



From Ireland to Hollywood Interview with Douglas Gresham, co-producer of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*

*Douglas Gresham is the author of
Lenten Lands: My Childhood with Joy Davidman and C. S. Lewis
and a co-producer of the film, The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe.*

*Lisa Beardsley is a co-host for
Loma Linda Broadcasting Network's program "Faith at Work."*

LISA BEARDSLEY. *I have an image of you from last summer. We were on the Sea Cloud II. We had sailed all night from Dublin to Wales.*

DOUGLAS GRESHAM. **That's a lovely ship.**

BEARDSLEY. *It is a beautiful ship. And that morning, Sunday morning, we were anchored off Solva, anchored into Saint David's.*

GRESHAM. **Right, where I spent a lot of time as a child.**

BEARDSLEY. *I have an image of you standing on the banisters. You weren't aware of any of us in the tender going off, but you were leaning against the varnished rail and you were looking at the cliffs by the harbor there at Solva. I hadn't read your book yet, Lenten Lands.*

GRESHAM. **Now you know why I was looking.**

BEARDSLEY. *Now I know. The wind was blowing in your face and you were oblivious to everybody else. I don't think you were even aware that you were standing on the ship.*

GRESHAM. The ghost of my childhood still orbits those cliffs at Solva.

BEARDSLEY. *What were you thinking when you were looking out there?*

GRESHAM. Just reminiscing, I guess, just loving the place. It's one of my favorite places in the world—not to live, but to visit—those cliffs along the Pembrokeshire Coast. The things that you get really astonished and fascinated by when you were a child never really leave you.

So I was standing on the deck of the ship looking at the places I'd climbed along those cliffs years and years ago. I wouldn't have the courage today, of course.

BEARDSLEY. *It was in that area where you had the last holiday in which all of your family was together—C. S. Lewis, your mother, yourself.*

GRESHAM. Yes. Indeed.

BEARDSLEY. *In rereading and looking through The Chronicles of Narnia, I saw something I had never noticed before. One of the books, The Horse and His Boy, was actually dedicated to you and your brother.*

GRESHAM. That's true. Indeed it was.

BEARDSLEY. *Was it about you in any way?*

GRESHAM. I'm not going to answer that question. [Laughter] Because you might ask me which character it was. But I don't really think so.

BEARDSLEY. *What has it been like for you to be a co-producer of The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe?*

GRESHAM. It's been amazing. First of all, it's the realization of a lifelong dream of mine. My children have told me that they were amazed because all their lives they have heard me dreaming and scheming and planning and talking about making this movie eventually, and now it's really happening.

But not only that. It's been an astonishing experience. All the fabulous people I've met working on this project, right down to simple people like the cleaners and the caterers, the people like that on

the sets in New Zealand—they're all wonderful people.

It was one of those unusual occasions when there must have been six hundred people, and I didn't meet one I didn't like. I never heard a cross word spoken on the entire set or any of the location shootings. It was a wonderful experience because the people were so fine.

We found four new actors, the children who play the lead roles. Not only are they great little actors, they are—superb actors, every one of them—but they're also wonderfully nice people. Their parents are wonderfully nice people. Everybody associated with this production has seemingly been infused by the magic of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* itself.

BEARDSLEY. *I seem to recall that some one thousand children were auditioned for these roles.*

GRESHAM. No, I think our casting director in England went through about four thousand auditions to find the children we needed.

BEARDSLEY. *What was it like for you to be on the set to actually see the book come to life before the camera?*

GRESHAM. It's very moving to see one of your lifelong dreams suddenly coming into existence, and not only coming into existence but exceeding all of your own expectations. And the team we've got working on this movie has such wonderfully gifted artists.

Roger Ford, the set designer, for example, is a superb artist and creative man. We've got Andrew Adamson directing. All of those people are just tremendous individuals to work with and very, very skilled. The film itself is coming together in a way that I could not have anticipated. It's better than I could ever have dreamed of.

BEARDSLEY. *What role did you have in creating or contributing to the creative artistry of what's been done here with the creatures of Narnia?*

GRESHAM. I consult to all aspects of the movie. We did some videoconferencing across to Weta [Workshop, a



visual effects facility] in New Zealand from London. When you have someone as good as [special effects supervisor] Richard Taylor and his team working on a movie, you don't have to tell them much.

They got the idea from the book and they got the idea from what we talked about. They just went with it. These guys are so good, they're amazing.

BEARDSLEY. *One of your passions has been to stay true to the integrity of the book. Why are you so passionate about that?*

GRESHAM. My stepfather was a man whom I grew to love very deeply. And he cared passionately about the books. He cared deeply about the essential values, messages they contained, and therefore I've inherited a kind of moral and emotional responsibility to follow suit on that.

He was a man I not only loved deeply, but also respected enormously, so if I can follow suit with his aims and his ideas and try to promote his works in the way he would want them promoted, I'll continue to do so.

BEARDSLEY. *Douglas, the numbers in this movie are just overwhelming: the numbers of creatures in here, the numbers of animations, the number of dollars. One hundred fifty million dollars is what I read from reports, is that right?*

GRESHAM. Well, you'll read a variety of reports, some of them are more correct than others.

BEARDSLEY. *Why does a film like this cost so much to make?*

GRESHAM. I think one of the things you have to realize is that we have a combination of effects. For example the Minotaur has an animatronics head—his nostrils flare, his eyes move, his ears move, his mouth moves, lips sync, and so forth—that's con-

trolled by three puppeteers with radio control units.

Inside is a real actor in a prosthetic costume from the neck to the waist, which means he moves with his own musculature. From the waist down, he's a CGI, a computer generated image. So when you start combining all of these disciplines into one movie and sometimes into one character, things get expensive. And of course there were so many different species Weta had to create.

Incidentally, one of the things about this movie that has just struck me is that when you get all these guys together in one place, you're surrounded by some of these super geniuses of the film world, and yet it's a little bit like an old Inklings meeting, the society of writing friends that Jack had around him...

BEARDSLEY. *...that first helped contribute to the writing...*

GRESHAM. ...because we had such a lot of fun when we all got together. We were doing a very serious job, serious movie, a large budget movie, and yet there's an awful lot of fun to be had doing it. We've enjoyed every minute of it.

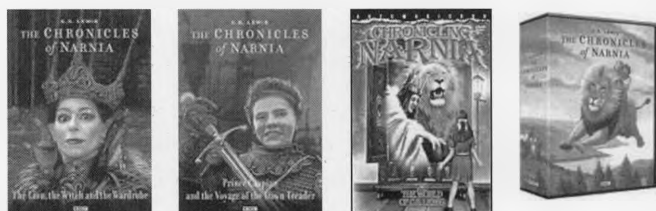
BEARDSLEY. *The team scoured the world for the right locations.*

GRESHAM. Location reconnaissance is desperately important if you're going to do a film about a place like Narnia. As Andrew points out, it has to exceed people's imaginations. All of us who've read the books have conjured up pictures in our own minds of what Narnia should look like. We can't just present our own thoughts; otherwise everyone else's gets lost.

What we have to do is try in a creative sense to exceed the expectations of all the audience. So you have to look to the very finest places in the world to find the finest locations. And Andrew's reconnaissance team did just that.

BEARDSLEY. *Douglas, you've been flying back and forth between County Carlow and Hollywood. What are you actually doing when you're in Hollywood now?*

GRESHAM. I consult to everyone who's doing a valiant job designing and constructing merchandise. We're doing a very large and intensive computer game program on several different platforms simultaneously.



Past *Chronicles of Narnia* book covers (from left to right) 1988, 1989, and 2005, and a recent BBC video version.