Dean Riesner Papers

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Descriptive Summary
Title: Dean Riesner Papers
Collection Number: WGF-MS-064
Creator/Collector: Riesner, Dean, 1918-2002
Extent: 8 linear feet
Repository: Writers Guild Foundation Archive
Los Angeles, California 90048
Abstract: The Dean Riesner Papers, 1917–1992, contain film and television scripts and production materials, as well as correspondence, story and development files, and other materials related to the life and career of the prolific film and TV writer Dean Riesner.
Language of Material: English
Access
Available by appointment only.
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Preferred Citation
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Acquisition Information
Donated by Chuck Simon, March 14, 2005
Biography/Administrative History
Dean Franklin Riesner was born on November 3, 1918 in New York City to a show business family. His father, Charles “Chuck” Francis Riesner was a vaudeville headliner and later worked as an associate director for Charlie Chaplin and other comedy film pioneers, including Buster Keaton. As a toddler, Dean Riesner started performing under the stage name “Dinky Dean,” and in 1923 he was cast by Chaplin as the disobedient “Little Boy” in the silent comedy The Pilgrim (1923). Riesner continued to work as a child and teen actor on other films, but eventually embarked on a writing career in the late 1930s after attending the University of Southern California. One of Riesner’s first professional writing credits was the 1940 Warner Bros. film The Fighting 69th, starring James Cagney and Pat O’Brien. In 1947, Riesner wrote and directed a live-action short titled Bill and Coo, featuring a cast of actual parakeets and lovebirds who protect their town of Chirpendale from a villainous crow. The film won a Special Academy Award for its innovative artistry. Starting in the early 1950s and throughout the 1960s, Riesner established a steady career in episodic television. Although many of his TV credits were on westerns such as Cheyenne and Rawhide, he also demonstrated an ability to write for almost any genre, contributing scripts to The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis, Slattery’s People, Ben Casey and Playhouse 90. During this period, Riesner received two Writers Guild Award nominations, for a 1957 episode of the television series Conflict and a 1964 episode of 12 O’Clock High. In the 1970s, Riesner earned a reputation for adapting popular novels into television mini-series. He was nominated for a 1971 Primetime Emmy Award for writing Vanished and received a second Emmy nomination in 1976 for adapting Rich Man, Poor Man to the small screen. Riesner’s career in feature films was equally varied. In the 1970s, he collaborated with Clint Eastwood and Don Siegel on Coogan’s Bluff, Dirty Harry, and Play Misty For Me. In addition, Riesner was a sought after “script doctor” in Hollywood and did uncredited work on several well-known films, such as Godfather Part III, The Sting II, and the German feature, Das Boot. The most notable of his uncredited work is 1984’s Starman. When he was not granted a credit following a WGA arbitration, director John Carpenter included the dedication, “For Dean Riesner,” at the end of the film, acknowledging his contribution and multiple rewrites on the project. A longtime member of the Writers Guild of America, Riesner received his final screen credit for the 1987 action-comedy Fatal Beauty. Over the next decade, he continued to write original stories, as well as being called upon by Hollywood studios and producers for script consultations. He died on August 18, 2002 at his home in Encino, California, at the age of 83.
Scope and Content of Collection
The Dean Riesner Papers are organized into four series: Series I: Produced Scripts and Related Materials includes film and television scripts dating from 1953 to 1990 as well as related items such as correspondence, contracts, publicity and development materials. This series is divided into three sub-series. Subseries A: Feature Films, 1967–1990, contains produced feature film scripts for which Riesner received screen credit, such as Charley Varrick, Dirty Harry, Play Misty for Me and Fatal Beauty, as well as others on which he contributed rewrites or a draft, but was uncredited. These uncredited projects include Starman, Das Boot, Blue Thunder and Godfather Part III, among others. Subseries B: Episodic Television,
1953-1967 consists of produced scripts from episodic television programs including Ben Casey, The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis, Rawhide, and several others. This subseries also includes episodic scripts from four television anthology series: Playhouse 90, GE (General Electric) True, The Outer Limits and Studio 57. Subseries C: Television Movies of the Week and Mini-Series, 1966 - 1978 is comprised of Riesner’s work on television movies and mini-series, including Rich Man Poor Man, The Moneychangers and Stranger on the Run. Series II: Unproduced Projects and Development Materials, 1959-1992 consists of scripts, treatments, story outlines, and notes written by Riesner, as well as research and other related materials that demonstrate various stages of development. This development activity covers film, television series and movies-of-the-week, and includes projects for performer Dolly Parton, actor Sylvester Stallone and producer Robert Evans, among others. This series also includes files of unproduced story concepts and treatments written by Riesner and unidentified partial scripts or script pages. Series III: Professional Papers, 1967-1998 consists of business contracts, correspondence, awards programs, and other materials that relate to Riesner’s career as a writer. Included in Series III are studio or production company writing deals with Columbia Pictures and Price Entertainment, among others, as well as talent agency contracts. The correspondence films include memos Riesner wrote while under contract at Columbia and Price Entertainment that are script critiques of other writers’ projects. Series IV: Personal Papers and Memorabilia, 1917 - 1986 consists of biographical material on Riesner and his father, Charles Riesner, as well as a few programs pertaining to Charlie Chaplin and his films. Also included in Series IV are personal photographs and a 1934 scrapbook compiled by Charles Riesner that documents the family from around 1917 to 1934, and highlights the show business careers of Charles Riesner (frequently billed as Charles Reisner) and “Dinky Dean.”

Indexing Terms
Television mini-series
Screenplays
Television scripts
Screenwriters
Television writers