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GROWTH

A story of life after cancer

by
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LENGTH

10 minutes

THE FILM

This is a story of those left behind. The ones who have watched a loved one die while they live on and have to deal with the loss. This is the story of their sorrow, their pain and their vivid memories. But it is also a story about their new found sense of freedom and lease on life. Following the lives of a handful of people who have had someone close die from cancer, the documentary challenges the way we look at growth: as a disease, personally and socially.

SYNOPSIS

We live in a country where the majority of us will be touched by cancer in some way. We will either develop it ourselves or know someone who does. This documentary not only looks at the alarming facts and figures associated with cancer but also puts a human face to the disease.

The film follows four people's experience with cancer: three who lost a loved one and the narrator who survived a battle with the disease. Each interviewee gives a personal account of watching cancer take hold and slowly eating away at the person they once knew.

Interviews are conducted at the participants homes and include Luke McDonald who lost his father to bile-duct cancer, Suzie McCracken whose mother died of a brain tumour, Winona Burgett whose grandmother was claimed by bowel cancer and Benjamin Beck (the narrator) who survived testicular cancer. A rodeo and the lecture theatre of Dr Yifan Yang complete the remaining locations of the film.

The story discusses a range of topics including cancer treatments, mortality rates, emotional reactions to the disease, coping with the experience of losing someone close and how the interviewees have grown from the experience. In this way, growth is explored at a disease level and from a personal and social point-of-view.

Each interviewees introduces an element that is a direct reflection of a social or personal attitude to the disease. Luke discusses the palliative care of his father and the

food he was fed during his dying hours. Suzie talks about her mother walking round a shopping centre wearing a turban and the ridiculous reactions she received. Winona remembers her grandmother's doctors' insistence she would not live another week only to have her survive a further six months.

The feel of the film is one of a positive attitude to cancer adopting the same "new life" feeling the interviewees appear to share despite their loss. In fact, negativity in general is absent from the documentary giving a light-hearted, feel-good and optimistic take to the context of cancer.

AIM

To EXPLORE the lives of people who have been touched by cancer not through society's doom and gloom lens on the topic but instead focusing on cancer as an opportunity for growth.

AUDIENCE

Given the statistics that approximately one third of men and one quarter of women will be directly affected by cancer in Australia, it's feasible that the entire nation is a potential audience. But, due to the empathic and alternative nature of the documentary, the audience is limited to those interested in feel-good, medical, test of faith types of stories. Those touched by cancer in some way will also find value in this film. This story would be suitable for a Sunday afternoon slot on ABC.

MOTIVATION

I have a personal investment in this story as my father passed away from cancer in 2004. It was a very difficult time for me as his particular disease was rare and aggressive and claimed his life in only four months. He was diagnosed just two weeks before he died.

I watched as my life transformed but it didn't lapse into a negative state. Rather, I could only see a positive influence in the changes that occurred. I was happy like I never could have been when he was alive.

I had grown and I wanted to know if others had experienced something similar after the death of a loved one to cancer.

The interviewees I found for this story all reported they had discovered something 'good' in themselves and had similarly embraced a new lease on life.

BACKGROUND

This is an original proposal and has been developed on the back of personal experience and research. The story doesn't require any specific prior knowledge as cancer statistics are illustrated throughout the piece and all other evidence is given through personal account of the people interviewed in the project.

STRUCTURE

The documentary takes a cyclic structure in presenting its content. Starting with Benjamin, each interviewee presents a piece of information about their experience, building the story. Each new addition is either a personal account, a social one or an observation of how they've grown from the experience of being touched by cancer.

Dr Yang's lecture is used to introduce additional information relevant to each of the interviewees. Re-enactments are also used to this effect.

Benjamin finishes off the story, symbolically representing the other three interviewees' lease on life, and his own, by literally grabbing a bull by the horns.

CONTENT ELEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

HOWDY

- **STYLISTIC FOOTAGE:** Narrator Benjamin Beck in cowboy outfit on the back of a bull inside a rodeo pen introducing the documentary.

I WAS LUCKY

- **STYLISTIC FOOTAGE:** Benjamin rides the bucking bull. The next shot he is standing outside the ring and continues with documentary: "I was lucky, bull-riding isn't nearly as dangerous as cancer."

DEVELOPMENT

YIN YANG

- FLY-ON-THE-WALL: Dr Yifan Yang gives a lecture to a class about cancer and its causes. Introduces alternative medicine approach to the disease including acupuncture and Chinese herbs.

CUSTARD

- INFORMAL INTERVIEW: Luke McDonald talks about how his father died of bile-duct cancer and how the disease had turned his father's skin a yellow colour.

TURBAN

- INFORMAL INTERVIEW: Suzie McCracken talks about how her mother died of a brain tumour and how her mother often walked around with a turban of bandage on her head.

EAST MEETS WEST

- FLY-ON-THE-WALL: Dr Yang candidly illustrates Western methods of treating cancer including surgery, chemotherapy and radiation.

TOO OLD, TOO HARD

- INFORMAL INTERVIEW: Winona Burgett talks about her grandmother who died of bowel cancer and how the disease was deemed inoperable because Winona's grandmother was too old and had too much bowel.

LAST SUPPER

- RE-ENACTMENT: Luke wheels his father into a cafe and props him in front of the cake stand. Luke feeds his father freshly made lemon gelato.

FACT AND FIGURES

- FLY-ON-THE-WALL: Dr Yang shows his class statistics of mortality rates of cancer in Australia compared to the rest of the world.

PARTY TRICK

- INFORMAL INTERVIEW: Benjamin talks about his own battle with testicular cancer and how he lost a testicle. He also talks about getting a prosthetic one - "the largest one they had" - and using it as a party trick.

HOLDING ON

- **INFORMAL INTERVIEW:** Winona talks about her difficult pregnancy and how her grandmother fought her cancer six months past doctors' expectations to die the day following the birth of Winona's child.

MOOD SWINGS

- **RE-ENACTMENT:** Suzie's mum turns cruel and is incredibly mean to Suzie then is suddenly calm and kind as if nothing happened.

CONCLUSION

GROWTH

- **INFORMAL INTERVIEW:** Luke talks about his successful business selling cakes and dessert since his father's passing.
- **INFORMAL INTERVIEW:** Winona talks about how every time she looks at her daughter she is reminded of how special her grandmother knew her child would be.
- **INFORMAL INTERVIEW:** Suzie talks about reuniting with her estranged sisters and having children of her own after her mother's death.

YEE-HAH

- **INFORMAL INTERVIEW:** Benjamin talks about his current studies in medicine and taking up bull-riding despite "only being half a man".
- **STYLISTIC FOOTAGE:** Benjamin climbs onto a rodeo pen about to mount another bull: "I've taken the bull by the horns".

VISUAL STYLE

The opening segment of the story will have a slightly sped up 'jumpy' feel to the **STYLISTIC FOOTAGE** as Benjamin rides the bull. It will slow down to normal speed as he continues with introducing the documentary. The film will start to speed up again as he readies to climb onto the bull for a second time at the end of the film.

INTERVIEWS are presented in an answer only format so that no question is heard throughout the documentary. This method ensures the experiences are told exclusively by the interviewees.

The FLY-ON-THE-WALL technique will be employed whenever factual information about cancer or its statistics is presented. This will occur during a Dr Yang lecture with the audience becoming another observer in his lecture theatre.

RE-ENACTMENTS will involve the interviewees interacting with actors playing their sick loved ones.

SPECIFIC CONCERNS

CULTURAL: There is a definite stigma attached to cancer and approaching it from the point of view of a "good" thing in the sense of human growth may be taken out of context and may offend some viewers. It will be important to ensure this positive approach is represented through the contribution of the interviewees.

BUDGET: The re-enactment of the interviewees experiences with their deceased loved ones require actors who are made out to look sick. There is a budgetary requirement to pay for these actors and the make-up to make them appear ill.

PRODUCTION: Benjamin Beck has agreed to participate in the project and is an experienced bull rider and amateur actor. He will be able to narrate the documentary effectively.

RESEARCH

PERSONAL INTERVIEWS:

- Luke McDonald
- Winona Burgett
- Suzie McCracken
- Benjamin Beck
- Dr Yifan Yang

INTERNET RESOURCES:

- Australian Bureau of Statistics. www.abs.gov.au.
- Cancer Prevention Research Centre. www.uq.edu.au/cprc.
- Centre for Burden of Disease. www.uq.edu.au/bodce.
- Cancer Council Australia. www.cancer.org.au.
- Leukaemia Foundation. www.leukaemia.org.au.
- World Health Organisation. www.who.int.
- Australian Medical Association. www.ama.com.au.