

00:00	JERRY ROTHWELL
00:05	Speaking to Power
00:10	I grew up sort of not very located ie not in a place you know my dad was in the Air Force so we moved around quite a bit I spent some of my childhood in Kenya, lived in East Anglia so so kinda moved around a bit. I guess I kind of followed a particular academic route I did an English degree.
00:29	Studying English at Cambridge University
00:34	In our English course there was a film component, um a film analysis component it was led by Stephen Heath who was kind of a very interesting kind of sort of Structuralist academic or something. And he kind of um I remember he just pulled apart a Man Alive program and I think at the time that sort of really fitted with where I was at politically. You know it was kind of the early Thatcher period um. You know a sense that the mainstream was way way way away from most people's experience and I guess that sort of critique of the media made, made an intervention in the media seem really important. The thing that interested me was his analysis of mainstream television and I don't think I'd ever broken down a TV documentary in that way to look at the kinds of assumptions it's making, the way it's nudging you in certain directions, the way it's cut, the kind of the sort of subliminal messages it's giving, you know how it kind of creates this consensus which might be not necessarily the sets of ideas are in a particular situation. So I think for me it was about pulling apart mainstream television and mainstream television was really monolithic at that time you know. We had at that time three channels you know and there was a very distant idea that anything that anyone who wasn't you know over there somewhere kinda high up could get in and make... And that's me even coming from Cambridge which is interesting, it felt, it felt to me like that.
02:07	The 1980s: Channel 4 & VHS Cameras
	I was a very sheltered middle class kid and then when I came out of university I was kind un, you know it was a time of kind of great youth unemployment even if you, well especially if you had an English degree, but even if you'd been to University. And I came to London, I squatted for a period um got involved in various sort of housing groups really. And and I guess there, it was also the time you know, just round about that time was the point at which Channel 4 um was formed and that I think was quite important because certainly for me as the as the quite sheltered middle class kid it it um it ushered in a whole set of voices that I dont think I was familiar with. You know that that People to People strand which was about um sort of trade unionism and particularly you know just this was kind of '84 so as the miners strike to start to take hold. You know getting that that view that I felt I had not in any way been exposed to. It was the politics of it rather than, I wasn't interested in film particularly I just felt it was a really good tool and I suppose this was a point at which for me it was sort of VHS you know the VHS camcorder suddenly had that effect that people could shoot things and play them back you know within minutes and see themselves on telly and such an unfamiliar concept I think for people now because that is suffuses everything we do on social media. But certainly it felt that that alone felt a sort of revolutionary act you know. Simply appearing in that box having a kind of existence that was, was me, was there was out there and the media, felt like it was going to change the world and it hasn't sadly.
04:05	Finding a Mentor on a Community Programme Scheme

04:10 I'd been unemployed for quite a long period and I knew I was kind of interested in doing community video and at that time there was a thing called the Community Programme Scheme which was set up by the Thatcher government as a way of the long term unemployed being put to some kind of use. And I got a job um first of all in the post room of the NSPCC for some reason, and then there was a very the guy who was the sort of the manager of a Community Programme Scheme was a really, he took a real personal interest in you actually and he kind of you know he recognised I was interested in doing community media and so he kind of moved me into another project which was this project in a church in Camden in Eversholt Street called Euston Community Workshops and that was a sort of multi-arts community arts group basically. We would go and do workshops and play schemes you know different mainly mainly sort of Camden estate-based work actually. I think some of those schemes who were really poor probably the kind of work was probably not good. But the guy who led that was a really sort of charismatic person and you he did a lot of training with us and you know er and so I think that was that was where I really started using video.

05:39 **Early Days as a Sessional Community Video Worker**

05:45 I'd read Tony's book about you know video and youth work um and I read in Owen Kelly's, I was quite interested in Community Arts I read Owen Kelly's Community Art and the State. I was quite aware of that movement and I think I was partly first of all aware of it through the workshops and through the things that I was seeing on Channel 4. I'd sort of yeah go to screenings and events and workshops and bits of training at Tower Hamlets Arts Project or the George Green Centre used to have the VHS free edit suite in London as far as I could tell and do stuff there. And er West London Media Workshop um and then Connections I was a sort of session worker at Connections in Hammersmith. Being like a sessional video worker basically working with video with groups of people and Connections was set up by by the council I think, by Hammersmith Council as a, as a media workshop. This was work in a adult day centre for people with learning disabilities in Goldhawk Road and it was a sort of crazy chaotic place but we started doing Super 8 animation there. And so kind of making things and drawing them and doing stop frame, odd kinda thing to do because of course people couldn't tell what they were making really, until it was shown back. So then I started you know kind of very quickly you know, it's not hard to learn the basics of using video so then I started doing workshops, I started working as an education video tutor doing group work using video basically. And I guess sort of early stuff with Connections I did like a lot of work on summer play schemes with kids, where we'd be doing like a play scheme a day and you'd make a film and by the end of the day you'd play that back to the community, the kids and their parents. And you know it was about kids developing the skills and and making the yeah you know everything edited in camera. So the difference between someone that came, got involved in that movement a bit later on it was it had sort of become a job you know in some ways, whereas maybe right at the beginning it was a kind of, it was a voluntary activist thing and I did do some voluntary work but actually I was kind of mostly doing paid, not particularly well-paid work, but sort of sessional video work so. And I kinda carried on doing that for next 10 years really in various forms yeah.

08:11 **Working at Valley & Vale Community Arts South Wales**

- 08:16 So then I really wanted to work for a community video workshop, that was what I wanted to do. I applied to Wrexham Community Video had a disastrous interview and then by now I was getting very desperate you know the places I was applying for were further and further away from London and finally got a job with Valley and Vale who were based in the South Wales Valleys above Bridgend in the Garrau Valley. So this was like 1985 and um just after the end of the miner's strike and those communities were very kind of you know lots of generational division, lot just very sort of depressed in a way. But the community arts team in the valley had managed to get redevelopment money on a big community arts centre which was actually in the old workman's hall which had been created by half penny donations on the miners wages in the '30s you know had been one of these kind of huge buildings with sort of you know Shakespeare on every week and classes in you know reading Marx and you know kind of just a wide range of sort of arts and adult education. And we did work yeah with lots of different groups in the community, youth groups, um stuff around learning disability, a lot of oral history and it was all mixed media so there'd be: dance work, drama work, writing, photography and I was for a period the video worker. So so often yeah either either a mixture of working with groups of people to make short films, creating like an oral history group who would record each other's stories all that kind of stuff. And in a way I suppose you know Valley & Vale was linked you know I guess there was this sort of community video bit and there was a community arts bit, of the sort of you know what you might call the community arts movement at that time and often they didn't really talk much the video but it was quite kind of techie based and had aspirations towards becoming a Channel 4 franchise workshop, and the arts bit kind of felt that was a bit sort of, you know that's not the point. So we were more yeah we were more embedded in that community arts culture. We ended up sort of having a split base, we were based in the Garrau valley but then we also started working in Barry which at the time it was the centenary of the docks opening in the, well this was in the mid '80s so I guess yeah they must've opened in the mid 1880s. And it was a kind of big project that sort of enabled us to get kind of funding to set up a base there and again worked a lot with sort of youth groups, did a big oral history project there.
- 11:05 **Making *Trade in Wind*, 1988**
- 11:10 Trade in wind was a sort of yeah a couple of people who just turned up one day and were interested in making films about their experience in the mental health system. A guy called Eddie you wrote a lot and this was sort of, he wasn't connected in any way to the anti-psychiatry movement and all of that sort of stuff but he you know he'd kind of come to it himself really and er so. So that was a really small group it was like me and three people. I suppose a means of him particularly talking about that experience you know and I think it was shown to psychiatric staff and mental health services staff and things like that. I was aware of a film that was again through the Channel 4 thing by Survivors Speak Out called 'We're Not Mad We're Angry' yeah. Um which was a really interesting film and I think also was that when I saw it as the first thing when you suddenly think oh there's this whole world of oppression around mental health that um you hadn't been aware of.
- 12:16 **Freelancing as a Community Media Worker in Coventry in the late 1980s**
- 12:21 The end of the '80s I moved to Coventry then I was a kind of just freelance sort of community media worker. So I would, I would kind of do those sorts of projects wherever it was possible to do and get funding to do, and so there were a couple, there was a group that I worked with over quite a long period maybe two years. You know once a week in the afternoon we do, we'd do video sessions. And that was the one ended up with a project called Our Lives and that's. So I suppose so that project was a mixture of you know I did a bit of sort of storytelling-dramay things and they interviewed each other and I think there were six or eight people in the group and and the film becomes a sort of film about their life stories really, different phases of their lives.
- 13:12 **Making *Our Lives*, 1990**

So Our Lives was made with a group called, which we sort of set up, called The Bedworth Video Group. I mean it was based in a little um, I can't remember what it was called was. It wasn't really a day centre was like a place people went and then they went out to other places. People with learning disabilities, often they were sort of young adults so they'd finished their schooling um and we you know I basically did a regular session every, you know, one afternoon a week for two years or something. So each session you know we'd, I'd plan structure sort of set of activities and then we'd do them and use the cameras and then gradually sort of built up into a film. I don't think they really started with a film, it didn't really start with a film, a particular film in mind actually I don't think. I'd sort of got a bit involved in the sort of drama community-theatre-drama-y work stuff. So I'd sort of I was kind of I would try and do things in sort of drama-y way. So for example you know exercises with the camera you know, where you'd point the camera at the ground and people would place objects you know er and talk about them. So you'd say oh bring in you know three things from your childhood, or talk about photographs or you know. So I suppose what I my I felt my role as facilitator was creating that kind of framework to... within which those things happened yeah. Most people at that time they were either, they were sort of on the cusp of that change from the kind of the big institutions where if they'd been five years younger they'd have ended up in a hospital. And in fact I think some of them, some of them had some older people had been in hospital, but now it was kind of community care and that's what enabled maybe the work to happen actually because it was community care and the process of community care, of these sort of day centres and they had to kind of budget for arts work. I think they found it a sort of good developmental thing in terms of their educational purpose as well. And then that film they they would go out and again use it to talk to staff. It was really widely used in staff training that. So it's so the product in a way became a tool as well, you know, there's this sort of process around it and then a product and we did, I mean you know, I suppose when I think about how that was edited you know we did edit it in sessions where we were all there. I think I probably played quite an influential role in that, but we did try and collectively edit and this was on a two machine Numatics as well so you know it's like once you made the decision you can't really go back with it it's starting again.

15:58 **The Power of Using New Technology**

16:02 I do think there's this significant shift that makes that period unimaginable which is about simply the representation of yourself in the media. I think that the existence of sort of YouTube and the smartphone makes it hard to, makes that very familiar now. Um and I think that, I think there is an incredible power of people using this new what seemed like an incredibly new technology to sort of put first of all the process of making it you know one in which your you know you're discussing ideas, you're trying to find ways of representing them visually, you're deciding what goes in what goes out. And then you've made this thing, and this thing is like this kind of object that that gives you, I think in those times I'm not sure whether it does now, but um gives you sort of a power to get you to talk to people who would never have a chance to tell your life story to, you know never have a chance to go and talk about the experience of being moved into a special school to the people who make those decisions without that tool.

17:16 **Using Video to Investigate Jobs and Work**

There was a whole thing in community care around work and the work people did and to familiarisation with work and we did do a project about work and um. We did that in an investigative way, you know they just took the camera and went out into the street and started talking to them. I remember we found some people working in the sewer and we sort of interviewed him you know about what he was doing. I remember one of the young women said you know 'What's the worst job you could imagine?' He said 'I think I'm doing it'. But yeah so so I think the the power of the camera as an investigative tool is quite important in that process. And I think when you, I mean I only watched a bit of it the other day for the first time after 20 years, but I think it's a whole mixture of different, you can sort of see the process in the film can't you. You can sort of see that OK at this moment we've brought in stuff, or this moment we've written a load of different sentences about what it feels like to do this and now we're saying them, or were taking the camera out to use it to explore things and investigate.

18:23 ***A View from Inside, 1991***

Then I did start doing sort of increasingly a lot of work around around disability and mental health and around disability rights I suppose and using media as a tool in disability rights. A view From Inside was work with a group of um people maybe a group of 10 people in in what was called an Industrial Therapy Center which is the idea of going to work therapy for people experiencing mental distress. It's people who'd been in the mental health system for long periods often kind of in and out of hospital. The crazy idea that you know getting people to fill in trays on a production line is somehow going to help their mental distress. That was again, similar sort of thing, we did a sort of once weekly you know sort of scheduled into the program of work of the place. And interestingly that when we made that film it was kind of banned. They wouldn't let, we showed it once and um I got a very stiff letter from the local health authority saying it couldn't be shown ever again. We did a sort of drama process and drama improvisations and one of the things where someone had a memory of being beaten up in hospital by the staff and we dramatised it and um they didn't like that. And again it was just about their experiences actually again we didn't start with a you know we're going to make this film. Usually both that and Our Life project just came together because we were doing these sessions which use video as a way of exploring their experiences. So I guess it is a kind of oral history approach it's still oral history that one. But used a bit of drama in that.

20:02 **Hi8us**

Hi8us was a youth media organisation that had sort of begun by using high 8 technology, hence the name, in developing devised dramas with young people for Channel 4. So these were films that were were devised by young people but people in terms of their story, content & characters they were sort of shot professionally for broadcasters. You know out of making a living out of that kind of work you inevitably get drawn into the sort of arts management side of things you know because you're making funding, you know you have to make funding applications to do the work and then gradually you kind of get better at it and then and then you're sort of getting good at you know training analysis and what the outputs are and this and that are. So I think my first involvement with Hi8us was creating a what we call the training program but I don't think it was really training but was about the really to answer the question: what happens to these young people after Hi8us has left? What's the what's the process give them as well as control over the story and character of a film. I think the first project that I worked on was a project called Pure which was in Manchester with young homeless people and I think my role was to put a sort of kinda development programme alongside the making of the film which explored how people would use the skills that they were learning through the film and what would happen afterwards.

21:35 **From Arts Management to Making Feature Docs**

Within Hi8us I think I became more and more like a manager, like an arts manager, and I suppose maybe that's what happens when you get older you just get instead of doing the thing you organise other people doing the thing, or you raise the money for the thing, or you report on the thing. And so for me I felt like I I didn't I just didn't really want to do that I think in the end. And so I was lucky actually lucky enough to get the opportunity to work on a couple of Channel 4 slots. I mean all through this time I'd been making things actually I'd made a lot of films for NGOs, you know training films, you know I was quite familiar with the process of making films as well as facilitating the making of films. I did a sort of making of alongside one of the Hi8us projects and those both allowed a bit of a bit of sort of independent filmmaking. And then I kind of went from doing short three minute things for Channel 4 to doing a half-hour things about artists for Channel 4 to making feature docs or to pitching feature docs and then in the last sort of 10 years really that's all I've done.

22:47 **Making Feature Documentaries**

Deep Water, 2006

Heavy Load, 2008

We were interested in making this story about Donald Crowhurst who was a round the world sailor in the late '60s who who abandoned and faked his voyage around the world. And that was a very sort of in a way traditionally almost like made in a fiction world you know it was funded by Film4 & Pathe and the Film Council. And I think that you know it was a difficult process and so from me making the next film I did which was called Heavy Load was sort of the opposite. It was like trying to strip down the sort of technology involved to the, something much more minimal, make it much more immediate. Again it was working around in that area of learning disability but it was a story about a punk band with learning disabilities, and learning disability wasn't the theme it was just kind of the sort of environment in which the film swam. I mean I think probably the community video side did influence that and does influence some you know quite a lot of the films I do I think. In the way I work with people probably I'm really aware of the danger of the filmmaker parachuting in and then leaving with your footage kind of thing. And there are so many pressures in the industry to do that. You know nobody funds work that is wider than that moment of being you know when the camera switched on and you know whatever it is that's unfolding at that moment. But for me making you know I sort of think in a film you see when when there's something wider going on when there's a broader process that's not just about coming and capturing the moment. I think actually even with Deep Water the way you know we worked with the Crowhurst family was um we did we spent a lot of time building that relationship and I think that you know there was a recognition that in a way in film, in documentary what you're, what an audience is seeing is that relationship unfolding on film you know that is about those relationships, that's what deepens the kind of thing that you're seeing. And I think there's something about that that carries over from the relationships you build in a in a community context.

25:07 **Heavy Load Contributors Seize Their Moment in the Spot Light**

So with Heavy Load for example you know where there's a group of people that are able that are organized enough to use that moment, the moment in the spotlight in an effective way then it's incredibly powerful. So they they set up this you know there was an issue that came up in the film that was about the fact that in group homes and residential places where people with learning disabilities lived because of the ways staff shifts changed often at 9pm. The staff would have to bring people back home at at 8pm which meant going out and having a social life, anything, going seeing a band was impossible because you'd have to be home and so they created this campaign called 'Stay up Late' which was within the film it kind of occurs as a story within the film but then it became the charity ten years later it's all over the world. There's one in Australia, in America, there's one here they set up this scheme called gig buddies which is about people without learning disabilities and people with disabilities coming together to go out to gigs together. And they've also kind of made changes at the policy level in the way the quality of residential homes are evaluated, it you know that made social the social life of the people who live there part of that process. So so that and that kind of in a way came out of the film but it didn't come out of the film because of anything I did really it came out because the group were powerful enough to seize that moment you know and I think it's all about seizing that moment.

26:48 **The Difference Between Documentary Filmmaker and Community Video Facilitator?**

I do sort of separate um yeah being a filmmaker and being a community video facilitator and I think the difference, the difference is in the way the purpose of what you're doing I think that my job as a filmmaker is to you know to tell a story in the most kind of compelling inventive way and it's all about the meanings in that story. And I have a responsibility for all the things that happen around that story as a consequence of me telling it. But still my my primary role is is you know is that film I think in a community video project you're doing it for completely other reasons that are about um you know people discovering things about themselves articulating them getting the power that comes through being able to say that through through the media, taking that out and talking and challenging those in power. The film is a sort of, it's just a tool, its not just the tool is a you know it's a it's a little bomb that you create to have an impact and the purpose of what you're doing is the impact in a way. For me it was always really important that the things that we made were kind of watchable you know. I did feel that if we didn't end up with something watchable that would lose a really important part of the process which was the group taking the thing out and showing to people talking you know showing to people that weren't their friends and families and talking about it. So I think, I think it's about um so the kinds of yeah so it's about the kinds of interventions you make and the point at which you intervene and how much those interventions take control or don't take control or facilitate more control you know and I think that's a delicate complicated thing it's not. It's not a matter of saying you know here's camera go and do your thing. The film industry the documentary industry kind of pushes you further and further away from more sort of participatory and innovative projects. I think that the way films are financed and very kind of is very much about the sort of safe outcome. I am sort of constantly in a way going thinking back to community video and thinking you know are there other ways of doing it. So for example I made a film in Ethiopia called Town of Runners which was about two girls in a village who wanted to be athletes. It was a shot over a period of three years went there kind of eight times yes developed very strong relationships with the people there but it was a fairly straight kind of observational doc and then we used the doc to support some youth projects in the town and develop things in that way. But but at the same time theres that sort of feeling about the parachuting in issue you know the fact that you're you're still telling, your coming in, you're telling someone else's story you're taking it back, they don't have a lot of control over how that is used or shown. And I'm just about to embark on a project in Sierra Leone where I'm trying to kind of co-work it with a Sierra Leonean filmmaker and that raises all of those questions about you know is there a kind of film we can make where the authorship of the idea is so diffused its not just me going there to make this film about what is a really compelling story. But it's very hard to do I think, not I mean it's not hard to devise what that project might be, but its very hard, it's like everything that is the element that makes that a little bit more participatory or changes the power relationship in it is everything thats not kind of covered by the budget you know. So its hard to try and prioritise that that side of things but I think yeah really obviously really important to do.

30:40 **The Legacy of Community Video**

So I think in the end those both the practice of community video is ultimately about power and ultimately about trying to address people's power through their access to tool to tools that that can you know win things for them, help them you know come together as a group, you know there's sort of power within the group and then power with what the group goes out and says. I mean community video is as good a word as any but yeah you probably wouldn't choose it, but I think participatory video becomes an enormous mouthful and I always find that a kind of more difficult term in a way but um. Yeah I mean I think its interesting to reflect on whether community video has become mainstream and whether actually those ideas that were knocking around in the late '70s or even early '70s and have have become mainstream but in a kind of Frankenstein's monster way. You know it's like that we have won. I remember that Nick Garnham saying you know like oh community video is a waste of time because you don't have a means of, you know owning the means of production is not the same as owning a channel of distribution, and that without the channels of distribution messing around with the means of production is kind of meaningless. Now you know we have channels of distribution but I'm not sure it empowers us. And that's I think it's really interesting as to why why those things dont empower us, is it because the sort of the environment in which we swim is very different. The images just dont have the same power because theres so many of them. Or is it that actually it was kind of wrongheaded in the first place. I dont think it was wrongheaded actually I think it was I think it was, I think there is a lot of evidence about the power of that work. The power to say something is really important but its also not power, you like you could imagine that if a state wanted to divert attention from the activities of it was, that it was doing as a government you would create some massive sort of online thing where everyone can feed in all their ideas and anything they think and have it all that argument there but actually there real things going on over here you know and I think thats a bit of that.

33:06 **CREDITS**

33:16 **END**