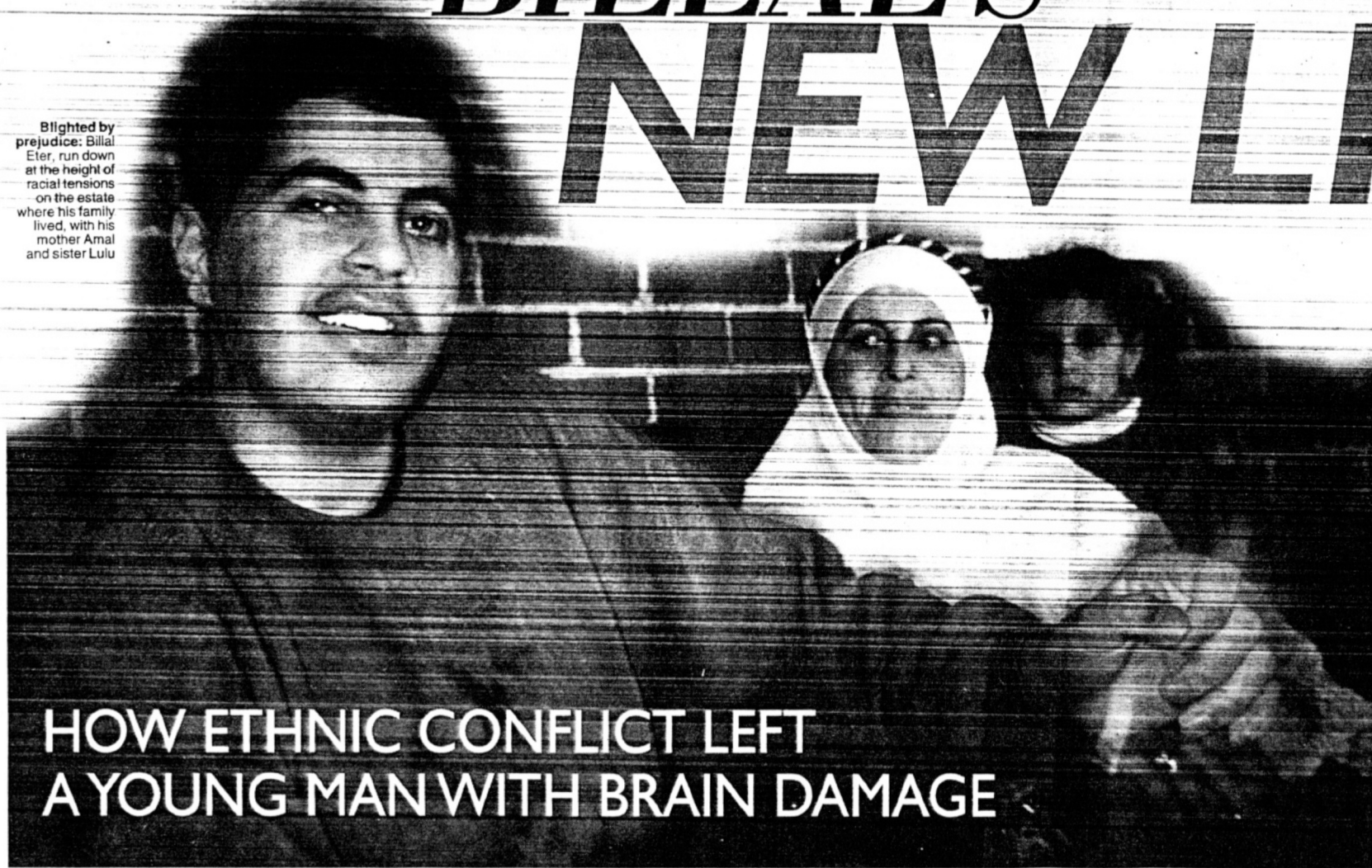


BILLAL'S NEW LIFE

Blighted by prejudice: Billal Eter, run down at the height of racial tensions on the estate where his family lived, with his mother Amal and sister Lulu



HOW ETHNIC CONFLICT LEFT A YOUNG MAN WITH BRAIN DAMAGE

Billal Eter would never be the same after he was run down by another teenager. Deborah Hope looks at how a film crew shooting a documentary about him became part of the healing process

IN 1994, Billal Eter was a shy 16-year-old with just a year of school to complete and hopes of finding a career working with animals. His dreams came to a sudden stop on Good Friday the same year when he was run down by a car as he crossed the street outside his house and suffered severe permanent brain damage.

Billal's story might sound familiar. After all, most cases of brain injury in Australia involve some tragic combination of young men and motor vehicles. The difference in Billal's case is that the incident was the result of racial tension between Lebanese-Australian and Anglo-Australian teenagers that had flared into violence the night before. Tensions that built up in the schoolyard and between neighbours, beginning with dirty looks and harsh words, moving on to stone throwing, fists and iron bars, a fight in the street and culminating with Billal lying in a coma in hospital with massive head injuries.

These events took place in Macquarie Fields, a neglected, graffiti-splattered public housing estate on Sydney's south-west fringe. On a recent visit there, teenagers were spilling out of Billal's old school, James Meehan High, and fanning out into streets with names like Mela-leuca, Blackwood and Eucalyptus.

Girls in hijab, Koreans and Pacific Islanders alongside their Anglo peers, laughed and chattered. Hip-hop music blared from the open windows of a house. A boy with curly brown hair played chicken recklessly with an approaching car as he crossed the road.

Any one of these carefree kids could have been Billal two years ago. But Billal will not be returning to school and will require support for the rest of his life.

Noted documentary film-maker Tom

Zubrycki was in Macquarie Fields early in 1994, talking to teenagers who were about to leave school. He planned to follow their lives on film to compare their dreams with the reality they found a year on. Billal was one of the boys he met during this research. Just after the Easter weekend, Zubrycki received a phone call from local youth worker Linda Abraham to tell him Billal was in hospital fighting for his life.

Abandoning his original project, Zubrycki took his film crew to Billal's bedside. During 15 months he recorded Billal's progress through several rounds of brain surgery and a year in a rehabilitation hospital, during which it became increasingly obvious Billal would never be the same. The devastating effect of the trauma on his family and the film crew's involvement in that also became an important part of the narrative.

The film's interpreter, Alissa Gazal, became an important support for the family: writing letters, filling out forms and acting as an advocate with the Housing Department when the family, fearing further violence, was desperate to move to another suburb. As the story unfolds, Gazal is increasingly present on-screen.

The result is *Billal*, a riveting 86-minute documentary to be released in Sydney and Melbourne next week, and to be screened on ABC television later this year. It has been nominated for the APT's best documentary award.

The film includes confronting images of brain surgery and two extraordinary interviews with Linc Beswick, the Anglo-Australian teenager who drove the car that hit Billal, in which he says he acted out of fear and was "stoned" at the time. A remorseful Beswick was sentenced to two years' jail for culpable driving, to serve a minimum of nine months.

Sipping coffee lattes in cosmopolitan

inner Sydney, strolling through Chinatown, munching a quick Vietnamese lunch or shopping for Japanese groceries, it is easy to forget there is a large chunk of Australia that has yet to come to terms with multicultural society. It is too late for Billal, but Macquarie Fields is attempting to act on the lessons it has learned from the events of Easter 1994.

"A lot of people couldn't believe it happened next-door," says Abraham, a local resident. "It knocked the hell out of me. I felt something had to be done in the area." When I phoned Abraham at her home one night recently, she was hard at work hand-painting posters promoting racial harmony. She pins them up on noticeboards at the local Glenquarie shopping mall, where most kids hang out, and at the youth centre in the hope that the message "one world, one people" will eventually sink in.

Abraham's poster campaign is part of what she describes as a "huge anti-racism project" involving local schools and youth centres. "Racial tension is still there, but it's not the same. It used to be the Pacific Islanders and the Europeans sticking together against the Anglos. There's been only one incident since Billal [was run down]," she says.

"It's not as aggressive and it doesn't involve physical violence. The kids have broken through the barrier, there's more tolerance."

A LOT of people in the area think it's unjust that Linc is still walking around the area now he's out of jail," says Abrahams. "Others said, 'Bloody well serves the wogs right.' There are mixed emotions. But the kids realise they have to live together."

Annette Rogers, a support worker at the desperately under-resourced local family support centre, is also involved in the campaign, offering a range of projects that encourage more social cohesion, tolerance and pride in the suburb. They include a mural representing Macquarie Fields's diverse population, plans for a community fun day and workshops on conflict resolution. A feasibility study is under way for a group of women who want to set up a multicultural catering co-operative.

According to Rogers, Macquarie Fields is characterised by a teenage population

with chronically low self-esteem. "Living in a housing project is still a stigma. They get called 'houso' at school," she says.

"All they get is negatives. The reason kids get into trouble is there is nothing to do. We need to change attitudes, to look at what they can offer us rather than just to say they are a menace."

"The Lebanese were the first new group to come into the community for some time. Then the Pacific Islanders came in. They came in bigger numbers and were more noticeable. There was some trouble as the new groups settled in. The Gulf War meant emotions were raw around the time [that Billal was run down]. A lot of people were shocked that someone would run over a person. It woke people up."

The Eters were not new arrivals. Abdul Eter migrated to Australia from Lebanon 23 years ago, returning two years later to marry his 17-year-old cousin, Amal. Back in Australia they had five sons and a daughter. They are Australian citizens.

Abdul worked in factories and on the railways, and for some years ran a Lebanese restaurant. He has been unemployed for several years.

The family moved from Lakemba to Macquarie Fields in 1990. A Lebanese family living next-door became firm friends, but the Muslim Eters found their Anglo neighbours inhospitable and socialised mainly within the Lebanese community.

Hostility became a regular part of the Eter daily diet. One night a mob of drinkers from the local pub arrived at their house to shout abuse. At other times stones and insults were thrown.

Well-intentioned planners built the estate at Macquarie Fields along lines intended to encourage a sense of community. Backyards faced the street, with house fronts verging on a communal footpath. After dark, however, these paths became feared zones, occupied by large groups of kids with nowhere better to go.

The night before Billal was run down, a group of Anglo youths from a house opposite gathered on the path outside the Eters, yelling insults of the "f...ing dirty Lebs go home" variety and urging a fight. Billal's 18-year-old brother Ahmed was knocked unconscious by a blow from a metal bar. Incensed by the assault on

Ahmed, Lebanese boys retaliated, attacking the Anglos' house, smashing windows and fibro panelling.

A brawl between the two groups began and continued until the police were able to bring it under control.

Other neighbours were outside their homes, screaming at those in the fracas. The next day Billal was run down by Beswick as he crossed the road outside his house.

A witness, Billal's friend Sawaz El-Bahar, tells Zubrycki: "The car was approximately 20m away from Bill. As Linc Beswick had seen him crossing the road, he gave the car some speed. Bill was still crossing. He froze and stuck his hands out, and he got hit by the car. And as the car kept going he was thrown on to the windscreen, on to the roof, on to the

"I was stoned. I smoke pot. I just froze. I ran him over. Then I went straight down to the police station."

back boot and he landed... in the middle of the road."

Billal's mother Amal was outside the house, serving coffee to her husband and a friend. The next moment she heard a thud and saw Billal flying through the air. "I only knew it was him from the colour of his pants," says Amal. "I ran to him... when he fell to the ground he stopped breathing. I thought my son had died. I wanted to die myself."

In his defence, Beswick tells Zubrycki he visited the street, Mahogany Place, that day because he was concerned about a friend, Jimmy, who lived next-door to the Eters, and that he had not been involved in the fight of the previous night. He says: "As I pulled up at Jimmy's house, they all came out the backyard... They had their hands behind their backs. They could have been carrying anything

... a gun, a baseball bat, anything. I just thought the worst... so I took off. When I drove on the other side of the road he came out in front of me. I was stoned. I smoke pot. I just froze. I ran him over. Then I went straight down to the police station."

Amal describes the effect on her family. She cannot sleep, feels faint when she hears English spoken and falls to the ground when she hears loud noises, her nerves "shot to pieces". Abdul stays in his room for a week, smoking and drinking black coffee. In the weeks that follow he becomes morose and cries a lot. Amal will not allow Omar to return to school out of fear of further attacks.

They do not trust the police, who suggest to Abdul that Beswick may have just been passing by, and believe they regard Lebanese people as trouble-makers. They feel let down by the law when Beswick is charged with negligent driving and let out on bail. When sentence is passed, Abdul comments off-camera: "Nine months? Is that all my son's life is worth?"

Doctors at the hospitals where Billal undergoes surgery and rehabilitation seem unable to communicate to the Eters that Billal's uninhibited behaviour and aggression are permanent features of his new personality. In the end it is Gazal who breaks the news that the damage is lifelong.

According to Abraham, the family's move out of Macquarie Fields three months after Billal was run down was a good decision. "It was so big at the time. People were talking about guns and machetes. I feared something silly might happen."

Appropriately, the release of *Billal* follows National Brain Injury Week late last month. About 25,000 Australians sustain brain injuries each year. About 10 per cent of these people will have a permanent disability, with one-third severely disabled. As many as 70 per cent of these injuries occur in motor vehicle accidents and a majority involve young men.

NSW Brain Injury Association executive director Freda Hilson says brain injured people are more visible in Australia as medical technology ensures accident victims survive in larger numbers.

"The most significant issue is that once people leave the hospital and rehabilitation system, usually about two years post-injury, there is almost nothing for them in NSW in support service terms," says Hilson. "Medical technology saves lives, but the community is not prepared for this or able to cope."

Hilson is lobbying for changes to laws in NSW that at present mean people at fault in motor vehicle accidents are not eligible for benefits from third party insurance.

According to Hilson, Zubrycki's film is unique because it explores brain injury from such an early stage — while Billal is still in a coma in intensive care.

She says: "Families pray the injured person will live, but that person dies and the survivor is a new person. Families struggle to cope as full-time carers. Sometimes marriages can't survive. It's awful for the people themselves as well because, although they have cognitive problems, they can recall how they were before." Frustration, anger and exacerbated behavioural problems can be the result.

In one interview, Abdul says he feels he has lost his son. "It is true that he is still alive, but I would say that he is here but not here. The dream I had for him is gone. I can't dream for him anymore."

As he leaves a rehabilitation hospital to return home permanently, Billal describes to the camera how he would like to brutally bash Beswick, to "give him more pain than he gave me... Because everything's been taken away from me. The doctor forbids me from driving a car and even riding a bicycle... I'm not allowed to go anywhere because my parents are scared I might get hit by a car again. That's what's happened to me. It's just like starting a new me. I'm starting a new life. From the start."

Billal opens on October 10 at The George cinema in Melbourne and the Valhalla in Sydney.

From Video to Film and Back Again

Tom Zubrycki

The digital camcorder is set to make a big impact on documentary filmmaking and the television industry in general. But will it be a democratising force in communication? Will it empower ordinary people or will it break down the ethical boundaries of human privacy? These are the questions I and other filmmakers are beginning to ask.

'Empowerment, communication ...'

This same rhetoric was around in the '70s when I started my filmmaking career and when the portable video recording unit was first invented. This was the black and white porta-pak, which 15 years later became the camcorder.

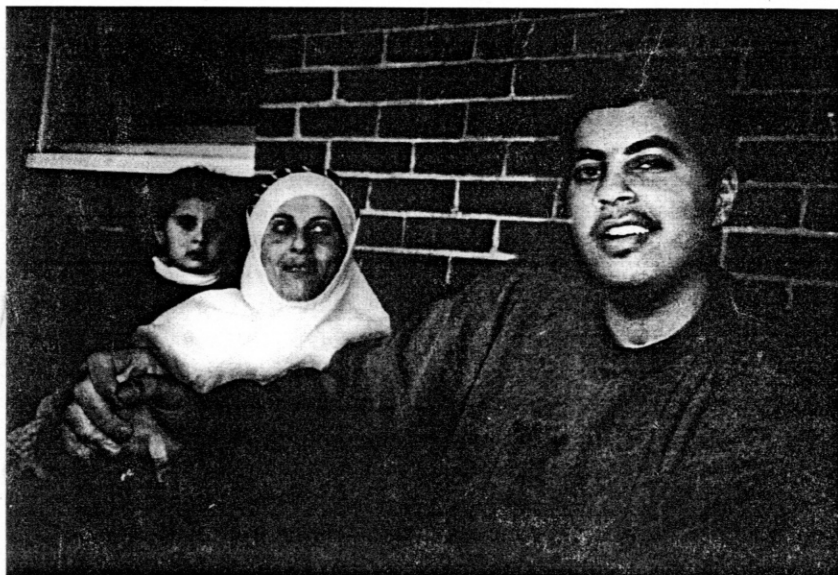
I was reading media guru Marshall McLuhan at the time. McLuhan had turned against all the claims made in the '50s and '60s that television was turning viewers into passive zombies. Instead, he contended that television was inaugurating new forms of interactivity and 'do-it-yourself' participation, and that the globalizing process of the television revolution would be balanced by a decentralising force that would democratise communications. It was McLuhan's rhetoric that in the late '60s stimulated a visionary experiment that had its origin in Canada. It was called "Challenge for Change".

I read about "Challenge for Change" long before I saw anything that had been produced. It was supposedly a government scheme that:

gave the disenfranchised and marginal communities of Canada a voice by giving them access to the media ... to improve communications, create greater understanding, promote new ideas and provoke social change.

(National Film Board)

This approach was a break away from the paternalistic style of many Canadian National Film Board (NFB) films at the time (copied by Film Australia), where the subject was brought to the camera in the mould of John Grierson. Location videotape recording meant the cost factor of shooting sync-sound interviews was negligible. Some filmmakers inside the NFB seized on this as a way of giving people a voice, particularly the disadvantaged.



However, the idea was rather than making films *about* disadvantaged groups, they were to make films *with* them. By re-defining the role of viewer into an active participant, the programme involved a radical re-evaluation of the role of filmmaker. No longer an authorial agent, the director became a 'video animator' whose chief function was to provide technical training to select communities. The emphasis, however, was not on forging a new style but on an ethical engagement with the processes of representation.

If we really believed in people's right to express themselves directly, then we needed to elimi-

nate ourselves from the process and find a way of putting the media directly into the hands of citizens.

Dorothy Henaut (NFB)

The aims of fostering community participation, creating greater understanding and promoting new ideas were seized by Whitlam's social engineers when they installed Video Access Centres in Sydney and Melbourne's western suburbs. Ironically,

as soon as the programme was starting to slow down in Canada, here in Australia it was just being born!

Almost from the moment these porta-paks became available they were put to use in the original "Challenge for Change" spirit. In fact, the first uses of the medium could be described as 'agit prop' (in the Soviet 'Kino-Pravda' tradition). Early videomakers, including myself, worked with local resident action groups (RAGs as they were known), but rather than putting video cameras directly in the hands of community groups, we made ourselves available to work *at the best* of those groups.

Billal by Tom Zubrycki

My very first video was made in just this way. I was living in Balmain, Sydney. It was 1974 and before the days of Environmental Impact studies. The Australian National Line ran a container terminal on a peninsula behind a congested residential area. The only access to the terminal was down a series of small residential streets running off the main thoroughfare.

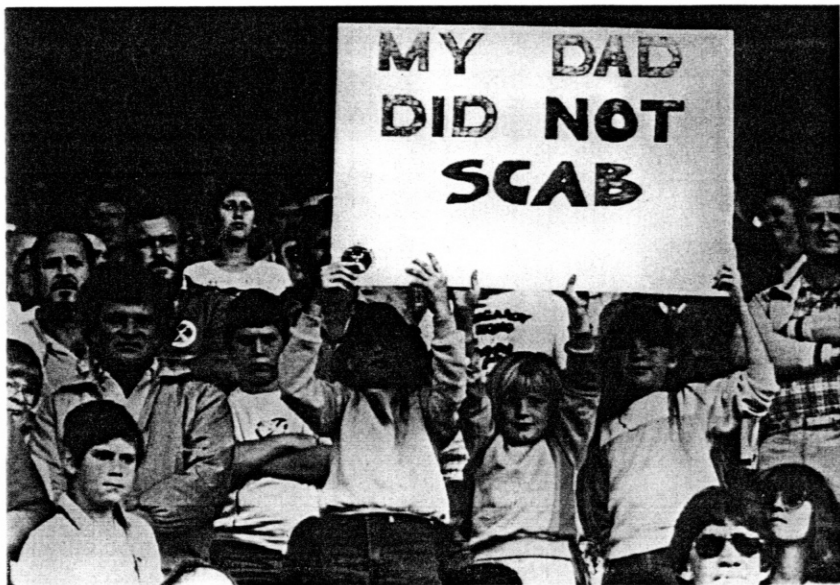
by-side interconnected with cables. This was several years before the days of electronic pre-roll. One marked the edit point with chinagraph, then had to wind-back each reel by hand to a roughly equal distance to allow for a three second pre-roll. The machines were then started simultaneously. Anticipating the in-point on the video monitor, the record button was

Apart from *You Have To Live With It*, other process-videos were simultaneously produced in other areas. Almost every resident action group in 1974/75 had activist video 'animators' attached. For us it was trial-and-error. None of us really knew much about the equipment, although technically we became more and more expert in editing. My next programme, *Fig St. Fiasco*, was more ambitious and took two weeks to make rather than two days. (I wasn't sure I'd ever get to see this half-inch tape again because the oxidation process and humidity has made it virtually unplayable, until I recently discovered the Film Archive in Canberra has a copy on 3/4".)

A small group of us decided to do process-oriented video within unions. At first we worked at the behest of the Painters & Dockers Union, which had mounted a strike at the Garden Island Naval Dockyard in 1976. Video compiles of rallies and interviews were shown to mass meetings of rank-and-file workers. A final programme which I completed with unionist Russ Hermann was titled *The Painters & Dockers Strike*, and it received limited circulation amongst other union rank-and-file groups. Another video followed a year later titled *Sack Black - the struggle for democracy in the NSW branch of the BLF*. The video documents a hard fought election campaign between the Jack Munday and Norm Gallagher supporters. Gallagher had sent up his officials from Victoria to take over the NSW branch. In this video we even went to the trouble of generating titles via a very crude method of lettrasetting the copy on to the video monitor screen, and then filming the same monitor with another camera with a background image running. This was the most sophisticated that black-and-white video was ever going to get.

By the late '70s the video 'animators' faded from the scene. This was partly due to a shift in the political climate as governments learned to be more sophisticated in dealing with and responding to community protest, often diffusing the anger through complicated inquiries and commissions. Ironically, many of us also became frustrated with video's sheer technological limitations. The primi-

Friends and Enemies by Tom Zubrycki



RAGs were popular in those days, and one was formed to unite the anger of residents and to lobby appropriate levels of government. The Balmain RAG was only too happy to have a keen video-maker involved. Coincidentally, the first Sydney-based video-access centre had opened its doors. The equipment was literally sitting in cardboard boxes when I first started to use it.

The first version of the programme (there were four versions in all) was shot in two days. It was called *You Have To Live With It*. The rough, glitchy, black and white programme consisted mainly of interviews shot in the street with affected residents and shopkeepers. The focus was a tragic accident involving one of these trucks where a pedestrian had been killed.

The technical limitations were formidable. In those days it was virtually impossible to edit with any degree of technical precision. The process was rudimentary at best. Once you started compiling the programme there was no turning back, so you had to do some very thorough preparation work at the start. The editing process itself was a hit-and-miss affair. There were two reel-to-reel machines sitting side-

abruptly pushed down and an edit-point plus or minus 25 frames was secured.

Somehow all these technical problems were surmounted and my first 'process-video' was shown at a meeting in Balmain Town Hall to 300 people. The video reflected the issues back to the same people who were involved (and their supporters). I was overwhelmed at the response and very excited. I couldn't wait to continue shooting, which I did as the community action unfolded. I remember one event where the residents staged a mock-funeral of a container which was sunk in the harbour just off Balmain. This and other new scenes were added to the end of the original cut and again shown back to the residents. Eventually the video was re-cut into a shorter programme. Finally the RAG secured a meeting with the local state minister. It was all going to happen in a small community hall. However, unbeknown to the minister, a video monitor had also been set-up in the room where the meeting was to take place. As soon as he arrived the residents forced him to watch my 20-minute programme. A few days later the closure of the terminal was announced.

tiveness of this technology allowed very limited application apart from the agit-prop use. Distribution was also limited because video players were still very scarce.

A number of us decided that rather than short-term political interventions, it was important to make finished films and circulate them as widely as possible. It was to be a twist on what Grierson always proposed should be the ultimate aim of documentary – making individuals into better citizens. Our avowed goal was to change the status quo and make those citizens activists. Paradoxically, the first works in this oppositional manner were only made possible when independent documentary first started to receive government support. Films like *Woolloomooloo*, *Rocking the Foundations*, *For Love or Money*, and my own *Waterloo* were made, and The Sydney Filmmakers Co-op sprang into existence to distribute them.

It was at this time that I became influenced by American documentary-makers – D. A. Pennebaker, Richard Leacock, the Maysles Brothers – and Australian ethnographic filmmakers Judith and David Macdougall. They became my mentors. Films like *Primary*, *Salesman*, *Takeover* affected me greatly, and I responded to their simple but effective narrative structures. For a while I rather fancied the idea of the camera being a simple objective recording device; however, a few years later I realised the camera was far from neutral! Yet I made several films borrowing from this style, *Kemira – Diary of a Strike* and *Friends & Enemies* are the most notable. But unlike my mentors of the '70s, I was not content to just be a fly on-the-wall. Besides observation, I used a whole range of devices: re-enactments, reflexive camera. I also felt that the material could be highly constructed in the editing, and that this is where the director's stamp could be best applied.

By the time I started making *Homelands* I'd refined a narrative-driven observational style. All my films up to this point were event-based. Using tact, diplomacy and intuition, I usually managed to access a strategic vantage point in order to observe the human and social drama unfolding around me. For example, the pit-top in *Kemira*, or the kitchen of the union office in *Friends & Enemies*. Typically,

I would start filming even before I discovered the key subjects that were to carry the story. This is how Ngaire Wiltshire in *Kemira* and Bernie Neville in *Friends & Enemies* came to be.

Homelands, however, marked a point of departure – more of approach than style or subject matter. Rather than entering an event that was already unfolding, and personalising it, I wanted to find the subjects first. My aim was to track down people who were about to undergo a process of fundamental change in their lives, something forced on them by events



outside their control. I wanted to be around to film this process as it unfolded in real time. This required a different working style. I needed to base myself for quite some time in a particular community to do some detailed and careful research, a methodology akin to that of a social anthropologist.

Each one of my films starts with an idea that reflects an issue of social and political concern. *Homelands* is no exception. In 1991, I was interested in the issue of refugees and how war-related trauma influenced their re-settling in a new country. I'd become aware that the civil war in El Salvador was finally coming to an abrupt end, and I had a feeling this event would have disruptive consequences on the exile community.

Homelands was shot on 16mm, but I used a video 8 camcorder as a research tool, shooting tape with four different families before deciding on

my key subjects: Maria and Carlos Robles and their four daughters. Carlos' decision to leave Australia for six months to work in El Salvador had the potential of impacting on the family in a way that would reverberate for a long time. Here was a potentially good event-driven narrative structure. There was nothing more than intuition, but it was enough for me to begin shooting. As it was, much more happened than I ever dreamt or suspected. The element of serendipity never ceases to excite me about this style of documentary, but the stress and the

anxiety also takes its toll – missing a significant moment is like dropping four pages of a script!

Two years ago I thought I was one of the few documentary filmmakers in Australia left working in a predominantly vérité style. But then the camcorder revolution suddenly arrived. Vérité and event-driven films are suddenly back in vogue again! Graham Chase's film on the West Australian ex-Labor politician Graeme Campbell is one of the first ones made in this style. (Graham does his own shooting, and edits on a cheap non-linear system attached to his own computer). After 20 years, 'video access' suddenly has a new meaning.

While there are distinct benefits arising from these new technological advances, there are also significant drawbacks. The ready availability of low-cost digital vision cameras has suddenly meant that filmmakers are able to start shooting without first

needing to go to a broadcaster to seek initial approval. That can be done later! Broadcasters may choose to pre-purchase fewer programmes and buy more on rough cut or at completion. The impact will be that budgets will drop as will filmmakers' salaries, and this will be reflected in a drop in overall quality, as people cut corners to make programmes more quickly. But the new technology has also spawned further developments removing the director from the production process entirely. I'm referring to the camcorder-driven video diary!

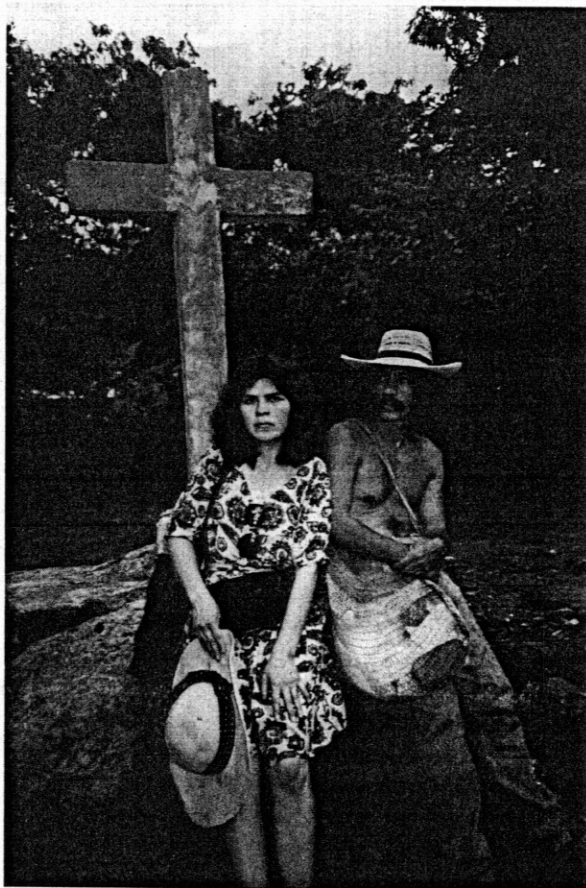
Video diaries began in Britain in the early part of the '90s when the video 8 camera first hit the market. Australia has been slow on the uptake and SBS's *First Person* has been the first cab off the rank. Six people were selected from 100 volunteers to record their lives during a six month period, using a camcorder which the broadcaster supplied. All the diarists faced some sort of personal crisis: an ex-prisoner trying to come to terms with life 'on the outside'; Bernice, formerly Bernard, in a small country town in Victoria facing her decision to become a woman; a taxi driver trying to change her life; and an unemployed man fights his gambling addiction. The diarists kept in regular touch with an SBS series producer who, from

what I understand, guided them in a semi-directorial fashion. The participants were theoretically given total veto rights – if they didn't like something, they could change it. Bernice, sat with the editor for several weeks. The result and programme is harrowing, riveting and, seemingly for Bernice, psychologically empowering. Yet this was not always the case. For one diarist the very reverse was true.

Barrie, the compulsive gambler, lives with his girlfriend Maureen and young child. The couple argue a lot – over money – and as the film unfolds, the camera becomes a powerful weapon that each person uses against the other. Occasionally, each confides to the camera as they would a counsellor sitting next to them. In one scene an almighty blue happens: furniture is upturned, a lamp is smashed, there

are tears and screams. However, when the crunch came to involve Barrie and Maureen in the editing, this didn't happen. Barrie claimed in an article in *The Australian* (20/5/96) that he 'wasn't given the chance'. 'The film', he says, portrayed him as a 'single-dimensional gambling nut case, and ignores the family's good times. It's a myopic view...'

I would be the first to acknowledge that a certain degree of voyeurism is intrinsic to documentary; how-



ever, reports like that cause me to be in two minds about the series. It's almost as if the producers had cut each episode in order to push aspects of the diarist's personality that are difficult or confronting. A basic ethical principle in documentary is that the subjects should not be humiliated by the experience; they should not leave a film with lowered self-esteem and social respect. Giving the participants total veto rights is a brave and unprecedented move by a broadcaster, but they should have followed it right through to the end. Interestingly, I learnt later that this program and others in the series returned SBS very respectable ratings.

Having started as a filmmaker using the primitive video technology of 20 years ago, these new developments present interesting paradoxes for me.

Times have obviously changed and so has the social context. The value system now prevalent in this post-modernist period puts the emphasis on the individual rather than on the community. Video, rather than facilitating social interaction, appears to be facilitating psycho-drama. 'Access' has a new meaning.

If video diaries are a preview of the future, are documentaries going to be subsumed by this new trend? The danger signs are obvious: not only are video diaries a cheap way of making quasi-docos, but by raising so many ethical problematics, they may also compromise the integrity of the form.

I'm not pretending that ethical controversies have not plagued documentary. They have. A case in point was Frederick Wiseman's first film, *Titicut Follies* (1967). This film caused a huge stir when Bridgewater, the mental institution where the film was shot, slammed an injunction against the film preventing its release for more than 20 years. (With voyeuristic shots of naked men humiliated by the male nurses, one can understand why.) It was a shocking experience, and allegedly, consent to film was improperly given. However, Wiseman and others have since mounted a powerful argument defending the film on the basis of important public interest.

Filming the private domain is a complex issue and the debate around it has led to a set of ethical standards, evolved over the years by documentary filmmakers, based on a strongly collaborative model and a notion of 'informed consent'. I've just finished a film where exactly this happened.

Billal follows the aftermath of an incident that occurred in a little suburban street in the suburb of Macquarie Fields. One evening a feud started between two neighbours: windows were broken, rocks thrown, a few black eyes and people arrested. The next day it turned nasty. A 16 year-old Lebanese boy, Billal, was run-over. It was a criminal act with distinct racist as-

Above: *Homelands* by Tom Zubrycki

Left: *Friends and Enemies*

pects to it. The film begins with Billal in a coma in hospital and follows him and his family as they sort out their shattered lives over the ensuing 15 months.

My film is a subjective interpretation of what happened, a recording of key events that took place, but filtered through my experience of the situation and the degree of access I was able to get. The film contained some highly sensitive material and I considered it paramount to show the film to the main participants as we neared completion. I wanted to make sure the film's content and emphasis was not inconsistent with the way the family itself had experienced the events. The issue was to ensure I was not misrepresenting them or putting scenes out of context. For example, there is a scene in the film where an operation goes wrong and causes startling changes in Billal's behaviour. We captured revealing material and I wanted to make sure its inclusion was not going to have any negative repercussions for the family.

As we approach the late 20th century, I believe that for documentary the relationship between the filmmaker and the participants will be ever more crucial; this is increasingly going to be the case given the digital camcorder revolution where new levels of intimacy will be achieved. The old codes and conventions that implied passivity on behalf of the subject have all changed. The democratisation that digital vision has introduced means documentary filmmaking has to be viewed differently. This inevitably clouds the position of filmmaker as the author and all-powerful artist. Filmmaking becomes a collaborative process which has to include the subjects of the film, and in cases where the filmmaker continues to have ultimate power then he/she must use it responsibly. I believe that's the key question of the late 20th century, not only in documentary but in the media generally. Brian Winston, in a new book I read recently, *Claiming the Real*, summed it all up in a rather provocative way:

Once the filmmaker is liberated from implications of actuality, then ethical behaviour becomes much more crucial than ever before ... Free of the need to be objective there is no reason why

... the documentarist could not put the relationship with participants on the pedestal.

Tom Zubrycki: A Short Biography

Tom Zubrycki was teaching Sociology at the University of NSW in the early '70s when he became interested in Canadian-based experiments on the application of film and video to facilitate community expression and political change.

Zubrycki became a formative member of the early video movement in Sydney. He utilised black-and-white 'porta-paks' to make issue-based, advocacy videos at the behest of inner-Sydney communities and trade unions. He directed, shot and edited his own programmes. He continued in this way to develop his filmmaking skills until he became frustrated with video's early technical limitations, and eventually made the switch to film in the late '70s.

The films of Zubrycki reflect his concerns with the issues of power and institutional accountability, and focus on people who are victims of institutional processes. *Waterloo*, his first film, is a historical account of a 50-year battle by residents of an inner-Sydney suburb to save their community from slum clearance and redevelopment. The film won the Greater Union prize for Best Documentary at the Sydney Film Festival in 1981.

Zubrycki was subsequently influenced by cinema vérité, but was critical of a trend towards pure ethnicity, which risked disengaging the viewer. He opted to make character-driven films around incidents which involved conflict and unfolded before the camera, often for more than a year. A good example is *Kemira - Diary of a Strike*, which won an AFI Award for Best Documentary in 1984. That same year he was one of the inaugural recipients of an AFC Documentary Fellowship, 'to encourage the pursuit of innovation and excellence in documentary cinema'. The fellowship enabled him to make *Friends & Enemies*.

Zubrycki has always been interested in carving out new and difficult subject areas for Australian documentaries. His working method remains the same: the film's construction on the editing bench keeps pace with the actual filming. His recent films have become more reflexive and the narra-

tive strategies more complex. One such film, *Homelands* (1993), is a story about a refugee family from El Salvador torn by the desire to remain in Australia or return to the homeland. The film played at festivals world-wide, and in Australia it received the Film Critics' Circle Award for Best Documentary.

This year he completed *Billal*, which premiered at the Sydney Film Festival and has played at the Melbourne and Brisbane international film festivals. *Billal* follows the dramatic aftermath of a 'hit-and-run' incident in Sydney's western suburbs involving a 16 year-old Lebanese boy and his family.

In the last 10 years Zubrycki has been an active member of the Australian Screen Directors Association, serving on the board and acting as the convenor of the Documentary Committee. He also lectures part-time at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School.

Filmography:

1996: *Billal* (88 mins) A story which follows the dramatic twists in the life of a Lebanese family as they cope with the trauma of their brain-injured son, Billal, the victim of a 'hit-and-run' by an Anglo-Australian teenage driver. **Festivals:** Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane.

1993: *Homelands* (76 mins) The story of a refugee family from El Salvador living in Melbourne torn by the desire to remain in Australia or return to the homeland. **Awards:** Film Critics' Circle of Australia Award for Best Australian Documentary 1993; Nomination for Best Documentary, 1993 AFI Awards; Audience vote for Best Australian Documentary, 1993 Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals. **Festivals:** Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Nyon, Cinema Du Reel (Paris), Bombay, Seattle, Margaret Mead, Festival Dei Populi (Florence), Chicago. **Australian Distributor:** Film Australia.

1991: *Bran Nue Dae* (55 mins) A film about Broome Aboriginal playwright Jimmy Chi and the production of his musical by the same name. **Festivals:** Melbourne, Montreux, Hawaii. **Australian Distributor:** Ronin.

1990: *Lord of the Bush* (55 mins) A portrait of eccentric British developer Lord McAlpine and his new-found domain of Broome. **Awards:** Nomination for Best Documentary, 1990 AFI

Awards; High Commendation plus General Award in Documentary Category and Highly Commended in Australian Category for 1990 ATOM Awards. **Festivals:** Melbourne, Cinema du Reel (Paris). **Australian Distributor:** AFI.

1989: Strangers in Paradise (50 mins) Co-producer and co-director Gil Scrine. Twelve American and British tourists go on a ten-day guided tour of Australia at the height of the Bicentennial celebrations, and come across Aboriginal Australians. **Festivals:** Melbourne. **Australian Distributor:** VEA.

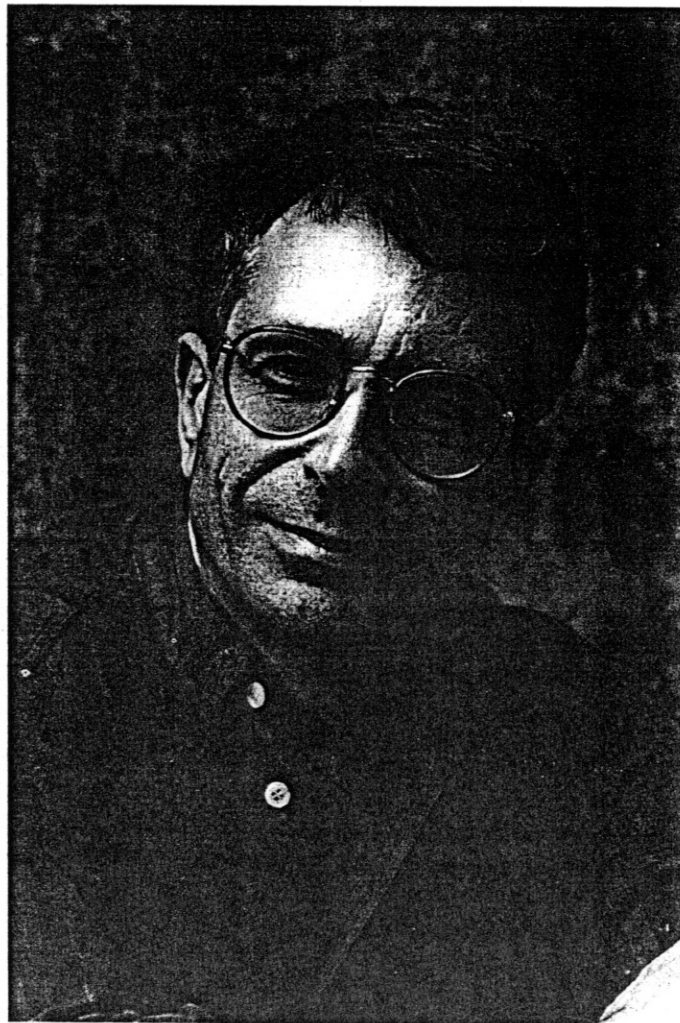
1988: Marrickville (30 mins) A profile of the inner-Sydney suburb of Marrickville and its diverse ethnic community. Funded by the Office of Multicultural Affairs and produced for the SBS *Mosaic* program. **Amongst Equals** (90 mins) An archival-based film of the history of the Australian Trade Union movement. Released in controversial circumstances by the filmmaker in 1991 after the ACTU attempted to censor and re-cut the film. **Festivals:** Melbourne. **Australian distributor:** JOTZ Productions, 171 Elswick Street, Leichhardt, 2040

1987: Friends & Enemies (90 mins) Blow by blow account of a year-long industrial dispute in Queensland seen through two main characters, who personify two opposing sides of the strike. Made under the AFC/ABC Documentary Fellowship Scheme. **Awards:** Nomination for Best Documentary, 1987 AFI Awards. **Festivals:** Sydney, Melbourne, San Francisco, London, Leipzig, Rotterdam, Margaret Mead. **Australian Distributor:** Ronin.

1984: Kemira - Diary of a Strike (63 mins) A day-by-day account of a 16 day underground Wollongong colliery 'sit-in' strike, mirrored through one of the families of the striking miners. **Awards:** Best Documentary, 1984 AFI Awards; Best Short Film, Tyneside Film

Festival (UK); Silver Bear, Leipzig; High Commendation, ATOM Awards. **Festivals:** Sydney, Melbourne, Tyneside, Berlin (Forum for Young Cinema), San Francisco, London, Nyon, Leipzig, Festival Dei Populi (Florence). **Australian Distributor:** AFI.

1981: Waterloo (50 mins) A historical account of a 50-year battle by residents of an inner-Sydney suburb



Above: Tom Zubrycki

to save their community from redevelopment by state housing authorities. **Awards:** Best Documentary, Greater Union Awards, Sydney Film Festival. **Festivals:** Sydney, Nyon, Bilbao, Melbourne, Chicago, Festival Dei Populi (Florence). **Australian Distributor:** AFI.

Videotapes originated on B&W portapak

Available through the National Film & Sound Archive and also held by the filmmaker on VHS.

1979: Port Botany: A Planning Dilemma (50 mins) Impact of the rapid port infrastructure development on the community and the fragile physical environment of the bay.

Sack Black - Struggle for democracy in the BLF (40 mins) An account of an election inside one of Australia's most militant unions (co-directed with Russ Hermann)

1977: Addison Rd. Drop In (25 mins) A process video designed to help community groups (mainly ethnic based) of Marrickville, Sydney to decide on the occupancy of a large site formerly owned by the Federal defence forces.

1976: Painters & Dockers Strike (30 mins), co-directed with Russ Hermann. A video giving a blow-by-blow account of a 13 week long strike by shipworkers in an effort to improve dangerous working conditions.

Collingwood Community School (20 mins) A profile of a Melbourne community school with innovative educational practices.

1975: The Inner City Tape (30 mins) Segments of a process video compiled as a visual presentation to the Human Relations Commission set-up under the Whitlam Federal Labor government.

1974: Fig St. Fiasco (40 mins) A process video of the residents' lead campaign to stop a freeway cutting through and decimating the inner-Sydney residential areas of Glebe and Ultimo.

You Have To Live With It (23 mins) A process video of a residents' led campaign to close-down a container terminal in the Sydney suburb of Balmain.

Have you seen ATOM's home page:

<http://www.cinemedia.net/ATOM>

It lists all our publications, study guides, training and other services

pects to it. The film begins with Billal in a coma in hospital and follows him and his family as they sort out their shattered lives over the ensuing 15 months.

My film is a subjective interpretation of what happened, a recording of key events that took place, but filtered through my experience of the situation and the degree of access I was able to get. The film contained some highly sensitive material and I considered it paramount to show the film to the main participants as we neared completion. I wanted to make sure the film's content and emphasis was not inconsistent with the way the family itself had experienced the events. The issue was to ensure I was not misrepresenting them or putting scenes out of context. For example, there is a scene in the film where an operation goes wrong and causes startling changes in Billal's behaviour. We captured revealing material and I wanted to make sure its inclusion was not going to have any negative repercussions for the family.

As we approach the late 20th century, I believe that for documentary the relationship between the filmmaker and the participants will be ever more crucial; this is increasingly going to be the case given the digital camcorder revolution where new levels of intimacy will be achieved. The old codes and conventions that implied passivity on behalf of the subject have all changed. The democratisation that digital vision has introduced means documentary filmmaking has to be viewed differently. This inevitably clouds the position of filmmaker as the author and all-powerful artist. Filmmaking becomes a collaborative process which has to include the subjects of the film, and in cases where the filmmaker continues to have ultimate power then he/she must use it responsibly. I believe that's the key question of the late 20th century, not only in documentary but in the media generally. Brian Winston, in a new book I read recently, *Claiming the Real*, summed it all up in a rather provocative way:

Once the filmmaker is liberated from implications of actuality, then ethical behaviour becomes much more crucial than ever before ... Free of the need to be objective there is no reason why

... the documentarist could not put the relationship with participants on the pedestal.

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