



Home movies

Liz Crow, disabled film maker, artist and activist, tells us about the power of the moving image. Plus, how you can make movies and get them seen



This year YouTube is five years old. Now one of the biggest and most successful sites on the internet, it has brought out the movie director in millions of people all around the world by making it easy to post video clips online. Filmed on equipment as basic as camcorders and even mobile phones, it means you can make your short movie quickly and cheaply and then let anyone and everyone watch.

One of the reasons for the success of YouTube and sites like it is the amount and variety of clips available to watch online: you can easily find and watch everything, from the latest pop video to archive TV footage from decades gone by as well as home movie footage and professionally shot independent films.

But where the website really excels is in allowing ordinary people to tell their stories and show off their talents. It has even made stars of a few (we've highlighted some success stories on page 34). So why is film such a good format to tell the stories we think are important? Liz Crow, a disabled film maker, artist and activist has one opinion about the power of film:

"Film is an amazing medium," she says. "The power it has to tell a story is unbelievable. There's something beautiful about making a film and then taking it out to people and letting them have their interpretations of it. Nowadays you hear of people having film parties where everyone meets up to watch a film and then discuss it – like a book club. And of course, by being able to post your own movies to the internet, your films can reach all around the world."

Home movies

Liz, who has a young daughter, Molly, lives and works in Bristol as director of her own film and arts company, Roaring Girl Productions. Liz runs the company from her home and her films have been shown at Tate Modern and the British Film Institute in London, on television and at arts and film festivals internationally.

Disability is a theme that has run through Liz's film career. She has made films about Helen Keller, the first deaf-blind person to gain a degree in the US, and about Frida Kahlo, the Mexican painter who, it has been said, became disabled after a bus accident (she also contracted polio at age six and it is

thought she was born with spina bifida).

"My films are about telling the stories that haven't been told," she says. "They can involve fact or fiction but it's about telling the stories of people who aren't usually represented. Ultimately my work is about trying to change things. It's about bringing new thoughts and points of view. If you can make an emotional connection with people through your film, it can drive them to take action and change things."

Before becoming a filmmaker Liz worked as a disability equality trainer and enjoyed the "exciting" role where she felt her impact could be "direct and immediate." And yet there was something missing: "When I started to make films I realised there had been a hole," she says. "I didn't know that what I'd been missing was the creativity."

In her latest project, a film-based installation titled *Resistance: Which Way The Future?*, that creativity is used to tackle a hard-hitting subject that she believes still has relevance today. "The work is about the Nazis in Germany in the 1930s," she says. "Aktion T4 was a

euthanasia programme carried out against disabled people. In some ways it was the prototype for the concentration camps and everything that came after. They viewed disabled people as inferior. But there were also disabled people involved in the resistance to it. Again, I feel it's a story that hasn't been properly told. I wanted to humanise it and bring the story into the present to show the echoes that run through to today."

Inspiring others

The film-based installation has already been shown in Liverpool and Mansfield and transferred to Washington DC in early summer 2010. Back in the UK again, it will be shown in Weymouth in September and Bridgwater in spring 2011. Liz hopes that over the next couple of years everywhere from galleries and film festivals to schools will book viewings of the film and use it as a vital educational resource.

For many, the urge to pick up a camcorder, or edit a short film with your home computer's software, perhaps won't lead to making a movie as serious as *Resistance*. But you still might feel you have a story burning inside that's waiting to be told. So why not take a look at our tips, below, get your camera and give it a go?

You can find out more about Liz's films online at www.roaring-girl.com.



Do it yourself – home movie making for beginners

If you fancy your chances as a novice film director, how do you go about it? Here are some quick tips to get you started.

1. Don't worry about expensive equipment. These days good results are achievable even with footage filmed from your mobile phone or small camcorder.

2. Clips can be edited together with software that either came with your home computer or freely downloaded from the internet. For example, try www.digitalfilms.com.

3. What's your story? Decide on this before you pick up your camera and start to shoot. The story always comes first.

4. Keep your idea for the story simple. Don't overcomplicate things. Most short films have a clear central premise and stick to it. More convoluted plots and messages take time to master.

5. Don't use technology just because it's there. Adding too many crazy graphics or fancy effects to your film will distract the viewer. Again, keep it simple.

6. With film, the rule is 'show, don't tell'. So let the pictures do the talking and don't use narration to explain everything that's happening on screen.

7. Remember, your film isn't complete until you have an audience, so invite friends to watch it or upload it to the web – with sites like YouTube it takes a matter of minutes. If you do post one of your films online – whether it's you showing off a hidden talent or even a destination guide for wheelchair users – remember to tell us at *Lifestyle!*