INTRODUCING... liz butterfield marilyn stonehouse

"She's the best!," they all say, and it's curious. Curious because "the best" is such a rare adjective to use when describing fellow Canadian craftsmen. "The best" is usually reserved for Hollywood and New York. But "the best," in this case, describes two lady production managers, Liz Butterfield and Marilyn Stonehouse, who have wrapped up at least four decades in Canadian filmmaking. Together they have woven themselves into the fabric of the industry, becoming part of the grain and can no longer be separated from it.

In fact, one could say they built the industry. After all, a production manager carries on his/her back the awesome load of the production – is the muledriver, so to speak. And, as we all know, the creative part is dandy, but it's a sigh on the wind until the physical process makes it flesh and blood.

So who are these remarkable women? And how over the past 20 years have they not only survived but have risen in a business, so precarious, so fly-by-night where, rather than deal with its ups and downs, lesser beings retreat into the safety of the CBC or into commercial production houses?

Liz Butterfield, whose last picture was **Running**, shot last summer, came to Canada from England in the late '50's as stage manager with the Old Vic Theatre's touring company. The company went back to England, but Liz fell in love with Canada and stayed. "The first job I got was script assistant at the CBC. I knew nothing about television, of course, but the fellow who hired me was so impressed with all things British that he thought I must be able to do the job. So I did."

Marilyn Stonehouse started as a secretary with Robert Lawrence Productions in 1955, one of the first commercial production houses formed in Canada. For four years, she too was a script assistant. "That was unusual, because in those days everyone was brought up from New York." But both women had the ability to nose-dive into work and plied their way up to production secretary and producer respectively, until someone noticed they were capable of consuming vast quantities of responsibility and made them production managers.

Liz Butterfield, production manager of **Running** works a 19 hour work-day

"Until I was hired as her secretary, Marilyn never cashed her cheques," says Sheila Sone, now producer at Grey Advertising in Toronto. "When I started working for her, I noticed her drawers were full of uncashed cheques. That's because she was working so much, she didn't have time to cash her cheques." Sheila also used to buy the shoes and dresses which Marilyn wore to client presentations, because Marilyn just would not take the time off to do it herself. "I mean she worked from 8:00 in the morning, until 10:00, 11:00, 12:00 midnight, every single day. She ate her lunch while she worked. She probably did not need the number of hours she put in, but she made her job her life, her life her job."

Liz Butterfield starts her day at 5:30 am on a set and often stays till midnight. She expects as much of her crew. "If people don't like the hours or the work, then they should be working in a bank."

Alright, hard work is one thing. But it doesn't necessarily qualify for the title of "the best." "The best," is a subjective phrase said more with admiration. It is not acquired merely by the stretch of time one puts into a job. "The best" is a philosophy, and the secret is morale. Efficiency goes without saying, but morale is paramount. "A picture is as good as the people in it," says Marilyn, and her first job as production manager is to see that the people are good. Listen to what folks in the industry describe as "the best."

"One thing I have learned from Marilyn that will always, always stay in my mind," continues Sheila Sone, "is that she never demanded, she always asked. It didn't matter who she was talking to,

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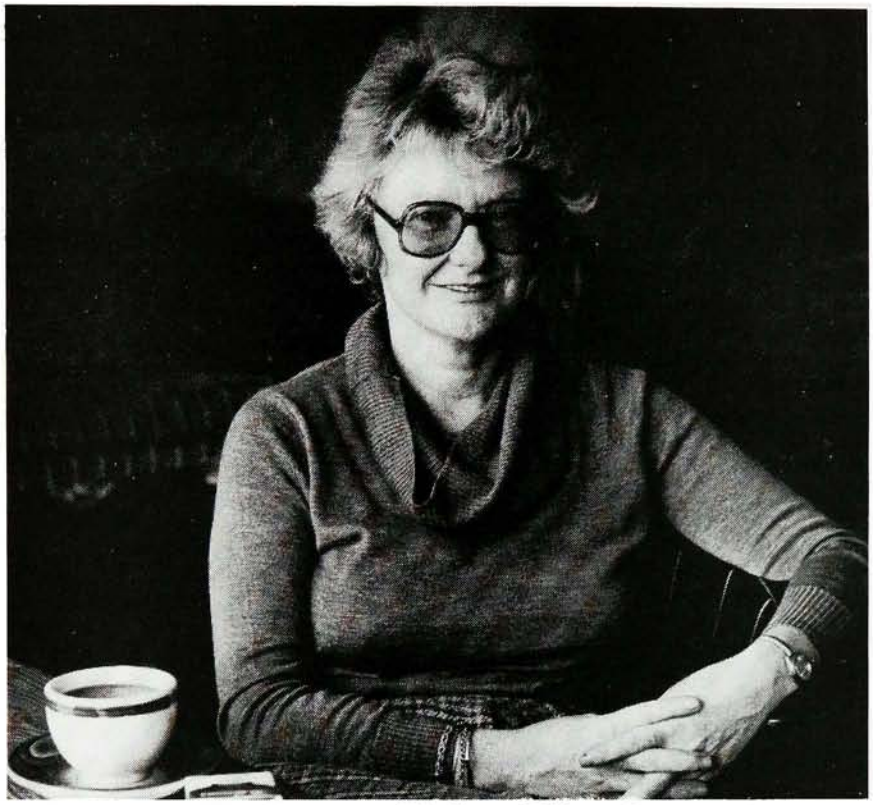

Marilyn Stonehouse, production manager of **The Shape of Things to Come** pauses for coffee

it was always 'Could you?', 'Would you?' That is something I have held onto with people working for me."

Tony Lucibello, who has been working with Marilyn for 10 years since **Heart Farm** and up until **The Shape of Things to Come** wrapped up last November, says, She's very sharp, very thorough, very good. She treats everybody equally, and she always knows what's happening. She's a very warm person. If anyone has a problem she always listens, even if it's the coffee boy. A lot of production managers don't take the time to talk to individuals about their problems, but she always has time. Her crew are her family, and she treats them like one.

I believe very much in the tradition of the business," says Marilyn. "You treat people like you would like to be treated yourself. Everyone I hire is a specialist. I trust him to know the job and I respect him for it. I also expect him to respect me for knowing mine.

"I know it's not always easy to work for a woman," adds Sheila Sone, "but Marilyn is easy to work for. I wanted to do things for her, because she treated me properly."

Chris Hooper, production secretary on **The Shape of Things to Come** ponders a moment and puts it all into perspective. If there's a problem Marilyn tends to bring all the people involved into her office and breaks it down to its roots. Then in a flash it's gone and everyone's working again. Marilyn earns your respect without being aware at all that that's what she's doing.

"Everyone says that Marilyn is 'nice'," says Linda Kemp, wardrobe mistress on **Running**. "I don't think too many people would describe Liz as "nice." If she's angry she shows it. The first time I went to work for her, she yelled and screamed at someone for about ten minutes. I was in mortal terror of her that entire shoot. But she is one of the most respected people in this business." Linda pauses and adds, "You have to be a bit of a ballbuster to be in a position of authority on a film set. Even Marilyn is a bit of a ballbuster when the crunch comes."

Phil Desjardins, location manager on **Running** is grateful to Liz for giving him the job when he was relatively new to Toronto. "What I admire about her is that she will hire a person she has never worked with before, on the potential she sees in them and not a fancy resumé. I will always be grateful to her for that.

She has one of the most thorough and efficient minds I've come across. For instance she had seen a car in a parking lot where we were to shoot the next day and asked that it be moved. Five o'clock the next morning she was there to see if the car had been moved. It hadn't. She had stayed awake all night thinking about that car and went out there early to check on it. It was moved before the camera arrived.

"I've never tried to be liked. I don't know whether anyone likes me, and I don't care," says Liz. "But I would like to be respected. Because if people can't respect me, that means I'm not doing a good job.

"One of the things I've found out about working with a crew is that very few people like to make decisions, and it is extremely important to make snap decisions. They see a car blocking a driveway, and nobody knows what to do about it. I can make decisions. I will say, That car has got to go, and you see that it's done.' Then someone will quibble, 'But there's another car parked behind it,' and I will say, 'Well see that that one is moved too.' I hate quibbling. Also the vast majority of producers know nothing about how a picture is made. So they leave all the authority to a production manager. I got very used to a position of command."

Interestingly enough, both Liz and Marilyn have made it in a profession that does not take kindly to having women in authority over crew and equipment.

Linda Kemp says, "The women I've worked with are so much better than the men. They keep things under control much better. It's a job for a good organizer, and that fits in with women's work very well. I've heard all those horror stories of what an IATSE crew can do to a woman director on a set. But you have to get past the point of thinking of a woman as a woman, and when they begin thinking of a woman as a friend, it begins to work.

"When I first started out," says Marilyn, the industry was very young and very little, so no one was a threat because there was nothing to lose. We were all starting out and struggling together. Everybody was supporting each other.

There's never been any problem with an IATSE crew as far as Marilyn being a woman is concerned, " says Tony Lucibello. "The guys know that she's the kind of woman who will help them to keep working and try to make them look good.

"Production management has become a woman's job because men didn't want it," says Liz. "In the U.S. and England the way to become a production manager is through the position of assistant director. Here all the AD's want to be directors, so they tend to look to the production secretary for their next production manager.

"Women are usually much better at detail than men – always have been. Production managing is like housekeeping. Besides, women have to settle problems as soon as they come up because they can't afford to let them escalate to the point of fisticuffs like men can. There weren't many women production managers when I started, but there are a lot now, and they are among the best in the business."

Both Liz and Marilyn are in the profession they are in because they love putting things together to make them happen. "I like organizing," says Liz. "I like problems and post-problems, and turning around at the end of a production and saying 'Christ, we did it!' Both live on the high of a new challenge and on being one step ahead of disaster. Routine would kill them. "You never stop growing," says Marilyn. "There are always new techniques, new equipment and working with new and different people, because no two people work alike." Marilyn has a story about a chimp on the set of **Search and Rescue**, who ate the cast and crew out of house and home and rampaged the set looking for soda pop and another story about coaxing a panther out of a tree. Liz tells of hoisting equipment up six stories by donkey engine when filming **The Whiteoaks of Jalna** at the Winter Garden Theatre. The theatre, closed since 1929, is six stories above a movie house in Toronto, and the elevators no longer work on that floor. "We had to haul Johnny-on-the-Spots up empty and haul them down full." Marilyn shakes her head about having to find a mound of snow in April within 24 hours, and Liz laughs at chasing live chickens off the set before a shoot can start.

Both are perfectionists with an eye for detail that is uncanny, and both complain of hiring crew that is interested in the job only as a stepping stone to becoming a director. "First they want to be a go-fer," says Marilyn, the next job they want to be third AD, then second, then first, and then they think they're directors. All I can say is, just learn to do one job well, and the rest will follow.

"What I can't stand," says Liz, "is someone who comes out of film school, head filled with Ingmar Bergman and immediately has his eye on the director's job. A lot of learning about filmmaking is doing the jo-jobs and doing them well. It does absolutely no good for a go-fer to know how **Wild Strawberries** was cut, because this film is not **Wild Strawberries**, and in the meantime, I need someone who knows how to lay a cable and can concentrate on that. Also, they all want to be go-fers on the floor. Well, you learn a lot more about what makes a film by keeping an eye on the paperwork in the office than you do on the floor. And it's to my way of thinking that an assistant editor's job is a much more efficient route to becoming a director, so they're wasting their time being on the floor in the first place."

Both, oddly enough, look forward to getting out of the business. Marilyn believes she'll give it another ten years, then retire and just travel. "She won't retire," ways Sheila Sone. "She'll just keep on working."

Liz thinks if she would win a million dollars, she wouldn't do any of this anymore. But who knows? Pressure and challenge can be just as addictive as they are exhausting, and a pipe dream of a million dollars can be a safety valve, but probably not to be taken too seriously. Besides she has yet to buy her first lottery ticket.

Neither woman has ever married. But then there may be few men who will accept a "career first" attitude from a woman and a lot less men than women are willing to tolerate a workaholic as a spouse.

Marilyn still loves going to movies as an escape, but Liz finds herself watching something like, **Waterloo** and being aghast at how many lunches the cast must have needed. Liz takes the time between shoots to swallow up art galleries, which she adores, reads all the biographical and historical books she can lay her hands on and magazines six at a time. "It's like feeding a camel's hump. I absorb it all in a concentrated period, and it carries me through those long cultural dry spells of a shoot."

Both women stay out of politics and refrain from getting involved in the creative direction of a film, which probably is one reason why they are so popular and do not seem to have enemies. They have adopted the film industry as their home and family, their life, their joy and the stuff which nourishes them body and soul.

"One thing a good production manager has got to remember," says Liz, "is that it's just as important to keep track of the toilet paper, as it is to keep track of the film stock, because it's just as disastrous to run out of toilet paper as it is to run out of film stock." Her eyes twinkle. "How many men are aware of that?"

So with one eye on the film stock and one eye on the toilet paper, Liz Butterfield and Marilyn Stonehouse have injected the Canadian film industry with the spirit and substance it has needed to grow, and quite simply have become "the best."

Krystyna Hunt