

Steve Nelson, sound recordist

Steve Nelson has more than thirty years of experience recording and mixing sound for film and TV projects like *Fast and Furious* (2009) and *Inception* (2010). Nelson has worked on sets and locations across the United States as well as in Jamaica, Hong Kong, Moscow, Thailand, Mexico, South America, and Japan. In this interview, he describes the rewards and challenges of the job, as well as the pressures posed by tighter budgets and production schedules.

Describe your job for us.

I'm a production sound mixer—a soundman—recording sound for movies and television, which makes me the head of the sound department. I also am a member of the International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees [IATSE]. Local 695 has jurisdiction for sound, video, and projection engineers based in Los Angeles.

As a department head, I interface with the people above me, like the producers or directors who give me the job. I make the deal for my department and me, though there's not a lot of dealing to be done anymore. I read the script and discuss it with the producer and director. I do the breakdown and analysis of any given project to determine what might be required to get through that production. I am responsible for putting together the sound crew. The size of the crew is contractually determined. At minimum, according to the union contract, there must be three people in the sound department. There's a mixer, a microphone boom operator, and a sound utility technician. The department can grow from there to include additional boom operators,

playback operators, even another mixer and crew for a second unit, but that's generally what you'll find on any given day.

Once the production starts filming, I show up with my equipment. I own it and maintain it. I rent it to the production while I'm doing the work. My crew and I are responsible for capturing the sounds, primarily dialogue, that happen in front of the camera. At the end of the day, we deliver a mix of individual component tracks to postproduction.

That sounds pretty focused and intense. Describe a typical workday.

We work long days, usually no less than twelve hours, but often a lot more than that. We may only be rolling for three or four hours in a full day's work (sometimes more, sometimes less), but with rehearsal, setup, location changes, putting mics on actors or around the set, testing audio, and correcting audio, it's a very busy day.

We get a call sheet at the end of each day, which is a road map of the next day's work. It tells you when to show up and where to go. It indicates what crew are needed and when. It indicates what actors are needed and when. It also tells us what scenes are being shot. It includes a weather report and all kinds of notes for different departments. Basically you show up and set up your gear. On a good day, we'll shoot the call sheet and maybe even some more. It's your reward for being efficient: "We're going to give you more scenes to shoot since you finished early!" More often, we are rushing or working overtime or trying to catch up the following day.

The director and actors might start with a private rehearsal. Once they get it worked out, they'll bring in a few key people to watch. This is when my boom operator and I start to finalize what we'll need for sound. Sometimes when you read the script, your vision of how the scene will play out doesn't match what the director, cinematographer, or actors have in mind, so we think, improvise, and collaborate on our feet. We have to deal with various questions throughout the day. How many cameras? Where are the lights? Where are the actors' marks? Once the filming starts, I push the record button and the sound department listens like no one else. We're making sure we are capturing what we need as things evolve.

What are some of your biggest challenges?

We spend a lot of our time on any given day eliminating extraneous sounds, which, although "natural," will cause problems later in the postproduction process. It can be a real challenge. Producers want to keep moving relentlessly forward all day long because there are 150 people on the clock. Directors want to make their schedule. Every second costs money. So, problem solving costs a lot of money.

But when my team is trying to capture this very fragile thing called “production sound,” we often have to intervene to rectify a problem that only we can hear at the time, a problem we know will cause much bigger issues later in the process if we don’t fix it right now. I don’t think others on the set fully appreciate that work. If we hear a noise, we have to figure out what it is and where it comes from. What is that squeak? What is that humming? What is that buzz? Maybe it’s somebody’s shoes. Maybe it’s a generator. Maybe it’s a lighting rig. Maybe it’s the dolly wheels. Little bumps. Little rustles. Little scrapes. I’ll hear something that the director doesn’t. You can’t hear it with your ears, but the mic is picking it up. So, the director will say, “What? I don’t hear that squeak. It’s fine.” Or, “Don’t worry. We’ll fix it in post. We’ll fix it in the mix.” We hear that suggestion quite often. Or an actor will say, “I love to loop” [re-record dialogue in postproduction]. Really? No you don’t. You’re working hard to get a performance here—let’s capture it.

Sometimes it feels like I’m reinventing the wheel every time I’m on the set. I’m like, “People, really? You’re going to put the noisy fan right there next to our mic?” But it’s my job to make sure the desired sound is crystal clear and there is no unwanted noise on the tracks. It’s my job to speak up when there is a problem and correct it. For instance, I may have to tell the director or others to move the generator or ask craft services not to make cappuccinos while we’re filming. I may have to suggest we put down some carpet so we don’t hear the clickety-clack of the actors’ shoes. It can get really complicated: we have to fix that, move that, adjust that, then, crap, something has created a shadow or shows up in the frame. So we fix it again, move it again, and adjust it again. It can cause a cascading series of problems to get the sound right.

It’s a delicate process that requires a deft touch with other folks on the set. We have to maintain good relationships because we can’t do our job without their help. I need to know if the actor is going to whisper that line or scream it while throwing furniture. If I ask someone to move the generator, I know it’s going to require him or her to shut down power to the entire set. That’s a big deal. It requires a series of conversations with a number of individuals who have to understand why it’s important to move the generator. These things can make or break a recording, and we have to figure out how to get what we need without irking our colleagues.

It sounds like you need a thick skin to be a sound mixer. You have to intervene when there are problems that nobody else is noticing. You’re breaking their momentum.

Exactly. I often am the bearer of bad news. Nobody wants to hear about it because it’s perceived as an impediment. But it’s not the same for other parts of the production. They’ll light a scene for hours! If the set isn’t quite right, they’ll fix it. They’ll repaint it, even. We will literally watch paint dry. They will change costumes because they don’t work with the lighting. All these things can go quite noticeably

wrong but our [sound] problems are largely imperceptible to other crew members. Yet you can't go home bitter. It's not personal, and, in the end, I'm there to make a suggestion to help improve the quality of what we're doing. That's why they hired me. When we get it right, we have made a significant, if unnoticed, contribution to the success of the project.

The hardest moment is when the director says, "Cut. That's great. Move on," and we've realized that the particular take didn't work for us. I have to yell up to my boom man to stop everything. Then you have a debate with the director that lasts thirty minutes. "I didn't hear it. Did you hear it?" "No, I didn't." "I heard it." And so on. Well, if we could have just done it again, we would have been done with what we needed in the time it took us to debate.

At the end of the day, if I go home and know I have done everything I could to make the best possible sound track, then I know I have done my job well. If I'm constantly getting the door slammed in my face, I'm still done at the end of the day. I turn in my stuff and it's someone else's problem. I've been trying to make this production better, and if those decision makers spurn my offerings, it's on them.

Let's switch gears a bit. How do you land jobs?

Workflow is the big mystery, and the root of all that's good and bad in our business. How do you keep the work flowing? You get jobs by word of mouth, from people you know, by recommendation, by luck, and maybe from an agent who every once in a while finds you something. One job usually leads to the next if you did your last job well. All of our jobs are short term, so we go from job to job. That's the good news and the bad news. If the job is great, you wish it could last a long time. If it's not a great job, you're happy to be out of there. But you're always worried about where you'll find your next one.

Is everyone in your union an independent contractor?

Pretty much everyone on the set is an independent contractor. We are hired at the will of our bosses. They can let us go at any moment. We're guaranteed payment for the day we show up and whatever the contractual minimum is for that day—eight or nine hours. Guarantees are pretty minimal when you're a below-the-line worker.

But—this might be interesting to those outside the industry—we aren't contracted with the studio. A payroll company employs us all. That's our employer of record. When the production ends, we fill out our unemployment papers with the payroll company, not the production studio. When crews are hired for a production, the production studio—Universal or Warner Bros. or Company X—will contract the payroll company to disperse salaries to the crew.

So not only are you an independent contractor, but you're also at arm's length from the actual production itself. The production company takes no responsibility for you at all?

Well, that's not exactly true. There's another layer of bureaucracy called the Contract Services Administration Trust Fund. It's another third party that's responsible for ensuring that the terms of our labor contracts are administered appropriately. These groups mediate the terms among the production companies and the workforce. They approve the work roster; they make sure the crew is approved to be on the work roster; they make sure everyone keeps their I-9s updated. All of that paperwork flows through contract services, which acts as an intermediary between all the parties involved in a production. We sign a deal memo at the beginning of the production that includes the name of the production company, but all the administrative logistics of our contracts, salaries, and benefits are handled through these third parties. It's become a huge business, and it's still growing. You can tell when the business is starting to get big in other locations because these services will establish offices there. I just came back several weeks ago from a job in Albuquerque with paychecks from a company I'd never heard of before.

*How has your **craft** changed in the last thirty years?*

It's amazing to me that the machine hasn't changed that much. I think the parts are changing, for sure, but there remain the same departments, the same crafts, the same jobs. Focus pullers used to have their hands on the lens but now they can do it from an entirely different room. But "roll sound," "clap," "action," "cut"—that's all pretty much the same.

The biggest change for the sound department—any department, I'd guess—is technology. We have new parts for this big moviemaking machine. When I started my career, I was using quarter-inch analog tape through a wonderful and legendary Swiss-made recorder called the Nagra. In fact, I have one displayed on my mantel at home. But now it's all digital. I'm recording nonlinear digital tracks onto a hard drive.

Is that good or bad?

I think it's good. I miss my Nagra. It had a sweet sound, and was a beautiful and precise machine and very innovative. But it only had one track. We had to mix multiple sources onto that single track. That was the mix! If I forgot to open that guy's mic, then it wasn't on the track. Or if I had one mic turned up and caught background noise, it ended up on the track. You couldn't separate your sources.

Eventually there was a stereo Nagra that allowed you to record two separate tracks with a time code. That's when we started mixing sound to a multitrack mas-

ter. I had a mixing board with four inputs. Today, there are so many more sources. My mixer has sixteen inputs. A scene might have multiple radio mics, boom mics, microphones hidden in the set. Ideally you're working with one sound source. You set your levels for the boom mic, and you're ready to record. But those days are rarities. Generally it's far more complicated, and that's when I start to do my job. I sit there with my hands on my knobs adjusting levels—turning this mic up, that mic down, trying to re-create something that's going to sound like what you'd expect to hear in the theater.

How many more sources of sound are you dealing with now as opposed to then?

Now, with the advent of nonlinear digital recording, you're recording each source onto its individual track. You're mixing up to thirty-two tracks into a master mix that you then turn over to the production company on a small flash drive. Normally I'm working with ten tracks. Reality television often requires more, but god help me if I'm ever recording all thirty-two tracks at the same time. I think that's my cue to retire!

*How has the **business** changed in the past thirty years?*

I've been doing this a long time. I live and work at a certain level in the food chain such that I don't have to obsess about the trades or obsess about changes in the business at the corporate level. We often live in our own world anyway. We know the business through our experience of it. Look, this business has always been about the money, but it's become more and more about the money throughout my career and less and less about enjoying what we do. I can't pinpoint any specific development, but I think I started to feel this shift most noticeably since 2008, around the time of the WGA strike and the collapse of the economy.

Historically there has been some truth in the image of Hollywood as a place of glamour. We're making movies. We're playing with imagination. We're the best at what we do. Let's have some fun while we're doing it. You struggle for so long in this industry doing low-budget, independent productions that once you reach the higher tiers of production, you expect to enjoy some of that old Hollywood glamour. We're supposed to treat ourselves well, and there's nothing wrong with that because you earned it. Why not live up to that image? I'm not talking about coke and blowjobs (well, that was the 1980s) but about capturing some of that spirit. Sadly, a lot of the fun is gone.

I'm not sure what happens on the operational side, but budgets are tighter, even on the high end of the production spectrum. Contracts are less protective, too. Maybe that's why it doesn't seem as fun as it once was—it's no longer, "We're in this thing together, let's get it done, and let's enjoy doing it." At one time, the business

felt much more like a family business. If you went down to the studios you'd see all these neighborhoods built up around the lots. People lived in those neighborhoods; they raised their families there. And at the end of the day, you went home. That's not the case anymore.

I remember my first union job. We were working late one Friday night and the clock passed midnight. Suddenly, everybody around me was cheering, blowing up balloons, bringing out party favors. It was great, but I was so confused. When you work a nonunion job, you work until you're done. Nothing changes because of the clock. When I asked what was happening, they said, "It's midnight!" It was Saturday, the weekend. Weekends were protected in the union contract. The contract protected a sacrosanct notion of leisure time that was separate from your working time, so you actually had a weekend. If you had to work into the weekend, your rate of pay doubled or tripled or quadrupled! The union even had pay rate increases for working later into the evening. Remember, this isn't supposed to be an expected benefit to the workers but a way to hold managers and employers accountable for how they make use of time. It is a penalty for employer inefficiency.

We no longer have a weekend clause in our contracts, and once you give up something in your contract, it's nearly impossible to get it back. Sure, there's a vague notion of a weekend, but the sense that work stops Friday at midnight and resumes Monday morning doesn't exist. I've seen a lot of what they call Fraturdays, which basically means you'll work until the sun comes up on Saturday morning and then maybe your weekend starts. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) was famous for their Fraturdays; the show was known as *Buffy the Weekend Slayer*. So too was *True Blood* (2008–14). Maybe it's a warning to stay away from vampire shows.

It seems like there are two things happening here. One is that the technology has made it possible to generate and store much more raw data. The other is that the boundaries around the workweek aren't being controlled like they used to. Does this mean that the people who plan and manage the productions are perhaps less disciplined than they were in the past? Or does it mean that people are willing to push themselves to work harder and longer to generate better material?

That's where it all starts. In designing the whole production. I'll just say it: some producers are inefficient. Granted, there are a lot of factors to juggle, but some producers and their overlords narrowly focus on the bottom line. They lose sight of the bigger picture, which might lead to greater efficiency. Moreover, some disregard the toll that inefficiency takes on their employees. But as long as it doesn't cost any more, it doesn't show up on the bottom line, and it is acceptable.

And it *does* take a toll. It's a risky wager to shoot fourteen, fifteen, sixteen hours a day, and it happens with great regularity. And it shouldn't happen. How much

money is it actually saving the production? And at what costs come those savings? There's got to be a more efficient and safer way to plan the schedule. We've been trying to limit workdays for the past fifteen years, ever since the young camera assistant Brent Hershman was killed in a car accident after working a nineteen-hour shift. Yet extremely long shifts still happen. Just in the brief time that I was in New Mexico, a teamster was killed in a car accident. This wasn't a worker on my show, but on the other show that was shooting there at the same time. He rolled his car on the way home from working a seventeen-hour day. Nobody wants that to happen. There are times when people will say, "People, this is going to be a long day. We know that to reach our goals, we will need to work a sixteen-hour day." They plan for that, and I think that's wrong in so many ways. I mean, a twelve-hour day is a generous workday already. And that's what we assume as a starting point. Name one other business where employees expect a twelve-hour workday. Whereas we're *advocating* for a twelve-hour workday. It's ludicrous.

Why doesn't anyone refuse?

Contractually we can't. If I said, "No, it's been eight hours, or twelve or sixteen or twenty, that's enough for today," that would be a violation of my contract. That's the case for other employees as well. It would be a wildcat strike. We're getting paid and these are the terms of the contract. If nobody has made it prohibitive for the bosses to keep us on the clock then somebody is going to take advantage of the situation.

So you can't refuse as an individual, but should your union be saying no?

The union negotiated the contract.

Why are they doing that?

There you go! Why? I don't have the answer, but it gets worse. Did you know the number of hours we need to work to keep our health insurance active actually increased in our union by 33 percent a couple of years ago? We have to work 33 percent more time to keep our coverage active, and it's less coverage! Go figure.

Part of what's driving these changes is the overall diffusion of the production business around the globe. Right now, for people like me, the biggest threat to continued employment is the siphoning of our jobs off to other places in the United States and Canada and England. Places like Santa Fe or Albuquerque or New Orleans or Shreveport or Atlanta or wherever in North Carolina or Rhode Island or even Canada all have union locals now. These grab bags of locals, which include the stagehands and everybody else, used to be pretty small, but now, as the work

has spread throughout the land, they've grown and they have their own agreements forged by the international union. They're called Area Standards Agreements. The contractual terms are different for each local according to its particular agreement. For instance, what hours you work, your overtime, your annual wage increase, and how many hours a year you must work to keep your health plan active are different for various locals. Area Standards Agreements allow producers to film in other locations with a local crew that will work in very different wage structures than we do. They also have very different pension plans and health coverage. And these are union contracts! If you're a producer, you can use those agreements to ensure your labor costs are kept at a minimum. It also forces our local to make more concessions—how else will it keep its membership competitive with labor in other locations? So we give up a bit of our health care to lower our costs.

Of course, it's not just the union that has created these issues. The state governments have also decided they are going to pursue motion picture work through tax incentive programs. All of these states are trying to undercut each other, and I think it's just one big race to the bottom. A 30 percent cut! A 35 percent rebate! We'll do it for free! Maybe it works out. Maybe it doesn't. For every study that says a dollar spent is a dollar earned, there's another that says a dollar spent is a dollar lost. You can make the numbers work any way you want because they're just numbers.

Tax incentives look good on paper, so Hollywood heads to those areas. A lot of times executive teams don't even create a budget for a production in L.A. anymore. They'll go to Louisiana or Georgia or anywhere but here and work with anyone but us. So that's one of the biggest changes, and the union isn't doing anything to stop it. They're actually enabling it. In the last five to ten years, there has been a strong disinclination to work in my geographic area and a bigger disinclination to bring me on staff. Now it happens that we do travel—they'll bring us, especially when a location lacks the necessary skills—but as these locations host more production, local crew are learning the required skill sets. Productions won't need to bring me anymore.

How much is a sound mixer paid?

It has changed a lot. When I started, there was one contract: the "basic agreement." If I'm doing a job today, I have to determine which contract it is under. We have basic cable, other cable, long-form TV, and one-hour episodic contracts. There are so many different contracts. Which one is it? What is my rate of pay? How many hours until I get double time? Do I get holiday pay? All these things have been negotiated away depending on which contract. The contracts also have tiers: tier 1, tier 2, tier 3. There's even a tier 0 where there are no numbers written in. This is for some of the new media stuff, and the terms are "as negotiated." We're talking about people being paid what they would be for flipping burgers. People

are getting minimum wage for some of these jobs. If I'm making full basic scale on a basic daily rate, my hourly rate is roughly \$68 an hour for my straight time.

As you look back over the last thirty years, what has happened to the income of someone at your level? Take a senior sound mixer back thirty years ago and compare what he or she was taking home then to what they're taking home now. What's the rate of deterioration?

If we're lucky, we've held our ground. If I'm making \$68 an hour, that's a good rate. But think of it this way: if you call a plumber because you have a leak in your house and it's the middle of the night or it's Saturday night and your toilet is overflowing and the plumber finally stops laughing before he agrees to come over, what would you pay? You'd pay that guy a lot of money to come out. But as a Hollywood movie crew, we work for the same low price in the middle of the night or on a Saturday night as we do when we show up on a Monday morning.

That's one of the things that has changed. We do the same work no matter the day or time. It's as hard as it ever was. It's as challenging as it ever was. We have to go to the ends of the earth. We've got to work in the blazing sun, in the freezing cold, on the water, in the desert, for the same or less money that we always have earned.

Take my equipment rental as another example. That's not negotiated by any contract. But it's a significant part of my income. I provide a big pile of the best equipment. I keep current with technology. It's good stuff, and it works. I'm responsible for it. I keep it in tune. It's a big investment. You know I've got a couple hundred thousand dollars invested in sound equipment. My collection has grown, and it's grown relative to what people expect on a movie set. Today producers and directors expect me to have *a lot* more gear. When I was starting out more than thirty years ago, you could get \$1,000 a week for a pretty minimal package. Today I can get up to \$3,000 a week for my equipment if I'm working on a big movie. But for TV, like if you go to work for ABC or some of the television networks, you may get \$1,600 a week, \$1,700 a week, or maybe \$1,800 a week for the same equipment package. Over the span of thirty years, that's not a lot of growth considering all the gear they expect you to bring. The rate of increase has not kept up with the realities of what we do.

I live in Santa Barbara, and my wife makes a pretty good salary, and her retirement package at the University of California, Santa Barbara, is a lot better than mine. That's for sure. I looked at my retirement package and there's some cash in there, but if I retired at the appropriate age and stopped working now, I think I would have maybe \$1,500 a month as a pension. That's not very much for thirty-something years of work. It shows how much ground we've lost. We've lost all forward motion. Until very recently, our annual rate of pay was decreasing rather than increasing. In the most recent round of negotiations, it was restored to what

it was previously: it went back to 3 percent after being at 2 percent for quite some time. Woo-hoo!

As a production sound mixer I'm one of the highest-paid people based on contractually negotiated pay rates. Camera operators and sound mixers are pretty much at the top of the pile. But with the cost of movie production skyrocketing, we're clearly not part of that increase.

More than thirty years of work and your pension is \$1,500 a month?

Well, in all fairness, not all thirty of those years were union years. But I've got more than twenty years invested in the union.

Do you think that media conglomerates have played a big part in what has happened to workers?

Yes, I do. Like all businesses, they have become more concerned with shareholders and stock prices. It's more about the money and less about anything else. Conglomerates have played a large role in destroying any sense of community in this business. I hate to harp on that, but there was a time when there was a community here. Now, as the conglomerates get bigger and bigger and further removed from what it is that we do as content providers, there's a much bigger gap between the powers that be and those of us on the set. Even on a more local level, there are people who sit in offices in the various studios who are less engaged or more detached or less knowledgeable about what we do than their predecessors were. The leadership seems much more numbers oriented and much less involved with the nuts and bolts of how the process works.

So the squeeze is on. They're thinking numbers. They're thinking quarterly reports. They're shuffling pieces around the globe, and as they do that, conditions for the production community in Los Angeles are deteriorating.

And they're deteriorating everywhere. You can go to other places and see the same issues. When I was in New Mexico people complained a lot about the money they made or didn't make.

Talk about that. When people discuss runaway production, they're thinking that the glamorous jobs are taking off to other places. People think the folks in places like New Mexico are doing great. Is that the case?

I worked with some people in New Mexico, and they knew what we made and what they made. There was a big difference, and they could feel the difference.

They knew they were working for a fraction of what we were making—about half—and that that’s why we were there to shoot. We don’t shoot in New Mexico because studios are being generous. Executives sense a better deal, and they go to where the money is. And then they figure out how to make it even more cost effective. New Mexico is interesting in that sense. Like a few other states, it has two production centers. There’s Santa Fe and Albuquerque. They’re about an hour apart, and people live and work in both cities and are considered local hires even if they live in one city and the production is based in the other. If you’re part of the out-of-town L.A. crew, the studio is putting you up in a convenient and comfortable spot close to the filming location. They’re taking care of you because the contract says you require accommodation and a per diem and other compensation. But if you’re the local hire, you have to go home every night. You don’t have the same protection because your contract is different.

My boom man was complaining about this very distinction. He lives in Santa Fe. The production was based in Albuquerque, but we were working in a third location, like the third point in a triangle between the two cities. In New Mexico, you can’t just drive in a straight line between two points—sometimes you have to go sixty miles out of your way to get to your desired location, which was the case for my boom operator. But because he was a local hire, he had to go home every night. There was no hotel room for him. Instead, he had to drive 110 miles back home after a thirteen- or fourteen-hour workday in the desert.

What advice would you give to students interested in a career in sound?

How I feel about my career at any given moment is directly related to my state of employment. Right now I feel pretty good. However, when I talk about my career, I try to be straightforward about what we do. I try to be the guy who tosses a cold bucket of reality in their direction, and the reality is that this business is a hard way to make a living. It’s hard on your personal life. It’s hard on your family. You can’t even plan a vacation. The craziest thing is when I see people on holiday checking out of a hotel, and making their next reservations a year in advance. They know that they’re going to be back. I could never do that. I don’t know where am I going to be in a year. I don’t know what job opportunities will come my way. Whenever I plan a major vacation, like going to Europe for three weeks, it’s inevitably going to overlap with some work. I’ll plan something, then hear about a job happening at the same time.

Something has to give. I’m now at a point in my career where I won’t give up vacation time with my family anymore. It’s an earned privilege to say “no” to work when it conflicts with what other people consider normal life! But it’s hard to do that, especially for people who are just starting out. So, for young people who value job security and stability and need to predict what they’re going to be doing and

where they're going to be, this is not a job I'd recommend. This job requires a spirit of adventure and improvisation and an open mind and a valid passport to make it work. Oh, and they'll need understanding and flexible relationships in their lives as well. Absolutely.

Here's a great example I like to share: I've lived in Santa Barbara since 1996. In that time, I've done one job where I could come home at the end of the day. Even if I'm working in L.A., it's too far to drive back every night. It's a hundred miles each way. So I spend most of my week in L.A. It's additionally hard to have your kid growing up while you're gone all week long. Anyway, the one job I did in town was a TV movie for Hallmark. I unexpectedly came home in time for dinner after shooting one day. Both my wife and daughter were a little shocked. My daughter—she was only six years old at the time—looked up at me, stared, and asked, “Daddy what are you doing home? Did you get fired?”