

Stories from the brainreels Transcript

November 1, 2013

Introduction

[music]

CHERYL: Welcome to Stories from the brainreels. I'm your host, Cheryl Green, from StoryMinders up in sunny Portland, Oregon. This is a monthly podcast about brain injury and disability with a focus on art, culture, and disability pride. Contact me at info@storyminders.com with questions or topics and guests you want to hear on an upcoming show.

[music]

Welcome to Stories from the brainreels for November, 2013. Today I'm taking a little break from interviewing other artists to talk a little bit about some projects I've been a part of.

On November 23rd, we'll be premiering a set of three short films that I helped produce. The set is called "The Tablet Shorts, Out." I'll tell you why it's called that in a little bit.

RACC grant and "The Tablet Shorts, Out"

I got a grant this year from the [Regional Arts and Culture Council](#) to work one on one with three people with brain injuries to create their own short films. I think I did this to try to prove a point. Basically, when people find out I make films about brain injury and disability experiences, it's easy to assume that I am more capable than people with brain injury who don't make films and that that's why I make them. I'm praised for helping those people and for teaching them to focus on what they CAN do.

So let me take a moment to say "BLECH!" and "No!"

The way I see it, there are two main reasons that I make films and some people with brain injury don't:

1. I want to make films, and some people don't.
2. I have tremendous access to resources that some people don't have. I'm not saying this to show off. I'm saying this because I believe access to tools and resources is the most important difference. And it's being overlooked by people who genuinely mean well.

I have great equipment, professional editing software, training in the arts, and time on my hands. I have a high-speed internet at home so I can watch video editing tutorials anytime I wanna solve a problem. I also live right by 3 great bus lines. So I can load up my gear and go. Being part of the disability and mixed ability arts community for over 10 years has also played a

huge role. I'm surrounded by people who support my work in arts and activism. My family is also really into my film work. A lot of people with brain injury don't have some or any of these kinds of supports and access.

Did you notice that I didn't say I make films and other people don't because "I'm less impaired than other people" or "I'm more motivated" or "I'm more positive"? Because I didn't say those things. Because those things are unfair and, frankly, rather irrelevant. I wanna make films AND I have access to all the resources I need to make them. That's why I make them.

Now, it's true that I have a lot of friends who have more impairments from brain injury than I do. But I find that pretty much beside the point. Because if you give each of us the right tools, training, supports, and resources, the level or type of impairment isn't an issue.

Also. And I really wanna make this clear to the people who thank me for teaching other folks with brain injury to focus on their strengths and to find their lingering talents: I don't say these things to a person with a brain injury. It's not my call whether someone should focus on their strengths. It's not my call to say what someone's strengths are. I also have no right to tell someone what their remaining talents are. More importantly, I think it's very harmful to say that people with brain injury are still valuable and valued because we have remaining skills and talents. I believe we are valuable no matter. Whether or not we can pursue the things we used to or that we want to should not be used to rank our value. So I want people to stop seeing me as more of a contributor than people who have more impairments. They are contributing. But without the resources to produce and publicize their stories, you simply aren't aware of it. So I worked on these films to share the access.

That's my soapbox. It's important to me that people recognize that it is society keeping more stories of brain injury out of the public. It's not people's lack of abilities or talents to share their stories.

So on that cheery note! Let me tell you about the films that we made now for The Tablet Shorts, Out.

I worked with Joel Campos, Marih Alyn-Claire and Sam Vranizan. Joel and Marih are in the brain injury camp. I'm not sure if Sam puts himself in that camp because he has cerebral palsy. That's usually labeled as a developmental disability because it's present at the beginning of life. But I think it counts because CP is caused by some type of brain injury. So he's in my club if he wants to be!

Joel had made some short films while he was in high school, but the other two had not made films before. Both Marih and Sam have experience with doing a lot of performance onstage.

I basically approached all three and said "Do you want to make a five minute film about anything you want? We're going to film and edit the entire thing on a tablet computer because we can." And that was it.

The project was called "Brain Injury Shorts" when I wrote the grant for it because I can never think of good working titles. Also, I figured that like most people in the brain injury community, they would choose to make short films about their experiences around their brains. Wrong! And how happily wrong I was!

I was also wrong that it's a good idea to film or attempt to edit on an Asus tablet, which leads to the project's title, "The Tablet Shorts, Out."

Basically, that darn tablet shorted out a lot while we were filming. It would freeze up, or the camera app would just die completely. Sometimes the video quality was beautiful. And other times it was disgusting even though nothing had changed in the room or the lighting. I've seen some gorgeous iPad films. So for anyone wanting to do some filming on a tablet, please, just use an iPad. I'm not getting a kickback. I don't even love Apple products across the board. I just think Asus isn't ready with their camera or editing technology. So do yourself a favor if you want to do low budget films and digital storytelling: iPad.

But the other part of that title "The Tablet Shorts, Out" is in that little pause before "out". "The Tablet Shorts, Out." The word "out" is something I want to borrow from the LGBTQIA community, the idea of coming out. These films are not about sexuality or sexual orientation like you might think of when you hear the phrase "coming out." They are unique, original, and fantastic, and they are the ideas of the storytellers themselves. Because so many people have told me that I am the one showing these folks their talents, I wanted to be clear in the title: I believe society closes a door in front of people with disabilities. We're waiting there, chomping at the bit to find someone who will acknowledge that doors are being closed on us. Now these three storytellers are not hiding in some kind of closet keeping these stories to themselves. I didn't have to convince any of them to do the project. All I did was show up with the gear and walk with them.

So I kind of see my mentorship and letting them borrow all my equipment for free as getting the stories "out". You get to learn some great things about these folks by watching their films this way. One great thing is, again, I didn't come up with any of the ideas. The creativity and storytelling belongs to these folks even though they belong to a group that is usually considered to be not very talented or skilled. Or a group that is only supposed to be doing rehab and therapy, not art.

So, the films! There's three of them.

[Sam's film is a comedy](#) that explores the idea that you should not judge someone based on what they look like and what you think they can do. He takes standard expectations of disabled folks and flips them completely on their head then rights them again at the end. It's very poignant and funny.

[Joel's film is a horror comedy](#) about obsessions taking control over people. It's visually and auditorily saturated and immerses you into the depths of one man's bizarre world. It's got tons of audio and visual special effects. A real treat for the senses. But be careful if you can't stand blinking lights, cuz it's got them for a minute at the beginning.

[Marih's film is about the responsibility people have](#) for maintaining their health and keeping healthcare costs down. But a major problem with that is that much housing--especially low-income housing--doesn't have kitchens that are adequate for people to be able to cook healthily at home. She also looks at food from a black cultural perspective.

So, I think you know this now, but again, I had nothing to do with any of those creative ideas. The three wrote their own scripts, shared the directing with me, and shared the editing with me. I wish I'd also had them help me with the sound recordings because I didn't do a great job at that.

The other problem: it turns out that the editing app I could get for an Android device is horribly horrible. I couldn't get it to work for anything. So instead of being able to bring the tablet to the artists and share the editing right there together in the artists' space, I threw everything on my home computer to edit. My house is completely physically inaccessible in every way possible, so that posed barriers we simply couldn't get past. With some of the films, I edited by myself and then sent the artists what I had done. They sent me back suggestions, changes, and feedback. Then, I sent a new version. That's OK, but that meant they didn't have as much creative input as I'd planned for. Still, they definitely were involved in every step of making the films, and we adapted because that's what we do. Since Joel lives near my place, he did come over, and we edited together. That was very cool.

I'm very excited to be sharing these films with the public. We will have DVDs with all three short films on them for sale at the event.

Details of the premiere screening of "The Tablet Shorts, Out."

Saturday, November 23rd, 2013

3:30 - 5:00 pm

Hipbone Studios at 1847 E. Burnside Street on the #20 bus line.

Wheelchair accessible entrance is from the parking lot on NE 18th.

Films will all be closed captioned. Live audio description will be available as well.

Please be as scent-free as possible. That means no perfumes or even essential oils like sandalwood. The space is not totally scent free. But we can help each other out a ton by not wearing any extra scents.

Please contact me to reserve a seat at info@storyminders.com or 503-432-3169. Let me know if you have accommodations requests at that time.

We'll see you Saturday, November 23rd, 2013 at 3:30 pm. The event details will also be up on the blog at www.whoamitostopit.com and www.facebook.com/StoryMinders later this month!

Presenting on personal narrative and film in rehab at ASHA

The other thing I wanted to talk about is Chicago. In a couple weeks I'll be going to Chicago to co-present at the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association's national convention. It's quite a coup to present at the national convention given that I'm not even a speech-language pathologist. But that's sort of the back story to what and why I'm presenting. I did train as one. But the bike wreck sort of screwed up my schedule for showing up to work. And then I became a patient. And then I left the field for good.

Last year, Dr. Rik Lemoncello and Lisa Stember--two wonderful local speech pathologists--and I co-presented at the state conference. We showed my two short comedy films "Cooking" and "Friending with Brain Injury!" and talked about the importance of making cognitive rehabilitation relevant to the patient who's in rehab. That means letting us tell our personal stories and give you our personal preferences on what goals we wanna work on and how. It also means finding ways to get far, far, far, far, far away from boring worksheets and instead find ways for us to work on our skills doing activities that actually mean something to us. If you listened to the last episode of this show or you read my blog at whoamitostopit.com, you're well aware by now that I am a cognitive rehabilitation drop-out. I couldn't keep going because the worksheets were way too boring and irrelevant, and my speech therapist was working on some goals that mattered to me but not many. Worse, when I mentioned what I DID wanna work on, that was pushed aside. So I dropped out.

Around that time, I started writing and making films. As I got more and more into films, I realized that in fact, I was improving on a lot of skills that got pretty messed up by the bike wreck. I didn't go into film to rehabilitate myself, but it was happening. That felt pretty damn cool. Here I was, working on something that was pretty much the most motivating thing in the world for me second to hanging out with kitties, and my brain was coming back to life too. I also

got my social life back in order, which is something huge numbers of my community struggle with at some time or another.

So Rik, Lisa and I put this presentation together. Wouldn't you know it, but there's actually a lot of very good research out there these days that supports the idea of working on projects and activities that the patient loves, focusing on the patient's life-world, and deciding whether worksheets are appropriate AFTER you meet the person, not before they show up. So we're presenting on that: oral histories for people with TBI, drama clubs for people with aphasia after a stroke, my films. People are studying this stuff as scientists and finding that it not only brings joy and improved skills to the patients but that it helps clinicians have less stigma against us and helps them form higher, more realistic opinions about us.

I understand why the worksheets are used. I honestly do. I can even see that they might have real value for some people on some isolated skills. But in the end, why do we go to speech therapy and to rehabilitation? Is it to improve on isolated skills? Or is it to enhance our lives overall? I think it's the second. Frankly, some of us couldn't care less how well we "perform" on tasks. We want access to a great life and to a community that respects us. And I think we can get closer to that by storytelling, films, blogging, art, and music than we can by generating a stack of completed worksheets that may or may not even be correctly filled out.

So we're off to Chicago to talk about all of that. I plan to have a most excellent time playing in the snow while everyone's at their workshops. Then I'll show up for our presentation and go back to the snow. Brrr.

Wrap up

The documentary is in great shape. Cynthia is editing a trailer right now. I hope you will keep up with the blog and check out photos from the documentary footage at facebook.com/whoamitostopit.

My guests on the next two episodes are a couple of poets and amazing people all around, Jackie and Rick. I'm not sure who's going to be broadcast first. But you'll get two episodes in a row with some poetry, some really thought-provoking stuff, cross disability conversation, and hopefully some Olympic games. Stay tuned and thank you for listening!

[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.

[music]