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JMS 4 – Television

RagingFerrets

SELF-REFLECTIVE ESSAY

Our initial idea for a 24 minute documentary was a story on the tequila production in Graaff Reniet. The reason as to why we thought this would be an interesting piece was that it is the only place in the world, besides Mexico, which is producing tequila. We wanted to explore the cacti fields and examine the production of the tequila; also focusing on the fact that this town is situated in the middle of the Karoo and people are unaware of this phenomenon.

However, we realized that the story would not work in the sense that it would just end up being a very general story about the town. We were then told about a story which had been published in Grocott's Mail, about a rehabilitation centre just outside Grahamstown, called Salem Crossroads.

On our arrival to the centre we realized that Salem Crossroads has a different functional system in comparison to other usual Rehabilitation centres. The centre, which is non-profitable for the owner and is also Christian based, was started by Mr Noel Banfield after receiving a calling from God, telling him to help those that needed help. The centre resembles a farm like way of life, whereby the clients plant their own vegetables to sell and also as source of food supply for themselves. They also produce their own plants, mostly from cuttings, which they also sell at the little stall outside the centre. The most interesting fact about the centre is that it is meant only for white males. This is because, as according to Mr Banfield, whites are the ones that are suffering nowadays because of systems such as BEE etc. and males because he does not know how to relate to women in the sense that he is male, he knows more about male problems and he can thus connect with them on a much deeper level. Our documentary was then born.

On our first arrival at the centre, we had a discussion with Mr Banfield about what we were planning to do with regards to the layout of the documentary. After the introductions I already felt a bit uncomfortable; especially after introducing myself to him and he said that he would never remember my name. I had never felt so "exposed" as a

black female, until that moment. Thus my attitude towards the centre became highly negative and every trip to the centre proved to be quite a mission for me as I had highly offended. There were days when I felt like not going to the centre, but I had to, for the sake of my group. In essence if this had been an individual project, I would have cancelled it at that moment; I probably would not have been allowed to do it in the first place because I am female and I am black.

Besides the discomfort, we decided to stick with the story, focusing on Salem Crossroads as our main subject of investigation. But our task was hindered by Mr Banfield's refusal of speaking on camera; even though he had prayed about it, God told him that he should not participate. His refusal was also strengthened by him not wanting to seem like he is showing off for his good deeds. Another hindering factor was that most of the clients at the centre did not feel comfortable relaying their stories on camera for various reasons such as: some of them do not want their families to find out that they are residing at this centre and also, it is too painful for them to talk about their addiction and the things that have done as a result of either drugs or alcohol.

Initially, the only person willing to talk to us was Wayne and he proved to be a very good source and subject because of his openness and good nature. We then decided that we would make the documentary into sort of a profile as we only had one subject. But we decided to persevere and that is how we finally found Shane, our second subject. Both Shane and Wayne proved to be sufficient for our documentary because although they are both recovering drug addicts in the same rehabilitation centre, they are also very different in terms of their attitude, and also their backgrounds.

In terms of the making of the piece we decide to keep our way of working, in the sense that we did not have specific roles. We decided that since we have been working in this manner for the whole year and it has worked very well for us, having specific roles within the production of the piece would throw us off; trying a different method at such a crucial time would work against us. However, Richard became our spokesperson as he is very good with words and he seemed to have been the one who warmed up to Mr Banfield the most. He was also our main interviewer although, if any of the rest of us felt that we had further questions that he might have missed, we would ask them. And I would help out in drawing up the questions that he would be asking. Bryce became our

main camera man because most of the shooting was done without a tripod as our subjects would be moving around a lot and Bryce is the steadiest with a hand held camera. I however took over when it came to shooting cutaways for the piece so that Bryce would not have to do all the camera work. Thus this left Graeme and me to focus on the sound.

Although these were sort of specific roles, we were all involved in the direction of the roles. In the sense that we would give each other ideas or directions on how we thought different things would work within these "specific roles". Hence, we were all always there for the shootings at all times except for one day where I was not present because I had to go home for a funeral. Either than that occasion, we were all present at all times as a team. The idea of having set specific roles would have meant that some of the team members would not be present in some of the filming and post-production; and since this was a team effort, it meant that we all wanted to have an input in the project from beginning to end.

When it came to the post production, we took turns in editing the documentary, giving each other breaks. Because of the length of the documentary, it proved to be a difficult, yet do-able task, with four people in the tiny edit suite all the time. This also worked out well because we could then have debates on what would and would not work for the piece. It took us quite a while to really start editing this piece because we all had different ideas on what would work, but in the end we managed to get it right.

I believe that our time management was not at all that great, because we found ourselves working until the afternoon of the due date. I think we were initially thrown off by the unavailability of the equipment in the first two weeks of the term. We, however, did not work hard enough to counteract that delay. I think that we were a bit too relaxed with regards to the pre-production of this project but we overcame that obstacle by standing together as a group. There were no major disagreements, as we are mature enough to know that disagreements do not have to end in a fight.

In the end the project came together because of good team work.