



Our **EXCLUSIVE** interview with *Moonlighting*, now *Boston Legal* editor Phil Neel

By Diana Maiocco

On the morning of Monday, February 14, I drove to Manhattan Beach Studios to interview Phil Neel, one of the editors of the hit ABC series *Boston Legal*. Phil worked on *Moonlighting* as its Post Production Supervisor, Editor and Associate Producer (Seasons 3-5) and he was very happy to sit down with me to discuss what it was like for him to work with Glenn Gordon Caron, Neil Mandelberg and the rest of the *Moonlighting* cast and crew. In fact, 20 years later, Phil is now working right next door to Glenn and Neil, as *Medium* is shot on the same lot. Isn't that ironic? Not only did we discuss *Moonlighting*, but we also talked about *Boston Legal*, including episodes he edited, *Hired Guns* and *It Girls and Beyond*. After the interview, Phil was gracious enough to take me down to the set to meet some of the cast and crew and view the filming of a scene from the amazingly powerful episode *Death Be Not Proud*, which he also edited.

DM: You were an editor on *Remington Steele*. Is that where you met Glenn Caron?

PN: Yes, Glenn was a writer/producer. The way it worked that first season was that whoever was the writer of record on the episode would work with the editor and bring the show to final cut. I think Glenn and I worked together on two or three episodes. We got to know each other pretty well and enjoyed working together. I think it was mid-season or so that Glenn started talking about a show he was developing, a series of his own. He asked me if I knew Artie Mandelberg who he had worked with on *Breaking Away*. Artie was also

an editor who later became a producer on *Moonlighting*. He thought that someday I should meet him because we might enjoy working together. Of course, this was a year or two before *Moonlighting* had started.

DM: You were the post production supervisor on *Moonlighting* beginning with the third season. Can you explain the role of the post production supervisor, and you were also an editor and associate producer, so can you get into that also?

PN: For the first seven or eight shows I was the post supervisor, and then became associate producer. I was also editing at the same time. A post supervisor is like an associate producer, basically responsible for bringing the show from final cut to air. I worked with the sound supervisor spotting effects, background ambiences, and ADR (looping). I was also involved with music and would sit with Glenn and Artie while they spotted music with the composer. After I became associate producer, I supervised the dubbing stage, where all of the sound effects, dialogue, and music were mixed together. Regarding music, there are two types typically used in editing and mixing. There's needle-drop music, which is existing records and songs that Glenn would've selected during the writing of the actual script, and we would edit to those songs. There were other times when Glenn would have us edit-in needle drop music after the show was cut, just to give the scene an attitude we never saw before. Alf Clausen, our composer, scored the other type of music we would use in the episodes. Alf would underscore the emotional scenes, plus any other whimsical or comical cues that were necessary. I forgot to mention that as post supervisor I also supervised the color correction of the shows, and made up the post schedule for the delivery to the network, which was always done under an extremely accelerated amount of time. I'm not sure at what point it's best to talk about our schedule because it was sort of infamous, the post schedule.

DM: I'll ask it now. What were the challenges of working on a show like *Moonlighting*?

PN: Well, obviously there was the physical aspect of getting the show on the air. We consistently shot until Friday with a Tuesday airdate. Turning the show around for post production was definitely a big challenge. This was in the days of cutting on a Moviola, not electronically. It was all cut on film so that was a slower process. Nevertheless, even by today's standards, this would be considered a tight turnaround. We developed a system that seemed to work pretty well to get the show on the air quickly. We'd usually mix the show on the weekend. Then we'd play the show back for Glenn on Monday morning, one day before air. This was in the days when shows still cut the negative, so we would have the negative cutters doing their work over the weekend, and we would start color correcting in telecine Monday morning as well. Another challenge was in the creative side of editing a show like *Moonlighting*. It was an extremely well written series and editorially we had to support the writing with proper pace. It was comedy, and it

was drama, and at times it was a musical. It was a series that tackled all three very well. Usually you have a series that's one or the other, but *Moonlighting* was consistently all three. As an editor, it was very challenging because we had to know when to slow down the pace and play the moments, and then turn around and edit David and Maddie doing rat-a-tat dialogue.

DM: And overlapping dialogue.

PN: Yes, and overlapping dialogue, just the physical aspect of cutting a scene where two frames can make a crucial difference in the pace. It was definitely a challenge to give the story the emotional feel it deserved and still give the show its trademark pace. I remember when I first got there, I cut a scene together where there was a lot of back and forth with David and Maddie. I was making cuts that were ten and twelve frames long. It went back and forth, back and forth, and Glenn looked at it. He liked it, but he said, "Can't you get back to Maddie just for that one word?" And I literally don't think I had more than six frames to devote to that word, so

here I thought I was cutting the scene too tight and it wasn't tight enough.

DM: So what were the most challenging episodes that you had to get ready for air and why?

PN: One show was *Tracks of My Tears* because Bruce and Cybill had each been off the show at separate times. Cybill was pregnant and



...when they (Bruce and Cybill) both returned, I remember ABC said, "Look. Now that we have both of them back, whatever it costs, get it on the air."

while she was pregnant we shot around her. We shot her close-ups when she was still there and after we released her we had to shoot with her photo double over her back. Then Bruce injured his shoulder just before Cybill returned, so now we had to shoot around Bruce. Ironically, we shot around Cybill's pregnancy to hide the fact she was pregnant for many months. Then after she returned, the writers had a new story arc where Maddie was now pregnant, so we had to make her look pregnant for the next several months. Altogether, Cybill must have felt like she was pregnant for 18 months. Finally, when they both returned, I remember ABC said, "Look. Now that we have both of them back, whatever it costs, get it on the air."

DM: Tracks of My Tears is when Maddie returned from Chicago by train and she walks into the office and tells David she's married (to Walter Bishop, portrayed by Dennis Dugan).

PN: Yes, and the show that aired after that, *Eek! A Spouse*, was even more difficult. We had to shoot that episode Saturday and Sunday and also Monday morning for Tuesday night air. It was definitely challenging. I think it was Sunday night at midnight and I was measuring the show as I was editing. At one point we had five of us editing at the same time and I was trying to go from room to room to measure the show and see where we stood length-wise. If the show was too long by as much as a minute, we could varispeed it (speed it up) on the telecine rank (the machine used for transferring cut negative to videotape). I think I made a math error somewhere along the way and I told Artie at midnight on Sunday we were not two minutes over...we were nine minutes over. There was a scene that I had been working on all day with Jay Daniel, a big chase in the parking lot that was maybe two and a half minutes long, so the first thing we did was drop that. Within three hours Artie had gone through and made enough lifts in the show that we got it to footage. Meanwhile, the negative cutters are trying to cut negative, and the sound effects and music editors are trying to keep up with our changes, and of course this impacts the dubbing stage as well. And then Monday morning we're still shooting, so I sent one of the editors home early so he could come back late Monday night to edit the scene that was shot that morning. He had to have the scene edited by about 5:00 in the morning Tuesday (day of air), so we could view it and make changes before the sound effects and music editors spotted it at 6:30 in the

morning. Then we were on the dubbing stage by 10:30 a.m., mixed it, married it to the picture and delivered it to the network, I think, at 2 or 3 o'clock that day, which is about as late as they take it. And it looked beautiful! Everything came out wonderfully. The sound was great, the picture looked great. But this editor said it was the strangest experience for him because he came into work, edited all night, went home, went to sleep, woke up and turned on the TV, and it was on the air. It was as though the network had just plugged a big cable into the back of the moviola.

DM: ABC didn't even bother screening it. They just plugged it in and prayed that there was nothing too risqué in it. (Laughing)

PN: Exactly. Right. As a result, I think that I had one hour of sleep in about four days and I felt it. It was really tough. But it was a lot of fun, you know? We never stopped.

DM: Working on adrenaline.

PN: Yes, exactly. I don't know if anybody else had mentioned this but one of my favorite quotes, just to define the post schedule and how tight we were, was when Will Mackenzie, who had finished directing an episode on a Friday, asked, "I'll see my first cut Wednesday?" and he was told, "Well, it will be on the air Tuesday."

DM: Yes, yes. It was Will Mackenzie asking about Atomic Shakespeare. He asked Glenn, "When will I see my director's cut?" And Glenn replied, "You'll see it like everybody else, on the air on Tuesday night."

PN: Yes. What a great story. Another example I just thought of about Glenn's musical influence happened in *Blonde on Blonde*, the one where David was wandering in the streets...

DM: Following Maddie but he was really following Donna Dixon.

PN: Yes. But the song was the Dion and the Belmonts song.

DM: Run Around Sue.

PN: Yes. What Glenn wanted to do was have David hear the song coming from here, there and everywhere as he walked down the street. We had to keep giving the song different perspectives. As he walked by one store, it was coming from the speakers of the store and then it would come out of a car that drove by, and then he would hear it coming from the outside speakers of a store across the street. We were a mono show. We weren't stereo, so it was really hard to do that. I remember that was a big challenge, and it ended up working fairly well. That's the kind of creative way that Glenn had music comment on the scene. In another episode, there's a great example of how music can add another dimension to the scene. It's where David is following Maddie's father around because she thinks he's having an affair.

DM: Yes, Every Daughter's Father is a Virgin.

PN: Yes. Exactly. Love that title. It was the scene where David is in the car following Maddie's father to his lover's hotel room. But Glenn looked at it. It was already a strong enough scene and Glenn goes, "Here. Try this song" and it was *Papa Was a Rolling*

Stone. The editor dropped it in and it suddenly took on a whole new feel.

DM: Yes. Great! Excellent! Very memorable. The way they cut between Papa Was a Rolling Stone when David was driving and Love Is a Many Splendored Thing when Mr. Hayes was driving.

PN: Right. Yes, exactly.

DM: Songs that tell a completely opposite story.

PN: That's right. Another post production story was when *Cybill* returned after she was pregnant and Bruce was out because of the shoulder injury. It was the episode where Mark Harmon and Bruce get into a fight in the parking lot.

DM: Yes, yes. In the underground parking garage.

PN: I've forgotten the name of the episode. Which one was it?

DM: It was I Am Curious... Maddie.

PN: Well, I was editing that scene when they fought in the parking lot and like I said, we would have either *Cybill* but not Bruce, or Bruce but not *Cybill*. But in this particular spot, we had Mark Harmon's character as well. Bruce and Mark were in this fist fight (over Maddie). At no time did I have all three actors in the scene. We first shot half of the fight without Bruce, and then shot the other side, days later, without Mark. I think he was already scheduled on another show so he wasn't around.

(About a Moonlighting reunion movie) I think it would be loads of fun and be very popular with a huge, huge following. I can't tell you how many people I've met who are in their twenties who follow reruns of the show religiously.

Then I had *Cybill* without Mark and Bruce. So I was cutting a fist fight scene without the two actors. At one point, when the camera dropped back wide, I had none of them. They were all stunt doubles. That was the fun of editing the show.

DM: I think Chris Howell was one of Bruce's stand-ins.

PN: Yes.

DM: Because you could tell in that sequence that it wasn't Bruce's hair (as seen from behind).

PN: Yeah, exactly. You could see it. Couldn't stay for too long on that shot.

DM: You had to cut away real quick so people wouldn't notice.

PN: And you know who Chris Howell's son is?

DM: Yes. C. Thomas Howell.

PN: Yes.

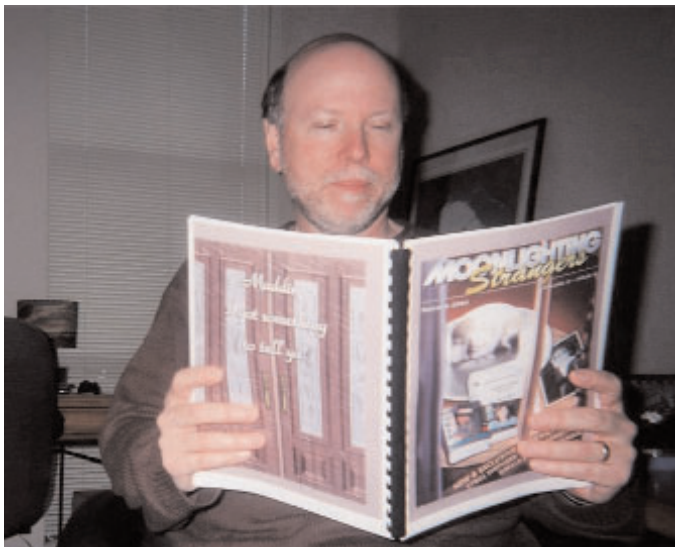
DM: He did some stunts. C. Thomas Howell showed up a few times in *Moonlighting*. He was knocked around a few times, as a waiter (in *Lady in the Iron Mask*) or in *Come Back Little Shiksa* when Bruce and Curtis Armstrong (Herbert Viola) were in a department store and he was store clerk adjusting a mannequin. He did some stunt work on *Moonlighting*.

PN: Oh yeah.

DM: Now, any memorable instances dealing with the network executives at ABC, especially since *Moonlighting* liked to poked fun at them? Anything that they had you edit out at the last minute?

PN: Well, the dialogue was risqué, so we usually had standard's notes to deal with, but nothing I remember about poking fun at ABC.

DM: What I meant by poking fun was that in the



beginning of the episode *Fetal Attraction*, there's an ABC executive lying in a hospital bed in a coma.

PN: Oh right! Yes.

DM: *Moonlighting* was always poking fun about how ABC had to deal with the production delays or what was going on with the storylines. The opening to *Fetal Attraction* was where an ABC executive was in a coma and when he came to, he asks the nurse if David and Maddie are back together yet, and when she replies no not yet, he slips back into a coma.

PN: Oh yes! I remember that. There's another one with a crystal ball.

DM: That's the episode where they were auditioning all these David Addisons. (*Cool Hand Dave, Part 2*) because David was missing, and so they had to find another David Addison because the real one was stuck in prison.

PN: Right. I remember editing that sequence where all of the different Davids are jump-cutting from one to the other.

DM: Yes, with the wanna-bees singing, "There she goes just walking down

the street singing 'Do wa diddy...'"

PN: "...diddy dum diddy do." Yes. I remember that. I mean, I was not as involved with the direct contact with the network as much as Artie, Jay, and Glenn were, so I don't know as much about that.

DM: What was your rela-

(About *Boston Legal*) To quote another editor, "If it's this much fun, how can we call this work?" Like all of David Kelley's shows, *Boston Legal* is extremely keen-witted, has the comedy mixed with drama, and very distinctive music.

tionship with Glenn like?

PN: It was a lot of fun. It was rewarding to work for someone who demanded the best out of people. During the editing process, we would first do a pass for Artie. Artie definitely knew what Glenn preferred, and he would give us notes that would get the show pretty close to Glenn's liking. Then we would go into a screening room with Glenn for his notes. Glenn's acute eye for editing taught me a lot. His notes were more about the emotion of a scene. He might say this is Maddie's scene or vice versa, this is David's scene. That was an interesting approach and

that might mean she gets more close-ups versus David's shots, which would be wider shots taken over her shoulder. Maybe play more of David's dialogue over her close-ups as well. As I mentioned earlier, after we had edited the show and it was locked, Glenn and Artie and I would sit in a room and spot the music with Alf Clausen. This is where Glenn would describe where he wanted music and what kind of music to score. Then after the show was mixed, I would sit with Glenn, usually on Monday morning when it would air on Tuesday, we would sit together at 8:30 in the morning and view the show on a three quarter inch tape, and Glenn would react to the mix and give me notes. Meanwhile, I had the dubbing stage starting at 10:30 that morning and I would go back to the stage to make the changes. While we're talking about music, just for a second, I remember on *Atomic Shakespeare*, again, we were kind of under the gun, and we spotted with Alf Clausen on Wednesday the week before it aired. I'll never forget, Neil (Mandelberg) had edited one side of a sword fight scene with David shot but not the other side. Neil just had one side so it was cut against "scene missing" banner. It's extremely difficult to time what the final scene will look like, so for the composer, he doesn't know how much music to write for a certain point or where the hits are going to happen. When Glenn got to that scene, he said to Alf, "Just give me ten yards of action adventure swash-buckling music." Obviously, Glenn knew that the scene was not ready for him at this point but just ordered enough

yardage for the music editor to cut together once the rest of the footage came in.

DM: So the people you worked most closely on *Moonlighting* would be Glenn, Artie, and Neil?

PN: Yeah. Glenn, Artie, Neil and the other editors at the time were Harvey Rosenstock, Roger Bondelli and Curtis Frielich and then later we had...everyone called him "Large". Jerry Frizell. I want to mention that in the final season of *Moonlighting*, Neil left early to edit a pilot in Ireland, so we brought in an editor from *LA Law* I knew named Jonathan Pontell. He worked the final 2 months of the series, and technically edited the very last scene of the final show where David and Maddie are in the church. I mention this because Jonathan has been my boss for seven of my eight years at David E. Kelley Productions. Anyway, I also worked closely with the post houses, Compact Video, the sound effects editor and supervisors. Val Kuklowsky was our supervising sound editor and he was pretty unflappable. He had pretty much seen it all and it didn't matter how late we gave him reels, their company would just drop everything and tackle *Moonlighting* as soon as it walked in the door.

DM: Did you interact with Bruce and Cybill?

PN: Yes, more in my first season (the show's third). My only involvement would have been in having to loop them after we shot scenes because of



Are we missing a good rivalry? Some *Boston Legal* fans have asked as the Brad and Alan confrontations were stifled during the show's first season.

bad sound or if there's any dialogue that we needed to change because of rewriting. I would meet with them on the ADR stage and we would do looping. In later seasons, it was easier to just go to their trailers and record what we needed because their schedule was just so difficult. It was hard to get them off the stage when they were in so many of the scenes and so we would do the best we could with that and just drop the dialogue in. Also, because looping them became more and more difficult, as editors we all had to make sure the dialogue tracks were "dubbable", meaning we fixed as much of the bad sound as possible as we cut the scenes and we could air these tracks. Neil, who was the Supervising Editor, was the master at this. Neil was always the "go to" guy when scenes were in trouble.

DM: Was it the same thing with Allyce and Curtis? Did you have much interaction with them?

PN: Yeah, for the same reasons, just having to loop them, but I was not as