

Retired Marietta native lands role in Hollywood movie

Ed Reich is a 1933 graduate of Marietta H.S. He was a sports writer for the Washington, D.C. Herald and press agent from 1933 to 1940 and served nearly four years as a Navy combat correspondent in the Pacific during WWII.

He became a civilian public relations officer with the Defense Department following the war, serving briefly in Washington, 18 years in Hawaii, five years in West Germany and three years in Chicago.

He retired from his Chicago position in 1972 and settled with his wife and three children in Asheville, N.C.

He is the elder brother of Jay R. Reich of Marietta and Mary Sheetz of Mount Joy.

He visits Marietta once or twice a year usually making one trip to coincide with the annual Marietta H.S. alumni reunion.

Ed is enjoying his retirement doing free lance writing and playing golf.

By Ed Reich

One of the advantages of retirement, I have discovered, is the freedom to choose and perhaps begin, health permitting, a second career. If one has patience, he can even wait around for an offer from Hollywood.

My Hollywood offer came in the form of a five line help wanted ad in the local Asheville newspaper. It read: "Hollywood production seeks extras for major motion picture titled 'Being There' to be filmed locally. Need extras for roles as newspapermen, chauffeurs, secret servicemen, maids, and butlers. Apply Rm 217 Smoky Hilton Hotel."

I have played the role of newspaperman in real life for most of my working career so I thought I would be qualified for the part. Just make it to the set and act natural.

The job interview was conducted with typical

Hollywood efficiency. After standing in a long line in the hallway, I reached the room where a young man promptly snapped my picture with a Polaroid camera.

He handed me the print, wet and sticky with developer, and asked me to sit down at the table and fill out a simple application. The last question asked if I'd had previous acting experience. I printed a bold "NONE."

The color print was fully developed by the time I completed the form. Not bad at all for a beginning. The picture looked just like me standing straight and tall against a blank wall.

A young girl took my application, stapled it to the picture and tossed it on top of a stack of applications at least a foot high. It slipped off the pile and fell to the floor. I waited to see if the girl retrieved it which she did.

There are certain advantages in embarking on a Hollywood career in this manner. First, and perhaps most important, you don't have to pay high fees to a Hollywood agent. It has its disadvantages too. In most cases, your Hollywood career will be short-lived. Another disadvantage is that you're competing with several thousand other people who read the daily help wanted ads too.

Within two weeks, just about the time I'd nearly forgotten that I even applied, I received a call to report to the Biltmore House and Gardens at 7 a.m. in the morning.

"Wear a black suit and a black coat," a man's voice said, "we're going to use you as a mourner in a funeral scene."

Biltmore House and Gardens is a 12,000 acre estate located on the fringe of Asheville city limits. The majestic Biltmore House, a masterpiece of early French Renaissance architecture, was built by the Vanderbilts.

Arriving promptly at 7 a.m. I milled around the huge foyer with no less than 50 extras.

After hot coffee and doughnuts, we reported to costuming. A young man looked me over. "Your suit is OK and your black cashmere coat is just fine." He gave me a black tie to replace the one I was wearing. "This will be more appropriate for the occasion," he said.

At 9:30 we were bussed to the set located on a hilltop overlooking the Biltmore House. It was a dreary, overcast day—perfect for a funeral scene. Three inches of snow covered the frozen ground.

The assistant director



A somber Ed Reich stands behind an equally somber Shirley MacLaine and Peter Sellers on the set of "Being There," a major motion picture being filmed in Asheville, NC. (Photo by Ewart Ball, staff photographer, Asheville Citizen-Times).

soon began moving extras into position flanking a coffin. I was moved from one spot, then another. Finally I was told: "This is your spot. You will be here during all the filming."

In the Army, veterans will recall, it was always "Hurry up and wait." On a Hollywood movie set I soon discovered it is "Take your time and wait."

This we did for nearly an hour until Peter Sellers, Shirley MacLaine and Jack Warden finally appeared.

The director conferred with the star performers at length, then moved each into position. Jack Warden took his place at the head of the casket. Shirley MacLaine and Peter Sellers were placed into position directly in front of me.

Finally, an assistant director shouted: "Quiet on the set! We're rolling! Action!"

During filming of the scene, Warden delivers three different versions of a short eulogy. Sellers, on cue from the director, turns, looks at me and mumbles something inaudible. I nod and say something equally inaudible.

Sellers then turns and walks away. I turn my head watching him until he gets out of camera range. A few moments later, Shirley MacLaine turns, looks at me and then follows Sellers. I also turn my head and look at her.

When Sellers and Mac-

Laine are out of camera range the director shouts: "Cut!"

And that's it. That's it, I should say, for the first take. This same scene was shot and re-shot at least 50 times during the two days I spent on the set.

Film, I learned, is the cheapest commodity in producing a movie. The huge camera gobbles up 35 mm film at an enormous rate. Splice all the takes together end to end and you'd have enough film for a full-length movie. Granted, it would get pretty boring.

We broke up promptly at noon each day and returned by bus to the Biltmore House for a sumptuous lunch catered by food specialists from California.

The movie, as far as I can figure out, is a political satire scheduled for release in February 1980. It is based on a novelette written by Jerzy Kosinski who also wrote the screenplay.

All in all, the people involved in making the film are of highest quality.

Hal Ashby, a meticulous director, is being mentioned as a likely Academy Award winner for "Coming Home."

Perc Westmore, perhaps the best makeup man in Hollywood was busy on the set powdering Shirley MacLaine's face after each take. Once he straightened my gray scarf and flicked some cigar ashes from the

front of my coat.

The burial, incidentally, is for Melvin Douglas who plays the role of a wealthy tycoon. He was not on location during my two-day stint.

Scores of extras playing roles as newspapermen and secret servicemen were on location during the two days of filming but were never on camera. They were paid from \$32.50 to \$50 a day, the going rate for extras, but spent most of their time sitting or standing around—waiting.

The movie company's on-location casting director said that some 1,200 local people applied for extra and stand-in roles in the film, of which perhaps 200 were used.

Movie work is not hard but tedious and boring at times. The hours are usually long. During the two days on the set I worked 11 hours each day,—from sun-up 'till sundown.

MacLaine and Sellers are friendly and quite nice. Somewhat aloof because they're movie stars, but still quite nice nevertheless.

I have no delusions about embarking on a career in the movies. It was an interesting experience. I merely filed an application as a "Shot in the Dark," which just happens to be the title of one of Peter Sellers' best movies. The pun, therefore, is intentional.

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