

***Dad by Numbers* : Process notes**

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Dad by Numbers is my first poetry film but certainly not my first film. I have been making films, or teaching about filmmaking, since university days. I first began making films at film school in Melbourne, Australia. This particular school was oriented to experimental and abstract filmmaking rather than the more traditional genres. This early influence has had a great bearing on my work, particularly in more recent years. After leaving film school, I worked as a documentary maker: director, writer and editor for a Melbourne government film unit. Here I made more conventional documentaries suitable for school use and broadcast television. After this experience I moved into academia, teaching filmmaking. When I undertook my PhD by creative practice, I decided to expand my filmmaking to embrace the world of multi-screen video installation, viewed in an art gallery rather than in a cinema or on television. Since then I have moved more towards experimental film using found footage. I think all elements of these approaches are evident in *Dad by Numbers*.

I have long been fascinated with old family photos and family stories that are passed down from generation to generation, and I was eager to pursue a means of visualizing these stories for others to enjoy. Being a filmmaker, I was particularly interested in exploring how best I could develop these stories to create meaning for myself and others. Moreover, I had always been drawn to the medium of Super 8 film and its inherent ability to provide an aura of nostalgia which was fuelled by an interest in the reuse of found Super 8 home movies. In my work I have been exploring how a filmmaker can best use the film medium to elicit memories and promote storytelling in the viewer. I began this journey by referring to my personal experience with my grandmother's stories which I used as a basis for a video installation, "Roses Stories; revisioning Memories". I then moved to exploring the family stories of others I knew and using their found Super 8 footage as a catalyst for further video installation. I became more and more interested in found home movies particularly on Super 8. In my work *Remixed Memories*, I use found footage from the internet to create a piece that I hope elicits memories in the viewer.

Recently I have been drawn to the poetry world. I am not a poet myself but really am inspired by the spoken word experience. Carolyn Masel, who wrote the poem "Dad by Numbers", was a colleague and close friend. I started following her spoken word career and was very excited about the poetry she was writing. At the same time, I had been

attending a series of alternate underground film screenings in Melbourne. As part of this, a night was devoted to poetry video and I was totally inspired. I felt this was the direction I wanted to move my practice. I came across "Dad by Numbers" in Carolyn Masel's poetry anthology, *Moorings*, and was instantly drawn to her poems devoted to family memories and stories. I asked her if I could make a poetry film some time and she agreed.

In 2020 in Melbourne we had a long lockdown due to COVID which gave me plenty of spare time to think and wonder. I began working on the poem film. Of course, I instantly thought of going to find footage as a source, family photos, home movies, old vintage footage. I trawled the internet for footage of the 1920s that featured babies, of the 1960s in Melbourne, of the second world war. I also asked Carolyn if she had any photos of her Dad that she wouldn't mind me using. When I started I had many different ideas for approaches. Initially I thought I could just feature shots of random fathers, from any source, past and present and home movies featuring fathers. Then I decided to do a combination. Some photos in the film are actually of Carolyn's father and others are not. These are purposefully woven together as it's the memories and feelings they evoke that I am concerned with not any historical accuracy or documentary or memorial.

I asked Carolyn to record the reading of her poem as she is an active spoken word poet with a great voice. I also asked her to send me some examples of music her father liked to give me direction with the soundtrack. These varied quite a bit from upbeat jazz to Maria Callas. I went with Maris Callas which gives the piece a melancholic and ethereal feel, I believe.

Because we were in lockdown we couldn't collaborate in person, only via Zoom or phone and initially I was just playing about but soon got stuck into the project with a passion. I sourced all of the found footage which proved quite a feat and chose a series of photographs. Also, I decided to break up the piece with audio and moving images about the start of the war to add a different dimension. With the audio, I initially edited Carolyn's spoken word the way I felt it had the most emotional impact, reinforced by the music and the pacing of the images. After seeing a cut, Carolyn wanted me to stick to the meter of the verse more and was very specific about where the words should be and how they were grouped. This I found difficult at first, as I felt that my first version had more emotional impact. Also, Carolyn wanted me to change a couple of images that I had selected. I did this but still had some reservations.

As a filmmaker, I have mainly written my own scripts and had full control of my work. Collaboration as to content and style is an interesting departure for me, not without its challenges but also very inspiring. Since the film was finished, Carolyn has found some really great old footage that she would like me to include and we have talked about a slightly edited new version. Thus, I can see that the poetry film medium is quite unique and offers many opportunities for new forms of collaboration. Carolyn and I are talking about collaborating more, particularly with her family story poems, and I am very excited about this.

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