

The Editor's Cut - Episode 060 - "EditCon 2021: In Conversation with Michelle Tesoro, ACE"

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

Relationships are more important, sometimes than what the job is, because you just never know what weird TV show is going to lead you to another prestigious TV show. Because those players, whoever you're working with, do a variety of things and things are always changing. Try to keep in mind what relationships you're creating and what that may mean later on.

Sarah Taylor:

Hello and welcome to The Editor's Cut. I'm your host, Sarah Taylor. We would like to point out that the lands on which we have created this podcast and that many of you may be listening to us from are part of ancestral territory. It is important for all of us to deeply acknowledge that we are on ancestral territory that has long served as a place where indigenous peoples have lived, met, and interacted.

We honor, respect, and recognize these nations that have never relinquished their rights or sovereign authority over the lands and waters on which we stand today. We encourage you to reflect on the history of the land, the rich culture, the many contributions and the concerns that impact indigenous individuals and communities. Land acknowledgements are the start to a deeper action.

Today's episode is part two of a six part series covering EditCon 2021 that took place virtually in February, 2021. In conversation with Michelle Tesoro, ACE. Michelle is a master of drama, intrigue, and suspense. From fringe to the newsroom, Michelle's work shows a range of storytelling techniques. Paul Day, CCE and Michelle Tesoro, ACE discuss Michelle's work, including her most recent feat of editing an entire mini-series, The Queen's Gambit.

Speaker 3:

And action!

Speaker 4:

This is The Editor's Cut.

Speaker 5:

A CCE podcast.

Speaker 4:

Exploring, exploring, exploring the art.

Speaker 5:

Of picture editing.

Paul Day, CCE:

First of all, I want to welcome Michelle Tesoro for joining me live from Los Angeles. You got up early to join us. She has cut such wonderful shows as Godless, Luck, of course, The Queen's Gambit, House of Cards, When They See Us, Newsroom. Again, thank you for joining us so early from Los Angeles.

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

Thanks Paul. Thanks for having me.

Paul Day, CCE:

I want to jump right in by saying, or at least asking you to just give us the journey of Michelle to where you are today. I know you started in Chicago. You now reside in Los Angeles. And of course along the way, I'm sure you've had your trials and tribulations of getting to where you are today in such an outstanding career. So can you just give us a quick little sort of Reader's Digest version of how Michelle went from Chicago to Los Angeles?

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

Well, I'm from Chicago, and I spent my first two years of college at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. And I always wanted to get into film, I just didn't get into any of the film schools for my freshman year. I wasn't that great of a student. I was an average student. But for my junior year of college, I got into NYU and I decided to pursue a career in film that way. So I went to Tisch and finished my degree there. And it was there that I got bit by the editing bug. I just decided to move forward there.

At the time when I graduated, there wasn't a whole lot of work, but I was able to get a job at a music publishing company, which is Echo Music and Records. I was their in-house video editor, librarian person. And I did that for about three years, cutting special things and little promos for all their music CDs and things that were going out.

Probably after about three years, I decided to move to Los Angeles. So I came out here through ACE. I had applied for the internship program. I didn't get it, but I did attend their three-day workshop that they had. And I met a lot of people there at the workshop. This was probably 2005. And I just started through some connections. I had started post-coordinating and assistant editing in network television, and it sort of starts there. I joined the union and everything. And I think it was maybe three years of just

assistant editing until I was able to be lucky enough to get a bump up on Swingtown and In Treatment.

Paul Day, CCE:

When you first started out, you started meeting people like this. That whole networking process, being parachuted into Los Angeles, is that when you start meeting the people who inspire you, the people who support you along the way. Are there a few people that you can name that helped guide you, mentors, people that you even maybe even call upon today for advice?

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

Oh, there's so many people. But I would say... like... the people who gave me the crucial advice that I needed in the beginning, to.. before I moved out here, would probably be Marty Nicholson, ACE, as well as Paul Barnes, who's also an ACE member. I met Paul in an editing class at NYU back when I was in school, and he connected me to Marty Nicholson. They told me just the practicalities of having to move out to Los Angeles, which was joining the Guild, getting your hours, and being an assistant editor, how important that is. And so initially that information was really important.

And also another editor I met in New York is Peter Frank. He's also an ACE member. I did my first couple of assistant editing jobs with him, and he was so supportive and really understanding. For...Now when I think about it, I was really green. I remember I didn't even know how to organize a lined script, like with the facing pages and all that. So he's super patient. And I think-

Paul Day, CCE:

You got to learn somewhere, right?

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

I guess so. And just be with people who are nice enough to not be annoyed by you. But I think the first few people I worked with, and that would be Michael Ruscio and Lisa Bromwell and Ron Rosen, I got in with the right group that were doing, at the time in television, really great work. And they were willing to.. kinda bring me up and really help me become an editor and also let people know that I edit and without any preconceived notions or protectiveness over their own. So they're very willing to share. And I still talk to these same people to this day. We're all close.

And I would say, even along the way, one mentor, he doesn't like me calling him a mentor, but he's sort of an accidental mentor, I'll call it, is Sidney Wolinsky. He's been just instrumental. He's such a good friend. We met on Swingtown, which is the first show I got bumped up on when Ron Rosen left to do a pilot. I took over his rotation. But

Sidney was one of the other editors and we became fast friends and talked a lot about... And ever since then we call each other about, "What would you do in this situation? Do you think you should take this job? What would you say about this?" And that's just been so good for me, just how to understand how to conduct myself as a professional. And he has so much experience too, other than a great editor and I could talk about that kind of stuff with him.

Paul Day, CCE:

Sure. I couldn't agree more with having that resource of having people to call. I definitely have several people who I can call upon and bounce ideas off and career advice and stuff. This is a two-part question and this sort of goes hand in hand with you getting the opportunity to start cutting. But also now that you're an extremely established editor, how do you also encourage your assistants in getting bumped up or getting cutting opportunities? So tell us a little bit about your transition from assisting to cutting, whether it was easy or difficult, or who you had supporting along the way. And then also tell us a little bit about how you conduct yourself as an editor with your team.

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

So.. I think I was always doing a lot of stuff on the side, like whether it was cutting what we used to call little webseries for YouTube with my friends, or somebody, first time filmmaker like Robbie Pickering, we did Natural Selection together. That was completely for nothing. I literally did it for nothing. And I did it while I was cutting In Treatment season three. Amy Duddleston will remember this because she was working with me at the time. But yeah, I practically killed myself doing other stuff while I was trying to just do the practical thing of working.

So I did a lot of that and I think the people I worked with saw that I did that and saw I was putting the hard work. And I was also, if they asked me for help, I would help them. I also think at the time, the assistants were doing a lot of the previously-ons in network television. So you got to showcase your editing work, not just to your editors, but also to the producers. So that enabled me to showcase and have the producers work with me one-on-one other than other things I did for them for the main show. Like for Swingtown. I did a lot of the dissolves. I created the look of those dissolves and transitions. We had special soft iris dissolves that close and different things. So that was something that, it made people see how you would work with a producer. Because that's the biggest thing, is how do you act in the chair.

Paul Day, CCE:

Sure, sure.

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

And to segue way to how... Well actually... And then when once you get a bump up, it's never secured that you're going to work again as an editor. So... There was a period of time, I think every editor who can remember their transition between assistant editor to editor will know that you're kind of riding that fence. And I did that. I was an editor. Then I was an assistant editor. It was a period of time where you go back and forth. And you're just waiting for those first three credits to say, "Okay, look, I have enough editing credits, can I just do this?"

And I think now with my assistants, I try to give them, if they don't have enough time of it, enough time in the chair. Because I think that is the biggest thing, if people question whether they can handle something or not. Because oftentimes it's fine when you're... A, yes, they should be cutting on their own and honing their own craft and getting fast. And I, of course, encourage that and I try to get assistants who want to cut, cutting, get them involved. But the biggest thing is also to be able to know that they can take a note, know that they can take a note in the room with you within a certain speed of time.

And that's sort of how I try to help them, other than if I get any calls like, "Oh, I'm doing this short," or, "I'm doing this," or whatever, I try to recommend, if I feel like somebody is ready. I'm always recommending.

Paul Day, CCE:

It's interesting, [Gillian 00:11:00] and [Steven 00:11:01] were talking earlier about doing all this remote stuff and not really catching the vibe that's going on in the room. It's one of those things where I was always trying to pass along to assistants to sorts of read body language and mood. And you just don't know what other things have happened to a producer or director before they get into the room. And I always looked at it, it's sort of like you want a calm, warm, comforting environment for who's ever coming in so you can at least get the true creative self coming out of them once you get into it.

All right. So once you've transitioned into becoming a very established editor, you meet Scott Frank. Can you tell us the story of your relationship with Scott Frank? That you worked on Godless and of course The Queen's Gambit. But I think you did one other project with him as well. I think this is your third project with Scott? But just tell us about that building of a relationship, because you cut all episodes of Godless and you've cut all episodes of Queen's Gambit. I want to talk about that maybe a little bit later, but just tell us about meeting Scott Frank, and that evolution of a creative relationship.

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

Well, it's interesting because yeah, I met him, I wanna to say kind of in the middle of my... Well, it was now 10 years ago, 2014. Oh, actually not that long ago, I guess... I met him in 2013, 2014. I was doing a movie, Revenge of the Green Dragons, but it was after I did The Newsroom. Yeah, so I had a pretty good run of it. And we met on a pilot called Hoke for FX, which did not get picked up. And the producer on that was David Manson, who I had assisted one of my very first jobs when I worked with Peter Frank. And I think I had done one other recut for him on a Movie of the Week just prior to interviewing with Scott.

So I think he was the one who actually recommended to Scott that he meet with me. And I see at the time Scott was looking for a new editor, and now that I know him, he's super open. And we met, and I don't remember this, of course, but Scott does. He said, because somebody else asked him about this in an interview... That what he.. What he liked about me is that we talk a lot about story. We focus a lot about story and how things are playing out. And that's just sort of... You know, how it happens with us. And I did the pilot. It didn't get picked up. He really liked me. And then I think two years later he... Or that year he moved to New York and was developing Godless, I think. And then he asked me to do that. So that was 2016.

Paul Day, CCE:

Okay. Because we don't have a huge amount of time, I want to jump in to our first clip of The Queen's Gambit. So I think we're going to show the audience two different chess matches. We're going to start with the one that takes place in Ohio. Why don't we roll that, and then we'll talk a bit about the style of that particular clip. And then we'll show the other clip.

[start of the clip1]

Benny:

Why, hello Beth.

Beth:

Why, hello Benny.

Benny:

I read about your game with Borgov. That must have felt terrible.

Beth:

I felt like a fool.

Benny:

I know that feeling. Helpless. It all goes and you just... push wood.

Who have you got up first?

Beth:

Manfredi.

Benny:

That shouldn't take too long. Highest rated players in the whole fucking country, and yet here we are in some second-rate university playing on cheap plastic boards, with cheap plastic pieces. If this were a golf or a tennis tournament, we'd be surrounded by reporters as opposed to... whoever these people are. You should see the places they play in the Soviet Union.

Beth:

Oh, I'm planning on it.

Benny:

You have to get past me first.

Beth:

I'm planning on that, too.

[end of the clip1]

Paul Day, CCE:

So that was clip one. And there was a lot of split screens, a lot of exciting DV movements and stuff like that. How much of that was written? How much of that is designed? How much of that was you? And how long did it take to put that particular sequence together?

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

Well, that's a crazy one because I think the idea of the split screens was definitely written in the script. That wasn't anything that he could write in like, "Oh, it's going to be placed this way." But I do seem to remember that in the script he described, they don't look at each other until the end. They never face each other until the end. And when they went to shoot the sequence, actually, they were running out of time. Something was happening with the schedule where they didn't have as much time in the location as they originally planned. So he completely had to throw all of his plans out in terms of how much of that was done in camera. He was going to do this whole choreographed

scenario where they were going to face each other and do all this stuff ..and that never happened.

So they just did the best they can, which... They did the best they could, with covering it in a way that sort of made sense. And he called me saying, "So... the day didn't go that great, but.. there you go! figure it out!"

Paul Day, CCE:

Did they do any pickups or anything for that?

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

We did. I think the surest thing though, I do have to say because it was important to him, is that he knew that he wanted **classic or gas** and he had that music cleared prior to shooting it. And he told everybody to listen to it so that they knew what kind of rhythm they were going to... Or the vibe of the whole thing. So I knew that I at least had some sort of rhythmic spine to work with.

So basically, what they shot was her playing with the other players and all that. And I kind of mapped it out with... okay, here's day one, two, and three. And it's also not being... What you don't see here is the scene where she comes out and Benny is talking to the reporter. That was supposed to be in the middle somewhere. So there was a lot of other scenes that were getting in the cut with day one, day two, day three. So it was never supposed to be in one section, but it was very clear to me that we had to even just restructure the reel in its entirety. So-

Paul Day, CCE:

You say the reel, do you mean the episode or do you mean that particular segment?

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

I mean the 20 minutes. No, I mean literally the reel that that segment was in, which is like the 20 minutes around that scene.

Paul Day, CCE:

Okay. Right.

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

And there's all these other complications of, well, what shirt is she wearing? And I was like, well, hopefully if it's working dramatically, no one's worried about what shirt she's wearing, but if you really keep track of it, it doesn't make any sense. But I was like, well... And I don't think anybody has a problem with it, obviously. But yeah, so I kind of mapped it out. I think the overhead part where you see the chess board and the faces

come out of it, I had used a shot from one of the Shaibel matches in episode one. I used that and I used their little faces. And then I think, when they're circling the names, I had used footage from episode two, I think, in there. And I made a shot list of what second unit needed to shoot for that particular sequence so that we could have more to play with. Plus I just asked, "So just get some shots, close up shots of the board," because that wasn't shot at the time either.

So..Basically with my two other assistants, Charlie Greene and Phillip Kimsey, we created... Like I think I did day one and then I created the kind of structure of it. And I had them try their hand. I think Philip did day three and Charlie did day two. And, you know, we created, we tried to make it look different. Because I was like, "This Brady bunch thing, is it going to last for the other segments?"

Paul Day, CCE:

Does Scott Frank shoot a lot of material? Does he shoot a lot of footage?

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

Comparatively, no. No. When I compare to some other directors who might shoot three cameras and you end up with four hours of footage every day, it's half that. They really try... That's when he and Steven Meizler is DP, they really try to shoot what the elements that they want and not just shoot a bunch of coverage. You know... So I think, yeah, it wasn't really a lot. But luckily, when you do these split screens, you have higher resolution when you make the image smaller. So for example, at the beginning of day one, you see the closeup on the chalkboard, Benny Watts and Harmon, you know, that was from some other wide shot that I really zoomed in on and had to make sure that [inaudible 00:19:51]. That wouldn't be a problematic. So...

Paul Day, CCE:

Oh, okay. He made footage. That's good. During some of these chess matches, there must have been a lot of footage of chess. Did you know chess going into this show? Or did you learn chess? Or did you have anybody to guide you along in the rules of a chess board?

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

I knew the basic rules of chess, of how pieces move and how pieces get captured. But to know chess, no, I did not know chess. I thought... I think I tried and I realized, oh, this is like learn how to be a first-rate tennis player in a month, that's just not going to happen.

Paul Day, CCE:

I was the chess president at high school. I was the president of the chess club for two years. So... I played a lot of chess. So watching the show, I definitely had a reminiscent of going back to sort of the early stages of learning all the moves and learning all the names of the people. And I think you had a couple of consultants who are world champions. So it pays to have those people.

Hey, look, I want to roll the other clip by comparison. This is a chess match that takes place now in Paris.

[start of the clip2]

[end of the clip2]

That's just amazing. The emotional context within that. And it's one line, which is, "I resign," to go five minutes of screen time with just music and faces sweating, drinking water. You know... You suck the audience directly into exactly how she's thinking. Tell us about the process of getting to that point. I mean, was there more dialogue? I felt like, did we want to hear more conversations? And there's one thing I just love, which is when she makes the move with the rook, there's a gasp in the room, but it's so subtle and it's designed that you just know she's made a mistake, and there's something that's about to go wrong for her. Tell us about creating that sequence. And it's such a contrast to the other chess match. How did you come up with both those scenarios?

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

I mean... I think this sequence, you know.. they were very deliberate about the kind of footage that was available to me. I specifically remember in the script, there was no dialogue. So there wasn't other dialogue that was cut out. It was all supposed to be just performance-based in terms of Anya, in terms of her memories, of thinking back on studying with Benny, the faces in the room, trying to maximize as much pressure from exterior sources onto her. And the way they shot her, you know, very tight, very intense, the pieces that they got for me to play with already put me in a mode of just trying to tell the story with faces.

I think though, and I was noticing this time around watching it, how informative the sound design and the music really help tell you where those moments are when you've gotten to a different mode, like when she moves the rook. You know, or actually, when she decides that she's not sure if she wants to move the rook (laughs) There's a little tick, tick, tick, tick, that adds on top of the ticking.

The other thing that I employed after the fact is the use of the clocks. At that point, you're familiar with how the chess clocks are utilized in these tournaments, but in

here I wanted to use it as like a more subjective running out of time. I'm running out of time, and literally the ticking clock that is actually the rhythm for the entire sequence, like all the moves I wanted to keep to make sure I was keeping in time with the rhythm of the clock. And I think also music and sound... kinda of took that and ran with it. 'Cos literally when I cut that initially, I just had the ticking clock and I had things moving to it. And when I first showed Scott, he just saw it and he was like, "Oh great. We just need a tick there." I was like, "Uh, wait a minute." Let's just see what music and sound can add to this. Because I still want to be informed about when it's over for her, because there is nothing, unless you really know chess, you don't know when it's over. You don't know when it's reached the point where she knows she's going to lose. And I think that the music and the sound effects do take you there.

Paul Day, CCE:

And also those oners, those straight-on shots of people looking down the camera, the uncomfortableness, the tension, like being stared at and being scrutinized over. Another aspect of that is also just, you could play that silently and completely understand what's going on. So to add the elements of the sound design and the music is brilliant.

Now I'm going to touch upon really quickly. You cutting all seven episodes. I mean, to what benefit did you have because of that choice of style from episode one to episode seven?

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

I think there's probably a consistent feel when you go from episode to episode. It's consistent, yet different. We were trying to bring a different element to every episode, certainly to every chess match. You know I was recalling a lot of things from the opening, the Paris opening in episode one there, that I wanted to just remind people of what they initially saw. So I just think having that knowledge of where all the episodes are, where she is personally in the storyline was useful. Other than that, it's a lot of work. (laughs)

Paul Day, CCE:

Of course, it's a lot of work! In keeping with our schedule, I just want to have a conversation that about *When They See Us*, which is another series that you were involved in. This one is a very emotionally charged mini-series based on true events that happened in New York City, where five... I think, five teens got wrongfully charged for rape and murder. A tour de force of a mini-series, I have to admit. And I'm just surprised it didn't get as much attention as it did. But I know it was nominated for I think, 15 or 16 Emmys. I just think that the contrast again, of your career with the many different facets that you've worked on from *Godless* to *Luck*, *Queen's Gambit*, this

series is a tour de force. And I can't express how amazing it was to watch it. It was so wonderfully put together. Tell us the story leading into working with Ava and working on this project. And how were you able to get through some of these such emotionally charged scenes?

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

I mean, I think we all had, and when I mean all, all the other editors, Terilyn Shropshire, and Spencer Averick. And with Ava, you know, we felt obligated to.. tell the story on behalf of the men. You know, do it justice. Having people understand what their experience was. And... what was interesting about this, about the show, is that every episode gives you a different perspective on the story, on what happened to them. If you've watched the first episode, which is just this horrifying experience for the boys, and then you see this episode, which is how they each come out of prisons and how fragmented their lives are, as a result, the context of it really, really puts you in their shoes, which I think was the point. And ultimately is the point of why we tell these kinds of stories, is so that people can relate on a human level to what they're going to.

I mean, I was really interested in becoming a part of this project. For a long time is just going to be Teri and Spencer, each cutting two episodes. Ava had directed all of the episodes very much like how Scott directed all of the episodes. And I think at some point, because Teri was cutting episode one and that's such a beast of an episode, like from top to bottom it's... I mean, not only are you trying to establish the look and the feel of the show, but.. you know, you're also trying to tell that part of the story. It was just always a very difficult episode to work on. And I think by the time you get to episode three or... when it came time to her to start putting that together, she kind of knew, she thought down the line that she wasn't going to be able to handle another episode. Because all these episodes were running like, I don't know, 80 minutes. They're like little movies. So.. they brought me on at that point. So.. I was, I came on in the middle of them shooting. And it was such a different process. You know... Very, very collaborative. And it was fun to kinda bounce ideas off of the other editors and see what they were doing and.. try to not necessarily match styles, but... have some continuity, what we were doing editorially, so that it felt consistent. But you know, each story is different. My story, my challenge was to try to tie the young versions of the characters to the older versions of the characters. And.. you know, the sample that we watch is just an example of how different they could be. And what occurred to me is that Antron's... They kind of coincide with their relationships with their fathers. Like Antron's relationship with his father is very fragmented. The style of the editing there, even though... those two scenes were never put together, none of those were ever put together in the script, but it was something that Ava and I felt like we needed to do, we needed to go from young boy to older boy, so we tried to make direct transitions. But in a lot of ways it represents

their fragmented relationship. Whereas Raymond and Ray Sr., you know, they were always together and in contact. And.. sort of the fluid way that you see you know, his growth in prison and how the father was always talking to him. And then obviously at the end, it's so different than Antron and his father's reunion.

Paul Day, CCE:

How much did Ava give you that leeway to play with that back and forth between the storylines? Was it per the script, or did you massage that into that evolution with the other editors?

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

So, for my episode is completely different than the other episodes. I mean, this one Ava and I had to do a lot of restructuring of the episode itself. Yeah, she gave me *carte blanche*, you know? I think the first cut I gave her was basically the script and she was like, "No, no, no. Go back and make it what it's supposed to be. And here's my problems with basically how the script was, so can you fix these in editorial?" So... it was really great to just do what I needed to do to get the episode together. Yeah, this is a good example of... Like, so the Raymond transition part, that was all storyboarded, they had previs, they really prepared for that.

Paul Day, CCE:

Oh, interesting. Okay.

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

And Antron's... Whereas the Antron transition, that was all created in the editing room, really.

Paul Day, CCE:

That's great. And so let's touch upon just briefly about your experience working as a solo editor, cutting a full mini-series, and working with other editors. I think there's some audience members who definitely always constantly have those questions about what's it like on a series maintaining continuity, but also just working relationships with people, that kind of aspect. You know, how do you guys organize yourself as far as making comments on shows and stuff like that?

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

I think When They See Us, you know, as opposed to how Godless and The Queen's Gambit were done where I was the only one, on When They See Us, it was really important, for even during dailies, how we all commented on dailies. Ava wanted a breakdown from all of us of what we thought of the footage, if we needed any, if we

needed her to get anything, based on what we thought. And so we all knew, what we had that collaboration from the get-go, and because she was shooting it all at once, it's not like somebody was finished before the others. I suppose like episode one was finished sooner than say episode four, for example, but just the way it worked in terms actor schedules. But I think... What was great is we just made it a point to sit down and look at everything and comment on everything. And when episodes were coming together, Ava was very much like, "Okay, come in and you see it, you give your feedback, and you give your feedback." And we did that. And towards the end, when the episodes were two studio cuts in, we actually sat and we did a whole binge of the four, which is just really emotionally draining. And we were able to give like the feedback by sitting all together, watching it and having an opportunity to go over it one more time. You know, so that was interesting on that show. Now, if you're on a show that's more episodic, where you have different directors, it's a completely different thing. I think what makes a difference is how many directors you have on a show.

Paul Day, CCE:

Having that one guiding force, moving you through it.

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

Exactly.

Paul Day, CCE:

Let's talk briefly about your method, your isolated... How you approach dailies and how you sort of break down looking at footage. Just give us a day-to-day habit that you go through.

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

The day in the life in the cutting room of Michelle Tesoro. It depends on the show, but I'll just say what it was on *The Queen's Gambit* just because it's the most recent thought of me being in dailies. The footage comes in and I have the assistants organize it and in sequences that I call pulls, which are basically the segments of the scenes in script order. All the setups, all the cameras, everything in one sequence. And, so, they do that for the day, and on *Queen's*, those were usually ready by right before lunch or just after lunch. So we'd have a leisurely lunch, and then after lunch we'd sit and we'd watch all these things together, all the sequences, meaning everything that was shot for the day. And I would make my notes, we would make our comments on it. We'd talk about what we saw, basically me and the assistants on *The Queen's Gambit*. I had two. And... by the end of it, I would say, okay, if there were scenes that I think I could give to them, I would give to them. So every time they would have something to cut, I would say,

"Okay, you do 3:24 to 3:30," or whatever. And then I usually would give myself the hardest chunk, which actually sometimes it sucked because sometimes you look for those oners or those easy scenes to give you a mental break. And so on The Queen's Gambit and I was always doing the hard stuff. I was like, "Goddamn it."

Paul Day, CCE:

Got to hand over one of the hard [inaudible 00:34:45].

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

Yeah. Which I did, but I didn't want to overload them because I knew they already had a lot of work that they were doing. So... But it was fun because whatever they did do, how it rolled is once they started cutting, they would show me, like they would show us, we would screen their versions of cuts and we would make comments. We would all make comments on each other's cuts. And I could give feedback if they had time to do that. But, you know, you have a certain amount of time, so we worked well with what we had. And I think that was basically the daily routine for many weeks. And at some point at the end of every week, we would get everything together so, to pick sequences and send it to Scott for his feedback.

Paul Day, CCE:

Now you were talking about pulls, I think you referred to them as. Is that like a selects reel? Would you just have everything in the selects reel or would you just have circle takes or would it be based on director's choices or your choices?

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

So we typically get everything even B neg footage. And within the... when we're naming the clips, if there was a director select, that would have an asterisk next to it. So I could see in the timeline, what were circles, other than looking at the facing page, but I could see in the timeline what they were. So if we were really pressed for time, we wouldn't watch all the B neg stuff, we would just watch the director selects. But in the pull sequence itself, which is, as you described, like basically I would say, "Okay, line one to line eight would be this section." And then you'd see all the setups for that and all the takes for that, or all the cameras for that. You would have everything there.

So it's mostly set up. So while you're cutting, if you need to reference other takes, you had kinda an easy way. It's just, I can't just [crosstalk 00:36:35] sync.

Paul Day, CCE:

Yeah.

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

[inaudible 00:36:35] sync is hard for me because it's just words. I need pictures.

Paul Day, CCE:

Right. You're a picture editor. That's why. You need the visuals.

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

Yes.

Paul Day, CCE:

Nothing wrong with that at all. Don't have to say you're sorry. One of the things I wanted to talk to you about was the series Godless. I think I told you when we met for pre-interview, it's like one of those shows that I think I've binged twice now because it's so deliciously done.

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

[inaudible 00:37:02]. Oh my God, thank you!

Paul Day, CCE:

It's so well done. It's amazing. I can't gush enough over this series. Watching it is just so much fun. And Canadian Kim Coates just chews up the scenery in just about every scene that he's in, because he's just so good. But I have two questions actually. And one of them is just, I just noticed that Godless and Queen's Gambit are seven episodes. Why seven? Why not eight? Why not six? Why not 10?

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

Seven episodes means we've gone over and had to create a seventh, for both.

Paul Day, CCE:

Oh. So it always started off at six?

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

It always started off at six. Yeah, it's funny. I think the run times for both of them both ended up about seven and a half hours.

Paul Day, CCE:

When you sit down to cut a whole mini-series like that, do you know where the changeovers are as far as the episodes are concerned? Or do you cut it like one big seven, nine-hour movie?

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

You cut it like one, what starts as almost nine and a half, 10-hour movie. And then you wind it down. Obviously when he writes the scripts, they are episodes. They're written in episodes. He has already decided, "Okay, this ends here, this starts here." But I think Godless is a little clearer where things started, we shifted things around. I can't remember if we... Oh, no, we did break up. We broke up episode five into two for Godless. For Queen's Gambit, we broke up episode two into episodes two A and two B, which is episodes two and three. It's funny because you look at it, it's like, well, we do want to keep all this story, but we're always struggling with length somehow. He hasn't quite hit that... Been able to write a good 45 minute episode. (laughs)

Paul Day, CCE:

But I think that's a testament to the fact that all the characterizations and the dialogue and just everything that's put together. That sequence, the second question I have for that particular was sequence is, was it written that way or were there a lot of embellishments that you added to connect it all together and make it so cool?

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

Yeah. What's fun about that... Well, it was a little bit of both, you know, I think it was definitely written in a certain way. If you're counting, we definitely are stick tight to how many clips, how many bullets, because it's very important that, 'oh, there was a seventh one!' but where is it in terms of scoop, putting everything together. And they did storyboard that. They had to, there was so many stunts involved, especially with the horses. But I think that... And I remember I put it together exactly as storyboarded in the assembly and he was looking at it, going, "There's something wrong with it. Just do another pass where you're making it cool." And I'm like, okay. And that's when we see the intercutting of Roy and McNue on top of each other when he's, "Shoot, shoot, shoot," is when I started getting a little bit more into it there.

Paul Day, CCE:

Right. So well done. So well done. What advice would you give for up-and-coming editors, assistant editors, people wanting to get into post. What is your top secret go-to advice?

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

Oh my gosh, I guess it would be, you know, keep cutting, keep challenging yourself, and let people know if you're trying to move on up. I think in my earlier story, I sort of I made that clear as everybody knew that I was doing it and it was just a matter of time. That's what I would say.

Paul Day, CCE:

Another question is, if you're put into a situation that you may not necessarily think it's an advantage to you, do you look at it as at least a stepping stone? Like if you're involved with a show that might not be something you want to do or being put into a situation that, you know, what it's going to take to advance you to the next level.

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

Yeah. I mean, I think... Troy Takaki gave me this advice recently. It is, in so many ways, about your relationships. Relationships are more important sometimes than what the job is, because you just never know what weird TV show is going to lead you to another prestigious TV show. Because those players, whoever you're working with, do a variety of things and things are always changing. So... I mean this sort of attaches on to the first question, like what would be the good advice, is try to keep in mind what relationships you're creating and what that may mean later on.

Paul Day, CCE:

Well, tell us about the things that really get you jived up, like the shows when you're on shows. What is it that you wake up in the morning and can't wait to get into the cutting room?

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

Usually when there is a puzzle to solve that we haven't quite cracked and I've been mulling it over in my mind, whatever it might be. And I think I have that, "Ah! Ah! I know what I want to do." I need to get in the cutting room and makes, see if it works or not, or if it's just a fantasy that lives in my head.

Paul Day, CCE:

Well, I think we've come to the end of our road. The one thing I just wanted to say is thank you for taking the time to join us and be part of this. Again, your career, your.. all the shows that you've worked on have just been amazing and you should be quite proud of yourself. And I want to thank you on behalf of the Canadian Cinema Editors and EditCon that you had joined us. Thank you so much.

Michelle Tesoro, ACE:

Thanks so much. Thank you. It's been a pleasure. Take care.

[Sarah Taylor:

Thank you so much for joining us, and a big thank you goes to Jane MacRae and Alison Dowler. This episode was edited by Alex Schead. The main title sound design was

created by Jane Tattersall. Additional ADR recording by Andrea Rusch. Original music created by Chad Blain and Soundstripe. This episode was mixed and mastered by Tony Bao.

The CCE has been supporting Indspire, an organization that provides funding and scholarships for indigenous postsecondary students. We have a permanent portal on our website at cceditors.ca or you can donate directly to indspire.ca. I-N-D-S-P-I-R-E dot C-A.

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Till next time, I'm your host, Sarah Taylor.

Speaker 5:

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