had been shot and Norman asked Jan and I to start work on it almost immediately. He was very loyal in that way, which is one of the things I admired most about him. Many years later, I asked him why he hired me to edit, considering I had virtually no experience. He told me that he liked my intuition and also the fact that I didn't go to film school so I wasn't bogged down by rules. He also said he liked my 'nimble oriental fingers' (*laughs*)

Chaiken: What do you remember most about the editing of *Maidstone*?

Jokel: I was very fortunate that Norman let me edit certain scenes, but it could be frustrating because he was so articulate about what he wanted. I'd

suggest a way to cut a scene and he would go on and on about how he thought it should be done. It got to the point where I just looked at him and said 'Norman you are so articulate and I am just the opposite. You'll always win in the argument, but my instincts tell me that we should ….' More often than not, Norman would tell me the way he wanted a scene to work and then afterwards turn to me and say 'Ok, let's try it your way.' We were dealing with so much material that initially it was chaos. The first thing we did was to watch all the rushes. That took awhile because there was close to forty hours of material to contend with. At the beginning, I don't think Norman was sure what he had. He certainly wasn't sure how he was going to pull it all together. It felt almost like we were working on a documentary. As we began to put certain shots or scenes next to one another, it began to take on its own kind of logic. Themes began to develop. Very much like writing, I suppose. Later, like in a novel, Norman even added chapter titles. It took awhile though and things were not made very clear to me. Especially the way the film kept jumping from one scene to the next. I remember the dream sequence very well and watching it in rough cut for the first time. Not many people know that the soundtrack to that sequence is a recording of Norman making love with Carol Stevens.

Chaiken: In terms of editing, 'The Dream Sequence' is the most complex scene in the film. Can you talk about how it came together and what Norman's intentions were for the scene?

Jokel: That scene is very erotic to me, principally because of the soundtrack. In a way, it sums up the entire film using sound and image in the place of dialogue or narration. The long walking shot is the unifying thread. The film flashes backwards and forwards—leaving a lot of room for ambiguity and for the audience to make of it what they will. Norman had huge respect for the intelligence of his audience and wasn't looking to pander to them in obvious ways. The sequence is composed of these abrupt juxtapositions where levels of fantasy, reality and dream merge together and come apart as if Kingsley's past, present and future are flashing before his eyes. It's also, quite literally, the 'death of the director' since at that moment the film looses any pretense of narrative order and logic. A lot of the things Norman was aiming for in the film weren't explained, but it had its own flow and style unique to a Norman Mailer film.

Chaiken: With Norman running for Mayor of New York and writing *Of A Fire On the Moon* in the middle of editing *Maidstone*, were there long gaps in the work?

Jokel: There was so much footage that even when Norman wasn't in the editing room we were working. Synching everything took a huge amount of time. But Norman was around more often than not because he was so enthusiastic about the project and wanted to be there despite how busy he was. He was on a real high throughout the entire process. At the time, critics really took him to task for his supposed charlatanism when it came to directing, but they never understood how totally serious he was about his films. If *Maidstone* had been more of a financial success, I'm certain he would have gone on to make many more.

Chaiken: How did the film find its structure?

Jokel: It was process of elimination. Because there was so much footage and since there was no script to follow, we experimented. At one stage, I can remember the film being a bit clearer and more linear. Then it got chopped up and folded in on itself. I remember once we assembled the rough cut thinking that all the film really needed was bit of a fine-tuning and that would do it, but Norman wanted to continue to play with it and shift it about. Editing this way, before computers, it's hard to come back to what you've lost. My fantasy would be to re-edit *Maidstone* and restore it to its original length, with all of the different corners and plot twists that got cut.

Chaiken: What was next for you after *Maidstone*?

Jokel: After working with Norman, I worked on the Jimi Hendrix and Richie Havens sequences in Michael Wadleigh's *Woodstock* (1970). After that, I got taken on by Andy Warhol and director Paul Morrissey.

Chaiken: How did you meet Warhol and Morrissey?

Jokel: After *Maidstone*, I began editing documentaries on contemporary art for producer Michael Blackwood and his brother Christian, a great cinematographer who has since passed away. I edited a film on the NY School of Abstract Expressionism and another on American Art in the sixties. That's how I first met Andy and Paul. Paul hired me and Jed Johnson, Warhol's boyfriend at the time, to edit his films *Heat* (1972) and *L'Amour* (1973). War-

hol was the producer of both films and rented a house for us to work in East Hampton. What could be better, right? Paul and Andy would come out on the weekends and I got to know them both very well. I worked at the Factory for about a year and a half after that. I remember Andy saying to me 'Why don't you have a Factory baby so I can be the Godfather?' I had a boyfriend at the time, but had no intention of having a baby. It was the period right when Warhol was beginning to do all those commissioned portraits for a lot of money.

Chaiken: It was around this time that you directed your first film?

Jokel: After *Heat*, I was editing again for Michael Blackwood. He had a connection at a German television station, who commissioned him to make a number of documentaries. Michael asked if I had any ideas and I told him that I would love to make my own film on Andy Warhol. We presented a proposal to German TV and Michael got us the money. Since I had access to Warhol, it all seemed to make sense. The only problem was I'd never directed a film before. When you are very young, it's amazing how fearless you are. I was convinced I could do it so I went ahead. I hired a great cameraman in New York, Mark Woodcock, who worked with Pennebaker. I went with Andy, Paul and Jed to Cannes for the premiere of *Heat* and took my own camera, a non-sync, handheld, 16mm Cannon Scoopic. I filmed our entire European trip and used a little tape recorder on the side to capture our conversations along the way. I edited together all of this wild footage I shot, alongside the material Mark shot in New York. Many people still think it's one of the best documentaries on Andy because I was able to get him to open up and talk in front of the camera, which was unusual for him.

Chaiken: It's interesting that you ended up with Warhol after working with Mailer considering they seem to occupy almost opposite ends of the cultural spectrum.

Jokel: Bob Hughes, the art critic for *Time* magazine who was a close friend, was furious that I was working with Warhol. But I learned a lot from him and it was exciting, all consuming and fun. Of course, I have this whole other Chinese side of my personality, so even as I was very much a part of the Factory scene, I always remained a bit outside of it. It was a wonderful experience, but I also saw a lot of self-destruction. I don't think Norman thought much of Warhol's work, but even he couldn't deny what a phenomenon

Andy was. Like Warhol or not, there is no way to ignore his brilliance and perception.

Chaiken: Do you feel critics at the time treated Norman's films fairly?

Jokel: No. Critics love to put people in boxes. In America, especially, they just wouldn't accept Norman as a filmmaker. Despite this, I thought he was very daring to just go out there and do it, to put so much of himself out there. What most of the critics missed is how deeply personal and ahead of its time *Maidstone* is.

Chaiken: After working with Norman and Andy, you directed, shot and edited several films on your own. I'd like to ask you about two projects specifically, your portrait of artist Larry Rivers and the documentaries you made on Chinese contemporary art. You first met Rivers through Warhol?

Jokel: Yes, Andy introduced me to him the summer we were editing *Heat*. Larry had his studio in Southampton so we would see him often. He and Andy were the first two artists I knew shooting films on Sony Portapak video. Eventually, I became very good friends with Larry and his second wife Clarice.

Chaiken: One of the most striking things about *Larry Rivers: Public and Private* (1993) is the intimacy between director and subject . . .

Jokel: By the time I made the film on Larry, it was the early nineties and I'd known him for twenty years. I was able to ask very provocative questions and he gave me answers that were direct and honest. Some might say shockingly so. Larry was such a complex and creative individual. I wanted to show all the different sides of him—the artist, the man, the father, the husband and the musician. It was my job to weave all of this together. That's truly what I love most about the documentary process.

Chaiken: It's an enormously accomplished film in that respect. How long did it take to edit?

Jokel: What happened was immediately after I'd finished cinematography on the Rivers film my father died of Alzheimer's. I was very close to him and when he died I was devastated. After the funeral in Brazil, I came back to Bridgehampton and had a Steenbeck shipped to my studio there. I worked non-stop through the summer. I'd get up at six in the morning, jump in the

pool, take a swim, have coffee and then work on the film the rest of the day. I edited by myself for three months. I just worked and worked and worked and by the fall I was finished. I remember going back to Brazil that Christmas and having this delayed reaction to my father's death. It was the film that kept me together. I think it's some of my best work. Ricky Leacock's son Robert was one of the cameramen on it. It really all came full circle for me on that film. I'm very proud of it.

Chaiken: When did you begin filming contemporary artists in China?

Jokel: The first film I made on China was in 2000 when I went back there with my sister having left China fifty years before. I brought along a little camcorder just to record the trip with no intention of making a film. It was a very emotional experience, visiting my aunt who was ninety and who I hadn't seen in many, many years. As I was recording, memories just came rushing back along with my impressions and feelings in the moment. It wasn't until I got back to New York that I realized I had all of this footage to work with which became this very personal film of mine titled *China Revisited* (2000).

Chaiken: This lead to the other projects in China?

Jokel: Yes. I suppose making these films was my way of getting back to my roots. The next film happened a few years later on my second trip in 2004. I was intrigued by the burgeoning contemporary art scene in China and wanted to try to capture it on film. This was a few years before Chinese Pop art became the worldwide phenomenon that it is today among curators, collectors, and dealers. I had my own video camera and did all the filming myself. It was hard for me since I don't speak Mandarin, only Shanghai dialect, and needed an interpreter to ask the questions as I interviewed artists at work. I shot mostly painters and sculptors and this became a film titled *Chinese Contemporary Art: Artists Working in China* (2004). Shortly after I returned, the Institute of Contemporary Photography and the Asia Society in New York jointly were doing an exhibition of new video art, photography and installation work from China. I decided to continue filming and made a second part titled *Chinese Contemporary Art Comes to America* (2004). Many of the artists I filmed went on to become hugely successful. I got to them at just the right time.

Chaiken: One final question, what do you feel you gained most in your time working with Norman?

Jokel: More than anything else, I learned how to become more fearless, to move forward without necessarily having all the answers and to live with this ambiguity. Personally, I found him to be patient, charming, responsive … the public rarely saw this private side. When you work with Norman as closely as Jan and I did, you got to see the entirety of his personality. He was incredibly loyal. He could have chosen anyone to work with, but he chose to stick with Jan and I. He took a chance on me, believing in my instincts and whatever else. For that, I'll always be grateful to him. The last time I saw Norman was after the screening of *Tough Guys Don't Dance* (1987) at Lincoln Center in the summer of 2007. After the panel discussion between you, Norman and Michael Lennon, I went up to the stage to say hello to him. In spite of the canes, he struggled to get up from his chair and introduced me to Mike by saying, 'Lana was an editor on *Beyond the Law* and *Maidstone*. Isn't she beautiful?' That's Norman …