



# IATSE LOCAL 891

International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts of the United States, its Territories and Canada • British Columbia and the Yukon

## Apple Box Talks – Interview with Jimmy Chow

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Interviewee - Jimmy Chow

Interviewers - Crystal Braunwarth and Hillary Bergshoeff

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Crystal Braunwarth: Hello everyone, it's Crystal here, one of your hosts for IATSE 891's podcast, Apple Box Talks.

It's been nearly two years since we released an episode of the podcast, and for many of us, a lot has changed in that time. Our industry, our people, have come through an incredibly challenging two years, and now we take stock of how we want to move forward with this work in the future.

We're hoping to release season two of Apple Box Talks in 2025. Season one introduced you to some of the creative artists and technicians that make up the membership here and gave you a peek behind the curtain, with our episodes focused on helping those new to the industry learn more about what it means to be a part of our local. In season two, we want to take a step back, looking more broadly at IATSE 891's role in both the motion picture industry and the greater labor movement here in BC.

We're really excited about the upcoming interviews and the stories we will get to share with you in 2025. In the meantime, we've gone back to our archive and edited six previously unaired episodes from season one, and we'll be releasing those monthly for the rest of 2024. Since they were recorded in 2022, there are a few dated references, but there's still some excellent stories for you.

So, until we see you fresh again in 2025, pull up an Apple Box and let's talk.

[Theme Song]

Crystal Braunwarth: IATSE 891 presents Apple Box Talks.

Hillary Bergshoeff: The podcast where we get to talk to the very best in entertainment, the artisans and technicians of IATSE 891.

CB: From prep to post and everything in between, we create worlds on screens of all sizes.

HB: Welcome to Apple Box Talks. I'm Hillary



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CB: and I'm Crystal and this week we are joined by the department who brings the details of the story to life on screen; with credits to their names such as Seven Years in Tibet, Snow Falling on Cedars, Watchmen and the BFG.

HB: This week taking their seat on the Apple Box is a property master and member of the props department, Jimmy Chow. So let's pull up an Apple box and let's talk.

CB: Welcome, Jimmy. Thank you for coming.

Jimmy Chow: Thank you. This Apple box is quite comfortable.

CB: The name of the podcast came about because, you know, how everyone's standing around on set all day and then some gracious grip pulls up an Apple box and says, how about you have a seat? And then, you know, conversation ensues.

HB: So Jimmy, how would you describe your job in the motion picture industry?

JC: I would describe as being exhilarating, a lot of challenges, fun, and hopefully quite poignant to help tell the story if I do the props correctly.

CB: You are what we would call a veteran of this industry. So you've seen it grow and change over the years and just take us through where you started and where you are now?

JC: Well it's been a long journey and the film industry was probably going to be my third career. I was in retail and I was always in the arts and the music and theater and I thought well what am I going to do now? Well I'll try social work and it was rewarding but I found out dealing with the bureaucracy and social work in the government it just wasn't my calling so I was looking for something else and friends of mine were working at BCTV and one person was working at CBC and they said, "Well, you apply." And I said, "Oh, okay." So I applied and I got a call and they asked me to come down to work. I said, "Oh, great." It was Christmas Eve and I ended up cleaning Bob Fortune's Blackboard. I did such a great job that they called me back again a week later and it was New Year's Eve. So I guess that's why I got the job and I got a job at the CBC as a stagehand. I did graphics and I was doing set decoration and then a position came open for a TV series called Beach Combers. I kind of liked film. I'd done one documentary and so I went and did it. It was wonderful. It was three years of fun challenges and that was my schooling. And then in '78, I wanted to do something different and a show from Hollywood came in called Orchard Children. I asked for a leave of absence, I said, "Let me go, it'd be great. I'll learn all this Hollywood stuff and bring it back." And they wouldn't give me a leave of absence, so I quit. And they said, "Nobody quits the CBC." And I went, "Well, I did." So it was '78, and 40 years later, I've been freelancing ever since.

CB: So Beachcombers, I mean, That really was part of the very beginnings of the industry, so you've really part of carving the pathway of film and television here in BC.



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JC: Well, it was a steady position here. We didn't really know what we're doing, we just kind of winged it. But looking back at the film industry, Hollywood was here in the 30s, and they came for the you know, the mounted place, the oceans and the mountains.

But Beachcomber's actually was a steady run and who would know that it ran for 19 years. I was there in season four, five and six and every year we never thought we'd be coming back 'cause everything was controlled by Toronto and they wouldn't tell us if they're gonna renew or not.

But it was a wonderful, I still have friends that are from the era. I learned an enormous amount. And the beauty about that was that we were so small and naive....If you're doing I guess on the design part called set decorators, if you're in the freelance world now, we'd be doing about 10 or 12 jobs. So that gave me a really good background of all the other positions.

So when I started freelancing, it started separating into different little departments. And I went, oh boy, this guy's really good. And so you would just let that person do it. And that's the philosophy I've always had, is to find the very best people and let them join your team. And it's worked for me, you know?

HB: So for someone who's not very familiar, how does props fit in a show between costumes and set deck and all the pieces? is, where's props?

JC: Well, props is a very general term that's used in theater, film, TV, it's quite general and specific to the actual area that you're actually working in. For example, when you say props in New York for picture cars, the props people do that there. I used to do that here, now the teams just do that. So generally speaking here, because we're cut from the cloth of the American system, props generally means that they're hand props that are handled by the actor, touched and used. I don't have that philosophy. That's what I generally do.

I work very closely with certain set decorators and if they have something that's in the set that works really well, I'll just use that because it has to flow and blend into it, and I'll say to the decorator, "Well, I'll need two or three of these," or whatever. But props generally in the North America scene is what is usually handled and used by actors, so that could be a quill pen to a weapon of any kind. But I'm much more general, and certain shows I tend to like to do that if they'll allow me to do it.

CB: And you really have taken up some very challenging shows. And your career has taken you all over the world really. Can you talk to us about seven years in Tibet and what that was like? –

CB: That's probably the most challenging show that I've ever done. I was gone from Vancouver for 10 months. And originally when the producer and the director and the designer called me, We were supposed to be shooting in India, and first thing you go to the family and say, "I think I'd like to go away," and that's always tension, and that's one of the balances one has to do.



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So I said yes, and I turned down all these other shows that were locally here, and I waited and waited, and every day, research would be coming in, and with Fedex Express, and I was getting my shots for India and we're ready to go and I was talking to all these people and six weeks later I get this phone call because of course there's no one's using computers we're basically faxing and Fedexing and talking on phones and they said oh we just got kicked out I go my first thing is do I still have a job oh yeah we have a job but we don't we're shooting yet. So what happened there was that seven years is a story about the Dalai Lama and Jean -Jacques was doing that and Martin Scorsese was doing Kundan and he got kicked out too.

So we had a construction crew building in Meizur for five months and the long and short of it was that the Chinese government like they're still doing now, came to their neighbor saying, "You know, we don't want to have this story told." So the permits that were promised never came. So everyone scrambled.

They had the money, they had the actors, they just didn't have the location. Unbeknownst to me, what we needed was we needed the foothills of the Himalayas to recreate The Tibet look and the only place that looks like that is the Pyrenees and the Andes. And so Scorsese's people went to Marrakesh and we had four production managers and they went and booked all the hotels. So when Marty's team came in, they couldn't shoot there.

And our producers had done Wings of Courage and they knew the mountains of the Andes. So they said, "Ah, it's okay. Yeah, that's what we do. We're all going to Argentina." So they shipped another shipment of tools from England, and the 50 carpenters from India went to Argentina, and Jim Erickson, the set decorator, a good friend of mine, said, "Look, we're out of time. We only have five months, so Jimmy, don't come to India. I'll get the stuff for you." I said, "Jim, I don't think so Jim and I in the early days had worked as props, right, so he had worked as my assistant. I said, "Okay, well you go to England and we'll meet there and you help me with the set dec." And I know you can do that. So long and short of it was Jim had the six guys over in India procuring everything and I was a bit worried because he was procuring my props too and I was doing a set dec in England. Our offices were in Paris, the costume department was in Italy at Cinecittà so that was all great. It's just you know I was tubing to Paris for meetings, and I had my own driver and we're flying over to Cinecittà for meetings and next thing you know six seven weeks later. I'm landing in Argentina by myself - and Jim's still over there - So look we need people. I want you to interview all these people. I Said well, I said, "Well, what do you need?" "Well, we need cutters and costume people this and this," and so I ended up interviewing about 200 people.

I don't speak Spanish, and the office that the production manager for India got was one little one-bedroom studio that she was living in. We didn't have an office. So I interviewed all these people, and Jim kind of came in with his guys over in India, and they brought a lot of the stuff, and they hand carried it. And I think each one of them had to pay about \$10 ,000 overage for a lot of the stuff they're carrying. So we prepped in Argentina, we shot there, there was 22 different languages spoken. So if you told a joke, it'd be a five minute delay. [laughing] It was



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wonderful. You know, we had people from all over the world and those challenging, you know, I had another war to do.

Legends of the fall had a thousand people, and this was 1940s and the Chinese against the Tibetans. And it was challenging 'cause the Falkland Islands had just happened and the British had attacked and a lot of the people on the crew had people that were in the army.

So, and I wanted to get machine guns in from England. Well, they didn't, they gave me the permits, but they never came. So we actually used Argentine weapons and we converted them to blank firing and we made wooden machine guns that, you know, they didn't fire and took jeeps that we cut them up and made them look like Russian jeeps. So it was a huge challenge and of course we had to recreate Tibet which was wonderful in the sense that we lived with 200 Tibetans and the Dalai Lama's sister was there and it was great and you know it's just a really challenging movie and then we had to come back here and do all the mountain climbing stuff and I wondered why the heck aren't we doing in the Himalayas well the mountains here look just like the Tibetan mountains over seven eight thousand feet and plus you can get helicopters up there it's just too difficult to shoot there.

So it was really a challenge, just probably one of my favorite shows and my wife is still with me after 10 months away and the kids came down for Christmas. I have three kids and we had a two- or three-week holiday, but the business is wonderful, but it's a challenge on one's personal life. So that's Seven years in Tibet and I'm quite proud of that.

HB: That's amazing. I think That production has come up across several interviews that we've had as something that just stands out in so many people's careers.

CB: I just sit here listening to you and just absorbing sort of all of the history. And these are movies that I watched, you know, as a kid and just in complete awe, you know, and just to know all of the elements that go behind it. And that local Canadian folks had a huge hand in making these huge films so successful and I want to kind of know what it's like to be on a Martin Scorsese- Marty -name base with him. [laughing]

JC: It was Jean Jacques with Marty the only relationship I had with him I was asked to do Silence and I was doing like it's called Man of Steel- Superman and I met the designer and the producer and Marty couldn't get enough money for it and they said well Marty's in town on this day, he'd like to meet you. And I said, "What day is that?" He says, "It's the Tuesday." Oh, I'm really sorry, I can't do it. It's the first day of shooting in Chicago and I just wouldn't do it. So that's the only relationship I have with Marty. [laughing] –

CB: Oh, having to turn down a date with Martin is of course easy. That's really, though, a testament. You have worked the trenches from beachcombers through most of everything that Zack Snyder has shot here with some really big, incredible shows, and probably everything in between. Can you talk about what might be a smaller show or a gem of a show that you're just so proud to have worked on, and what that was like, the differences?



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JC: I guess for name-drop-wise, it was always great doing the little TV movies when my kids were younger and my all-time favorite director is George Schaefer and I worked the first show when I left the CBC with him and I ended up doing five movies. And a little gem is that I had a chance to work with Katherine Hepburn twice and that was really, really sweet. And to see such a legend be just a nice, hard-working professional was just wonderful.

HB: So what is a day in the life of a prop master look like?

JC: Long hours. I'm usually in the office and prep about seven and I get to go home around six, about 10 hours. On a good day, I might go home sooner, but it's usually about 10 or 12 hours. And a prop master is in charge of just one of the departments and there's basically three phases to the job. It's prep, shooting, and wrap. So the prep part of it is after I accept the job, because it's wonderful, you take the script and you break it down and you research it and you find people who can help you research. Those days we didn't have the internet, so you'd have to go of the encyclopedia or the Smithsonian. So that's the fun part. And you have to interface with the different departments who's doing what and follow the designs of the costume designer and the production designer and work with the set decorator and talk about what the effects of how we're gonna do this and what it can be and what should I do.

And you know, you get beat up over the money and the budget and all that stuff and so it's getting thicker bureaucratically through the studios and the legal but that's all part of it as long as they realize that we're there to try to make a movie with whatever restrictions there are in time and money.

So I find that the fun part because I've gone to England, I've gone to different places to look and to find things, make sure they're correct and for example we had a climbing scene and I needed climbing equipment from the 30s so I went to the museum and in London and a dusty little place in the basement and this is oh this is this would do I said what's that that's Edmund Hillary's climbing pick from climbing Mount Everest you know and things like that are just wonderful so I just had to find some place to manufacture 40 of those and there's all kinds of wonderful little upsets and places and being down in Tahiti working and you don't know anybody and you have a day off and you're working with certain people and you're walking down the thing and say, "Hey Jimmy, we're having a wedding. Come on in." Huh? How do you get that? You can't do that on a package tour, and you get to meet all the locals and I remember I did a shopping scene for Little Women. I ended up going to 200 antique stores, finding props, 1860s. And my driver, we got caught in the snowstorm, says, "Well, I can't get you back to the hotel. I want you to spend the night with us." He lived in this wonderful little saltbox house from 400 years ago.

And he says, "Oh, we didn't expect you, so we're going to go out for dinner." So we went to this little place that all the locals hang out. There's people playing music and the family and kids running around. There's all this homemade food and you get to see all the locals.



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And you know, it's like that's what's kind of like really, really wonderful. And the other aspect of it is the shooting. The shooting could be anywhere, but that's what it's all about. You're bringing whatever you are to one particular scene and it's helping tell the story.

You're working with actors to make sure that they're very comfortable, that they're being a pen or a gun drives me crazy. I see these shows all the time and they never put weights in suitcases. And it's like, you know, if they don't have a weight in suitcases, the actor should act it. I mean, something, it just takes away from the performance. So, I always weigh all the suitcases and my guys go, oh, and the actors go, well, we'll take some out, but at least they don't have to worry about it. You know, they had that tension on one side of the arm. Those little, little details and a lot of times, you know, we make wonderful, beautiful props and they're designed, they're all okayed and the actor likes it, the director likes it and you look at the scene and the actor is just stumbling around trying to fix this thing and it's like hey, \$30,000 and months later just take it away and give him a coffee cup because it's not important but sometimes that prop, it just says something that conveys what you're trying to do, what the script is trying to do, what the actor's gonna do. For example, "Snow Falling in Cedars," it's a murder mystery and all the little clues are featured and working with actors is fine 'cause you have to get them comfortable with what they have.

Certain actors are great. Alec Dreen was a wonderful stunt guy here and you know he had him on Catwoman with Halle Berry doing whips and you know three months of training the producers so it's too dangerous get rid of them so you know stuff like that and he came out to Alberta to do Shanghai Noon and Jackie Chan and Owen Wilson doing these guns Jackie picked up the stuff and just spinning around thing we gave it the Owen and we had a trainer in Texas for him we had another trainer down in LA but I don't think he worked very hard he came here and he was doing his stuff and was like, "Oh, okay, okay, and Jimmy, bring the guns out again tomorrow." So we did this for three weeks and finally I went to the director and I said, "Geez, you know, I don't know if you're going to be happy with Owen why don't you come down and take a look." So he came down and looked and he was just stumbling around and I don't know if it's my idea or it's his idea, but I think it was my idea, but I didn't get the credit for it. He says "Why don't you ask Owen to play it like he's a con?" "Like he really can't do it, "but he's just, you know, kind of like, you know, "big like he can do it?" "Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's a good idea." So sometimes that doesn't work, works in the show.

CB: I wanna circle to something that you said just then 'cause you bring so much meaning to every single item that the actor's gonna touch. And when we interviewed Jim Erickson, who sings your praises to the moon and back. You know, it doesn't surprise me that you guys worked well together because there's so much crossover between the thoughtfulness of him putting, you know, an actual book from the Lincoln Library on Lincoln's desk. And the things that you do, you bring some pretty deep meaning to the entire story.

JC: Thanks for Jim for saying that. And Jim's a very good friend of mine. When I was a decorator at CBC, he was assigned to my crew when I looked at him, I said, "This guy is, whoa,



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he has a lot of potential." Couldn't get in the union and set deck in those days. "There's only three people in set dec." So it was kind of like, can't get in. So I was chairman of the prop department at that time and I said, "Jim, I know you don't want to do props, "but come and do a show with me." So he did a show or whatever, he got his qualifications and he got into props. And then the union said, we want to have individual departments now and meetings. And I said, oh, and the art directors and the set decorators didn't want to do that. And I, having been a set decorated art director. I said, well, I'll chair that. So we had a three -way chair. I was chairman of set decorator props and art directors. And I had art directed. I have two art directing credits and features and it was a small group of people you know when I joined the union as 54 people.

CB: Wow and now we're if you include our retirees and our permittees we're about 15 ,000.

JC: Oh my god and so anyway I was sharing a meeting and I said you know I think I won't mention the name there's one set decorator at the meeting I said you know Jim really would rather do set dec is it okay that he switches department everybody put up their hand and the one set decorator left and the next week they formed their own department. So Jim was in and and then I did a show with Doug Higgins, one of my mentors, a wonderful man and there was Gray Fox and all this other stuff happening in town and I had kids and the wife says you shouldn't go and then Doug asked me, "Well why don't you come and art direct this show in Alberta." It was with James Gardner, it's called Pure Escape. We shot for 10 weeks and we prepped for 12 and then it ran out of money and never got finished. But anyways, Doug asked me to hire the whole crew and I said, "Okay, fine, so you hire everybody, "okay, construction, special effects in Alberta "and all that." And hire the best people you know.

So I hired Jim Erickson, when Jim came out Doug and marched my office and says, what are you doing? I asked you to hire the best person, you know? What about the people in Los Angeles and Toronto?

I says, I don't know them. I just know them by reputation. So that was Jim's first set decorating job and years later, two Academy Award nominations and one win. Good for him. –

CB: Good instincts? - Yeah. - So what would you say to someone? How would you guide them if they were trying to get into the department? What would be your piece of advice for them? Where would you steer them?

JC: Props is a really unusual department in the sense that everyone looks at it, of it's fun, that's so easy. Of all the departments, like costumes and set deck and art department, it's a design portion, so every show is a little different. And with props is that your life experiences really helps you. So if you're older and you have other experiences, it helps you. It's mainly just basically attitude, too, and finding the right team to work with. So you have to get a start somewhere. I don't know how people start now. I know how I started. I know how other people started. And the prop department is unusual. We have people who are lawyers and chefs, and they come from all different backgrounds. So I just say, you know, try to meet as many people as you can, you know, work on a commercial, do whatever you can, go to school, and hopefully,





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you know, there'll be an opening and you can get a chance to work with someone and try to find somebody that'll spend the time with you.

Props is difficult in the sense that we're not that big In the sense that if you're in set dec, there's different jobs and you can kind of interchange. When I did props, a lot of times when I was first hired in certain shows, I'd come out and say, "Well, where is my assistant? What do you mean an assistant? This is it. This is a TV series. It was Huckleberry Finn and the producer, Bob Stabler, who did the Mule team in L .A. He says, "You only need one person in props, and that's, and now there's 10, right? And there's truck people and all this other stuff, but it's an unusual job in this sense. And I just try to help people and introduce them to different people. And hopefully they give them a break. And it comes down with attitude too, and how things are.

And I'm hearing stories about new people right now. and unfortunately, we're growing so fast. They haven't had the chance to experience other things. And they're in one little pocket, for example, they're saying, "I'm a truck person." And my answer is, "What is a truck person?" So it never used to exist, but there are positions now where they just are in the truck and they prep and they fix and they do this and that. But it's a job where you have to be very versatile.

Or else, like myself, I can only do certain things. I realize that, oh Just get Brad in there. He can he can do this much better than I I can you know.

CB: That's one of the best traits of being a head of department. You know you said one of the characteristics that make you good at your craft or knowing your limits and restrictions So what do you look for in your crew around you?

JC: People always say to me and say you know, hey, we got a job for you I just got an offer after two years and people say why didn't you take it and I go Well, let's put it this way, use it as an analogy, as I'm the hockey coach, and I need a good goalie, I need a defenseman, and I need a forward line. That's just the players. And behind that, there's people who are taking care of the equipment, the chiropractic, it's the same thing in this job. You can't do it all yourself.

On Warcraft, we have 30 people in the shop. And I don't know why they brought the show here because it was too expensive in England. They have all kinds of different departments there. In England, the Cobbler's department, I go, "What the heck is that?" Well, the Cobbler's department is not a shoe department. It's a department that makes bricks so they're rubber so when the horses go over it doesn't make any noise.

And they have an armourers department. You know, armourers, they just do the weapons and other people would just do horse armor. Well, we don't have a horse armor department everyone says he's doing the horse armor everybody stood back and here's me standing in the prop department, so we had to have to do horse armor and So, you know people wise you get the best so I I have some contacts down at WETA.



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We couldn't do all the weapons here There's all the prop shots are disappointed, but I said, you know, I need so many so quickly. We spent a million dollars down at WETA and the horse armor Richard down there We were talking we were zooming leak any emails me says Jimmy do you realize how difficult that is and I says "No!" So he said "I'll send a couple of people up from New Zealand for you" and I said "no no it's ok" I'll see what I can do. So the art director was fabulous and he had contacts over in England And we actually sent two prop makers from England and they had pre -molded certain things so the challenge is that we're doing the horse armor so you gotta go well we're putting horse armor on horses that the Wrangler and the coordinator haven't decided which horses are going to use and I'm sitting there going yeah but I have to measure these horses like a custom -made suit right And someone says, "No, no, no, well, Jimmy, you don't have to do that because we tried to measure them and we didn't know which of the horses." So I said, "Just scan them." I said, "What? Scan them." I said, "Okay." So I phoned the scanned guy and he says, "Have you ever scanned horses before?" I said, "No." He said, "How the hell do you get them to stand still and there's hair and all this other stuff?" So we somehow scanned them, sent them off to England and they had other pre -made molds. We came back here and then we had this, the fabulous team, we put them all back together here. And then we have buyers. You have to go search for different things. You have chain mail. So where do you find chain mail? Of all places we found in Saskatchewan. So it's kind of strange that way.

HB: How have you seen the changes in technology in the motion picture industry affect the props department with the increase in visual effects and digital components, how has that affected how the department works?

JC: Well quite radically and when we did Seven Years, we had the visual effects people just travel with us they just did measurements and then Jim Erickson had done Independence Day and he was telling me this story he says you know we had this scene on the roof here and all they wanted was one table on it and the rest was just green.

I said, "Jim, what do you mean green? It's like chroma key?" Yeah, they didn't want anything. So from there it's evolved. So sometimes it's good, it's efficient if it enhances the story, but at the time it's really quite difficult for actors too because you know physically can't handle or feel something and actors want that and need that.

So, you know, I always tell the story about in Seven Years, Brad Pitt had a knife, a native knife, and he was doing damage with it. So in order to do what he did, you know, we have a briefcase, I had it made down in Los Angeles. We had the knife that was picked, the real knife, the sharp knife, the aluminum knife, the rubber knife, the hard rubber knife, the soft rubber knife, the retractable knife, he's gonna cut someone over. We have a little tube with a blood lead for a left -handed cut, a right -handed cut. Well, flash ahead to now, you just give an actor a green stick.

CB: Oh yes.



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JC: So that is good and it's bad, you know, it's safer, it's better, but you know, But he has to act, you know, and actors need stuff, you know, I mean, especially the people that are my favorite and best actors, they usually come from stage, and they do their own their props, they do their own hair, their makeup, and they just appreciate all the things you have, you know, and these young actors are, you know, they have their hand out and where's my stuff, and they say, "Oh, here it is, you And who would you put it? It says, oh, it's over in the tables, you know.

CB: It's like actors taking their rings or their watches home, their prop rings or their watches or their glasses, right?

JC: That's where we have doubles and triples.

CB: Can you think of something that is like the craziest moment of your career? Maybe there's several.

JC: I can't think of a moment, but I can think of a lot of challenges where I go, how the blankety blank, am I supposed to do that with the amount of money and time that they have? So in Seven Years, we have horses, and there's a certain species, and they're quite short and stout, and they have long manes. So we have actors that are riding, and so we actually snuck into Tibet, and shot secretly with the mountains in the background with these actors riding as doubles, right with the props and the saddles and all that stuff So that's one scene We have another scene where we at the same point.

CB: Wait a minute. [Laughing]

HB: "You just casually snuck into Tibet?"

CB: Yeah, Let's just back up a little bit How does one sneak into Tibet? How does that work?

JC: I won't mention any names, but he's a still documentary photographer and he was there shooting something and they allowed them to come in. We gave him pictures of a certain type of horse that we're looking for. He established the horse and then we have saddles that were made and certain packs and certain costumes and and little sticks so they didn't know what he was doing. He was just shooting something so that was traveling shots left to right, right the left, sunrise, uphill, whatever And so, the director loved it and said, "Oh, that's great. It's beautiful,

beautiful." So, we're gonna match to that. So, then I did the horses and the airplanes and the cars and Seven Years, not props, but I mean, that's what I think it should be, but we had to find a horse that matched it. So, we went to a ranch and the guy went through the thing. So, we found a horse that matched it. We had to paint it a little bit, but it was fine. And then what happens is Mr. Pitt, Brad Pitt, so he's now trapped with the campers or something. So he escapes on this particular horse, now it's just another scene, so he cuts through this tent that we had to make and he hops on the horse and he rides off, so that's the third horse in Canada now. And then what happens is that he rides so hard, he rides it to death, It's like the scene in Revenant, I prepped Revenant and so I'm familiar with it. And so the horse dies and he cuts it



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and gets in it and he actually eats it. So we're out of money and we're in Canada back here shooting in Mount Waddington and the producer is directing, "Jimmy, Jimmy, we need this horse, but we're out of money. You can only do this." "Well, I don't listen." And so I go and get Danny Virtue and I say, Danny, you know, I know, you know, animals and they're all going to the glue factory. And I says, could you pick one out for me that looks like this and kind of save it? So I took it to the taxidermist. We had it made. And then we had to get food made so Brad could cut into it and eat it. So that was four, four horses that were kind of like, how the hell are you going to do that? And they did. And the producers were yelling at me, don't make a head. "Don't make a wolf, we just have the body." I said, "No, no, no, Jean-Jacques, how can you do that?" He says, "You're gonna be in a helicopter, you're gonna be zooming down, you have one person in the horse." It's okay, Jimmy, we just do that. Well, I don't listen, you know? And I've been threatened to be fired a lot of times, but I usually get rehired again 'cause I don't have a history of going over budget.

But I think he really, really needed this. And I said, "Yeah, yeah, okay, we'll do what we can." So all of a sudden the horse comes with a head and the legs is, "Oh, wonderful." Mm -hmm, So he, you know, he, it made a shot wide and he came in and that's, that's one. And I don't know, I'm sure there's other ones that I can't remember anymore.

CB: I'm still not sure how you quite got into Tibet, but that's okay. Cause it lead that into quite a good story about Brad Pitt inside of the guts of horse.

HB: Well yeah, between that, and painting the horse, and then eating the horse, I think we just, we got there somehow. [laughing]

JC: Yeah. But horses aren't props usually, they're usually done by the Wranglers.

CB: You mentioned Danny Virtue and just for anyone listening, Danny Virtue is a legend in this industry in stunts and also with all of the animal work that he does, it's pretty incredible.

JC: Incredible guy, yeah. Now he's a true pioneer. I mean, you know, just, "Danny, what are you doing? You can't do that. All right, all right, we're going to do it. We're going to do a studio of this and I'll do the high -folio and some show with it. Okay, he's quite the character.

CB: It's so fascinating, you know, you talked about the diverse skillset you have to have and back in the day, managing different departments and really, you know, and I'll circle back to what I said earlier in the interview, it's folks like you and like Danny and like Jim Erickson and Glenne Campbell and a whole small group of you that really laid the foundations for the success in the film industry now. And I, for one, appreciate you.

JC: Thank you.

CB: Thank you, yeah. Really, you're one of the most memorable props person I've ever worked with.



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JC: It was some good movies as we worked on "Sucker Punch" and "The Watchman," it was great. It was wonderful. Zach's a wonderful director, it's just great.

HB: What's the balance for someone going into props between, you know, - Searching and searching and searching and hoping you'll find the right thing in some antique store or someone's cupboard and just having to knuckle down and make it.

JC: It's a hard decision. You have to just kind of look at what the object is and how important it is. I work for the studio and so there's a time restriction how much money is allocated to the department and if they'll allow me to split it up. You know, some producers think they know everything. This is, well, you know, that figurine shouldn't be more than \$1,200. Sometimes you just go around the corner and you find it. And other times you go, "Oh my God, I'm going to have to make this." In Argentina, I was trying to help the costume designer. A lot of times the costume says, "Oh, the webbing, you props people do." We needed canteens. We saw we had the research of the canteens of Chinese armies were using the late 40s and they're quite prominent. So, you know, everyone's going to have it's a big bulge and I said, I don't know how to do this. I said, I got to go have a coffee. So when I had a coffee and I walked in the hardware store and I did a double take and there it was on the shelf and I got my interpreter to come in and just ask him how many he has. He says he has 20. He says, "Can he get 300?" And he says, "Yeah." I said, "How long?" He says, "Well, maybe three weeks." And they we're like \$3. And I said, "If I buy 300, can I have them for \$2 each?" And big pause. And so we negotiate that down to \$2.25. I think I gave him \$2.50 'cause I was so happy. \$2.50. So you don't know. If you wanna hear another story, I'll tell you another prop story.

CB: Yes, please.

JC: There's a scene in Seven Years where Heinrich Haager and his partner, they've escaped from India and now they're in Tibet and they're heading towards Lhasa. And they finally stumble upon this marketplace. It's like a foreshadowing. They actually see an old Chinese soldier's shirt there and they look at it and they pull and they tug at it and they want it and they wanted to try it on and wherever they're going to do.

We hadn't shot the scene with all the 300 Chinese soldiers and I was over in Rome at Cinnetta with Enrico and the designer says, "When you get your shirt, could you just give me a shirt?" And they say, "Okay, okay, we'll get you one." So he gives me the shirt and it's brand new and they have like 30 people running around they're trying to dress everybody in this the first day and they have aging machines they use cement mixers with rocks and they put water and they throw the clothes in they smash it all up and sorry Jimmy we can't help you you've got to go do it yourself I said but it's just give me a major thing this year you do it you go you go well so we're back up on the hills the first day of shoot it's a crazy little scene where there's gonna be 200 Tibetans up there and you can see right now there's hundreds of paparazzi.

It's the first day of shoot, right? Paul Mulder is a good friend of mine. He's been with me for years, and Catherine Layton has been also with me, and we're up there trying to get the things



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ready for the scene. Paul and I are scrubbing away at this thing, trying to make this brand-new shirt look old, and we look at each other and say, "It's not going to happen, Paul." And Catherine's there doing this stuff, and he says, Catherine, could you drop what you're doing and help us out here? You have to go to the laundromat. She comes back three hours later and says, I went to the laundromat, they couldn't do this, they couldn't do that. So she goes down to the hotel where we're staying at and it talks to the manager. The manager shuts down the whole laundry facilities. She throws the stuff in and she washes it all and gets it all done. Finally, the sun's going down, she comes back and I look at it And it's just thrashed, the green has gone out of it. There's brown coming through it. Oh, what are we going to do? Because he's supposed to it's a major prop. He's supposed to pick it up, right? So it's getting dark.

We go back and all the British crew sitting there drinking away and the technical crew and the camera guys are having a good "arr yeah we're shooting tomorrow." Yeah, you know, we're still working away. I says, we got to we got to show them what this is.

So I meekly kind of go in and talk to Laurence and I say I got to see your designer And I said, "Enrico's goes very busy. He's dressing so it's important to us. We'll wait." So finally he comes out. He goes, "Gee, Jimmy, how are you? Nice to see you." I said, "Do you remember when Rome and I said we needed that shirt? Yeah, Pedro. We gave it to you, right?" Yeah, yeah, yeah, I got it. I says, "Well, I just want to show you what we did and then we probably need another one. So, give him the shirt and Catherine and I are standing back there and he looks at it and he goes,

"Dead silence." And he goes, "Beautiful, beautiful. "Pedro, Rod, Gloria . "Come on, they're coming in here. "Everybody come here. "You see how there's a shirt? "I want all the uniforms just to look at it, "just to look at this." (laughing) And what happened is that they had the shirts made in India and they dyed it green. And all the stuff is that the green came off and the brown was underneath.

So, you know, so sometimes another happy accident.

CB: I feel like whichever streaming company owns Seven Years in Tibet right now or is running it, owes you a little bit of promotion dollars there. You just have such incredible, incredible stories.

JC: Well, that's one of I guess the most challenging wonderful 10 months of my life. You're just involved in this relationship and it's five, six days a week, 10, 12 hours. All you do is do the job and you get very happy if the people that you come in every day you see you really enjoy and the seventh day you just kind of recuperate.

CB: So, looking ahead, I know you've mentioned you turned down a few really big shows, but what did it take for Zack Snyder, Marty, or Steven Spielberg to get you back on a set?



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JC: Well, I worked with Steven on BFG and I kind of thought, "Oh, geez, I wish they would have called me for a West Side Story, but they didn't." I don't think I'm going to go back, you know, I'm in my mid -70s and it's quite excruciating physically. I know I have a lot of friends that just don't retire, you know, they're 90 years old and there's still costume design and there's, you know, Clint Eastwood, you know, they'll drag them off the set. But I don't want to do that. I've had a wonderful time, I've met good people, and it's such a big commitment to do a movie well, and I don't think I could give it 100 % anymore. And plus the fact that I only can do it if I have the people that I work with.

And that's really, really important, 'cause you need your researchers and like Catherine's been with me for like 30 years and she's still kind of going at it. And you need really good set people. It's really, really important how they do it. And the producers, the legal and how everything has evolved with Netflix and all these Amazon, you have people in key positions and they're not like the old folks, you know, the guys who are the producers, they came through the old system and they started producing after 20 or 30 years.

These kids are bright, brilliant people with MBAs that are coming to make movies and I just feel they just don't have the understanding of what it really takes to do it. But who am I to say I'm sure that's been with every industry in every evolution with certain things. My next little interview, I guess I'm doing a Zoom for the Academy. I'm doing a career day down there. You know, it's 'cause I'm a member of the Academy. I get to watch like 40 or 50 movies a year at home. And I miss it though, you know? And I like to help out if anybody can. There's a wonderful show right now called Shogun. A lot of my crew I used to work with are on there and give them some of my supplies that I still have for my shop, but other than that, you know, they're doing well. And for me, I don't think I'll be going back, but you know, I shouldn't say never, but it'd have to be really something really, really special.

And maybe I get, you know, a couple of people kind of prop me, but I'm just carrying me around a little bit.

CB: I'm sure there would be a lineup around the block of people in the props department waiting to interview with you if you did.

JC: You know, I'm quite happy, I'm quite busy, so I'm quite active and I'm waiting for the snow to come back so I can get back on this ski slope, you know?

HB: Amazing.

CB: Well, Jimmy, thank you so much for sharing pretty well the history of Vancouver film with us, as well as your own experience. It's such a beautiful tapestry of what this industry has been built on, so thanks again.

JC: Okay, you're very welcome.

HB: And that's a wrap for another episode of Apple Box Talks.



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