



Title: My father, Orson Welles
Interviewee: Chris Welles Feder
Duration: 6 minutes, 10 seconds

About this transcript

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Introduction

Who more than a child watches a father's every movement and listens to his every word?

In this Skype-recorded episode of Bookpod, Chris Welles Feder -- author of *In My Father's Shadow* -- relates her observations about Orson Welles, the filmmaker, writer and magician whom she knew as a father, a self-absorbed artist and one of the most humane influences in her life.

Presentation

I'm one of the few people still alive who knew Orson Welles. I saw his magic show for the troops. I was five years old at the time. And I knew him in his twenties and his thirties, and there are not many people around who did.

He was constantly working on projects. He was a man who only slept a few hours a night. He really lived hard and he burnt himself out early. You know, he died at seventy, which doesn't seem that old to us any more. He was working right up until the day he died. I mean, he was found slumped over his typewriter working on a movie script for the movie that he hoped to make about magic, as a matter of fact, called "The Magic Show."

Some people haven't seen the films that he made in Europe when he was in his prime. You know, he made six films during his European years, many of them brilliant. One of them -- "Chimes at Midnight" -- he considered his masterpiece. And these films are almost never shown in this country, even though some are now available on DVDs. And I think we really need a reappraisal of his work as a whole. And this is one of the things that I hope my book will achieve -- that it will familiarize the general reader with not just the movies that they've heard of, like "Citizen Kane," but the great scope of his work.

The book is a lot of things. It's a candid, intimate portrait of my father. But it's also a human interest story about what is it like to be the child of a world-famous



person. How do you deal with that? Such people do cast a long shadow, and how do you come out of the shadow of the famous parent and find your own identity and make a life for yourself? This was my story that I interwove in the book.

Even though it's true that I did have in many ways a difficult childhood, I think it's the end of the journey that counts. So I hope that my story would finally be uplifting -- that people would see other people who've had similar experiences. There are many, many people out there whose parents divorced when they were children, or who had to deal with difficult step-parents or who were moved around. I mean, just think of all the children of military parents, for instance, who get moved from one spot to the next, and have to adjust to a new school or making new friends. I mean, many of my experiences were pretty universal when you think about it.

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I think my father put all of his efforts into his creative life, and he really had very little left over for his personal relationships. And he made his art supreme.

He didn't have time to be married. He didn't have time to be a father. He barely had time to be a friend.

He spent so much of his life looking for money, looking for backing. I think that's so sad because he could have done so much more. He had all these unfinished projects, which could have easily been finished had he had the funds to do that. He was an independent filmmaker in an era when this was unheard of. I mean, either you were in Hollywood and you had the Hollywood studio system behind you or you had a government behind you, like Fellini, who got great assistance from the Italian government, or Bergman, you know. But my father had nobody behind him except his own efforts. And he acted in a great many awful movies just because he was doing this to raise money so that he could put the money back into his own work.

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He was a very fair, evenhanded person. He was always trying to be understanding. And he was not a person who was resentful or bitter even when he fell on hard times. You know, he tried much more to be accepting and understanding and forgiving of people. And I tried very hard to model myself on my father because I just felt that he was a wonderful person, you know, not just a



great artist, but a man of high principles. I don't think most people realize that about Orson Welles.

He was a man who was very political and especially in his youth he fought very hard for the causes that he believed in. He campaigned for the re-election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. And he went all over the country campaigning for him and paying for, out of his own pocket, you know, for that. He put on a magic show to entertain the troops during World War II before they were sent off to the Pacific theater. And again, he paid entirely for the cost of that. The servicemen got in free. He did all sorts of things like that, which I feel really need to be known about him.

There wasn't a mean bone in him. He was a very good man and I don't think this is generally known about him.

Valedictory

To read a review of *In My Father's Shadow*, visit brightlightsfilm.com.

Incidentally, Chris Welles Feder also writes *Brainquest*, a series of children's game books.

Bookpod producer is Barbara Finkelstein. Music is by Kevin MacLeod.

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<http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/66/66bookswelles.html>

Wikipedia entry on Orson Welles

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orson_Welles

IMDB entry on Orson Welles

<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000080/>