

Stories from the brainreels podcast transcript

October 1, 2015

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Introduction

CHERYL: Welcome to Stories from the brainreels monthly podcast about brain injury and disability with a focus on art, culture, and disability pride.

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My guest this month is documentary filmmaker Mike Turner who has made a film exploring stuttering from inside the stuttering community. He joined me to talk about this film "The Way We Talk." I got to see a pre-screening of it and had the great pleasure of meeting with him the very next day. That's the conversation you'll hear today.

There's a screening later this month of "The Way We Talk" at Pacific University.

Friday, October 23rd at 7:00 pm

Taylor-Meade Performing Arts Center

2014 Cedar St. in Forest Grove, Oregon

On the #57 TriMet bus line

In other news, I'm kind of beside myself with joy that I've been invited to give a keynote address about storytelling for community building and self-advocacy next month for Mt. Olivet Rolling Acres near Minneapolis for a TBI conference they're hosting. I'm really excited about this event because a lot of people hear about TBI or disability and automatically think services, healthcare, rehab, medicine, and improve, improve, improve. We still also have a focus on our social, emotional, family, vocational, educational, spiritual and other parts of ourselves. I appreciate them giving me the opportunity to talk about how we use storytelling to express those things and to get our needs met in those areas--or try to. Thanks, Mt. Olivet Rolling Acres!

And now I wanna quote disabled blogger Karen Hitselberger. This is from her blog called Claiming Crip, "[Why I Will Never Say I 'Fight' My Disability.](#)"

"I will never say I fight my disability, because doing that would be fighting a war against myself, and a very important part of me. I will never say I fight cerebral palsy, because disability, and cerebral palsy, are not problems to be battled. I will say I fight ableism and prejudice. I will say I fight lack of access, stigma, and ignorance....These are battles to fight, and win....I will fight to make this world a better place for future generations of kids just like me. I will fight to make sure that they are never told or led to believe that their bodies are a problem, or something they must do battle against on a daily basis just to fit in.....

I will fight for a better world, and a better future, because those things are worth fighting for, but I will not fight a war against myself."

Thank you, Karen, for permission to use part of your post on this podcast.

As always, you can subscribe to this podcast on iTunes, Stitcher Radio, and SoundCloud. More details about guests and links are at the blog at www.whoamitostopit.com, and screen-reader accessible podcast transcripts are there too. Don't forget some great neurodiversity pride swag at cafepress.com/whoamitostopit. All proceeds go toward the documentary "Who Am I To Stop It" about artists with traumatic brain injury.

And now on to the interview with filmmaker Mike Turner.

The Interview

CHERYL: I am really happy to be here with you today, Mike. Oh, sh**. Mike or Michael [laughs]?

MIKE: [laughs] I hope we keep this in. But yeah, Mike is fine.

CHERYL: Mike, OK. It's great to be here with Mike Turner, a filmmaker. And why don't you go ahead and just start by introducing yourself.

MIKE: OK. My name is Mike Turner, and I'm the director of a new documentary called "[The Way We Talk](#)" that is about a lot of things but mainly about my experience with stuttering.

CHERYL: Cool. And it is new. I just saw it last night, in fact. That wasn't the premiere, though, right? It's premiered once?

MIKE: Well, we had a showing earlier this summer at the Portland Art Museum. And then last night, we showed it at Oregon Health and Science University. But it's still in the final stages of post-production. So these are just kind of pre-screenings, test screenings for our community.

CHERYL: What's the release gonna look like? Will it be theaters or film festivals or what?

MIKE: Well, we are just doing the festivals and universities in the Fall, Winter, Spring. And then it is gonna come out as an educational DVD with Collective Eye Films in Portland. And then it will probably be out for consumers next summer.

CHERYL: OK, great. Great. The film was really beautiful. And I think you got a really good reception from the audience last night, wouldn't you say?

MIKE: Yeah. It was really cool to show it there at OHSU because that is where our support group meets every month. So a lot of the people that I interviewed for the film and who are part of that whole process I actually met at that group there. So yeah, it was just really cool to be back there and have everybody there to see it.

CHERYL: Yeah, yeah.

Making an Insider Documentary

CHERYL: One of the many things that I like about your film is that it is a film about stuttering and exploring stuttering, and it's made by someone who stutters. And when I look at most of the media around disability or around health or anything like that, it seems to almost always be people outside that community looking in and just kind of dropping into the community, making a film, and leaving, and maybe staying in touch with some of the subjects. But to me, it makes a big difference to hear that someone who's in the community made a film about your own community from the inside.

MIKE: Mmhmm. Yeah, I do feel like you're gonna get a different film if you've experienced first-hand what you're talking about. I think that's pretty unavoidable. That was part of why I wasn't really interested in making a film that's just all about stuttering, you know, that's like a Stuttering 101 kind of thing. Because for me, it's very complicated and very deep-rooted and really tied up in every part of my life. And so I felt like I wanted to make something that kind of had those complexities and those kinda emotional shadings to it that might be a little bit different than other documentaries about stuttering out there.

CHERYL: I do appreciate that the film wasn't Stuttering 101. That's another thing that I see a lot, again, in media that's around health or disability, is this imperative to start the film out by saying, "Stuttering is a disorder classified by the blah blah blah."

MIKE: Mmhmm.

CHERYL: And just listing out physical characteristics or listing out symptoms. And sometimes that overshadows what you were talking about, the complexity, in that it doesn't affect just say your mouth. It affects your entire life cuz it's communication. Sometimes I feel like we're a little bit of circus side show freaks.

MIKE: [chuckles]

CHERYL: Look at them. Let me describe a couple of characteristics, and now you know everything.

MIKE: Mmhmm. Yeah, and one part of that is, I think, stuttering is really hard to define. There's a speech therapist in the movie, Glenn, who was one of the first people that I interviewed. And he ending up turning into a main character in the movie and one of my closest friends now. But just the first day I filmed with him, I went to his office, and I just kinda sat down and turned on the camera. And I was like, "OK, so my first question is 'What is stuttering?'". And just kinda like...sighed and looked at the clock. He was just like, "Michael, this would take like a 12-week graduate course to even scratch the surface of that."

And so I did really try and leave out a lot of the academic part of it and just let people see it. I hope it comes across, you know. Cuz I feel like that's what a lot of people's experience of stuttering is, is you meet someone somewhere, like at a gas station or at a restaurant or in your class at school, and they might stutter. But you don't really know how to ask them about it. And you don't know if they're ready to talk about it. And so I just wanted to kind of have a space where people could just talk.

CHERYL: Yeah, yeah. And you have a nice mix of interviews and real life so that it doesn't get too explanatory, but that you actually see it. And you see people interacting with each other. I think that means more to audiences, to see communication play out in real life rather than have somebody describe communication to you.

MIKE: Mmhmm. Yeah, and I also feel like a lot of times you see that it's not just in stuttering but in all kinds of films, and probably all kinds of media, but just people really highlighting the more depressing aspects of a condition, you know, and making it just like, "Aw! Look at this! Look! Ugh. Look closer!" And you see that in just all these art films where it's just like a couple yelling at each other for two and a half hours. And it's just this landscape that I did not want to inhabit. And so I just really wanted to show just all parts of it and what happens when people come together. And I feel like that I stutter too allowed

people to really be honest, and we could laugh about things. And we could also really share things about it that were hard. But that was not all of it.

Should Stutterers Make Listeners More Comfortable

CHERYL: Yeah. I wanna talk about the coming together part. But before, I wanna talk about the funny part. I thought that overall the film is pretty serious, but very engaging and not tragic, not pitiful. It did not look like a Jerry Lewis telethon.

MIKE: Mmhmm.

CHERYL: To me, it wasn't sad at all. Somebody in the audience insisted--and I say insisted only because they brought it up in the forum and then came up to me, personally, and brought it up again. So to me, that's when it became insistent.

MIKE: I see.

CHERYL: And then, when I walked away, they brought it up to Andy.

MIKE: Uh-huh.

CHERYL: So somebody in the audience said something along the lines of, "This is really heavy. And don't you think it would be helpful if you would train people to start with something funny? Start off with a good sense of humor, and describe your speech to people, and then they'll wanna buy in, and they'll warm up, and they'll want to listen to you.

MIKE: Hmm.

CHERYL: That's kind of an amalgamation of the three different versions I heard of it.

MIKE: I see.

CHERYL: They didn't say all those things in the open group. But there was some insistence that in order for me to want to listen to you--as a person who stutters--I need you to crack a joke and tell me it's gonna be OK first.

MIKE: Hmm.

CHERYL: So it's all about me.

MIKE: I see.

CHERYL: I was pretty grossed out by the question.

MIKE: [chuckles]

CHERYL: You handled it really well. You didn't appear grossed out at all.

MIKE: Uh-huh.

CHERYL: But you didn't set out to make a sad movie. What do you think is going on? Or what, what's? What...was that?

MIKE: I can see his point, in a sense, I guess just like from a film perspective. And I guess this goes for life too: if someone can make you laugh, it is like a really warm feeling, and it's like a really engaging way to interact with someone. And with a film too, you're making entertainment. Even a documentary, I feel like, has to be entertaining and have a story and have some jokes, maybe. I don't know [laughs]. Hopefully, there were some parts that made this person kinda laugh or smile in the documentary. But as you were saying too, it's not always the time for it. There were a lot of people that I talked to that I would not start my interview by trying to make them laugh or tell them some funny story about stuttering, you know? It's like it just happens to be one of those things that can make you feel very vulnerable, and sometimes a laugh is good. But sometimes it's just not the time for it, you know? I didn't talk about stuttering really until I started planning this film. My brother stutters too, and I'd never talked with him about it. And so it did take a long time before we could actually start laughing about it, which now, luckily we can. He calls me up and tells me these funny experiences that happened to him out in the world and the kind of reactions he gets. But it did take us a long time to work up to that.

CHERYL: Yeah. I think that this audience member, based on the relationship they were talking about to people who stutter, I think this person was feeling very vulnerable by watching your film and being confronted with so many people who stuttered so openly and spoke honest truth.

MIKE: Mmhmm.

CHERYL: In your film, nobody seems to be coddling the audience: Well, I'll let you know what I think you wanna hear. I feel like this person felt very vulnerable, and yet they put it on you to make them feel better.

MIKE: Hmm.

CHERYL: Insisting that people who stutter need to reassure the audience that it's gonna be OK before you launch into your actual ideas. Do you feel like it's your responsibility or people in the stuttering community, it's your responsibility to reassure non-stutterers?

MIKE: Well, certainly not, but I think the more open we can be about it--and that doesn't have to be in a humorous way, but just--I do feel like something in the way I communicate changed once I started keeping eye contact through a block, for example, to just show this might not be funny to me, but I'm talking with you and this might take longer. But this isn't necessarily something I'm ashamed of. This is just part of it. And I do think that just being open and being present through it is really hard for those of us who stutter. Because for a long time it was something that I wanted to black out, you know, and just get through a block in any way I could. If someone had cracked a joke at that point, [chuckles] that would not have been a positive thing for me. But I feel like now I've gotten every response possible, and so this whole process of making the film has made me a little bit more confident when I'm talking with people. And so if someone says something that I don't think is appropriate, it's not something I'm gonna take away and hold tight the way I would when I was younger.

CHERYL: Hallelujah. That's a hard thing just in general, is to let go of the negative feedback and move forward in general. But when it has to do with your communication, when you're trying to communicate something to someone and they don't accept your style of communication, that means they're gonna reject the message too.

Community and Pride

CHERYL: I wanna talk about the coming together. There was a huge range of people there.

MIKE: Yes.

CHERYL: So that's a nice thing about a film screening is a coming together. And I brought this up last night too: One of the things that I really love about the film is how many people openly say, "I felt like I was alone. Growing up, I didn't know anybody else who stuttered, and I felt like I'm the only one who struggles to speak. And then I met other people who stutter. Now I'm not alone," and just what relief there is in the coming together.

MIKE: Mmhmm.

CHERYL: And I like the choice. And I'm curious about your choice to have that be a recurring thing that so many people in the film said over and over.

MIKE: Mmhmm. Yeah, I do think that everyone feels alone at times. And everyone has some kind of issue that can make you feel pretty vulnerable or isolated. And growing up, I really identified as a stutter. That was like I felt like it really held me back in a lot of ways. And it was something that I didn't want to show to anybody, or I would be rejected from society, which of course, now I know is not true. But it was something that I just didn't want out there. And I would go to pretty ridiculous lengths, at times, to not have to talk in public. And that was the case, even though my brother stuttered too, my mom stuttered when she was younger. But it just wasn't anything that we ever talked about. We would--me and Ryan would--go to speech therapy, we would come home, and that was it. And it never improved. And so it became not only this thing that I was kind of embarrassed about, but it kind of, over being in speech therapy for 10 years without any improvement, I feel like anyone would kind of start to feel pretty insecure about what's happening there, you know? And it wasn't anything that I wanted to ask about. So anyway, I just kind of internalized it more and more.

And so I think walking into a room where everybody is introducing themselves and stuttering, I think can be really paradigm shifting, just in one moment. Like the ground under you is just split open, and you're kind of in this place where you can just talk and not have to worry about it. And so I think a support group can be a really, it's just the coolest thing, you know? And that first time there, I'll never forget it. And I still go back every month to just kind of check in because if a month goes by, and I don't have that kind of interaction, I can kind of lose that spark, that feeling that it's actually OK to go out into the world and stutter, and that there's other people out there. And there's people who understand it. Whether they stutter or not, there's people that are just patient and kind. I think meeting young people who stutter too at the group who come for the first time is really powerful. And I feel like it makes me want to stutter better and be more open because if I interact with someone in the world and stutter, it's not my responsibility to explain to them what stuttering is. But if I do, then the next time an 8 year old comes in and stutters, they might pause before making some crack or try to hurry him along. I just feel like if people can understand it and recognize it, there's just more patience for it and more appreciation for it too. I feel like now, going to the group, I just really do like being there and like listening to people. It's not like a problem, in my opinion.

CHERYL: I think it's really beautiful what you said. I agree with you that it's not really your responsibility to lecture and educate people out in the community about what stuttering is. I think it would be nice if people were just like, "Oh, now it's Mike's turn to talk. Now it's my turn," and not have to do this whole big deconstruction of gosh, you're so different from me. I need to know why. I need you to tell me all about it. So I love that. You were talking about the young people, and it's neat what you said about young people. And you talked about TOPS and raising money for them. Do you wanna talk about that here so people know what that is and if they wanna support it?

MIKE: Sure. TOPS is a really important thing in Portland right now. It stands for Teens Out Promoting Stuttering. It's a group for teens who stutter. But it's not like a meeting in that kind of sense. They'll just go to a hockey game or have a game-pizza night. They're actually kayaking right now with you know the speech therapist in the movie, Glenn?

CHERYL: Yeah.

MIKE: He's also a kayak guide. He has like 15 teenagers right now out on the Columbia river. And it's just a really cool opportunity for young people to just know that they're not alone. And even if they end up talking about heavy stuff or not, it's just I think it's really cool for them to have friends who stutter too.

CHERYL: Yeah. And in the name of it, promoting stuttering, are they going out doing direct action and talking about stuttering? Or are they promoting stuttering because they're simply out and about?

MIKE: That's a good question, and I'm not completely sure. I think probably both. I just think when they go out and order pizza, and there's 15 kids there, and all of them stutter, I feel like you can't help but notice it. They went to a hockey game, and they had their group name kinda flash up on the big monitor over the stadium, Teens Out Promoting Stuttering. Thousands of people in the stadium got to see that. So it's just cool that there just out there doing that and in a way just doing really good work and spreading awareness, but also just having fun and chilling with each other.

CHERYL: What I like about that and that they showed up on the Jumbotron, I'm sure it's--

MIKE: Jumbotron, yeah.

CHERYL: Is it actually a full-on Jumbotron here?

MIKE: Yeah.

CHERYL: OK, excellent.

MIKE: I was trying to think of the name for that.

CHERYL: When you said "monitor" I thought maybe we didn't have a full-on Jumbotron in Portland.

MIKE: [laughs] No, there is a Jumbotron.

CHERYL: I don't ever go out to sporting events ever cuz they're loud and they have people at them. And those are things I don't like.

MIKE: I see.

CHERYL: Yeah. What I like is that I know there's so much history around well, it's not only history cuz I do read and keep up with some of the stuttering literature from the speech pathology world. I do sometimes still read that stuff. And there are still people--historically, I think there were more, but there are still people--who say you can't be happy, you should not be proud of yourself or your speech or your communication, and you really need to knock off the stuttering at all costs. You need to stop so that you--and I'm not exaggerating or making this up. There are people who really openly promote that there is nothing to be proud of and that society has no obligation to support you as long as you're still speaking that way. And so to have Teens Out Promoting Stuttering, yay! I don't like the word normal.

But I do kinda like the word "normalizing." And I do think it's important to normalize because it's just part of reality the world over. Some people stutter.

MIKE: Yeah.

CHERYL: It's just kind of a normal thing that some people talk in one way and some people talk in another way and another way and another way. That's part of reality.

MIKE: Yeah.

CHERYL: And I'm not an advocate of picking one group of people and saying, "You, group, you should be ashamed of the way you speak." I really, I don't support that.

MIKE: Mmhmm.

CHERYL: [chuckles] So I like the sound of this group. And they're a non-profit, right? So they do some fundraising?

MIKE: Yeah, I guess so. But it's a pretty new group too. So I think they're still kind of figuring all that out.

Mixed Experiences with Speech Therapists

MIKE: But yeah, I do agree with you that there is a lot of kind of weird attitudes in the speech pathology world. I feel like I really encountered both, working on this project. There were some speech therapists who would just get it. And then there were some whose attitude was kind of astonishing, like people at major universities who had this, what I would call, kind of like a backwoods mentality about stuttering that really kinda knocked me over. Because just from being in Portland in our group where a lot of speech pathologists come, and they're so positive and so understanding, that I guess it kind of caught me off guard to meet people who were just not into that. Like this is not anything to accept. It's kind of complicated. And I'm still kind of working out my feelings about it.

But I feel like when you look at the facts about stuttering, the only thing that really comes to the surface is that it's very complicated and very different for each person. And so to say there's a certain amount of stuttering that's acceptable by society, I feel like is not a good standard just because every person's line is going to be different. And people that have very severe stuttering often have just incredible things to say. There are people who have a much harder time to speak than me. I mean, obviously, I'm pretty comfortable right now, feeling pretty fluent. Sometimes it is harder for me to talk, much harder for me to talk than it is right now. But there are people whose level of stuttering I've never experienced and are very worthwhile to hearing them out. I mean, it goes without saying. But if they don't want to change their stuttering, that doesn't mean anyone should stop listening to them, you know? I do still struggle with the idea of speech pathology. Like, if I had a kid who stutters, would I send them to a speech therapist? Honestly, I don't know yet. Just because I had a lot of negative experiences. And even the idea that they have to change I think is like we're just all on our own process of accepting who we are and figuring out who we are.

CHERYL: Now, I'm not sure if you know, I'm a speech therapy dropout.

MIKE: I did not know that.

CHERYL: Yeah. Just wanted to just let you know that [laughs]. I was in speech therapy in 2010. I had negative experiences, so I dropped out before I was finished. I don't know your story. So I don't know if

we would relate on stories. But to leave that situation and say, "That doesn't feel good. That feels negative," I can relate to that part of it.

MIKE: Mmhmm.

CHERYL: I don't think that speech therapy is necessarily the perfect match for all people. And like you were saying in the talkback, maybe you had negative experiences cuz you weren't in the right place to receive it.

MIKE: Totally, totally.

CHERYL: We don't know. Maybe the speech therapy, maybe you weren't ready, maybe it was both. I think it's good to have some skepticism around rehab, that it's not the perfect match for everybody.

MIKE: Mmhmm.

CHERYL: And that there's something to be said about saying, "Nope, I'm kinda proud of the way I talk anyway. I'm good. I got this."

MIKE: Mmhmm. Yeah, I think I had to get to a pretty low point to actually go to a support group, to actually feel like I had nowhere else to go, that I actually had to start looking at it. And when I was younger, I could just ignore it. Yeah, I think it is a really complicated issue, speech therapy. And I'm still not really equipped to talk about it. But there was one experience in the film where we were able to meet a speech therapist from Osaka, Japan. It was interesting because he doesn't do speech tools at all. He's a speech therapist. But he doesn't work on that part of it. He just works on helping people develop a confident attitude. And as my wife and I were leaving his office, I was just like, "How does he get clients, you know? What kind of parent would send their kid to a speech therapist that doesn't work on tools?" And she was just like, "A parent that actually knows what stuttering is." And I feel like that was the moment when a lot of stuff just kind of clicked for me, just like yeah. I mean, parents aren't going to send their kids to a speech therapist like that because they just don't get it yet.

CHERYL: And they think that maybe, well maybe we can cure this with some sessions.

MIKE: Right, mmhmm.

CHERYL: It's not something that you cure. But I also like when we question why is it that we insist that people be cured. I'm not convinced that it's the right attitude to take that certain speakers need to be cured of the way they speak.

MIKE: Mmhmm.

CHERYL: But even if somebody does want a "cure," there isn't one, right?

MIKE: Right, that's true.

CHERYL: Yeah. In the meantime, it's good to feel like a confident communicator.

MIKE: Yeah.

CHERYL: That scene was very moving. And I like how, rather than give him subtitles, the translator was there. And so we got to hear them speaking one after the other. That was neat. And what was the phrase? Not "let it go." What was it?

MIKE: Oh, giving up.

CHERYL: Give up, yeah.

MIKE: Yeah.

CHERYL: But in a positive way, give up.

MIKE: Right. Yeah, just a very Japanese idea where giving up is something you aspire to.

CHERYL: Yeah, right, right. Because I mean, do you wanna be Sisyphus?

MIKE: [laughs]

CHERYL: Do you wanna keep pushing?

MIKE: Right.

CHERYL: If you wanna keep pushing that boulder up that hill knowing that tomorrow you're gonna push it up again, and you'll never get to the top.

MIKE: Right.

CHERYL: If you want that, yeah.

MIKE: Yeah, and in the film, he explains that giving up doesn't have the same context as it does in our culture where you're like, "Oh, we give up." In their culture, that phrase often means to just look deeply at something, to stop struggling and just look at it and try and see exactly what it is. And you can keep doing what you're doing. But if there's no cure for something, like I think it is hard to say it: there's no cure for stuttering. And a lot of speech therapists might not want to tell their clients that because some people do improve, and improve meaning they stutter less. So it just was cool to get that perspective from a different culture and just a totally different kind of therapy. Cuz up until I had met [Shinji Ito](#), even the most accepting speech therapist from our country I talked to, there's still that goal of we want it to go away. Yeah, stuttering's cool. But really, we want it to go away [laughs]. And I feel that. But it's not something I can say that I'm proud of yet, to stutter. But it certainly is a good feeling to be with other people who stutter. And when I hear other people stutter, I don't want them to be different, you know? And so yeah, I guess it is just like a bunch of mixed emotions. Would I want my kids to stutter? No, I wouldn't. But would I take it out of me? No, I wouldn't. So it just is a very mixed issue [chuckles].

Complexity

CHERYL: It is. And I appreciate that about the film. And I think it's really important for people to see that because, for instance, do you ever watch Nina G. Comedian?

MIKE: No.

CHERYL: Well, why not? You stutter! You should.

MIKE: [laughs]

CHERYL: No, just kidding.

MIKE: I should.

CHERYL: [laughs] I thought it was required watching.

MIKE: Uh-huh.

CHERYL: Why did I bring up Nina? Well, she stutters. But she's very, very proud of the trolls that she gets on her YouTube Channel.

MIKE: Mm.

CHERYL: So she's got lots of comedy clips up there. And she has lots of haters.

MIKE: [chuckles] Uh-huh, nice.

CHERYL: And she will very proudly display on Facebook, "Look at what this one said!" And they're just, they're very cruel and hateful. And a lot of them are like, "I can tell she's faking that st-st-st-st-stutter." And they'll write it like that.

MIKE: Whoa.

CHERYL: First of all, number one, no you can't. Number two, what? Who cares? Why are you attacking her for faking? "Oh, you're a cheat, Nina! You stole this little gimmick." [laughs] It's like, what?

MIKE: Uh-huh.

CHERYL: And she posts pictures of these pictures on Facebook. And it actually bumps up her pride. She's like, "Yeah. Yeah! Go ahead. Try and shoot me down because you're not gonna be able to. Because I know who I am, and I speak just fine. And my material's really funny." And it is funny. And like I was saying last night at your screening, she doesn't crack jokes about what it's like to stutter. She cracks jokes about all the horrible things people say to her in response to her stuttering. But the way she tells the stories, it ends up being very funny. When people troll her and put these nasty comments up, it's clear to me that they're not thinking of stuttering in any complex way.

MIKE: Sure, yeah.

CHERYL: And they're not appreciating the complexity. That's another really valuable thing about your film is that it shows a lot of complexity. You're no less complex than someone who doesn't stutter. Obvs.

MIKE: Mmhmm.

CHERYL: [laughing] Why wouldn't it be complex?

MIKE: Uh-huh.

CHERYL: Is there anything I haven't asked you about yet that you want to talk about, about filmmaking or stuttering?

"Who Am I To Stop It" and Audience Diversity

MIKE: How's your film coming?

CHERYL: Oh, my film? My film is in, I think we're at the fine edit stage. So we have five rough cuts. We just picked our music.

MIKE: Oh cool.

CHERYL: So it's gonna be needle-drop, no composition. We'll just throw in some already recorded music. It's a real goal of mine to not emphasize how people got their brain injuries in my film. So I think every brain injury documentary I've ever seen starts with somebody describing how they got hurt, which--

MIKE: Falling off a stage, having a piano fall on them.

CHERYL: Yes, exactly.

MIKE: Construction accident.

CHERYL: Yes. Those are the more common ones. The piano falling on the head is the most common actually for a certain age group.

MIKE: [laughing] Yeah.

CHERYL: But it does always start with these graphic details. My stomach turns. I don't wanna hear that stuff.

MIKE: Sure.

CHERYL: We made it a point to not record people telling those stories. So in the interviews, we never asked them those stories. But then, in their daily lives, those stories came up. And we still recorded it. So there's one guy telling the story of his wreck. But I don't wanna show any visual images that evoke the idea of the kind of wreck that he was in.

MIKE: Sure.

CHERYL: It was a car wreck. And so we've been back and forth for months about what do we do during that segment to honor his story, to not chop it up and throw the details out, but to also not be so ham-fisted about it the way most brain injury media is, where you just come right out and give all the gory details. I mean, I hear these stories. People tell you what part of their head was bleeding and all these. I'm like, "No!"

MIKE: Mhmm.

CHERYL: I would like to get to know you. I don't wanna know the scary, scary details of what happened that day.

MIKE: Mhmm.

CHERYL: It makes me cry. It makes my head hurt. We were talking about complexity in stuttering. I find that a lot of people wanna know the crash story. And after they hear the crash story, they don't have any more questions for the person.

MIKE: I see, yeah.

CHERYL: Like, do you go to school? Do you have a job? Do you have siblings? Do you have a cat? I don't ever hear those questions in the brain injury community. I just hear: "How did it happen?"

MIKE: Hmm.

CHERYL: And so I like to promote not sharing the wreck story because then we can skip that and get to the kind of human contact that other people seem to be allowed to have.

MIKE: Mmhmm.

CHERYL: What's your last name? I can't tell you how many people don't know my last name, but they've asked me, "How did it happen? Was it traumatic!?" I'm like, whoa, whoa. That's not an OK first question to ask me. I'm supposed to be the one with messed up social skills. What are you doing?

MIKE: Mmhmm.

CHERYL: That was a long story.

MIKE: [chuckles]

CHERYL: So but the movie's almost done. We're gonna do Audio Description and Closed Captioning, and then it'll be done done.

MIKE: Cool.

CHERYL: I think released around January or February or so.

MIKE: Cool.

CHERYL: Second place?

BOTH: [laugh]

MIKE: You'll have a plaque for that too. But yeah, I like what you're saying about restraint. I think it is what you're talking about. I just really like films that show that. I think it's pretty uncommon.

CHERYL: Oh, thank you. Cuz I've definitely gotten criticisms from it even though it's not out yet. I've gotten--I've had some non-disabled men, and it's specifically non-disabled men, who tell me I'm not doing it right and I'm not putting together a film that audiences want to see. But what I want them to recognize is that as non-disabled men, they don't actually represent the diversity of what audiences want.

MIKE: Mmhmm.

CHERYL: And some audiences do want something different.

MIKE: Oh yeah.

CHERYL: Surprise [chuckles]! So I appreciate that you appreciate where I'm coming from.

MIKE: For sure, yeah.

CHERYL: And you also didn't do that. There was openness and honesty and truth in your movie but also restraint. Like you restrained, you didn't use all the academic jargon and try to define things. Things just unfolded. Information unfolded naturally in the course of your film rather than you smacking people on the head with it.

MIKE: Yeah, I mean, I have to admit I did not like "Avengers 2." I have kind of weird taste in movies.

CHERYL: I haven't seen it.

MIKE: Don't bother [laughs].

CHERYL: OK, it's a deal.

MIKE: What people think that people want to see in a movie, I feel like is not always accurate.

CHERYL: No.

MIKE: Usually not. Like often it's stuff that's a little bit different.

CHERYL: That's the thing is there are different audiences. There are gonna be people who don't wanna see a documentary about stuttering. And there's gonna be other people who are like, "Crap. I never thought of that. How interesting is that?"

MIKE: Uh-huh.

CHERYL: And then you're gonna have the people who say, "Thank gawd somebody finally made this film cuz it's so honest." You're gonna get all of it. Like all movies do. There's no movie out there that everybody likes, right? Is there? "Avengers 1"?

MIKE: "Groundhog Day?"

CHERYL: OK, you win [laughs]. Your second plaque will be in the mail.

MIKE: All right.

CHERYL: That was a good movie. I don't remember it. But I know I liked it when I watched it.

MIKE: Yeah, I love it.

CHERYL: Good [chuckles]

Wrap up

CHERYL: Tell folks where they can find you and stuff about the film online.

MIKE: Yeah, sure. You can find out more about the film at TheWayWeTalk.org. We're [on Facebook](#). We're [on Twitter](#). And we will just be posting screenings as they're booked. We're going to be at the 2015 ASHA Conference in Denver. And we'll just be showing the film in a lot of different festivals and universities through next summer. So hopefully it'll come to your area.

CHERYL: Yeah, great. And ASHA is the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. So specialty conference for speech therapists and audiologists.

MIKE: Yeah [laughs]! Yeah, don't just show up at that one. It's like a \$300 registration fee.

CHERYL: OK, great. Folks can follow you online. And they'll see when the screenings are coming.

MIKE: Yeah.

CHERYL: And then it will be released in 2016 for everybody.

MIKE: Yes, yes. Thank you so much for having me, Cheryl.

CHERYL: Oh, it was a pleasure. It was great to have you on. Thank you so much for being on the show and talking about your beautiful film. And I wish it much success!

MIKE: Thank you.

[music]

CHERYL: Thanks for joining me for another episode of Stories from the brainreels. Find more handy info on brain injury and disability art and culture on my disability arts blog, WhoAmItoStopIt.com.

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