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Framed Youth: We Wanted to Show that it was a Construction

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I'd met a couple of people who were independent, very independent filmmakers. I'd met this guy Thomas and had a little affair with him, and he was part of the London Filmmakers Co-op and he was making Super 8 films. And I thought 'Wow!', I'd never met anyone who made films, in those days people didn't have phones with cameras in. No, cameras were like television and huge and expensive, as far as I was concerned anyway.

I'd never even thought about making films, but I had got an urge, I think. I'd seen programmes as a teenager on television about young filmmakers, and I'd been interested, but never thought I had the confidence to do anything about it. So when I met Thomas, and then his ex-boyfriend, Bruno, they were both working doing stuff at the London Filmmakers Co-op with Super 8. I thought 'Wow they're filmmakers'.

So when I saw this article in Capital Gay about a lesbian gay, or maybe a gay youth video project, or maybe it was, I can't remember if it was just a lesbian and gay or just gay at the time. I just thought, Oh I'll go along to that, especially as I was living in the Oval just around the corner from where the first meeting was, which was Oval house. And so I went along to join the group. And I suppose there were about 15 people there, mostly guys. I think there was one woman, Rose, and Philip and Andy and Jimmy and Connie. I can't remember other people but I remember Jimmy and Connie particularly, because I became friends with them later particularly, and I suppose Graham was there, Graham Piper.

Philip Timmins and Andy Lipman Set Up the Project

They'd already done a project called the gay video project where they'd made a video about the police attitudes to gay men. And I remember seeing it, it was quite amusing. It was quite conventional in a way, the way it was made, but it was quite amusing. And through that they'd got some money, I think from Channel 4 because Channel 4 was just starting, as a development grant to do something more, and they decided to use that money to get younger people involved, rather than just themselves again. And so that was why they'd advertised in Capital Gay. They might even have mentioned Channel 4, which probably would have attracted a few people because Channel Four was very radical in those days, it was a new television channel and they were trying to do different things with minorities. And we were definitely discriminated against in those days, and well a minority obviously. The first meeting I don't think there were.. yeah, there were mostly men, but actually we wanted to work with women as well. We didn't want it to just be a gay exclusive thing

because the gay scene was very kind of, quite a lot of it was quite separate and I suppose the people that I hung out with weren't involved with that very masculine scene. We were going to a much more alternative world, that was a bit more mixed, and we wanted to reflect that in what we were doing. I think we actually made sure that Philip and Andy made it into a lesbian and gay project, rather than just a gay project.

The way Philip and Andy set it up, they were the kind of producer and director I think, they were going to get us involved in making a video about being young and lesbian and gay, or young and gay as far as they were concerned originally. But we decided actually, we wanted to make it. We didn't just want to come along, we weren't willing to be just participants in it. We wanted to be involved much more, they obviously wanted us to help filming because they couldn't do it all themselves, so basically we took over I think.

What was Documentary Film: How Did We Want to Make It?

What I remember is us meeting at Philips flat and trying to work out what documentary was, and how we wanted to make it. People were watching and recording stuff on VHS from the television. I don't remember watching much, but I remember us experimenting with cameras and playing around, just sort of seeing how we could film things, that would make them more interesting. And particularly, because we knew we were going to interview people, we were really trying to work out the best way of interviewing people without the camera being kind of a dominant feature that would put people off.

So we'd get quite an intimate situation, the camera would just be over the shoulder of someone who is filming, and it would look like the interviewee was almost looking at the camera, but it wasn't, it was just off. I mean that was fairly conventional I suppose for documentary film making. But the other thing we wanted to do is not have any narrator. We looked at various television programs about gay men or lesbians. In a lot of them they had a rather impersonal narrator and quite early on we decided we didn't want to do that, and like Isaac says in the video, we wanted to show how we do things, we didn't want to hide the artifice. We wanted to show that it was a construction, but in the same process we actually made a construction that was artificial (laughs). After we were filming in Phillip's flat, they found a studio we could use, one of Ron Grant's building we could go to, and we cleared out all his cinema museum, archive stuff and created this white studio space where we met. It was a bit of a set. It wasn't just where we met, we made it into a set and then we chose a small number of us out of the 25 or more people that were involved, to be filmed more particularly and to represent who we were as the filmmakers...Marginalized and without a voice in the media world. I mean it's such a different world today.

Jeff's Role

We were interviewing each other. But initially I wasn't part of that group. I was just one of the people doing filming because I actually had a full-time job, unlike a lot of people who were on the dole, on the dole I suppose would be the alternative. I was spending all my spare time coming into the project. I wasn't there during the day a

lot, except at weekends I suppose, sometimes I would take days off work and be involved with them. So initially I wasn't part of the set group, but Toby got hepatitis I think and therefore they found they wanted to find someone else and they chose me. We interviewed each other on camera so we could see ourselves interviewing each other. But then we also interviewed other people in clubs and pubs, people that we knew. Well I suppose there was the kind of relationship between the interviewee and the interviewer so that we knew the person who is interviewing, we didn't just find out about the interviewee so we didn't exclude the questions.

The Subjects We Covered in Framed Youth

We were asking about their relationship with their parents, family, coming out. Their sexual relationships their partners, any discrimination and violence that we'd been suffering. I think that covers most of the subjects, because it's only a 40 minute documentary, there's several people talking about all those different areas. But then there's a more political dimension. Some people were interviewed and talked about it more politically, Mark Ashton in particular. It gets included at the end. Well like Mark says you know, he couldn't see himself as gay and not question the whole society that he was in. And I think that was true for me definitely. I could see that I was discriminated against and therefore I had sympathy and empathy with other groups of people and other minorities. I'd been involved... I saw myself as a socialist. I don't know whether I was really, but I saw myself as a socialist and had been involved in demonstrations. And I went on gay pride marches when they were political demonstrations rather than Mardi Gras as they've become. Because I'd been at university and got involved with student politics a little bit and been on CND marches, pro-choice marches and had a feminist kind of education, as well as a socialist one. I think quite a number of the people in the group were quite radical and wanted to change the world.

A Curriculum of Film Making

I suppose what I really do remember is being in Phillip's flat and doing these little workshops. We kind of created a bit of a curriculum of filmmaking for ourselves you know and studying what other people have done, but also experimenting with how you could use a camera and look at the possible effects of how a camera has on a situation. And I just remember finding that very exciting and inspiring because it was a period of creativity and friendship building as well. You know we all became really good friends for the whole year. It was an intense time. It was a bit like doing a university degree.

When it was edited. I wasn't involved directly with a lot of the editing because I was at work during the day. But I remember coming in in the evenings and talking about it. Some of the filming we'd done was actually pretty rubbish in terms of wobbly camera and things not looking good, and because we were in this edit suite that had a freeze-frame still store which was like the height of video effects at the time, we started, or people started, experimenting with using stills of interviews rather than having wobbly, you now juddery zooms-in or whatever. And that really worked because it meant that you actually became much more aware of what people were saying when you didn't have the distraction of a moving image. And it became quite a feature of the way it was edited. And it also meant that people could edit the sound

just how they wanted it, rather than what actually people said. So it was incredibly manipulative but in a way that was telling the truth. We didn't want to kind of put people in a bad light. The way we were editing it was actually to make people sound better rather than, you know, take things out of context, and put words into people's mouth that wasn't what they said. Having said that my interview sort of implies I'd said something that I didn't because of the way it's edited which kind of was fine, but it wasn't how I said it. But it, yeah, it just meant editing the sound became much more straightforward because you could get rid of the 'ums and 'ahs' of people, or if that bit was a bit boring. Or if they made a mistake then you could just chop it all up and you wouldn't know because the style was like that.

I mean then there's all those bits of TV that people recorded, I wasn't so much involved with that, that was all edited in as comments. I suppose the way it was structured was something that I found really interesting because we went out filming in different... well, the men went out filming and did interviews, which we end up not using but the women went out and did interviews in Ridley Road market and we used those interviews as the kind of the 'straight' world. Interviewing people in the market about what they thought about lesbians and gay men, and what were lesbians and what were homosexuals blah blah blah. And did they know anyone. And so as a device we wanted to separate that out from the world that we lived in, so we filmed a monitor showing those edits, and then we had our space our white space where we talk to each other. Then we had our friends space which was unmediated, it was just in bars and clubs and people's flats or wherever else. And that was just normal. But we created this white space so that that we knew that was us, and we would sometimes be interacting in that space and talking about the editing or talking about the filming of stuff. Even though that was a bit of a device it did sort of convey a truth about the process.

It Was Shown on Television Late at Night

It was shown in a new slot at midnight on two consecutive Fridays or something. At a time I felt like Ahh, how annoying that it's not being shown properly, where people can see it. But actually I discovered years later it had a really positive effect because I met two young men who were about 14 when it was shown in 1986, they recognized me from it. They'd watched it and recorded it at midnight, without their family knowing, because if it had been shown at 8 o'clock or 10 o'clock... They were able to sneak down put the video recorder on, record it on the family's video recorder, and then watch it at various other times later on.

These two guys actually watched it probably hundreds of times. They felt like they knew us and one of them actually I met through the college I went to, he joined the college after I'd left. And I was teaching him how to make, how to use a video camera and he came up to me and said 'Oh Jeff Cole' and I was like 'Oh! how do you know my name', but I just assumed he'd seen it on the wall or something. But then something really weird happened well, tragic, a friend of his committed suicide. No, no, no it wasn't as bad as that. His friend died in a fire. His best friend from back home and because he felt like he knew me, because he'd seen me on the video and because he'd heard me listening to people, because you often see the back of my head in some of the shots, he felt he was able to talk to me. And so he talked to me about the fact that he'd lost his friend and we became friends. So that was a kind of

really bizarre kind of consequence of making this video, and then it being shown on television.

And then this other guy I knew, he was in Manchester, he lived in the building next door to where I worked, but I didn't discover that immediately. I used to see him around and I thought he's definitely not looking at me. I don't know whether you've ever experienced that. He would be walking on the street and I'd see him quite regularly because I was working in the same area he lived in obviously, but he was not looking at me. I subsequently saw him when he was working in the Whitworth Art Gallery, in the shop there and I thought oh that's him. And then I went up to the till and he said 'Oh Hi you're Jeff Cole aren't you'. 'How do you know my name?'

Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners

If I hadn't been involved with Framed Youth, and set up Converse Pictures together with Connie and Claire, we wouldn't have the space, we wouldn't have had a video camera. So when we both, kind of independently probably, got involved with LGSM – Lesbians and Gays Support The Miners group during the miners strike. Well we were both friends of Mark, and he encouraged me to go along. We just wanted to film everything we wanted to make sure that we recorded what was going on. You know what was going on in the alternative lesbian and gay world I suppose.

Well we decided actually we wanted to show the mining communities what they were...who was giving them money because we knew that they were likely to have homophobic responses to us giving money to them.

After the strike finished we decided to make a longer form documentary about why we'd done it and interviewed some of the mining communities as well. Well we went to some of the places where we collected money, and interviewed people during the strike. So through that and through me putting it online, there's all that Dancing in Dulais video which we finished in '86, and the writer of Pride was able to realize that the story that he'd heard about lesbian and gay men supporting miners, which he thought was... completely couldn't happen. It was actually true and I got in contact with people, so we never know what the consequences ofyou know, things happen...Framed Youth. I kind of think of it as a period in my life that was really really formative. But it may well have influenced other people in ways that we've got no idea.

As a Result of Framed Youth Several of Us Became Film Makers

As a result of it you know several of us really wanted to carry on making films and seeing what we could do to do that afterwards. I suppose several of us did really see it, not as a springboard, as a way of developing ourselves. A profound effect, I think. I'd done a degree in electronics which I'd thought was a bit more interesting than it was turned out to be. And then I worked tried to work as a research engineer but I was pretty rubbish at it to be honest, because I wasn't really that scientific in lots of ways. Going into, being in Framed Youth encouraged me to explore my creative side in a way that I hadn't done before. And then we set up Converse Pictures and tried to try to get some money from Channel 4. We did get some money from Channel Four to set up a development project to make some more queer television, although

we didn't use that term then, as being gay television we had quite an exciting idea, but they didn't end up going with it. I guess I because I'd been involved with that, I got involved with that alternative Channel 4 and film maker world. I got inspired that well maybe I needed to learn more about it, because most of the people I'd met had done an arts degree of some sort and had got some idea of film theory or literary theory or whatever. And so I decided to go to film school and study film properly and that was an amazing experience as well.

I've been working as a documentary maker for the last 20 years working in a small Buddhist charity. I became a Buddhist twenty odd years ago and then had the opportunity to work with other Buddhists making films. I've been doing that 20 years, it's pretty much the kind of no budget filmmaking that I was brought up in.