

## The Malcom Treen Life History #96:

*Blue Money*, a film made for Television by LWT, and a number of wonderful stories and characters came out of those five weeks filming.

Let's start with Jim and John, two plain clothes police that the production manager David Fitzgerald had acquired the services of, to look quietly after us, whilst filming on the streets of Dublin. They were armed, wore plain clothes mingled with the crew, and stuck out a mile and a half, but two nicer guys you could never wish to meet. A man by the name of Brian Kelly was supposed to teach me everything I was ever to know about being a Location Manager, but he left before the start of filming to set up a little cops and robbers series called Dempsey and Makepeace, and I fell by default for *Blue Money*. On my own, with no assistant, no unit manager and no cone men, sometimes shooting in three or four locations a day! I must have been very young and I must have been very stupid.

So the early recces in Dublin were very funny, booking into hotels always went something like. Ah Mr Fitzgerald yes room 124 and Mr Kelly, err, yes room 135 and Mr, err, Mr, sorry how did you spell your name sir ?

Anyway I digress. Jim and John. I had got back to the hotel really late, after doing a letter drop on an estate warning them of our impending arrival, probably the following day the way things had gone. The crew had eaten and then drunk and I wandered in, knackered, fed up and pissed off that the restaurant was shut, just like the time you arrive late at a party and everyone else is slaughtered and you have to decide whether to catch up fast or stay sober and enjoy the fun of watching everyone else drunk as skunks. I was so grumpy and anti social I went straight to bed, without drink or food.

The following day I got up at the crack of dawn to see the caterers into a supermarket car park and wait for the crew to arrive. My head was killing me. Jim and John appeared round about eight thirty and greeted me in their usual friendly manner. "Malacam, how are you this morning?" "Well to tell the truth a bit tired really. I've got the mother of a headache and I am not a headache person and my neck is killing me. And before you ask, no I did not stay up with the crew last night, bloody well enjoying myself." "Oh, dear, dear, dear. John we have something that will cure this, do we not?" "Oh, Jesus indeed we do Jim. Malacam, come away to the boot of the car with us." And I was led to rear of John's car, the boot opened up and the classic bottle in the brown paper bag was removed. A very small portion was poured into a polystyrene cup and offered to me. "What is this? I inquired." "Just knock it back all in one go and I bet your headache goes, won't it Jim?" "Oh Jesus, yes John." I did as I was bid. And just like a Carry On film, my eyes widened, my nostrils flared, I gasped for breath and I thought for a moment the end had come. "Good God, what the hell was that?", I asked, when at least my power of speech had returned, if not yet my complete vision, looking at the blurred bottom of the polystyrene cup, hardly believing that it had not gone straight through onto the car park and melted the tarmac. In a very low whisper came the reply, "It's Pochene." "But", I stared at the two police officers, "that's illegal isn't it?" "Oh, highly.", said Jim. "But it comes from Wicklow where they make the best stuff.", said John. "How's the headache?", asked Jim.

"Completely gone", I replied, "and the neck ache. Thank you." "Our pleasure", said John, hurriedly putting the demon liquid away in the boot and closing the lid quickly.

We spent two days filming in Howth Harbour, which I think was about four miles or so outside Dublin. I savoured the fresh sea air and was really still recovering from my attack of food poisoning, received from the English caterers, that had made me miss a whole week of the shoot. (See earlier chapter in autobiography *"Bright Lights and Bacon Rolls"*: "Chapter Six. Why I rarely eat at the catering wagon and how the bastards scarred me for life but it was just so unfashionable to sue in those days.") I drank pints of Guinness, very slowly, for medicinal purposes and did my P.R. job with the harbour master. He was a lovely man, very laid back, in complete control of his job, and had an old Alsatian dog that followed him everywhere. His office was full of pipe smoke and the dog lay at his feet under his desk, until he moved, whereupon the dog would also move immediately. I asked him, if during the course of one afternoon, he would care to come over and have a look at the filming. He seemed flattered that I had asked, a little dubious that he would enjoy the experience but I assured him that if, after ten minutes or so, he was bored, we could always slip away for a drink. So I duly arrived outside the Harbour Masters Office at the appointed hour and he climbed into the passenger seat. I opened the back door. "What are you doing?" he asked. I looked at the Alsatian who was ready to jump in. "I'm, err, putting the dog in the back." "Let him walk." came the terse reply. Now, as I have said, the dog was knocking on a bit, and we were filming way out on the point that had to be a good half mile from the office. "It's O.K. I don't mind." I replied. Another full attack: "Let him walk!" "Really, it's no problem, its a company car, I get it cleaned, I..." "Jesus, he has twice as many legs as we have, will you let him walk." It was a wonderful Irish observation that I had no answer for, with a twisted logic that I could not dispute. I closed the door, started the car up and the dog dutifully trotted along behind us, all the way to the location. He was such a sensible man. He got bored after five minutes and we retired to the pub.

Just time for one quick one: *The first job I ever had as Location Manager.*

I was working for a director called Paul Annett on a series starring Francesca Annis and James Warwick, as Tommy and Tuppence in a series of Agatha Christie stories. It was a period piece and we wanted a spooky old house in the country. It was my first day on attachment to the locations department at London Weekend; I had my company car, my Polaroid camera and my Polaroid picture of a house that Paul and I had dug out of the locations office files. It was a house he liked but was either in Barnes or Putney, I forget now but wherever, it was underneath the flight path to Heathrow and Paul wanted to get outside London to avoid the planes. So I was instructed to go west and try the two pretty villages of Great Tew and Little Tew and the surrounding area. I looked round the villages and they were ideal. I drove down a hidden drive to see what was there. Sure enough it led to a large detached rambling mansion; it didn't look quite right, not spooky enough. Well I mused to myself, I've got the Polaroid, I'll knock on the door and ask. Remember this was my first day, my first house and my first door knock. It seemed forever but finally a lady, I guess in her late fifties, answered the door, cigarette in mouth. She looked me hard and straight in the eyes and said, "Yes?" I stuttered and said in my best Hugh Grant (although he hadn't been invented then), "I, err, I, err, I'm



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sorry to trouble you but I'm from London Weekend Television." "We haven't got one.", she snapped. "No, err, no, err, I'm a Location Manager working on an Agatha Christie drama series and I am looking for a spooky house to use for some, err, some filming." "Ah. Right." "Yes, err and although your, err, house is quite large it's not quite right and I wondered if you knew of anywhere round here like this?" And I proudly held up my Polaroid picture. "Like what?", inquired the lady. "Like this", I replied, nearly shoving the thing up her nose. "I'm sorry", she said, "but what are you doing?" Oh blimey, I thought. I've offended her by shoving it too close. "Sorry, what do you mean, what am I doing?", I asked. "Well, what are you doing?" I was on the verge of losing my temper but thought no, no, you are London Weekend Television at this precise moment in time. "Sorry", I said, "but I'm showing you this Polaroid picture." I was talking very slowly and deliberately, thinking dear god she's thick. "...in the hope", I continued, as though I was talking to a four year old, "that you may know of somewhere that looks like this house in the picture, round here." "Ah. I'm sorry, I'm blind", came the reply, like a bolt of lightning. I wanted to sink into the earth. My stomach did hand stands. Thank God she never saw the look on my face or the colour my skin went and how far down my jaw had dropped. No television, now it made sense. I just didn't know what to do. She probably didn't even know what her own house looked like, never mind her neighbours. I froze. I stood looking at her in disbelief. After what seemed liked ten minutes, at least, I spluttered, "Ah. Sorry, sorry to have, err, err, troubled you." She looked straight at me, drew on the cigarette, flicked the ash off and turned into the house and closed the door. I stood looking at the photo in my hand. What a bloody funny job this is. I mused. Don't you think that should have been an omen and a warning sign? Why didn't I take note of it all those years ago and learn my lesson? Who knows?

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