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Douglas, Kitrina; Carless, David

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The Long Run: A Story About Filmmaking, Song Writing, and Qualitative Research

Kitrina Douglas and David Carless
Leeds Beckett University

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The Long Run: A Story About Filmmaking as Qualitative Research

Abstract

Against the logic that *if you aren't a film maker, you shouldn't make films* we hope to shed light on why qualitative researchers might consider making a research based film. For us, a vital step on the film making journey, has been writing songs. They are frequently an important component of film making, creating rich sensory connections. As a reflexive resource songs also anchor a researcher, in a deep multidimensional way, to events and relationships and lay the type of foundation stone that becomes hugely important when attempting to raise issues about the lives of stigmatised and marginalised people. We use a storytelling form here to illuminate these interrelated processes while giving support to the philosophy of 'slow' scholarship.

Introduction

At the core of many qualitative researcher's research practice is a genuine concern and care for the people and communities we live in and research. Finding ways communicate what we learn while expanding avenues for social justice requires us to extend our imagination about how we "do" research. Against the philosophy of convey-belt research flourishing in the neoliberal academy, slow science advocates remind us about the importance developing and sustaining a long-term relationships (Koro-Ljungberg & Wells, 2018; Scheurich, 2018). Tight budgets, short time-fames, limited room for experimentation and imagination, come at the expense of building the types understandings many researchers believe is vital if we hope to bring about social justice for the most disadvantaged people within our communities (Spooner 2018, p.32).

Current advise to those of us in science departments is, *if you aren't a film-maker, don't make films*. It is not unreasonable for a researcher to feel some concern when she is expected 'hand over' 'data' to someone with specific 'credentials' who will produce a good 'output' more quickly. While a qualitative researcher might not have film making skills most still house, in an embodied sense, recognition for what might honour participants and what will not. Rushing into collaborations because of a need to finish a project does little to nurture this knowledge. Nor does it foster the type of reflexivity that will dislodge from the sedimentary layers of embodied knowing what cannot be distilled and communicated in words alone – we can't hand this over. Expertise however, can and does change *given time*, and especially in response to being emotionally moved by what we hear, see, and witness. Carolyn Ellis, and her recent film/work with Holocaust survivor Jerry Rawicki are testament to this (Ellis, 2013a, 2013b). Experiences with participant, and concern for participants, often provoke in us the motivation to embrace technological advances in the service of communicating something more powerfully.

In the latest edition of the 'Grammar of the Edit' Bowden and Thompson (2013) raise an important issue about what lies at the core of filmmaking, they note:

More advanced tools allow new editors to play with more bells and whistles, but at the core, you need to maintain good storytelling. Don't believe the hype – 'the latest and greatest' technologies do not automatically enhance the quality or value of your project, (Bowden & Thompson, 2013, p.4).

'Good stories' don't jump off the street onto the page or stage of their own accord. The 'good story' takes a considerable amount of time to appreciate, distil and amplify. The problem we

face as a community, is that the good story might take several years to produce, especially if we are learning and developing technology alongside our research practices. Despite the pressure to finish and publish research quickly, we hope to encourage and support scholarship that is ‘in it for the long run’.

In what follows we recount one such story which evolved over the course of a decade. Its genesis was David’s doctoral research, yet at the time we embarked on *The Long Run* (Douglas & Carless, 2015), the only channel we were encouraged to disseminate the story through were peer-reviewed journals.

The catalyst for sharing the methodology behind the film is Johnny Saldaña’s chapter in the fifth “Handbook of Qualitative Research” on Ethnodrama and Ethnotheatre (Saldaña, 2018). Saldaña cites the film as being powerful, inspirational and impactful yet the type of film within the reach of most researchers. We agree with Saldaña, that distilling a first person narrative into a monologue is an important step in the move to film making. But, we also recognise the importance of music and songs for what they contribute to producing a film.

In writing the following story, and the various drafts and stages that have provoked conversations about creative and aesthetic processes, we have become more aware about how songs -written during our research yet not *about* our participants or the *research project*-unlock understandings. Unlike a diary, songs tend to get recorded and performed, over and over again, in different places, with different audiences. Each time a song is sung the singer/songwriter experiences anew a range of emotional connections and reverberations that give rise to thoughtful reflection and new insights. Thus songs live, are a testament, and provide an emotional and somatic anchor to events in the songwriters life; these include connections to participants lives and experiences. In this way emotional connections, empathic and relational understanding that might have been more difficult to preserve or access without ‘the song’ can be maintained as a living breathing artefact. At the same time songs bring into focus, in an emotionally and visually rich way, issues that might not have seemed relevant during field-research. Songs too makes it possible to blur artificial divisions between ‘healthy’ and ‘sick’ ‘them’ and ‘us’ while anchoring the researcher, the participants, and the research project to a cultural moment. Their inclusion in a film, therefore, provides a great deal more than a sonic backdrop or catchy introduction.

We hope the following story illustrates how ‘arts-based creations’ generated during the course of field-research are likely to weave through them things that the researcher didn’t know he knew¹. These insights and understandings are vital when we think about challenging stigma and discrimination of marginalised people. In the case of ‘The Long Run’ people who face discrimination and exclusion because of mental health.

The following story is presented in two chapters. Chapter one, narrated by David, and chapter two by Kitrina. All songs are available on youtube.

July 2001

Speak clearly, there’s no need to speak loud
Cause I am listening to you now...

(lyrics from *Window*, July 2001)

Ben strides out of the kitchen of the day centre’s café, wrapped in an off-white end-of-day apron which he wipes his palms on before leaning across the counter to shake my hand warmly. ‘So you’re one of us, eh?’ he says, nodding enthusiastically. ‘A runner, I mean. What did you say your name was?’

‘David’ I said, extending a hand across the counter. ‘Good to finally meet you Ben. Heard a lot about you. Not sure I’m a real runner, but I do run a bit. Nothing like what you do, though!’

‘That’s alright, mate, we all start somewhere! We’ll have you running the next Bristol-half, don’t you worry! What’ll you have?’

‘Oh, a tea would be great, thanks.’ Ben takes a teabag from the jar, tosses it into a bright orange mug and tops it off with boiling water from the Still.

‘Milk? Sugar?’

‘Just a splash, don’t need sugar thanks. How much do I owe you?’

‘Ah, that one’s on the house mate, don’t worry about that.’ And then, with a grin: ‘We runners gotta stick together!’

The Following Week...

It’s an unusually hot midsummer day and I’m back in the day centre for my first scheduled interview with Ben. We buy cold drinks in the café and I ask him where he’d like to do our interview. He chooses a private ground floor room. We carry our drinks along the corridor and settle into the two institutional armchairs. Ben gets up and closes the door. He seems calm, happy and relaxed, no sign of the possible paranoia – from closing the door and using a tape recorder – I was warned about. I lean forward and press *RECORD*.

‘Maybe we could start off by telling me what exercise and activity you’ve been involved in recently?’

‘What I’m involved?’ he laughs, wipes his hands along his thighs and takes a deep breath. ‘I go to the gym and go on the treadmill for an hour, go on the exercise bike for 40 minutes and the step machine for 35. But my main, what do you call it, my main thing is jogging. Running.’

Wow, I think, that’s a lot. ‘How long has it been since you started doing that?’

‘I used to do half marathons before I was unwell. I first started when I was 21. I started off with a friend and we sort of gradually built up, sort of went through the pain barrier together. Ran to Dilsley Common and both shook hands afterwards. It was a real good feat to actually do it, like. Thought bloody wow, like. We’d done it, we’d actually conquered it. We actually got there.’

Two months later: September 2001

I’m spending the morning in the file room, studying Ben’s lengthy medical records. I learn he was first admitted to an outpatient clinic in 1994. That means he’d have been about 29. About the same age I am now. The next year, 1995, ‘Loss of identity’ is written in his file and he’s prescribed trifluoperazine – an antipsychotic drug that is supposed to decrease brain excitement, with side effects of dizziness, drowsiness, insomnia, headaches, weight gain, constipation, swelling, and impotence. I read on, making notes as I go. Later ‘Low mood and anxieties’ is noted and diazepam is added, with potential side effects of confusion, depression, headache, slurred speech, nausea, blurred vision, restlessness, muscle spasms, nightmares, dry mouth, sleep disturbances, leaking urine and diarrhoea. He’s admitted to psychiatric hospital. The notes say: ‘Emerging psychosis with overlays of obsessional thoughts.’

Ben is discharged from hospital but later that year documented as experiencing ‘obsessional thought, depression, and paranoid psychosis.’ He’s apparently had mild symptoms over six years, but more florid for the past 2½ years. ‘Increased trifluoperazine and later changed to risperidone.’ *Hm.* I wonder, *how I would fare on that cocktail?* On top of the other side effects, risperidone risks a lowered white blood cell count and heart conditions. I read he’s re-admitted to hospital feeling suicidal and hearing voices. Then he’s given electro-convulsive therapy.

I stop reading for a moment. *Shit.* I’m feeling really uncomfortable reading this even though Ben has encouraged me to. I feel sick. Maybe its good someone reads it? Maybe he needs it witnessed? Maybe we all need to recognise the consequences of anti-psychotic

drugs? But I'm wondering what I will do with all this. I'm feeling swallowed-up. I need to get some air and decide to take a break, get outside.

When I come back I read he was given clozapine, sometimes used when other drugs don't work. The notes continue, 1997: 'Discharged from hospital' and diagnosed with either 'partially treated schizophrenia complicated by obsessional thoughts' or 'obsessive compulsive disorder.' *Nice!* I think sarcastically. *They don't even know!* 1998: 'Started at day centre. Anxious. Diagnosed with schizophrenia and tardive dyskinesia.' I've seen that in some of the guys at the day centre: involuntary jerky movements. I'd hate that. But hardly surprising that he's getting some side effects from all that medication. 1999: 'Continued episodes of anxiety which last up to 8 hours.' 2000: Psychologist's report: 'Panic attacks occurred almost exclusively when he was in a state of heightened physiological arousal from physical exercise such as jogging or gym training.'

I feel sick thinking of all these years – thousands of days – of suffering. I go back to the department and unload, Kitrina listens without saying much. My advisor pops his head round the door and tells us everyone is going to the pub. *Ha! Alcohol!* A chance to wash the residue of all this away ...

Another three months pass: December 2001

Still the wind beats on your shore
Always pushing wanting more
Fingers crossed against the odds...

(lyrics from *Jostled*, December, 2001)

For the past three months I've been coming to the day centre several times a week. I play football twice a week with one group, badminton once a week with another group, and I sit around and drink tea and chat, do interviews, go on walks. Today, it's a scheduled focus group. There are four of us: a clinical psychologist named Susan, a physiotherapist named Sarah, Ben and myself. I feel comfortable with these guys.

As soon as we've all sat down Susan initiates the conversation.

'Ben's expressed some concerns about two aspects of his participation in the study,' she starts, 'and we need to address that.' She's friendly, but firm, and now I'm feeling anxious, disappointed in myself and concerned for Ben. *How did I miss this?*

'The first,' she continues, 'is Ben's a little concerned about confidentiality. You aren't a member of our team.' I don't know whether to look at Susan or Ben and I'm feeling a bit defensive. Suddenly I'm an outsider.

'Well,' I rehearse in my mind what I'm doing to preserve confidentiality. 'The ethical procedures are when I write anything I don't use your name, Ben, I use a pseudonym, I change identifying details, you know, where you live, the places you talk about and so on.' He nods. They all seemed satisfied. But there's more.

'The second thing,' Susan continues, 'is Ben's finding it difficult answering questions about his illness. On two occasions during your second interview, questions led him to revisit memories of his illness that he was uncomfortable with.' I shift uncertainly in my chair.

'Ben, look,' I say, feeling concerned. 'I'm so sorry.' I try to imagine solutions. 'I can take you out of the research or...'

Susan interrupts: 'No, I don't think that's what Ben wants or was getting at.' She smiles at Ben and he nods in agreement. My eyes switch back and forth between them trying to get some idea about what is needed, what is ethical, moral, what is 'best.' 'He's happy for you to use the interviews you've done, and he's really pleased his story and the research might help other people, but he doesn't want to read transcripts, or give feedback or other stuff like that. And I don't think he really wants to do more interviews or conversations about his experiences. Is that alright?'

‘Of course,’ I nod. There’s a knot in my stomach and every muscle in my body feels tight and tense.

A year since the project started: July 2002

The typewritten letter begins *Dear Mr Carless*. It is from my landlady’s solicitor. Well, he used to be her solicitor, now he’s acting under her family’s instructions. She was 86 when she died. The letter tells me her estate is being settled and the lease on my flat will not be renewed. In two months I will lose my home and there’s nothing I can do about it.

A pang of hopelessness shoots through me. The sanctuary I’ve created is about to dissolve. What to do? Funny how things hit all at the same time. Well, not funny actually. It will be the same month my PhD funding stops and I am still analysing data, yet to complete my thesis. Bristol isn’t London, but finding affordable housing in a city now renowned for being ‘*The best place to live in England*’ proves futile.

The one bright ray, I own a van. A modest little Vauxhall, but it runs and has a bed in the back! I’ve heard stories from friends who’d taken off for the winter, either for work, sunshine or to live more economically. The stories they shared had seeped in. Perhaps I could make the best of it and *run for the sun!* Take advantage of cheap out-of-season holiday rentals in Portugal? Some paid writing would keep me ticking over financially, the cost of living is cheaper, and I’d be able to surf. And, of course, there would be plenty of time to work on my dissertation!

It was tough packing up my home, putting all my stuff in boxes, painstakingly dismantling all my recording equipment, microphones, mixing desk, studio speakers, along with a huge PA and all the stuff I use for live gigs, wires, mics, stands, every piece put together with attention to detail, and then, taking all these important markers of my identity and leaving with friends, in their lofts, attics, garages and under stairs. But, once I was on my way, it was like shedding a tired old skin.

October 2002

Took a long drive, a van ride
a cool weekend to realise
in the sunlight, by the waterside
no more darkness, another time
When the light’s bright, colours burn
a wave turns and I learn
that the harvest follows the sea...

(lyrics from *It’s Like the Dog Said*, October 2002)

I take two long weeks surfing down the west coast of France, living in my van. Time alone, time to think, time to become physically aware of things pushed beneath the surface when I’m busy. I don’t write research but I write songs. Leaving France, I drive the five hundred miles across Spain and into Portugal – passing San Sebastian, Burgos, Salamanca. I stop at Coimbra to visit a friend from the university. Then the final push south to Algarve.

Twenty days after leaving the UK I collect the keys to a small apartment in the village of Salema, overlooking the harbour – well, more a beach with few small boats. It takes an hour to unload the van and a week to settle into a routine: surf in the morning, writing research in the afternoon, cooking and making music in the evening...

I begin working on a thematic analysis of Ben’s interview transcripts and my field notes. What I produce is OK – but shallow somehow. There was so much in what he’d told – but it’s left out of my analysis. It just won’t fit. Its not that the analysis is *wrong* – it is textbook. But it feels foreshortened and dry. I keep working. Sitting at my laptop. Standing

up. Pacing around. Looking out at the sea. Watching the fishermen mending their nets. Sitting back at my laptop again. I feel like I'm going round in circles. Getting nowhere new.

Keep watching and keep waiting
 With patience in your hand
 Finally wake into the morning
 With a dream that you understand...

(lyrics from *Follow The Breeze*, October 2004)

But then something changes. Reading through his transcripts for the umpteenth time I am suddenly struck by a clear and strong memory of Ben's voice. I *hear* again the tone, rhythm and dialect of his speech patterns, as I read his words off the page. I *feel* the commitment, the passion, the anguish, confusion and triumph that lies within his stories. I *see* him running up Dundry Hill and shaking hands with his mate at the summit in celebration.

This is it! It's already here! What I am searching for is already here! What this needs me to do is not *more* but *less*. I must distil, craft, respect, preserve, witness and re-present the insights he has shared with me. I must try to give *readers* the kind of experience he has given *me*.

April 2003

Thinking, for an hour or two
 Feeling, that there's always too much work to do
 Rushing, into oblivion
 Winning, but it is the kind of prize you want?

(lyrics from *Worksong*, February 2003)

I return to Bristol refreshed, with stories in my pocket and an urge to complete my PhD. I stumble on an affordable room in a house near my previous digs. Although it's just an attic room, it's large enough to set up my recording equipment and begin to document the songs I'd written while I was away: *Running For The Sun*, *An Ocean Breaks Over My Heart*, *It's Like The Dog Said*, *One Way Ticket*, *Dirty*. It had been a productive time – for writing research and songs. Setting up the recording equipment feels like reconnecting to a part of myself that had been dismantled. Loading a seven-inch reel of eight-track tape, taking time to spool the feeder through the tape heads and secure it, to set the dials on the mixing desk. I love this kit. And what it makes possible...

I slot right back into the day-to-day happenings of a busy university department. Kitrina and Lucy are running a student conference and they try to sign me up to present.

'Fancy reading your story?' Kitrina asks. 'I might do my poems.'

'It's a bit risky' I reply, immediately putting up defences, suddenly fearful.

'Go on!' Lucy urges. 'It'll be great!' *Easy for you to say!* I think. You're on safe turf – a thematic analysis and Powerpoint presentation.

'We need to trust what we believe is right to share,' Kitrina offers, reassuring herself as much as me I think. 'This is a great opportunity.'

And so it is. A few weeks later four of us sit in a semi-circle facing the audience – a group of science academics, researchers and postgraduates. We're ready ... to walk the plank with our poems and stories.

As I'm introduced I shift my chair forward a couple of feet, and thump it down with a bang. *That got everyone's attention!* And I begin to read – for the first time in public – *The Long Run*: "It's a fear of a fear really. You're just frightened and you don't know why. Everything becomes out of touch. You're just frightened to death for some reason and you don't know why. The fear is so intense it just gets a grip of you..."

During the tea break people keep coming up to me: ‘Dave that was amazing!’ I’m shocked by people’s enthusiasm. They seem energised. One confesses, “I was expecting statistics, theories, categories, diagrams, and models.” Some compare Ben’s experiences to their own or to someone they know. One asks: ‘I never knew all that happened to you. How did you overcome such serious mental health difficulties to study for a PhD?’

I learned about the power of storytelling that day – in a profound way – and the dynamics that exist between teller and audience, teller and story. Something magic was going on. A seed of faith was planted. Its roots really began to take hold when I read Kitrina’s message:

I waited my turn feeling glad you were going ahead of me. A story will be easier to stomach compared to my poems! I watched your hands clasp the seat of the chair, no idea what was coming. Then in one move you lunged forward and I was jarred by the sound of the chair legs striking the floor. It seemed in that moment too you delivered the first line: “It’s a fear of a fear...” I was hooked. I know it’s a story, I know the story, but it was still so powerful. I looked at the floor, almost frightened to look up, but when I did every eye was rooted on you, the whole atmosphere of the place had changed, people were sitting forward, being reeled in. I felt so tense! Like I needed to hold my breath! What was coming next? I shivered, it was all so real. I smiled, laughed, learned ... what a journey!

May 2003

I pull out the contents of my pigeon-hole and lean against the wall in the corridor to read. It’s feedback on the latest draft of my PhD, including *The Long Run*. ‘Insightful’ my advisor has written in red, followed by a note that he thinks it could be included. *Good!* I think, reading on. My eyes dance over comments, looking for clues, encouragement, direction, and affirmation. In our field – exercise and health science – stories are not research. So they aren’t just rare, they’re non-existent.

The next moment he’s not so positive; it’s a deviation from the traditional academic voice, and that seems to be a problem. ‘Maybe put the story in italics,’ he suggests, ‘to separate it from the main text.’ Or put it in a box? Finally, he muses, ‘Perhaps it would be best in the appendices?’ I let my head fall back against the wall, close my eyes and heave a sigh. Why is a personal voice still so problematic that it needs it to be separated from the ‘findings’? As far as I’m concerned, stories like this *are* my research findings...

I wander home with the draft stuffed in my rucksack. I’m feeling low. That type of feedback isn’t encouraging. Am I letting Ben down? I’ve a paid gig to do this evening, but in the meantime I seek the comfort from Kitrina’s guitar, on loan for the weekend. It’s a handmade instrument and smells of the workshop where it was made. It connects me to my spirit and I want to stay with it. This instrument is smaller and more delicate than my ‘gigging guitar’ – which can stand a forceful strum, make a big noise. Kitrina’s guitar is delicate, it makes me sit differently, play differently, it calls to be fingerpicked. When I answer the call, I find chords and a riff that matches my mood. Like an addict I keep playing the progression, over and over. Slowly, the notes and tones draw some words from me and I sing them again and again:

If I took this heartache
and planted it this evening
Would there tomorrow be
Something warm and strong and free?
Cause I’m thinking of trading in
everything that’s broken

And maybe dreaming large enough
that you'd eventually see...

(lyrics from *Moving in Circles*, August 2003)

July 2003

Two years after meeting Ben, I'm still immersed in his story. I'm drawn in again and again. I want to feel its meaning, grasp its wisdom. Adrift on snatches of his story and my own dilapidated memories, I tune up and begin to play and sing. Loudly.

After a time, I find myself with a song called *Golden* that I'm not sure I understand:

I've got to run a little further, a little faster, to be free
I understand life's precious,
but there's a value in you not in me
I know good can be evil
But can love ever be me?

Think I better lie down, I can't beat it, it's bigger than me
Under pressure, out of darkness
I strain to believe
Then your lies become golden
and my life is more than it seems

I want to fly a little higher, a little longer, just to see
Understand there's nothing
in you like the darkness in me
I hope time can be altered
that there's no truth to my destiny
Then your lies will become golden
and my life will be more than it seems

(lyrics of *Golden*, July 2003)

I play *Golden* over and over in different ways. But whatever I do I just can't get this song to *sing* ...

May 2004

'Thank you for the story,' begins the email that popped into my inbox the day after I read *The Long Run* at a National Health Service Carer's Conference. 'I was listening to it with tears in my eyes, and thinking of my son. You could have just swapped my son's name in there. It was so him.' I feel humbled by this mother's response and justified for continuing to perform the story – and for keeping it in the main text of my thesis. The following week, after presenting at the First Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise Conference in Liverpool, I get another email. This one is from a psychologist. He too thanks me for the story and tells me about the friend he was with who was moved to tears. I think how easily the story could have been relegated to the appendices...

Nine years: August 2010

'While you've got the recording equipment set up,' wafts a voice from the kitchen, 'why don't we record you reading *The Long Run*?' A face appeared at the bottom of the stairs looking up smiling, drying a plate and waiting for an answer. Kitrina had been doing some backing vocals on a couple of my songs earlier that day and I'd just finished mixing them. After we'd recorded the *Across the Tamar* CD in 2005, we planned to record other stuff,

including *The Long Run*. But life gets busy and we never quite got round to it. Employment, self-employment, there's always too much to do...

'Yeah, alright,' I say looking down the stairs, feeling excited but apprehensive. 'I don't know where I've put the story!' After half an hour of hunting – a triumphant 'found it!' – I bound down the stairs. We sit at the kitchen table, my lips silently miming the words. Together, we rehearse, mark edits, pauses, recalling accents and emphases. Time passes, but we don't notice its passing. Nine years after first interviewing Ben, we finally record a performance of his story...

Another three years pass: July 2013

The truth is
Come the darkness
My faith slips away
Cause you make promises
You'll break some day...

(lyrics from *When the Light Comes*, September 2004)

'So what did you make of it?' I ask, throwing my coat over the chair and filling the kettle. We'd hardly had a chance to talk since we started the Filmmaking course. I was sent in one direction playing the role of 'Producer' and she was with a different group in the role of 'Editor.'

'Well,' Kitrina says thoughtfully, as I warm the teapot, collect cups and saucers, pour milk into a jug. 'I really liked the editing, loved getting my hands on the software and seeing how to do that.'

I bring the teapot to the table and pour Kitrina's straight away as she likes it weak. 'But?' I ask sensing she's not finished.

'Yes, *but*. What he said about plot and narrative trajectory – that a story must have a certain shape to work as a film – I'm uncomfortable with the sound of that,' she says. 'That sounds dangerous in the context of our research.'

On the second day, trying to help us write our screenplays, the lecturer had drawn a zigzag line across the whiteboard which looked a little like a truncated EKG cardiograph reading. 'This shape,' he'd told us, 'represents how a plot needs to develop if a story is going to work, be satisfying, as a film.'

'But Ben's story of his experiences as a runner with schizophrenia *did not* have that shape,' I'd responded. 'He didn't hit rock bottom and then rise, Phoenix-like, from the ashes. It was more a case that he went down, rose up a bit, then went back down again.'

'But,' he said 'there *must* have been an absolute rock bottom – a low point from which he bounced back.'

'No. There wasn't. And as far as I know, there still hasn't been even ten years later.'

'Well, you're going to have to write one if you want his story to make a good film...' the lecturer had countered.

'That was the big "but" for me,' Kitrina continued, sipping her tea. 'I suppose what really worries me is...' her eyes follow me as I go to the cupboard. '...Yes! Not having a biscuit with my tea!' she laughs before getting to the 'real' point: 'The lives of people we research, and our own lives too when we focus on them, they don't necessarily follow a template, a particular trajectory or narrative arc. Real life is *not* Hollywood, sometimes issues aren't resolved. It sounds like we are going to have to deviate sometimes from what a screenwriter considers to be a good story in order to be truthful and authentic. We mustn't sacrifice participants' truths just to make the story more sexy.'

Chapter two
narrated by Kitrina

October 2013

The filmmaking course didn't devote much time to editing but I had picked up the basics. I opened my laptop, created a new project in iMovie, typed 'The Long Run,' and selected a black background for the title. Moving the cursor I selected the 'voice recording' and dragged the audio file we'd recorded three years earlier into the project pane. Then I began selecting images from the footage we'd shot at another time, just playing and experimenting really. Some images seemed to fit the mood: there was Gwithian beach on a wild day, some shots of David running through the dunes. I was exploring options, trying to be aware of my emotional response to these images and sounds and allowing them to connect to some internal barometer.

After an hour or so I became aware I had stopped and was staring blankly at the screen. Something was missing, but I couldn't articulate what. I had become lost in my inner world, and now there was a slow dawning about the absent 'thing'. For almost the whole of our PhD's we were writing and sharing songs, playing music – David even recorded an album. These songs had created soundscapes, a sonic message that now was yelling to be included.

I wandered to the bookcase, selected *Welcome To The Sun*, slipped the disk into the computer, and transferred all eleven songs to my hard drive. Then I dragged one of them, *Moving in Circles*, to the project pane and hit 'play in full screen.' Immediately, the images and sounds combined in a deeply poignant way. *This is it!* On one level I was engaged with the opening images: an ambulance, the ceiling of a hospital, a tree blowing in the wind in black and white, and underneath the words '1 in 4' a statistic referring to the number of people with a mental health condition. These provided the essential backstory. Beneath, providing emotional wallop, a soulful fingerpicked guitar, David's voice, and the song written and recorded back in 2003.

If I took this heartache
and planted it this evening
Would there tomorrow be
Something warm and strong and free?

(lyrics from *Moving in Circles*)

April 2014

How do you make those decisions, the ones where you feel ought to do something, but your don't really want to. Well, that's how I felt, just an intuitive knowing that if I didn't push myself, I would lose an opportunity to get footage that might be important for this film. But the thought of road closures, parking restrictions and a whole load of logistical problems made me want not to bother.

When I played sport, inner voices were called 'self-talk' and here they were in conversation chiding me about my obligations to participants, about how a film might be accessible to Ben and people like him. So I found myself grudgingly packing the gear, driving, parking, walking towards the runners, and so on, with an attitude of apathy and detachment. But, in the act of doing it, something profound changed in me.

What did I see that moved me so much? Over those few hours I gained a sense of the possibilities of life *when you get to join in*, when you aren't stigmatised, discriminated against or denied access. You see, these weren't professional athletes, they were just 'normal' people, all ages and sizes, colours, ethnicities, and abilities and running as part of a community, in something public, in a big event. These images began to change how I understood Ben, his running, and the stories of other men we'd interviewed.

At the finish crowds packed the final stretch five or six deep, cheering the racers as they crossed the line. Those last few yards of the race were particularly magnetic for me, watching men running alongside other men, holding hands and raising their linked arms as they crossed the finish line *together*. It reminded me of how Ben talked about running with his mate, saying; ‘we done it!’ Often runners would look round to find friends, then slow down if necessary, to finish *together*. Then, falling into each others arms once they’d crossed the line. Passion, persistence, commitment, pride, humility, sweat, community, exhaustion, fun, laughter, tears, relief, joy. And I was totally unprepared these feelings welling up within as I watched through the lens of my camera. Solidarity.

And later that evening I felt an urgency to get the footage off the camera so I could watch it all again. Then, I couldn’t stop myself begin to edit. To slow the motion of some of the images or move close-in on faces. To look again from the different angles, over shoulders, between railings, my body remembering the feelings as I cut and moved sequences of footage, still feeling the emotions, the connectedness, the respect.

The Next Day...

I’d call it a moment of recognition: ‘So *that’s* why Tarantino plays loud music on his film sets!’ It suddenly made sense. I’d just dragged *The Journey (And The Way We Want It To Be)* from the music library to the project pane, lined it up against the part of the story where the narrator says: ‘Started on the treadmill, just five minutes, then I went for a run.’ I didn’t need to actually hear the song, my body *knew* and was already playing the rhythm and instrumental intro. I knew each strum of the guitar, the bass line, each word, each pause. In my front room, at gigs, parties, at friends’ houses, and on the beach, I must have heard David sing this song a thousand times – before he even recorded it. His physicality – a strong passionate vocal and powerful attack on the guitar strings – challenged me then as now: ‘*I’ve got your needs at the front of my mind/I put your dreams alongside mine.*’ These lyrics continue to provoke me, they rouse me to consider my obligations, responsibilities, what comes with privilege and opportunity. *And in the film?* The song immediately amplified the images, raised the energy and, with the words, filled me with a sense of hope. How could I have considered *not* going to film this race? I felt ashamed. Once again I was reminded of how close that line is – between *becoming* a person one who challenges stigma, discrimination, and takes social action ... or becoming one who does nothing but talk.

May 2014

‘Is it a good film?’ I ask Harry Wolcott in my dream.

‘One film won’t change the world,’ he replied, ‘not even a good one. But the question is not *Is this a good film?*’ he leaned forward, ‘but *What is this film good for?* I’ve told you that before. What are your hopes for it?’

‘Well,’ I laughed, ‘we aren’t expecting it to change the world. But I’d like it to make a difference, in some small way, for men like Ben, for mums and dads, family members, friends of people struggling with mental distress. Maybe use it in lectures. It’d be nice if it helps challenge the stereotypes and informs practitioners.’

‘And how will you know?’ asks Harry gently.

‘Oh,’ I replied, ‘we’ll ask people.’

‘And keep on asking,’ he added.

From: Alex

Sent: 20 May 2014 17:52

Hiya.^[1]_[SEP]

I recognise the music in that vid!^[1]_[SEP] Really liked it, can’t say enough how much exercise helps

me. However my meds make me super drowsy so more often than not it wins and i lose all motivation and sleep...major pain in the arse.

Its very true about the right meds. Has a massive difference not only on outlook but in some ways your character or at least behaviour. Which one is cause/effect i'll never know.

Very touching vid for me too as i ran a marathon a few years ago with the aim of curing myself. My doctor laughed when i told him that was why and sadly he was very right. At least in my lifetime there'll be no cure, just management.

Anyway glad you made it. Always good to teach people the inside story.

I'm well otherwise, hope you are too.

Hugs,

Alex

From: Matthew Staples

Sent: 21 May 2014 14:48

Thanks David,

Awesome film which I have 'liked' as definitely aspects in there that I relate to. Absolutely accurate whereby exercise is an excellent drug to help with depression. I hope many other people watch this who are sufferers, to help them to become more active and fight the illness.

Kind Regards,

Matthew.

From: Peter Smyth, Director of Research, Irish Sports Council

Sent: 21 May 2014 09:03

Dear David

It's great to hear from you again and thanks for sharing the film which I must admit made me cry. There is a beautiful sadness which just got deep into my very essence. It just resonates with my view that the human condition is a tragic one and yet....there is such a hopefulness there too. So much as I'm a number cruncher when it comes to research I find your story telling gifts a wonderful contrast in communicating a profound and ultimately hopeful message. (...)

Very best wishes.

Peter

From: Ashley

Sent: 20 May 2014 17:49

(...) I didn't know what I was watching and then when I frantically started reading, because I can never keep up with scroll downs, after all I was educated in the South West, I thought I won't cope with 7 minutes of this. But then I realised it was a story and I could listen and watch and this made me relax into it. I found it difficult to relate personally to the story because I have never had issues with mental illness, but, as a nurse in a former life working with people who had mental illness, I began to relate to the story through others. I also have a student who has done brilliantly on the course despite suffering from panic attacks regularly. We have worked together with hand in deadlines and this year she even went on an independent wild camping trip as part of her module. And, do you know, she actually said she felt better for the experience in herself, despite feeling very panicky beforehand. I thought a lot about her. If I had had problems with panic attacks this would be helpful/inspiring/thought provoking. The images are thoughtfully put together and resonate with the story well. The fact that much/all of the imagery is of Bristol is important and some of the race finishing shots I found really moving, but then I always get like that with sport. It's thought provoking and I hope those that are blindly taking medication because this is

what the doctor has prescribed will begin to question the role of medication in their lives and its appropriateness. For me the film made me feel very lucky that I seem to be in pretty good mental shape, for the moment. But, the only constant in life is change.

Come back soon - it's lovely here!

Ashley x

See if someone has never had a panic attack in their life, they *say* they can understand what it's like, but I don't think they can. If I get a panic attack I get tears streaming down my face, and I can be an emotional wreck, my eyes are welling up. It [*The Long Run*] was quite, my eyes got a bit watery there watching it, stuff like that I can relate to, it means a lot to me. See, being in the army, they can't see what's wrong, people kind-of look down their noses at you. So people with mental health stuff will keep it to themselves and that's the worst thing you can do. You end up just bottling it up inside. What makes me worse is looking at myself in the mirror, and at what I used to look like, but if I can get that thinking through my mind [he points at the laptop] like that man on there [pointing again] its never too late to do something, to get back into it. You see, when you have anxiety and panic attacks it feels like your life is over. Watching that video, it's given me a wee boost to get back running, 'cause if he can do it, I can do it. I like watching stuff like that. The video was good for me, it was powerful, I can relate to it a lot.

(Alan, soldier on 'Battle Back')

January 2017

'It was good seeing *The Long Run* again,' Matt says as we walk out the door after Kitrina and I have given a seminar on performative research for PhD students. 'I remember watching it a while ago.'

'OK, Kitrina posted it on YouTube in 2014 I think. It's had over a thousand views now. Was it then that I sent the link to you?' I asked.

'Yeah, early summer. I remember 'cause I'd been having trouble with my meds too. It was a really bad time – I couldn't even go on the golf course, let alone work properly. After I watched the film I made an appointment with my psychiatrist and asked him to change my medication too.'

'Really? *The Long Run* was the catalyst for you to do that?'

'Oh yeah, yeah. Hearing what the guy in the film says about getting *his* medication right made me think I needed to change mine.'

'And what happened when you saw him, Matt?'

'He didn't like it. I had to push. But in the end he backed down and prescribed **** instead. And it was *so* much better. Almost immediate, the change was. I don't think I'd have been able to start a PhD otherwise.'

'That is amazing. Thank you for telling me that Matt. Its really good to know a film like this can lead to that kind of change for someone. And you of all people! Do you mind if we write about this in our research?'

'No, that's absolutely fine. Let me know if you want me to write something too...'

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ⁱ While we use songs here, we don't restrict these insights to only being produced during the writing of songs, drawing, sculpture, poetry, painting, and so on all invite different understandings. As Elliot Eisner suggested, we need different arts to see differently, form and content are inseparable.