

RELEASE IN FULL

Lucy Jarvis

In a remarkable broadcast career spanning nearly fifty years, Lucy Jarvis has made her name by achieving the impossible. In 1963, she was in Moscow filming a documentary when the Cuban Missile Crisis erupted. Undeterred, Jarvis fired off a cable to the White House demanding that President Kennedy end his "little argument" so that she could continue shooting. Afterward, Kennedy joked: "I told Khrushchev if he got the missiles out of Cuba, I would get Lucy Jarvis out of the Kremlin!" *The Kremlin* was the first of many award-winning documentaries and specials that Jarvis would make for NBC News. Savvy, connected, indomitable, there were few doors that she could not pry open, from the restricted inner sanctums of the Louvre and Scotland Yard to the impenetrable (or so it seemed) enclave of China's Forbidden City. Along the way, Jarvis also produced a string of investigative documentaries about the crucial social issues of our time, from gun control to drug abuse to the imbalances of the medical system. When she left NBC in 1976 to become an independent producer, Jarvis was one of the first women in history to launch her own production company. Through it all, she credits her success to motherly advice: "She made me believe there was nothing I couldn't do, and I believed it and, therefore, did it."

Born in New York City in 1919, Jarvis attended Cornell University, where she supplemented her studies in home economics and nutrition with courses in architecture, public speaking, and finance, while also serving as president of the drama club. "It was as though I was preparing myself for whatever decision I would make for the rest of my life," she explained in an interview for an alumnus newsletter in 2005. Upon graduation, Jarvis found a job as a dietitian with New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center, where one of the doctors with whom she worked recommended her for an opening as the food editor of *McCall's* magazine. Jarvis, who had already written and published a cook book, flourished in the position, particularly when called upon to make appearances on locally produced television talk shows. The burgeoning medium held an allure for the ambitious, exquisitely curious young woman, who decided that she had "something I want to say ... and the place for me to do that is on television."

As she mulled her next career step, Jarvis left *McCall's* to raise her two children—"enjoying every minute of it"—while also volunteering for the Organization for Rehabilitation through Training (ORT). Here she got her first taste of film production when she made *Passport to Freedom*, a documentary on ORT's global efforts to provide skills training to Jewish war refugees, taking them, as Jarvis explained, "from hopelessness to education to a new place of

living, a new home, and a new hope.” Jarvis eventually resumed her professional career by working as a staffer for various radio and television outfits, such as David Susskind’s Talent Associates, and serving, for a time, as women’s television editor for Pathè News. In 1957 she collaborated with Martha Rountree, the creator of *Meet the Press*, on a Washington, D.C.–based public affairs radio show known as *Capitol Close-Up*. The program attracted such notable guests as President Dwight Eisenhower, Vice President Richard Nixon, Senator John F. Kennedy, and FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, and subsequently earned Jarvis an invitation to join NBC News.

Jarvis began her career with NBC as an assistant producer for *The Nation’s Future*, a forum on current and controversial issues in which two opposing personalities shared their ideas and opinions. This was the time of the space race between the United States and the Soviet Union, and one of her earliest successes was the exclusive pairing of American astronaut John Glenn with Russian cosmonaut Gherman Titov, an event which was carried live by all three networks. In 1962, Jarvis, by then promoted to producer, was sent to Moscow to arrange for the filming of a documentary about the cultural and political history of the Soviet Union. While NBC had tried and failed for a number of years to bring cameras into the Kremlin, the inner bastion of communism, Jarvis, who took a crash course in Russian, succeeded by what she later characterized as “sheer manipulative wile.” After much persistence and political maneuvering—indeed, her tenacity prompted her Soviet hosts to dub her the “Field Marshall”—Jarvis secured permission for the project from no less a figure than Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev (whom she would subsequently profile in the 1967 documentary *Khrushchev in Exile: His Opinions and Revelations*). Jarvis remained in Russia for the next five months, coordinating the various aspects of the production, and regularly smoothing local feathers with gifts of American cigarettes and home-baked brownies. Airing in 1963, *The Kremlin* dazzled audiences and critics alike and won an Emmy Award for its cinematography.

Jarvis next produced a dual tour of the Louvre in Paris and the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., *Museum Without Walls*, which aired on NBC in 1963. The logistically complex project—among the first to utilize telecommunications satellite technology—served as a forerunner to a more detailed exploration of the Louvre that Jarvis had in mind. The previous year she had accompanied Kennedy on a state visit to Paris and it was there, during a social event, that she had first broached the idea of a documentary about the hallowed institution to French President Charles de Gaulle and Minister of Culture André Malraux. In a feat comparable to getting approval to shoot inside the Kremlin, Jarvis finagled permission to bring a camera crew into the Louvre; when the museum’s curators expressed concern that the intense lights required to gain a proper exposure (for the sake of aesthetic, the film was shot in color on 35mm rather than the

customary black and white 16mm) might damage their treasured paintings, Jarvis reassured them by saying, "If Khrushchev trusted me, why can't you?" The color cinematography was an important element for Jarvis; indeed, General Sarnoff, chairman of NBC, the parent company of RCA, credited her programs on the Kremlin and the Louvre with helping to sell four million color television sets. *The Louvre: A Golden Prison*, airing in 1964, was recognized with a staggering number of awards, among them six Emmys, a Peabody, and a Radio-TV Critics Award. In 1968, Jarvis became the first woman—and one of the few Americans—ever to receive the French government's prestigious Chevalière de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.

Jarvis returned to her roots in healthcare with the 1965 documentary *Who Shall Live?*, a landmark investigation of the medical, moral, and economic issues surrounding the use of artificial kidney machines. The broadcast sparked a firestorm of controversy over whether life-saving treatment should only be limited to those affluent enough to afford it and is considered one of the cornerstones of the modern bioethics movement. As a result of the film and the debate it stirred, the federal government made funding available for artificial kidney machine centers around the country, prompting the National Dialysis Committee to state: "Each new patient treated with the therapy of dialysis on the artificial kidney will owe some portion of his life to the camera and cutting shears of Lucy Jarvis." *Who Shall Live?* was but the first of many crusading documentaries that Jarvis would make on medical and social issues. Among her other works in this vein are the NBC News specials *Pain! Where Does It Hurt Most?*, *Dr. Barnard's Heart Transplant Operations*, *The Pursuit of Youth*, *A Shooting Gallery Called America*, and *What Price Health?* (which she made for *NBC Reports*), and two programs for the venerable *NBC White Paper* series, *Cry Help* (about mental illness among teenagers) and *Trip to Nowhere* (about the drug epidemic).

Continuing her trend of "missions impossible" Jarvis embarked on an ambitious film about Scotland Yard, headquarters of London's Metropolitan Police Service. Although the Yard had never before allowed its internal operations to be captured on camera, Jarvis, quite naturally, prevailed and her film, *Scotland Yard: The Golden Thread*, aired to great acclaim in 1971. Jarvis next ventured to Communist China—becoming the first Westerner ever to film there—documenting the Peking Opera production of *Red Detachment of Women* (1972), a political ballet about the struggle between a peasant and her master. In perhaps the greatest coup of her career, she gained access to the fabled Forbidden City, the ancient stronghold of imperial China, which had been off-limited to Westerners, and most Chinese, since the fourteenth century. As with the Kremlin, Louvre, and Scotland Yard projects, obtaining permission to shoot inside the walled city required intense diplomacy; at one point, she was told her request would have to wait because elsewhere in Beijing, Henry Kissinger had

arrived to arrange a state visit for President Nixon.

Negotiations of a different sort awaited her back in the States: at that time, the editor's union was only open to men, but Jarvis insisted that her editing-room assistant, a woman, receive "special dispensation," and, thus, a full credit on the completed film, *China and the Forbidden City*, which aired in 1973. "I fought hard to help women move up the ladder," Jarvis explained in 2004 when she was honored by New York Women in Communication, "because I always felt that the more successful women there were around me, the better it reflected on me."

On the cultural side, Jarvis has produced such documentaries as *Mary Martin: Hello Dolly! 'Round the World* (1966), which followed the cast of the popular musical on a tour from San Francisco to Japan, South Vietnam, and London, and *Bravo, Picasso* (1967), which presented, via satellite, a simultaneous exhibition of the artist's work from museums around the world. Jarvis ended her eighteen-year association with NBC in 1976, when she left to produce a series of Barbara Walters specials for ABC. Soon thereafter, she formed her own production company, Creative Projects, Inc., and tried her hand at fictional films, such as the two-part television movie *Family Reunion* (1981) starring Bette Davis, while continuing to produce and even host documentaries like *The Incas Remembered* (1984). In 1987, she started a second company, Jarvis Theater and Film Limited (eventually merging the two entities), and produced the first collaborative U.S.–Soviet musical of Duke Ellington's *Sophisticated Ladies* in Moscow. In 1990, she brought the Russian rock opera *Junon and Avos* to New York City. Still going strong as she approaches her ninetieth year, Jarvis remains an inspiration to other women in television. As *SMI* honoree Sheila Nevins, president of documentary and family programming for HBO, notes: "Lucy lasts and lasts and lasts. She's sexy, defies age, and gives bounce to every ounce. A trailblazer for women, she makes it easy for the rest of us. I love Lucy."