



Richard D.
Zanuck



IN MANY WAYS, TALKING ABOUT FILM WAS, STILL IS, AND FOREVER WILL BE, TALKING ABOUT THE NAME ZANUCK.

WHEN *JAWS* was first released, I was a teenager living in France. I remember coming across a photo of producer Richard D. Zanuck, sitting on a table, surrounded by *Jaws* merchandise. There he was, handsome, bright smile, celebrating the first "Summer Blockbuster." My reaction was, "Wow, that's what a producer is!" That image made an everlasting impression on me and it forever symbolized the picture-perfect representation of the successful Hollywood producer.

Years later, I met Dick Zanuck when I directed documentaries on *Jaws* and *Jaws 2* for Universal Home Entertainment. Although I felt like I was meeting a legend—and indeed I was—Dick was not intimidating. He was serious but did not take himself seriously. He was a true Gentleman. He did not like to talk about himself; at the same time, he loved to share his passion for film and to tell stories about movies. But in many ways, talking about film was, still is, and forever will be, talking about the name Zanuck—not only Dick himself but also his legendary father, Darryl F.

When the idea came up to do a feature-length documentary on Dick's life and career, he was at first unsure about the project; he had for the past few years thought of writing a book and had

collected a few pages of personal memories. I read them and what immediately stood out was that Dick was writing about people. There was something universally identifiable about the stories he told. Yes, they were about the film business and the making of iconic films, but at the core, I was reading about the inspiring story of a man who was born to make movies. And I would hear that constantly from his colleagues: "Dick has film running through his blood." But beyond the screen, Dick's story was a very personal yet tumultuous one about a father and son relationship. That alone was fascinating.

One day, Dick and I sat down to talk about the documentary and we chatted in his library for four or five hours, straight through. By the end of our conversation, he was fully onboard for the film. Later, when we started shooting, the conversation continued. And like all good stories, it was to be told in three acts: childhood memories, the Fox years, the independent producing years. And so it began...

Richard Darryl Zanuck was born on December 13, 1934—and practically since birth he was a bystander, a fly on the wall at 20th Century-Fox, the studio cofounded by his father, Darryl F. Zanuck. From an early age, Dick was surrounded by movie

stars; Orson Welles used to come to the house and would perform magic tricks. In the winter, Dick would be throwing snowballs at Ernest Hemingway. And back at the house, he'd find his father hanging out with President Eisenhower. On other occasions, Wendell Willkie would spend the night. "So I wasn't intimidated ever in my life by the magic or the power of stardom because I'd grown up with that," Dick said.

As far as he could remember, Dick played cowboys and Indians on the Fox lot. One early famous story happened when he was eight or nine years old and was selling copies of the *Saturday Evening Post*. Not only did he collect the price of the newspaper, but also received handsome tips from Fox employees who wanted to be in favor with the boss' son. Darryl F. quickly put a stop to this, but by then Dick was already a well-known figure on the lot. The first job Dick had one summer was knocking down sets. The following year, he

would train in the editing room and, later, work in the story department. No specific discussion with his father about working in the film business ever took place; Dick just knew "the gate" was always open. He also knew that his father valued his opinion; as a 14-year-old, he sat through story conferences with the studio brass. The same Fox executives attending those meetings would be invited to cheer him on at his swimming competitions. In fact, sport was essential in Dick's life: "My father got me an athletic instructor and by three years old, I could swim across the pool completely on my own. Up until about 10 years ago, I held a high school record in the butterfly, which was my specialty." Swimming was no career, neither was football—but the sport of making films definitely was.

At the time Dick finished college, his father went to live in Paris. He created, within the studio, Darryl F. Zanuck Productions and Dick ran the company. Dick

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ABOVE: Zanuck selling *The Saturday Evening Post* on the 20th Century-Fox studio lot, c. 1943.

LEFT: Zanuck sitting at his father's desk, c. late 1930s.

far right: Zanuck and his father, Darryl F. Zanuck, c. mid-1940s.

right: Zanuck's Harvard Military Academy portrait, c. early 1950s

below: The Zanuck family at their beach house, c. 1936.



Santa Monica Beach Home



*Dick 1 yr. 6 mos.
Susan 2 yrs 4 mos*



[DARRYL ZANUCK] CAME TO DICK WITH A REQUEST: "MAKE ME A LIST OF WHO SHOULD BE IN CHARGE OF FOX..." A FEW HOURS LATER, DICK HANDED HIS DAD A PIECE OF PAPER WITH ONE WORD ON IT: "ME."

produced his first film, *Compulsion*, at the age of 24. Shortly thereafter, his father made *The Longest Day* and was asked to come back to run Fox, as chairman, because the studio was in so much financial trouble. DZ came to Dick with a request: "Make me a list of who should be in charge of Fox..." A few hours later, Dick handed his dad a piece of paper with one word on it: "Me." The first thing that Dick did was to close down the studio for four months; he felt he needed to start from scratch. Eventually, writers were hired and three films were put on the fast track, but it would be the enormous success of *The Sound of Music* that would literally jump-start Fox again.

Dick's taste was from the gut. In the same year, he would do *Patton*, a character piece with the backdrop of war; *Tora! Tora! Tora!*, a traditional war epic; and *M.A.S.H.*, a satirical film using the Korean War as a metaphor for the then-raging Vietnam War. Dick Zanuck made *Valley of the Dolls*, but also *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. He was faithful to Hollywood traditions with *The Sand Pebbles* but around the same time was embracing films that had been turned down by other studios (*Planet of the Apes*) or movies by new directors like William Friedkin (*The French Connection*).

However, Dick also made the decision to continue making large musicals like *Star!* and *Doctor Doolittle*. The films flopped and Darryl



ABOVE: Zanuck and David Brown publicity photo, c. early 1980s.

LEFT: Zanuck and his father, c. early 1960s.

OPPOSITE: Zanuck and his father at a stockholders meeting, c. early 1960s.

OPPOSITE: Zanuck receiving his star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, 1968.



Zanuck decided to fire his own son; after nine years at the studio, Dick was off the lot. A few months later, Darryl would be brought down by his own team. The eventual reconciliation of father and son still didn't change the fact that Dick needed to reinvent himself.

After a short time at Warner Bros., Dick and David Brown created the Zanuck/Brown Company; a deal was made on a simple piece of paper with Lew Wasserman and MCA/Universal. The team was interested in making films, any films. The first one was *Sssssss*, about a man who is turned into a king cobra. There was the success of *The Sting*, which won the Oscar for Best Picture; *The Sugarland Express*, directed by Steven Spielberg; and *The Eiger Sanction*, directed by and starring Clint Eastwood. But it was a novel called *Jaws* by Peter Benchley that would change everything.

The cinematic values of the book were obvious—how to make it was not as easily identifiable. After a failed encounter with a director who kept referring to the shark as “the whale,” Steven Spielberg was brought in. “The Kid” (as Dick affectionately called Spielberg) was exactly what the film needed. Fresh new eyes to bring vision to what was on “the surface” another monster movie. After surviving the now-famous tribulations of its making, *Jaws* became much more than another monster movie; it was, and remains, one of the great American films of all time. Its success surprised everyone, including Dick Zanuck himself.

One thing Dick Zanuck believed in was never to be afraid of taking chances. For instance, upon

returning to Fox in the early eighties, Dick and David Brown produced *The Verdict*, a project that went through many tribulations, including working with a writer who initially felt there should be no verdict at the end of the film. But Dick and David were returning to Fox with one added bonus; Dick's wife Lili was now part of the team. It was Lili who found an unpublished manuscript that became the movie *Cocoon*. Later, Lili would be the force behind the Oscar-winning *Driving Miss Daisy*. But, as different as these films were, they all had the “Zanuck” touch and spirit in common.

Dick Zanuck stayed young as long as he surrounded himself with the next generation of filmmakers—including his immediate family (his son Dean Zanuck produced *Road to Perdition* with Dick) and Tim Burton. Dick first met Tim when Fox suggested they work together on a remake of *Planet of the Apes*. From that first association, a strong friendship was born, one not unlike the one that existed between Dick and Steven Spielberg and Ron Howard. Dick and Tim would make six films together.

In making the documentary, I had the privilege of interviewing many of Dick's collaborators, and it was always touching and inspiring to listen to them talk about how much they loved and respected him. Some of their stories did not necessarily have to do with movies, but simply with the way Dick treated people around him. Johnny Depp talked about how a greeting from Dick in the morning would always give him the confidence needed for a day's work. And Steven Spielberg never forgot that Dick always



ABOVE: Zanuck and Lil Fini wedding photo, 1977.



ABOVE: Zanuck and Tim Burton on the set of *Planet of the Apes* (2001).



ABOVE: Zanuck on the set of *Planet of the Apes* (2001).

had his back during the making of *Jaws*. Ron Howard, William Friedkin and Clint Eastwood also looked back on their association with Dick as a defining moment in their career. Dick could play both sides; that of the filmmakers and that of the studio. With no blood on his hands, he never played them against each other and managed to keep them all in harmony. He very much lived in the present and embraced the future, particularly when it came to new technologies and new ways of telling stories. He trusted the talent he worked with, he loved actors and had no intention of ever retiring.

As we were filming, over a period of about eight months, Dick never asked once to see any interviews or any preliminary cuts of the documentary. But at the beginning of July 2012, when I felt I was done with the film, I wanted to get Dick's feedback. It was with great anxiety and apprehension that I delivered it to him. He watched it on July 10 and called me right after he had seen it. He was thrilled with it. As usual, his comments were generous, but I think Dick felt we had made a film that truly represented who he was. He was both moved and surprised by what his friends, family and colleagues had to say about him.

We were scheduled for a celebratory lunch three days later, on Friday the 13th. But that morning, Brenda, Dick's trusted assistant, called me to say that Dick had just died. I was never to see him again. The film of his life that exists today is the cut that Dick saw on July 10. When he passed away, it was not a page that was turned; it was an entire book, a full volume on Hollywood that was closed.

Not all the great stories that Dick told made the cut. Out of the hours and hours of discussion we had, a selection was made. But there's so much more...

One of the stories that stands out was in fact the very last one that Dick told me, on the day of our final interview. The first time we had sat down for the documentary, Dick immediately began by talking about his father; it felt only natural that he would end with a story of his dad, one that in his eyes changed the dynamic in their relationship. One that shows both the love and complexity that existed between them. One that was simply "Zanuck."

Dick Zanuck: "My father was very competitive, with me in particular. And as a young boy, during the summer, when he wasn't in the south of France, we'd run a movie at the beach house every Sunday night. And he and I would sit in the back and invariably he'd start wrestling with me and for years he'd finally get me in a headlock. And he kept squeezing until I could say, 'Give.' He wanted to hear me say that. So this went on for years. It was a tradition. And finally at 13 years old, I was very strong and a big swimmer. And gymnast. We went through the same routine and I got him in a headlock. And he finally said it, 'Give.' That was the end of the wrestling; we never did it again. I figured that that was a turning point in my relationship with him. And it changed dramatically after that."

Thank you, Dick, for all the great films you gave us. Thank you for your friendship. There's no one else like you. We shall never forget you. ✱

LAURENT BOUZEREAU is an award-winning filmmaker and author. He has created many documentaries on the making of films and on some of the world's most acclaimed filmmakers, including Steven Spielberg, James Cameron, Brian De Palma, William Friedkin, Alfred Hitchcock, David Lean, George Lucas, Peter Bogdanovich and many others. Bouzereau writes, produces and directs TCM's *A Night at the Movies* specials. He also directed *Roman Polanski: A Film Memoir* and has written or cowritten 11 books on cinema, including *The Art of Bond* and, most recently, *Alfred Hitchcock: Piece by Piece*.