

Interview with
MARIO DE ANGELIS

October 21, 2016

**MOTION PICTURE PRODUCTION IN
WASHINGTON COUNTY, UTAH
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

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MARIO DE ANGELIS

Mario De Angelis was interviewed by cell phone on October 21, 2016 in St. George, Washington County, Utah by Dr. Stephen B. Armstrong. He related his experiences with motion picture production in Washington County, Utah. Wendy Stabler also participated.

SA: This is an oral history project about film production particularly in Southern Utah. It is a grant that is funded by the Utah Humanities Office which is [funded by the] State [of Utah]. We have been working on this for about nine months. We have talked to numerous people who were involved in production [and] some people who were extras in films. We have a series of questions that per protocol we are supposed to ask each person the same question. Do you have any questions for us?

MD: No.

SA: Can you give us your name, spelling it out for us, and your age?

MD: My first name is Mario, M-A-R-I-O. The last name is De Angelis D-E A-N-G-E-L-I-S. I am forty-five [years old].

SA: You and I are about the same age. I am forty-six [years old]. It is our time, isn't it? Can you provide an autobiographical background detailing your experiences, personal and professional, leading up to your work with production crews in Southern Utah? Have you worked in Southern Utah?

MD: Of course. That is kind of a long answer. I moved to Utah in 2001 and since then I have been all over [doing] all jobs in production from production assistant, to writer, director, producer, cinematographer [and] gaffer. I am on a film right now as a FAD [first assistant director]. It has taken fifteen years of doing projects, helping people [and] being on professional shows such as *Blood and Oil*. I worked on a short film that was filmed down in Southern Utah earlier this year, I am sorry, last year. It has just been a long road of doing what I love, but it is hard work to get to a certain spot [laughter] that you want to get to. I guess that is the short answer. I have done a lot of different TV [television] shows, feature films [and] short films. Three years ago I produced a feature with my friend, Joseph Velasco. We made a film starring Anthony Michael Hall who back in the 1980s was a huge name. He is still doing [projects]. We made a movie with him three years ago called *Friend Request*. [Inaudible] in Southern Utah, but I have [worked] all over Utah so I consider myself, I guess, a Utah filmmaker at this time.

SA: Could you give us more background about where you grew up? Or what you were doing before you came to Utah? Why you came to Utah? Maybe speak to your education?

MD: A long time ago, back in the 1990s, I [was granted] a degree in journalism and communications from the Franciscan University of Steubenville [Ohio]. So I [received] my Bachelors way back in 1993. Then I went into the [United States] Navy. I ended up in Utah in 2001 to get married, but that didn't work out. I do have one son. He keeps me here in Utah. I love showing him Utah, but I love being a part of [inaudible] Utah. So I don't want to leave. My path brought me here to Salt Lake [City, Salt Lake County, Utah] with a family. I have a son and to be a part of his life, I stay here in Utah and work.

SA: Do you know a person by the name of Tobijah "Toby" Tyler?

MD: I know "Toby." I don't know him super well. We don't hang out. I know of him. I know his experience level and what he has done. He is a FAD, [has] gone through the ranks and paid his dues. He is a first, so I know of him. I have met him a couple of times. I have never actually worked under him, but I know "Toby."

SA: He is down here, now, in Ivins [Washington County, Utah] and promoting a web series he has been developing that he shot in Salt Lake [City]. Now he is going to do a follow up down here in Southern Utah. It is nice to see that there is some overlap with the working filmmakers in the state. Why do you think Utah seems to be thriving now with film and television production?

MD: That is a [very] good question. I think right now we are getting back to where it used to be, where there was a lot of attention drawn to Utah because of TV series. But there have always been feature films here, so I think the fact that feature films are being shot a little more here and HBO [Home Box Office] series. There have been several of those. I think all of that has [brought] attention on Utah and filmmakers, TV production in Hollywood, all over the place. People are realizing there are only certain locations in Utah. There are plenty of others, [like the] Salt Flats, but a lot of people come to Utah to shoot the Salt Flats. I was part of a film that I was a producer on about four months ago. Two [fellows] from New York came here to make a movie. They could have made it in New York, but they knew they needed the picturesque views of Southern Utah. They were just here. I don't remember exactly where they shot, but I am pretty sure they shot near Arches [National Park, Moab, Grand County, Utah]. So people realize there are only certain spots that are as beautiful as Arches and plenty of other spots there in Southern Utah. Of course, the Salt Flats [are] very popular to shoot.

I think why it is happening. It is getting back to where it used to be where there was a lot of production here. I think it is becoming more and more prevalent. The locations are one of the reasons that Utah is getting a little more popular right

now. There are a lot of car shows that have always been coming here, so that is always something that I can use.

SA: Do you think that there is a greater number of filmmakers living, residing in the metropolitan areas of Salt Lake [City]? That it is not just New Yorkers or Hollywood people who are taking a trip here and shooting over a month or so? Is there a little entertainment industry here in the Beehive State? People like you and “Toby,” who are working filmmakers, you don’t leave often because there is work here.

MD: You are right. I haven’t left Utah yet, because the work has been steady. So that is good news. I absolutely believe that. The two gentlemen that I mentioned from New York, one, actually, is from Utah. He grew up as a young Jewish man in Utah and brought his friend back here to make his home about a young Jewish man in Utah. They could only do that in Utah. So one of the two New Yorkers I spoke of is from here.

SA: Do you have the credit for *Jewtah*?

MD: You are right. That is the fellow I speak of – *Jewtah*.

SA: To kind of chase this a little bit, was there any filming in southwest Utah?

MD: There was. I just can’t remember how far they made it. They went down south. I know they did because I saw the footage. The film actually was within two weeks of being shot or in the can. There was a rough cut and I have seen it. The parts of Southern Utah look amazing for what they got. I just can’t remember exactly where they ended up. They went on a little road trip to Southern Utah and they just stopped along the way and got some gorgeous shots of my friend who is a young Jew. They just had some amazing footage of Southern Utah. I can find out for you, but I just can’t remember exactly where they landed.

SA: Can I throw some names at you? Cameron Bossert.

MD: He is a director.

SA: Jeremy Rishe.

MD: Yes.

SA: Is Jeremy the character then, the Jewish Utahn?

MD: That is correct. All true.

SA: You never know where these conversations are going to go. This is wonderful. How about back to your direct experience. Can you possibly go into details about

movies or industry people you have worked with in Southern Utah in the Washington County area?

MD: About filmmakers who actually lived there?

SA: Or worked there when you were down there on a job.

MD: We went down and shame on me, I don't remember the town we landed in. But we went down to Southern Utah and we made a short film at a small town. I can't believe I can't remember the name of it. We filmed in a warehouse and did some exteriors in Southern Utah. The film that we went down to shoot there, again, was about the location. I don't know anyone in Washington County. Going down to that area is three hours from us. So it is always nice to do that kind of thing. [The] experience that I had was four days on a short film I was FAD on.

SA: What was the title?

MD: It is called *The Orb*, O-R-B. That was a short film that we filmed down there. That was a very good experience. There are always people willing to help down in your neck of the woods. But I don't know anyone that has lived in the [Washington] County. That I don't have.

SA: Just the working on it. I am trying to find the credit here for *The Orb* and see what year it was. What was your role on that film?

MD: FAD, the First Assistant Director.

SA: You have done so much.

MD: Yes, I have done a few things.

W: Three actually.

MD: That one, they didn't put it on IMDB [Internet Movie Database] yet. [Inaudible] It will be a year it has been in post. That one is not up yet.

SA: I just noticed here that you worked on that *Superman Lives* documentary.

MD: No. The credit is supposed to be — I was a kick starter. I was a crowd-funding person. That is all the credit is. As a gig, I wanted that one on my IMDB, so I gave them \$75.00.

SA: I loved that film. I was surprised at how good that was with the Nicholas Cage—.

MD: It was a great documentary.

- SA: Even having Tim Burton in it. I was just spellbound watching it. I wish they had made it.
- MD: I am kind of glad they didn't because the Nicholas Cage part of it I don't think that would have worked out. It had some cool ideas, but I could go on and on about that situation. There were so many missteps they made in the 1980s in the Superman films that they didn't need another weird Superman movie. [Laughter] That is just where I am with that.
- SA: The landscape is striking out here throughout the state whether it is the Wasatch area or the [Salt] Flats or down here in Southern Utah. Why is it that this landscape appeals to human beings? Why do they like seeing it?
- MD: I think what it is, there are so many kinds of venues and so many different ways that it is just other worldly. It is not only science fiction ways that have used it, but I think people just realize that there is just a lot of different worlds it could be, a lot of different settings that it could be. It has been used in so many different ways and so many different films that they even figured out a way to work the Salt Flats into a pirate movie from the 1700s. So they figure out a way that it could be anything. I think Southern Utah, and Utah in general, have so many environments that it could be anywhere you need it to be. I think that is what it is. It is not like other states don't have these kinds of things, but [the] Arches [are] only in Utah. The Salt Flats is the biggest one. There are other salt flats, but we have the biggest. So it is because of all that it could be Mars. It could be another planet, which it has [been]. Bad movies like shot down there in Southern Utah. *John Carter* was not a good movie, but they used the landscape very well because it is another planet. So I think that is why. It is other worldly.
- SA: *Galaxy Quest* used it too with Goblin [Valley] State Park [Emery County, Utah].
- MD: Yes. Great use of goblins! I went down there. I wasn't filming, but I have been down to Goblin and it is amazing. I would love to go back and shoot a movie just there. Just like everything, the next movie maybe I will get to it. Goblin Valley is very unique. I don't think there is any place on the planet like Goblin. That is amazing and how they used it in *Galaxy Quest* was perfect. They made the little rock creature and all that kind of stuff. So it was awesome. You can't do that in any other place.
- SA: This will be the last question, your thoughts about Zion [National Park] Canyon [Washington County, Utah]. [Do] you have any information about it through the perspective of a filmmaker? Have you ever worked in there? Or just [your] thoughts about Zion [National Park]. We can claim in Washington County that that is our park. It crosses into our county.
- MD: Again, Zion has this feel to it that it could be wherever you need it to be as a filmmaker. So you write something in and it is like where am I going to find that?

Oh, that kind of place exists in Utah. So I feel like as a filmmaker it has so many locations down there like Zion. You can write to the location. So you can write it in and say I know where I can shoot that. It is right in my back yard. I think as a filmmaker you have so many options down in your neck of the woods, Southern Utah, that you can write those kinds of things. But if you want to as a producer, writer [or] director write in another planet, there are plenty of options.

We shot a dead volcano, not in Southern Utah but halfway, near Beaver [Beaver County, Utah]. There is a dead volcano. We shot on that one time and that was another planet in our movie, of course, *The Dead Volcano*. [This was], I don't know, how many years ago. There were all these weird little rocks we were walking on and it was all dead lava. That is like freaking cool. Where am I going to find that? Utah has something like that. As a filmmaker it's nice to have those kinds of locations at your fingertips.

SA: This is great. I have to tell you, looking at your credentials, I am blown away by how much work you have done and that you have done so much of it in Utah, or almost all of it, I guess. Congratulations! Wendy has a question for you.

W: Do you know Phil Tuckett and Ben Braeten down here at [Dixie State] University?

MD: Phil Tuckett, that name seems to be familiar. I am not sure, actually. Phil Tuckett seems familiar though.

W: Next time you come down in this area either "Steve" or I should introduce you to Phil and Ben. They run the film [program].

SA: There is a new film program at Dixie State [University]. They just bought an airplane hangar and they are converting it into a studio with 16,000 square feet, big sound stage —

MD: That is amazing!

SA: — an editing suite. They are trying to use the landscape as a resource and invite filmmakers from around the world to come here and work, but also to offer services. I have been watching it grow for the last decade. It is just fantastic. [For] someone with your experience it might be something for you to come and speak to students if you were inclined.

MD: Sure.

SA: We could follow up on that. Do you ever make your way down here to Southwest Utah?

MD: I do. It is really up in the air. I might be driving to [Las] Vegas [Nevada] for four days to work. I could stop by.

SA: Let me give you my cell phone number.

MD: [Inaudible]

W: [Inaudible]

MD: This has nothing to do with the interview. I have [been] very lucky. You asked me how I ended up in Utah. Wendy already knows this. Of course, my son is why I am still here mainly because I would be in Los Angeles [California] by now. [Inaudible] My son is like this anomaly in my life of a blessing that I could never have imagined. My situation didn't work out with being married to Wendy's sister, but if things can work out you just never know how they can work out. [Laughter]

W: Exactly.

MD: All of a sudden fifteen years later I have an amazing son. I am working in the film industry, TV industry and talking to you fine folks. So you never know what [life] is going to have for you.

[END OF RECORDING. END OF INTERVIEW.]