Wales Documentary Support Network
Transcript
Episode 3 – Alice Powell

Introduction

(Intro music starts – cinema film reel whirring, and countdown beeps)

Hello and welcome to the Wales Documentary Support Network, a podcast that celebrates non-fiction filmmaking. In each episode, our guest will share their tips on how to make award-winning documentaries.

I'm your host Angela Clarke, and this series is a Screen Alliance Wales & Wheesht Films Partnership, made with the support of the BFI Doc Society Fund.

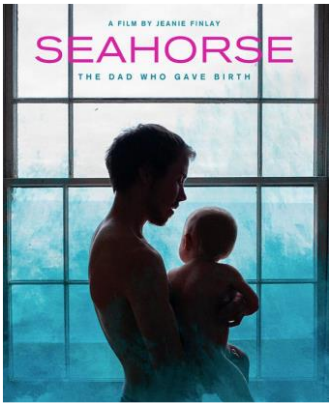
My guest today is editor Alice Powell. Since graduating from the National Film & Television School in 2007, Alice has cut a long list of high-profile feature documentaries, and her films have screened at Sheffield Docfest, South by South West, Hot Docs, the Berlin International Films Festival and the Tribeca Film Festival.

Alice likes to collaborate with producers and directors to tell stories with integrity and a delicate human touch.

We discuss her unusual pathway into the industry, how she handles hundreds of hours' worth of footage, and last but not least the ethics of editing.

I hope you enjoy listening... (music ends)

Game of Thrones: The Last Watch



Seahorse

Donna

The Closer We Get

Angela Clarke - Hey Alice, thank you so much for coming on today, much appreciated.

Alice Powell - No problem at all, very happy to be here.

Angela Clarke - When and how did you first get into editing? What sparked your interest in the field?

Alice Powell - I guess it was quite a kind of funny, not coincidence, but it was a fortuitous event. I needed to do work experience when I was about 16/17 old at school. I hadn't organized anything, and I went into the office a bit exasperated and got given the massive book of potential local companies that had a relationship with my school, which is in North Wilshire, so it's relatively rural.

There was a page that just grabbed my attention that said Swindon Cable, which is a local TV station, broadcasting one hour a day and I just thought okay that sounds interesting. I spent a week there and I just loved it. They were doing local news reports, weather, and local interest stories, but the people that worked there were just amazing. They were so lovely, and they just really encouraged me.

They then put me in touch with a local organization that ran training courses for young people, and they put me in touch with a volunteer network and I just decided that filmmaking or TV or some sort of media was what I wanted to get into.

I didn't really know a lot about it obviously, I was 16 years old, and I didn't really know what the hell I was interested in but that was how I found it, it was very fortuitous. I like to think I would have got there anyway eventually *(laughing).* But it was a very fortuitous thing and put me in touch with a lovely network of people. At that age, you're just keen to soak stuff up aren't you, so I did all the courses. I did a camera course, a sound course and editing course and just tried to get involved with as much stuff as I possibly could and then decided I was going to go and study at university.

I did originally think I would just leave school and get a job as a runner somewhere. But then I found out that you could do film courses and I thought that sounds interesting. So that was sort of my route to doing my undergrad film course. We got involved in everything screenwriting, directing, but as time went on, during the three-year course, I sort of always found myself in the edit and was just happy there and enjoyed that process and so that sort of felt like where I wanted to be.

By the time we graduated, we had to make a graduation film and the film I worked on, I edited and so that was how I grew into it. I suppose it was an evolution of starting off just being amazed by this new world that I had never even considered and then sort of honing it down over a period.

Angela Clarke - You were far luckier than my other half then because he left his work experience till quite late and then ended up being a hospital porter in the mortuary.

Alice Powell - *(laughs)*

Angela Clarke – Which he didn't pursue!

Alice Powell – Exactly. Maybe we wouldn't be having this conversation now if that if I'd had the same experience at my placement. *(laughing)* Yeah, so I'd love to say that I was watching Fellini from the age of 5 years old, I'd love to have that sort of romantic story. But I mean I guess that's how it happened!

Angela Clarke - And so then after you finish your undergrad degree, you went off to focus a little bit more on editing didn't you, you went and studied at NFTS?

Alice Powell – Yes. It wasn't that long after I graduated, I worked for a bit, I was working in Pizza Express as a waitress, living back with my parents. You know, classic post-university *(laughing)…*

Angela Clarke – Dream! *(laughing)*

Alice Powell – Exactly! But because I was back in my hometown, I was able to go back to those networks that I'd still had from when I'd been there before. And there was another step - the actual media organization which at the time was called Create Studios in Swindon, I think they're now just called Create. They're an amazing organization by the way if anyone wants to check them out, the work they do is incredible. They are a very nurturing group of people, and so they offered me a job. I was the facilities coordinator at the Media Art Studio in Swindon which had given me all those opportunities as a youngster which was great. I don't know if I was the best facilities manager that they've ever had *(laughing)* but I was there and I used to help with the courses and setting up all the equipment.

I worked there for about 8 months and during that time I was still volunteering on people's films on the weekends whilst I was still working at Pizza Express. I was lucky; my boss was good with me if I said I'm going to work on a film for a day she would accommodate me in the rota, so you know props to Jane at Mulberry Pizza Express *(laughs)*.
She was very lovely because I worked hard when I was there, I worked full time so she would give me that flexibility. And then I got the job at Create and thought I'd really like to step it up a bit, but I couldn't really see how to take the next step.

I'd heard a lot about the National Film School, and I thought that sounded like it would be a good thing for me to do. So, I was lucky, I applied, and I got in. That was easily one of the best things I've ever done in my life. It was amazing. I loved it there and it just gave me a good grounding in… *(pauses),* not even so much in terms of how to make films but like to how to understand why you make films and what they mean and how the things that you do influence an audience. I think that was probably the best thing I learned there.

But I don't necessarily think that film school is the only way that you can do these things. I really believe that's not necessarily true. For me, it was the way that I did it because it worked for me. But I think it's not the route that everyone has to take. I always feel it's important to say that because I know those things don't suit everybody. Some people really

thrive in that environment and for others, it's just not for them. So, it's worth saying that. It's not something that everybody *needs* to do. For me, personally, it was what I needed.

Angela Clarke - Yeah for sure. Also, I did waitressing after I left university as well between doing my Master's and I sometimes think all those jobs, the jobs I always kind of call the invisible worker jobs, like being a waitress, or driving a taxi etc, all the roles that people take you for granted, where you're servile, they give you an insight into the world. They give you an understanding of human beings from all spectrums across the board…

Alice Powell – Yeah.

Angela Clarke - And I think if you've worked in those worlds or roles, it gives you a bit of an insight in terms of how to approach people, and treat people with dignity and respect and all those things which are important values to have as an editor anyway aren't they?

Alice Powell – Yeah.

Angela Clarke - I think you draw your compassions and how you are as a human being from a lot of those roles that you did which, at the time, often don't feel like they're important but I think they are. I think if you've done those jobs, you've had a real understanding of speaking to different people from different worlds. And so quite often those jobs, I think, give you an insight into understanding how human beings tick. I always think there's a value in it.

Alice Powell – Yeah, and it's worth saying I continued that all the way through my degree, I was working at Pizza Express. And then when I was doing my MA I had a bar job, and I did that ostensibly because I didn't want to take out a loan, so I did that whenever I could. But, one of the best things, *(laughing)* I mean this has nothing to do with editing, but I met a bunch of people in that bar job. And they're still some of my best friends today, like we sort of formed a bond.

There was a bunch of us that all started at the same time. I think the reason it's worth saying that is because I think it's important when you're making films, because it's such a bubble, to hang out with people that don't make films. When you're at film school, all you do every day, all day long is just sit with people who are obsessed with films. And that's amazing and fantastic and incredible. However, you can get a little bit in your own zone, and I had this amazing group of friends that all worked in this bar with me on a weekend and they just had a completely different perspective on stuff, and I think that's important to have actually.

Angela Clarke - Yeah for sure. Also, they are part of the audiences, when you make films, whatever capacity your role is, they are all potential audience members. It's good to see life from the other side of the fence and how people engage with topics that you make.

So, once you left, once you completed your NFTS course, what was your plan? Did you have a strategy?

Alice Powell - I mean I don't know if I could call it a plan, because I certainly never been somebody that's very good at strategizing. But what I would say is I had an idea of the sort of values that I wanted to try and stick to in the work that I did. When I left film school, obviously in the first instance, I needed to earn money, so I had less scruples on the kind of jobs that I took. At that point *(laughing)* as somebody with absolutely zero experience, I just took anything *(laughing)* and everything that I could do, as long as it paid money.

What I would say, it's always worth applying for a job even if it seems like a lowly position because I got called into an office because they needed a tape, this is back in the days when people used tapes! *(laughs)* They had a tape that needed digitizing like a Digi Beta or something and nobody in the office knew how to work the machine. And they literally put on a job website we need somebody to digitize rushes which, as far as editing goes, that's the most basic thing you could be doing.

But I went into the office, and I did it for a couple of hours and then the woman in the office asked can you edit, and I was like, yeah…*(laughing)* having never done it professionally before so you just need to have a little bit of bravado and think, I can do this. They were a corporate comms company that did a lot of work for the Labour party. They did a lot of party-political broadcasts for the Labour party. So, I got in with them and I worked for them. I mean I didn't have a full-time job with them, but they were one of my main income sources for a long time and that all just came from a question about digitizing some tapes!

So, I would always say that even if a job appears menial, you can always use it to prove yourself. My dream wasn't to become editor of party political broadcasts for the Labour party for the rest of my life but it was a good way of earning some money. And then the next strategy, now I'm earning enough money to pay my rent and get by, was I need to try and work on the creative side of my career. How can I further that? Unfortunately, the way that had to happen was I had to work on projects pretty much unpaid to get that experience.

I wish I could say that it was not that way because I sort of wish that it wasn’t, but I think that's the experience of a lot of people I know have. Those first things unfortunately you probably do have to give up a bit of your weekends and give a bit of your evenings up to get that experience under your belt, because otherwise people just aren't going to trust you to cut something they're going to pay you to cut, if they can't see that you've done it before.

And I know that that is a barrier for a lot of people and that's one of the issues I think that the industry must deal with is how do you get over that initial hump? How do you support people to do that?

Angela Clarke – Yeah.

Alice Powell - I mean I was lucky because I had the editing skills, and I could use those to earn money. But not everybody necessarily has that, although I mean even if you haven't been to film school, you can learn how to edit probably to a level that's high enough to be able to walk into a corporate company and edit their stuff.

Angela Clarke - I mean I think even in any job in the film and television industry I think it's always much harder to say no to somebody once they've got their foot in the door. I started off doing work experience as well for that very reason because I thought once you're in, it's harder to get rid of you isn't it?

Alice Powell - Yeah and you do learn as well. It's worth saying, I learned a lot on that job. Doing those jobs, working for that company, you often must turn stuff around quickly. Maybe you're not telling the stories you want to tell, but you're still learning how to do the job. And they were a nice bunch of people, good to hang out with so there were a lot of benefits to doing that work. I don't want to sound ungrateful for the work that I was given because it was you know it was a good time. So yeah…

Angela Clarke - The creative process of editing is one part of the job, a big part of it is also dealing effectively with whoever the client is, be that your individual director or the people that have paid the funding for the film etc. Also working to a deadline and understanding that you've still got notes to get back and you've got things to turn around etc.

It is a risk averse industry at the best of times, and as you say I don't think there is any kind of solid advice you could say to people that this is a definite way to move forward etc. I think part and parcel of that sadly is because it's an oversubscribed industry having to do something for free. But the good thing is I suppose, there's a lot more shorts now, short films that people could do to build a name for themselves.

Alice Powell - Yeah, and there are funders that are willing to fund those kinds of films in a way that there probably wasn't previously because of the online space now. I mean it's worth saying when I graduated film school in 2007, it's not like online wasn't around then, but it wasn't obviously around in the same way that it is now. And there are now companies that have got the budgets to make the mid-length short, or a 20-minute short which is a really great way to get into doing stuff, I agree with that.

I would say, to be completely honest and transparent about it I graduated in 2007 and the first job that I did where I really got paid a decent wage to do something I really wanted to do was probably not until 2011 or 2012, something like that. It took a lot of years of pounding the keyboard, doing everything that I could to sort of get through. It isn't something that's just going to happen overnight. I mean maybe you will get a break… you never know, if you meet the right person at the right time, you might just get offered some amazing job. But in my experience, you do have to put in the hours, to get to that point.

Angela Clarke – So when you started out originally, you edited factual, and fiction and I wondered was that purely a practical thing? Or was it because you enjoyed what you get from editing each of the different genres in and of themselves?

Alice Powell - I would say I've actively tried to keep those different plates spinning where I possibly can. I've also done work for artists as well and done sort of gallery pieces which I really enjoy. And I think it's mainly because I like doing stuff that challenges me. I don't want to just be doing the same thing repeatedly and I think that when you when you step into a

different sort of mode of work, whether it's a short fiction or a gallery piece or a documentary piece, they all have different sensibilities.

Some people maybe just want to drill down and become an expert at doing one thing, and I think that's totally a great thing, if that's how your brain works. But I think my brain works in a way where I like to switch it up. I like to keep myself on my toes. And I think it can be quite good if you go into a job feeling like I'm not totally sure I know how to do this. I think it's good to have a little bit of doubt in yourself because I think it's that tension that keeps you fresh and keeps you searching for interesting solutions and ways of making the project work.

Whereas I think, personally for me, if I just do the same thing repeatedly, it's easy just to lean back into the crutch of like how did I do this last time? And because the pacing is just so different as well when you work with an artist for example, there's just a completely different shift in perspective of how they want to present the work. Rather than if you're doing something for TV or for a bigger audience then there's a sort of expectation of what kind of, end result you have.

Angela Clarke - I was also thinking the way documentaries, especially feature docs are now edited. I think the worlds of drama and documentary used to be much further apart, didn't they?

Alice Powell – Yeah.

Angela Clarke - But those worlds have moved closer and closer together now. More docs are taking on a slightly more fictionalised approach now and so I think it's interesting in terms of learning the sensibilities of both and what that brings to an editor because that world has changed in terms of how we tell stories especially probably because a lot of the streamers have moved into that territory and are funding hybrid things…

Alice Powell - I think that's probably true and I think it's just always good to have those skills to know how to deal with things and to have your mind open to different ways of telling a story. It's also worth saying it depends where you are in a project. But if you're working with a director who you have a good relationship with, you also get involved in those conversations, if you're working on the film and you're thinking about how to solve a particular problem or how some future filming is going to go, then you can feed into that as well and suggests stuff. It's not like your opinion is completely not wanted in that conversation and so if you've got that experience of doing other genres of film then you can be a part of that conversation as well.

Angela Clarke - What kind of documentary subject matters are you attracted to?

Alice Powell - I would say that it's not necessarily so much about subject matter for me. Obviously, I'm not going to work on a project that I'm not interested in if the subject matter doesn't speak to me. But it's also for me about the person or people who are making the film and how they're coming at that. And what I suppose I mean by that is for me, it's all about integrity and how they plan on representing this person or this group or this whatever

the subject matter is. Because I think there can be in documentary, particularly in faster turnaround stuff, a sort of lazy approach as to how you represent a person or a subject and that's not what I'm interested in.

I want to be honest about somebody and frank about them… I keep saying somebody or a subject because it depends, doesn't it? Sometimes it is about a person, sometimes it's about a subject. I'm not interested in a quick manipulative story that's just bang in, bang out and moves on. Really good quality documentary filmmakers build relationships with the people that they make films about. They take those relationships seriously and they take their duty of care seriously and there is a real consideration for the welfare of the person who you're making a film about. And I think that's so important because some people really don't consider that. I think that it is possible to make a film that is maybe critical of somebody and their actions or not even necessarily critical, but just shining a mirror to something, but you could do that in a way that is not exploitative and that I guess is what I'm looking for.

It's somebody who wants to make a probing film, because also you don't want to make a puff piece. It's a real delicate balance because you don't want to make a film that just celebrates somebody and doesn't explore the knotty weeds, because it's the knotty weeds and the grey which is what I find interesting. I guess that's probably the answer to the question is the filmmaker or filmmakers interested in the grey, and in representing that. When I say grey, I mean as in not black and white - most stories are not about a good person doing a good thing and they don't have any flaws. It's generally about a complicated person doing a thing, or group of people or whatever and you must be critical, but you must be respectful.

I think that is probably what I'm looking for when working with people, is some evidence of that approach. That there's a sort of duty of care towards the people because I think it's so easy when you work in documentary to not consider what it might be like to have a crew making a film about you. That's such a scary thing. And I think you need to be able to feel like everything that you're doing you could show to that person. I mean obviously it goes without saying if you're making a film about, I don't know, if it's a piece about a horrific dictator and you're trying to uncover a truth or whatever it is, if it's that kind of a film, that's a whole different story.

Angela Clarke -Yeah.

Alice Powell - But if you're making the kind of films that I tend to work on which are about exploring complicated emotional things, or the way that people move through the world, then I think you want to feel like you could sit next to them and show it to them. There might be some parts of it that they find difficult. But they would see a truth in that and say that is my truth, that was how it felt and that is how it was for me.

Angela Clarke - Yeah, it is. And also I think from the other side of the fence, I think it's always scary if you're a director and you've got things in your rushes because you have built up the relationship with the character and if you are a director with integrity and you film moments where you think I don't want to take that moment out of isolation because that's not the sum of who they are as a person. I suppose what you want when you work within an

editor it's about keeping things in context as well, so I think that is really important, that point to note about integrity, especially when you are working with real people.

When you're filming an ordinary person in an ordinary situation, regular life is tangled up and complicated and there's moments that we all display poor judgment in things, so everybody's fallible aren't they…

Alice Powell – Yeah...

Angela Clarke - The thread that run through the films that you've produced, certainly in terms of documentary is that kind of exploring the human condition I suppose. And in a way, I also noted that you have returned to working the same directors on multiple occasions. Is it important for you once you've built up a relationship, do the same people come back to you, and is that something that you like to build upon?

Alice Powell – Yeah. And I think that's something that comes with the longer you work, the more people you've worked with, the more opportunities there are to reconnect with people, and they get back in touch with you. Unfortunately, it doesn't always work out because schedules don't allow, but where they do, I really enjoy working with the same people. I think it's amazing to have that sort of relationship with somebody where you don't have on day one of the edit, there's not any of that sort of awkwardness. You just know you have a shared language of how you deal with stuff and how you look at stuff, because it's an intense process. You're often, especially on a lot of the films that I cut; we tend to have quite long edits. You know they can be like 28 weeks stuck... not stuck, in a room with somebody…

Angela Clarke – (laughs) Contained?

Alice Powell - Yeah, contained *(laughing).* You know, not against your will, but in a room with somebody, and if you don't get on with that person, or if you don't have a sort of shared understanding of what you're trying to do, that could be a painful process. Luckily, I haven't had too many terrible experiences, but going back to a little bit of the previous question, of what attracts you, I think it's also the person that's doing the work. Do I think that this is a person that I could sit in a room with for months on end and not go crazy? I think that's an important consideration.

I mean I really enjoy it and you can develop a language. I mean it's interesting because you know some of the filmmakers I work with, I'll look at the material and I will just know what kind of stuff they will want to use in the film. I can look through the rushes and be think they'll like that shot, and they'll like that shot.

Angela Clarke – Yeah.

Alice Powell - They'll want that, and I can already select the kind of stuff that that they're going to want in this film. It does also give you a shortcut as well as sort of getting to where you want to get to…

Angela Clarke - Off the back of that, I wanted to ask as well, and I suppose the answer to this might vary depending on the kind of project that you're doing. But at what point as an editor do you commit to cutting a project?

Because in the world of Feature Docs, as we know, if it's an unfurling narrative, films can be shot for quite a long period of time. And if, as you say, you vibe with that person, you want to get them hooked in from the off. But I suppose from your point of view because that world is so elastic at times, when things don't go to plan, and pandemics get in the way, or whatever else might make things go pear shaped at some point, when do you say yes to a project?

Have you got any kind of examples? And I know on a different note it might be different for example on an archive-based project compared to something that's an unfolding narrative, in the moment type of film. But by and large how do you gauge that because I think that's another skill? Do you hone that as you do more projects as an editor, because you gain more understanding of what can go wrong and how to hedge your bets on those things.

Alice Powell – Yeah, I mean I suppose as with anything, there's a sort of ideal way that it pans out and then there's the way that it actually does pan out. I mean in an ideal world you're sort of on the film from quite an early stage. In an ideal world, you want to be talking to a director before they've even started shooting the film, so that you can at least be having those conversations and feed into that. Now that's obviously, a lot of the time just not possible.

Angela Clarke - Yeah.

Alice Powell – I mean again, going back to the last question, if you are working with the same people a lot that's where it does help because if you're cutting one film whilst they're thinking about the next film then you can be involved in those conversations because you're already in the room on the other film.

Angela Clarke - Yeah.

Alice Powell - I would say that is the ideal. It gets difficult obviously with scheduling, because I would say directors are sort of, if you imagine them as like orbits of a planet, a director has a much longer orbit than an editor does. Once I finish cutting someone's film, they're not immediately ready to give me another film to cut, so I must go and work with somebody else whilst they go off and do whatever it is they need to do to get the next film ready to be cut and so you do have to alternate.

On one occasion, I did go back-to-back with the same director, and I don't know how she managed it because she was shooting one film whilst editing the other which was kind of insane. But that's a really insane schedule that most people are not on. So that's why I say the ideal is that you have these early conversations. But often that doesn't work out and there's been many conversations that I've had with filmmakers who I really want to work with and have had conversations with about their films.

But when it's come down to it, when they're ready to commit to a date, I've already taken other work because I can't just sit there and wait for somebody unfortunately. And it's a massive shame because you've got people, there's a lot of projects over the years where there's been people that I love working with whom I really wanted to work with, but we just couldn't make it happen because I had to take other work.

Or, in one instance, the work I was on, the film I was on, just hadn't finished and we'd thought it would be finished and it wasn't, so it's a really difficult thing. Because you're managing multiple relationships and ultimately you do end up having to let somebody down or say in theory, I want to work on this but then when it comes to it just because the way things have panned out, you just can't and that is a real shame. But you can't only work with one director because you just would not be working half the time so it's just not feasible *(laughing)…*

So, you do have to find these other relationships and then just manage it as best you can. People do understand, and I've been at both ends of this where I've had a film which I had to stop editing because I had committed to another project. And I really wanted to finish editing that film and I couldn't because I'd had signed a contract to start something new. And similarly, I've been brought onto a film where a similar thing has happened where an editor had to leave a project, maybe because they've had to go and do more filming, so it is a really difficult thing, and it happens all the time, which is why you will sometimes see a lot of films with 2/3 editors credited, and that's not necessarily because there's been a bad relationship, or you've fallen out. It's just that at some point you have without wanting to be too crude, it's like you're sort of letting one person down in order not let another person down, so it can be tricky because unfortunately these films, well let's just say I've never worked on a documentary where we sort of finish two weeks early… *(laughing)*

Angela Clarke – Pivoting on your chair in the edit, shooting the breeze! *(laughing)*

Alice Powell – Exactly, saying shall we go for coffee! Unfortunately, it never pans out that way, you're always up against it. You're always trying to get it done in time and usually I mean, not always, but usually you go over the allotted time. And then it's just how much flexibility you've got in your schedule to cope with that. And whether you've had to take other work or not and that is so painful having to walk off a project that you really care about and have someone else finishing it.

But you have to say this isn't about me, this is about the film and in that instance, the person who took it over did an amazing job and you watch the final film, and you think God I don't think I would have done that actually. I think they've done an amazing job. Sometimes that's just what a project needs. It's about checking your ego in at the door and saying this is not about who does what, it's about the finished film and making the best film that you can… Sorry I went off on one there*…(laughing)*

Angela Clarke - No it's fine, because you answered one of the questions, I was going to ask you next regarding how that process unfurls. I know there is never one set answer to this, but from the other side of the fence I suppose if there are directors listening who haven't

made their first feature yet and they're in that no man's land where they're still trying to figure out what time is a decent amount of time to give to a feature doc in edit.

With your editor eyes, when you look at projects and people come to you and say right - I've got, I don't know 12 weeks or 14 weeks or 16 weeks whatever and you look at the type of project, especially if it's an unfolding narrative, do you think there's no danger I'll get that done in that time. What would be the ideal in that situation I suppose?

Alice Powell - I mean I suppose it's a bit of a sticky one because obviously no editor is ever going to say I want less time in the edit. And obviously, if you're on a fully funded film then there is a cost implication and obviously the edit is often one of the biggest spends on a documentary. Well, I don't know if it's the biggest spend, but it is quite a large chunk of your budget, if you're budgeting for a feature film. So, there's always that tension between how many weeks do we need and how can we get it done in time.

I mean personally, I'm not a producer and I've never done a budget for a film in my life, so it's very easy for me to say you should give more time to the edit, *(laughing)* because that's how I feel. I also think there are things that sometimes feel like they might be money saving, like not getting an assistant that can sometimes actually save you money in the long run because you've not had to pay your editor to do a lot of the chunky work at the beginning of the project say.

But in terms of how long an edit should be, I mean there's obviously no absolute, but I would say for a feature that is not formatted and has maybe quite a lot of material, you want at least 20 weeks. But I would say more like 24 or 28 weeks is a good amount of time. I mean 28 weeks seems very luxurious, but I've done films like that where we've literally only just got it done in the time. It's about being able to explore the material because the first month, if not longer, will be spent just watching the material, like imbibing it, making notes, thinking about it, planning, and you can't rush that process. You know you can't watch stuff quicker.

Unfortunately, sometimes it's also hard, until you've tried cutting a scene to know whether it's going to work. Because even with experience, you can watch a scene and think that's great and then you try and cut it and it just doesn't perform in the way you hoped, so you have to go down a lot of dead ends. I mean sometimes I wish there was a way of streamlining the process, that could make it quicker. Obviously, there are certain things that you can do if you're in conversation with a director. There are scenes that you can say oh there's absolutely no way we're ever going to need this. But then I've had situations where we've said at the beginning, "There's absolutely no way we're ever going to use that", and then we've ended up using it. Because the process, it's just so hard to pin down because the process at the beginning and the kind of film you think you're making quite often changes by the end of the process.

So even the stuff you thought you could discount because it was never going to be relevant ends up sometimes becoming relevant and so it's a difficult one. I wish there was a way that you could say, if you just don't do this or don't do that then it's quicker! And if you really are up against it timewise then you probably do have to do those things and it may be that you

make a slightly weaker film as a result, that would be the thing I would say. Less time means less ability to be across everything and it may potentially result in a less complicated or less successful film because you've not had that time to really explore everything. But then if it's between not being able to make it at all, or only being able to make it in that way then I would never say to somebody don't do it. If you've only got 12 weeks, then you've only got 12 weeks and you just must make it work.

But you are sort of asking somebody to do their job with one hand tied behind their back a little bit when you do that.

Angela Clarke - Do you find that if somebody has gone and made a film, where the film in and of itself has been a bit more organic, so they haven't necessarily had that kind of narrative vision of knowing exactly what they wanted the film to be from the very outset so therefore haven't shot with purpose. When it's been a bit more organic, and bits have been snatched along the way because they've still been trying to work out, I guess what the story is.

Alice Powell – Yeah.

Angela Clarke - Does that prove more of a challenge to you as an editor because obviously I think sometimes, and everybody has done it, we've all done it at some point, where you think that the editor is there with your wand and can just waft it about saying I can repair anything and make anything makes sense of things or whatever. How does that work for you at the other end of that process?

Alice Powell – Yeah. I mean I think that's actually a really good thing to talk about because it's happened to me a couple of times where especially films that have been filmed over a long period of time which seems to be something that I have ended up doing quite a lot. One of the things I really enjoy is being handed a sort of like epic rag tag of material that's been put together over several years…. *(laughs)*

Angela Clarke – Here's 700 hours of footage for you! *(laughs)*

Alice Powell – Yes exactly, we've only got 700 hours and I've done projects with more than that…

Angela Clarke – Dear god…

Alice Powell – Personally, I mean that is not everybody's thing, but I quite enjoy the puzzle of trying to put something like that together. But it is a challenge and exactly as you say, what can happen is particularly if somebody has started looking for a story and they've been filming because they just happen to be there and they're not sure what the intention is and where they're going with it and all that kind of stuff.

You can end up with this material that's kind of great because your characters are raw and they're sort of young or whatever the situation is, but maybe the filming hasn't got the same intention and the same eye that it maybe has later in the process. I certainly have worked

on a specific film where the filmmakers found the kind of angle that they wanted on the film about halfway through filming and then the look of the film and the feel of the film took on a very specific tone and we had a huge decision to make about should we start the film at the point the filmmaker had their light bulb moment of this is how the film should be? Do we start at that point so that the film feels cohesive? But then we've got all this raw material of the characters at quite an early stage, which is more potent even though it doesn't really fit into the narrative or the sort of aesthetic of the film.

And in that instance that was what we did, but it made the film tricky to edit. I mean we had to work hard to make that material work. And I've had the flip side where we've had similar conversations and we've thought this is where the story starts, and we have not used some of the early footage because it didn't maybe have that energy, or it didn't have whatever it was that felt so sort of compelling that it doesn't matter that it's maybe a bit rough and ready or whatever you know.

I think that is the challenge, that is always the challenge with films that have been filmed over a long period of time because nobody really knows exactly what kind of film they're making when they first start filming, I don't think. I mean they sort of think they know what kind of film they're making and in the film that I was just talking about the filmmakers thought they were making a short film, so you know it's a very different approach.

Angela Clarke - I think also it's not until you build those relationships up as a director yourself, and sometimes certain characters can take time to warm up, to get that spark that brings them and their story to life on camera. So, there is always that moment of trying to work out if you can feel that energy and does that seem like a natural place to start but obviously that can sometimes means going back to the beginning again doesn't it? And then trying to work out how we cover the bits that we thought we had but we don't etc.

I wanted to ask you about one of the films you edited ***The Closer We Get*** by Karen Guthrie. That was an extraordinary story about the filmmaker's family, I guess. For anyone that hasn't seen it, it's an intimate portrait, a lot of which takes place contained within the family home, for the bulk of the feature doc. And it's all about Karen and her mum and dad and the slightly quirky family dynamics they have repressed or not always spoken about incidents that have happened.

I won't say too much because I don't want to spoil it for anyone who wants to watch it but just when I was watching that I thought God, I wonder how that panned out in the edit because there are certain seismic things that happen through the course of filmmaking that I would imagine would either have meant the filmmaker had to down tools or had to go back and get stuff and I just wondered how do you deal with it as an editor in those kinds of films? If it's a kind of slightly unfurling narrative and you thought, you knew where you were going with it when you started off the process of editing. Especially with obs docs, if you had 20 weeks in edit, you could still be filming some of the stuff at the start of the edit, couldn't you?

Alice Powell – Yeah…

Angela Clarke - And I just wondered if you could tell me a little bit more about how that one worked because I would have thought there would have been a bit of a stop start process with it.

Alice Powell – Yeah - I mean it's fair to say that one was a very unusual edit in that was a film we edited over a very long period, probably two years, because we were not working on it full time. The filmmaker Karen was caring for her mother at the time and so she's Scottish, her mother lives in lived in Largs and Karen lives in the Lake District in Cumbria. So, she physically had to leave her home and go and stay with her mother every two weeks. I think she did four days at a time, because she had siblings as well, so they had a sort of rota for caring for her.

She would stay with her mother and her father, who had moved back in, and so we literally couldn't keep the edit going all the time because she wasn't there. And because the story was unfolding as we were in the edit, most of the things, and again I won't say what they are in case people want to watch the film, but most of the seismic things that happened in that film, we didn't know were going to happen when we first started editing.

We were just sort of building a world of her family and so it really shaped the edit over time. And I feel a bit sad about it in a way because I don't know if I could do a film like that now anymore because that was when I was much younger and had less experience and so I was doing other jobs in between, you know shorter jobs. And then Karen would give me a call and we'd say shall we do sort of two to five week chunks generally speaking whenever she had a new tranche of material to give me.

It was a very stop start process and for that film I think that was the way that it had to happen. I don't think it could have happened any other way because also apart from anything else I would give her lists of stuff to shoot because it was a sort of funny one as well. Because she was making a film about her parents, and part of the process of making the film was the fact that she was just hanging around her parents' house. She was sometimes quite bored, because caring for somebody the way she described it was that you're sort of somewhere between constantly busy and then sort of bored because you're constantly doing stuff but then there's just these moments where there's nothing to do but you can't leave or go anywhere or do anything, so you are in the house.

And the film is born out of that that experience and so I could literally say can we get some shots of the kettle boiling or whatever it was, or even can you get your dad to buy a paper or weed the garden and film him doing it. So, we were sort of directing it a little bit as we went. The fact that I was on that film while she was doing it meant that we could have that back and forth and gather some additional images that help you along the way to tell the story.

So that was a tough edit because it was very complicated, and because we used lots of archive in that film, as in family archive, there's a lot of time jumping in the film and using time to reveal parts of the story, using the archive to reveal things.

Angela Clarke – Yeah…

Alice Powell - And it just takes a lot of working out to get to where we got to in that film. There's no way we could have just mapped that out from day one and gone, this is how it needs to be.

Angela Clarke - Yeah, well especially not with all the peaks and troughs. You have scene's that are emotional and you're in them for long periods of time because they're quite complicated. There are also moments of stillness too because it's quite a heavy film in places…

Alice Powell – Yeah…

Angela Clarke – It's a big personal narrative about something that's challenging, and complicated and I suppose when you're contained within one room, it's about being able to give those moments of reprieve and slightly break out of that room at periods and have a bit of archive so that you don't feel like you've got cabin fever in the one location because of the way the narrative unfurled.

But it's a beautifully done film and there's a lovely pace to it but it was just one of those ones that when I watched it, you get a sense that it probably took a while.

Alice Powell – Yeah.

Angela Clarke - You know with all the twists and turns and it's not the kind of thing that felt like you would have waited until you'd filmed all of that and then gone right, we should edit that. You kind of get the sense that, I suppose that comes as you make more films, you know there's a point I bet you probably started thinking we're in the home straits and then something I suppose takes a turn!

And one of the other things I wanted to ask then in terms of like how do you manage when you do something like Jeanie Finlay's film ***Game of Thrones: The Last Watch*** because I would have imagined that must have had enormous amounts of footage for you to plough through. Would that be right? I mean I'm just assuming there.

Alice Powell - No, we really did and again, what was nice about that was as I mentioned earlier about being in the edit whilst a director is filming and that was what I was referring to. We were cutting another film whilst she was shooting the ***Game of Thrones*** film. So, we had to instigate a bit of a rule which was that when we were in the edit suite, we were only allowed to talk about the film that we were cutting.

And then when we broke out into the other room to have a coffee or have lunch then we were allowed to talk about the ***Game Of Thrones*** film because she was obviously filming that and she was at that point, just to give a bit of background on that film, Jeanie was asked to be embedded on the ***Game Of Thrones*** set for the final season of ***Game Of Thrones***.

But our brief, and the brief that Jeanie had pitched to the producers was that she wanted to make essentially a kind of character study of some of the individuals that you would find on

the set of such an enormous show. But rather than making a film about the show because Lord knows there's enough behind the scenes stuff that you can access if you're interested in that. We wanted to make a much more characterful piece about what it really takes to put something like that together. The people and individual characters who are a part of that massive, and I mean it's indescribable how massive this sort of juggernaut of a show is really.

At the time she was casting for characters, and obviously that's a term that is used in documentary when you're trying to find who you want to be in your film. She was just having to sort of hang out on set and meet people and film loads of people, and there's loads of people that she filmed who ended up not featuring because their story didn't have the arc that we thought it might have. And so, with that film, because of that process, and it wasn't just Jeannie filming, it's worth saying that we had a crew that were sort of permanently based in Belfast which is where they shoot ***Game of Thrones***.

Angela Clarke - That's right, yeah…

Alice Powell – And they were sort of on base, and so we had somebody who could film something every single day, if needs be. Jeanie wasn't there for every single day of filming, but she would make sure she was there if something big was happening with one of our characters that we were following, then obviously she would make sure that she was there for that.

But sometimes there was just a lot of what I call, mowing the lawn and sort of we're just getting on with some filming, so we'd send one of the more junior camera crew to go and just cover it on the off chance that we needed it and a lot of the time we didn't. But it meant that we ended up with 900 hours of material.

Angela Clarke – Jeez, that's a beast. Is that the biggest amount of footage you ever worked on?

Alice Powell – Yeah, I think it is.

Angela Clarke - It must be, surely?

Alice Powell - We had an assistant editor, an amazing guy called Sean Keaney who we sent over to Belfast and apologies to Rose, his now fiancée, who didn't get to see him as much as she would have liked *(laughing).* But we sent him over there and I think he lived in Belfast for several months like 4 or 5 months or something and literally he was just going through the material.

We had him just tagging everything and what we would do is because in the Avid you can do a filtered search; we would give him things to tag the rushes with. We'd identified which characters we were interested in, say the names of the characters that appear in those rushes. Then there would be the location that they're filming at, the time of day that they're filming and the weather *(laughs).* Is it raining?

Angela Clarke – For continuity?

Alice Powell – Is it sunny? I mean in Belfast most of the time it's raining. Although they did have a crazy heat wave whilst we were filming. But what it meant was because the challenge of editing that material is that unlike a normal film that's following somebody's normal life, you can sort of build a mind map of that was the scene when they talked about something because you remember where they were sitting e.g., on the seafront for example, when they talked about that. So, you would think, yeh I remember that was when they talked about this thing.

Whereas when you're filming people that are making fiction, it's literally the same people, wearing the same outfits, because they all wear this kind of, because it's always cold in Northern Ireland, the same North Face jackets, with the same people, in the same location, doing the same thing! It's really hard to remember, did he say that on that day? Or on this day because I can't remember, they all look the same? *(laughing)*

Angela Clarke – Mmm, just saying he was wearing his fleece, doesn't really cut it then? *(laughs)*

Alice Powell – Exactly, so having those tags meant that when you were cutting a scene with somebody you could literally just input the filters, I need to see this guy on that day and then you could filter it through and find the stuff that you needed. Otherwise there just would have been no way to get through that material, because it was just so enormous.

Angela Clarke - And is editing something like that a bit like playing a game of snakes and ladders? Because you're juggling so many characters and as you say some of the stories are going in a particular direction and then somebody that you've been hedging your bets on thinking their arc is going to go in this direction, then it doesn't, and it slides back down.

Alice Powell – Yeah.

Angela Clarke - Because in a way you're, constantly trying to balance things. As you say, it's different when you're doing a film where you've only got the one character and you're just following their narrative arc all the way through. When you've got several and then you're trying to make sure that there aren't crossovers so that things still feel distinct enough and that the stories feel slightly different in and of themselves isn't it?

Alice Powell - Yeah, well we had quite a particular method on that film which worked well for us. It's worth saying we didn't start the edit properly until they'd shot everything, so we had all the material. I mean there were a couple of pickups that we had to do for certain things. But 99% of the filming was done when we started the edit properly. Although as I said because we had that time in the other edit, we'd been talking a lot about it.

Angela Clarke – Yeah.

Alice Powell - So, I came into it knowing what the stories were. It wasn't a sort of blank page. But the very first thing that we did was we went through, I can't remember how many

characters we ended up featuring, but we started off just going through all the characters that had been filmed in any kind of significant way and we wrote down what their name was and what they did and then we wrote down what our first instinct was, so Jeannie would say this is the first impression that I had of this character. This is why I thought they were interesting, and then we wrote down what we think that their arc is, what happens to them during this filming.

Because obviously the good thing about something like this is that you have an inbuilt structure which is the beginning and ending, you have the last day filming. There is a sort of inherent timeline. You don't have to worry about that so much. It's more about what the individual characters do within that timeline.

We did that for every single character. We wrote down sort of what we thought their story was, what their key attributes were, and what was interesting about them. Then we sort of put them all up on the wall and we just watched everything that pertained to that one character. Our main character, the person who we thought would be the main character was the main character in the end. It was one of the extras, a guy called Andrew McClay who is the sort of absolute beating heart of that film.

Angela Clarke – Yeh I loved him.

Alice Powell - He was a great character, he's really in love with ***Game Of Thrones*** and was just living his best life. The minute Jeanie met him, she thought okay we have a film. The way that we did it was literally, we didn't just watch all the rushes from beginning to end because we would have never got through it. We did it character by character. And because Sean had diligently been marking up all this material, it meant that we could literally just type in Andrew McClay and just watch his story as it went through time.

So, we'd just watch all the rushes that pertained to him in order through time and then we just did that with each character. We would then type in the next person's name and then watch all their story and through doing that we could sort of plot things out. But you know sometimes there's a bit of a gulf between what the director thinks…sometimes stuff happens, but maybe you haven't captured the material to tell that story. Just because it happened to somebody, if you haven't shot it correctly, you might not have got the shots that you need to tell that story. So, we had to see does what we know happen to that character match up in the material that we've got?

It was a bit of a sort of methodical process. Literally mapping each person, then seeing how those arcs worked out. And then we started on the edit and tried to build those key scenes with those key characters almost like tent poles. You sort of plant those throughout the film and then you drip feed everything else into it, so it is a bit of a matrix. But it was a joy to work on even though there was so much material because the material was so good, and it was so fun. The challenge was just trying to make it, like you say, when you've got multiple characters, you just need to feel like you're with each person enough that you get to know them.

Angela Clarke – Yeah.

Alice Powell - But that you don't leave them for so long that you forget about them. You know there is a sort of balance of doing that which I hope we just about managed to achieve.

Angela Clarke - Yeah because when I watched it, I must have been probably one of the only people in the whole planet that didn't watch ***Game of Thrones*** as a series when it was on TV. But I really enjoyed the documentary because it was about the human stories. It had those universal themes where you were just immersing yourself into a world of people that really, really, really cared about their job.

Alice Powell - Yeah.

Angela Clarke - They really cared about doing the best job that they could, and as you say were literally living their best life every day. It was the dream of what you'd want people to find in life, like your extras man. He was legitimately waking up every day doing this, he was nailing life, this is what he wanted to do. I'm loving this every day and so there was a lot of joy in it. And what was interesting about it was that notion of how you make that film work for the random people like me that haven't seen ***GOT*** as well because obviously it had a huge legion of fans around the world.

So, it's about that line, in terms of what you're assuming the audience know and what they don't, whilst along the way weaving that into all these complicated individual character stories. I mean I really enjoyed it for that reason, but I just thought it must be such a different beast and as you say that's a good example of an edit that you probably couldn't have achieved what you did achieve with the final film had you not had that help in the edit.

Alice Powell - Oh yeah, no absolutely ….

Angela Clarke - In terms of refining things, because you just couldn't have watched all the footage…

Alice Powell – No, we couldn't have watched it all and we didn't. I mean I estimated that in terms of what we watched, it was probably about half of it. And it is worth saying you know Jeanie's intention from the beginning was that she wanted to make a film that would work for somebody that had never seen it, because you want to try and make a film that feels universal and not something that is specific.

Obviously, we put little easter eggs in there for people that have seen the show. When I signed on to do it, I had never seen the show. I ended up watching it twice because you want to be able to make it so that the people who do love it, you put stuff in there that they will enjoy and understand, you can put little gags in there and stuff, which if you haven't seen the show, you might not get.

But if you have, you'll think oh that's good. However, ultimately although we put that stuff in, Jeannie's intention from the start was to do something that sort of transcended the people who have seen the show so that you could get something from it without having

seen it. My parents have never watched a frame of ***Game of Thrones*** and they watched that film and really enjoyed it.

Angela Clarke - Well that's the thing because it was ultimately about the human beings who were involved, and their passionate, and zest for giving their absolute best to whatever facet of the production they were contributing towards wasn't it? And I suppose in a way then, coming back to wider question, and you'd touched on this slightly earlier, what kind of rules and codes do you live by as an editor?

When it comes to your approach to editing and that line in the sand as we say where you are judging what's been shown. How does that build as you gain experience, and in confidence I guess as well as an editor to be able to have those conversations with directors or execs or whoever else contributes to that process?

Alice Powell - I mean I suppose ultimately, it's about trying to respectfully tell the best story that you can tell whilst thinking could I sit next to this person and show this film to them. Would they feel okay? Would they feel that I've represented them badly, because there's a difference, I think between showing… *(pauses)* you show stuff that happened out of sequence, and one thing happens after another that didn't happen like that. However, what I'd like to think is that you're sort of by telling a white lie, you're telling a truth.

So, you're helping the audience understand the truth of the situation by just shifting things, because editing is ultimately about momentum and how one scene plays off after another. You can feel very differently about a scene depending on what comes before it. And so sometimes you must rearrange things a little bit to make the emotional impact pay off and for us to feel empathy for a character say, and you know the order in which you show things can really help with that.

Like, an example that I would give for that is going back to Karen's film ***The Closer We Get***. There's some stuff in that film that maybe might make you not feel so happily disposed towards her father, so it was important at the beginning of the film, we built an empathy towards him, so that you were able to view him without judgment. And then, you could put that judgment onto him, but we wanted to give him a fair crack first.

You'd had an opportunity to meet this person and then you could see how you felt about him, and I think that is the thing that I would always want to try and do. If you are going to be critical of somebody, I think you do need to sort of give them an opportunity to shine. Give them an opportunity for the audience to see them for who they are and then you can sort of turn the screw and shape how the audience sees that character. And sometimes that means you might have to move scenes around a bit so that you can do that.

So, the way that I would justify that is that even though you are in inverted commas ‘telling a lie’, because you're saying something happened in the order in which it didn't happen. You're doing it to serve the character if that makes sense.

Angela Clarke - Yeah, it absolutely does.

Alice Powell - But I think it's understanding that line. You know when it's important to understand, because sometimes it's critically important that things happened in a certain order, and if you change that order, you're really screwing with the way that people perceive stuff. But sometimes you're not, and there's no ethics committee on documentary films.

You and the director are the ethics committee, overall, I don't meet the people that are in the film until the screening usually so it's up to the director to be like that's not representative of that person and how they would operate. And so, it's just always touching base on that, so that you can sort of shape the story in the way that you might shape a fiction. You know make it dramatic where you want it to be dramatic, and create tension where you want to create tension, but do it in such a way that feels truthful and about the person or people or group or issue that you are representing. I know we touched a bit on that earlier, but I think is just so important for me. That's just the way that I've always tried to go about the things that I do.

Angela Clarke - And I think that's what is obvious when you watch the films that you've edited. In terms of with reference to Karen's dad. Karen is Scottish, so if you haven't watched the film, her father is from the west of Scotland and being Scottish myself, I would immediately know watching her dad that he had some of those qualities like a lot of men in the west of Scotland, of Karen's dad's age have, they aren't men that emote.

Alice Powell - Yeah, lots.

Angela Clarke - You know he's very kind of buttoned up, very kind of dry, and at first listen can sound maybe dismissive isn't quite the right adjective, but he can be very brisk and abrupt. I think that was handled really beautifully in that film so for those that didn't know that, and who aren't from that area, you can get a sense of actually a lot of that was just kind of imbued. That's who he was and that's the kind of area that he's come from and that's the kind of person that he is, and he alludes to that too, there is a bit where he notes that himself. He's not the most emotive or emotional.

Alice Powell - Yeah.

Angela Clarke – So, it's all those little breadcrumbs as you said. And I figured that the same was true when I watched one of Jeanie's other documentaries ***Seahorse*** about Freddie. Freddy being a trans man who gave birth. Again, those early scenes that you got with Freddy, it's having it in the bigger context to understand well actually that response is, especially with Freddy's journey, an unusual process that nobody including himself could probably have foreseen how he would feel at points with regards to the dysphoria and stuff.

Alice Powell – Yeah.

Angela Clarke - And what he felt through that whole process of the pregnancy itself and so I think it's those moments isn't it. Handling those moments as you say, whilst giving context and understanding what those individuals are going through at that time as well too, so that the audience is viewing it fairly and in context.

Alice Powell - And I think an important thing as well, I think there's a lot of stuff that you can do around the language that you use. And I would say this this goes for both that film and ***Even When I Fall.*** On ***Seahorse*** one of the things that we always said with Freddy, although it was a film about a trans man who was going to give birth. We didn't want to make the film about the sort of tabloid version of transition. We just wanted to say this is a person in the world who is a trans man. We're not going to dwell on that process of transitioning and the sort of before and after.

And again, that was something clear from Jeanie, she was like that's not what this is about. This is about building empathy for a human being going through an experience. And similarly, with ***Even When I Fall***, which is a film set in Nepal about young boys and girls who've been trafficked at a very young age into circuses. We always said from the beginning that this was a film about survivors, and *not* a film about victims.

Angela Clarke - Yeah.

Alice Powell - And I think the way that you use that language in the process of making the film, shapes the way that you treat those characters. And so rather than looking at it as a story of, again, we were keen not to dwell, but we obviously touched on some of the painful stuff that those people had been through. But we didn't want to sensationalize the pain. We wanted to lift and celebrate the journey of how you go from that place of pain and how you move on from that as best you can and start a new life.

So, I think the way that you deal with the language of how you treat the people in the film that you're making is influential to what ends up on the screen. And having that kind of framework from the very beginning which is often led by the director or the producer or whoever has sort of originated the project. It's like setting out this is the way that we're going to do this and in both of those films I'm pretty sure we had material that we didn't put in, that we could have put in, that would have been maybe more sensational or raw. But we felt that overstepped that line that we had set ourselves from the beginning. We're not going to go there, and we don't think it's fair and so we didn't. You know there was stuff that we could have used that we didn't yeah, certainly in both of those films. And I think probably in some of the other things I've worked on as well. You know just because you can, it doesn't mean you should.

Angela Clarke - No absolutely. And when you're filming somebody and you're spending a lot of time with them, all of us have good days and bad days generally in life and I think it is about that bigger sensibility of being able to step back and think well does that sequence reflect that person 95% of the time?

Alice Powell - Yeah.

Angela Clarke - And showing them as you say in a fair and just light, rather than taking that out of context and turning it into something that it isn’t. Which isn't fair to the person that’s featured either because ultimately, they are giving over their life and their story to a

filmmaker and an editor to make up their interpretation of their life isn't it. So, I suppose it's about honouring that that code as well.

What piece of advice would you wish that you'd been given kind of at the start of your career?

Alice Powell - Sometimes people think if you work every day, crazy hours and you do weekends because you just must get it done. And I sometimes think that is a bit of a false economy because you just exhaust yourself and you run out of energy, and it can sort of take over. I think being kind to yourself will ultimately be a good thing for the film, even if it doesn't feel like that at the time.

It's not a job where you can say I've done all my jobs for today when you've got 700 hours of rushes to watch! Like you're not going to be done for ages, so you just must literally say we're going to work until whatever time you decide is relevant and then you just must stop and go home.

Also, I find with watching rushes I do sometimes worry that the stuff I watch in the morning I sort of notate a bit better than the stuff I watch, just after lunch say when you're a bit sleepy from your lunch. *(laughing)* It requires a lot of concentration to sort of sit there chunking through rushes and taking it all in. It's just a lot of concentration for a long time. It's when you start building the edit that things can get a bit more difficult because you're sort of in a flow. And you know maybe you hit the time that you would normally go home but you're sort of in the middle of a scene and you're really vibing and you're really getting something, but it is important to sort of keep that as a bit of a boundary, I think.

Angela Clarke - Let's be honest, you know that with most films there is no specific endpoint. You can cut and you can cut, and you can cut, and you can cut and as an editor what kind of feeling do you get? Like how does it work for you - do think right that's it? I know, obviously probably 9 times out of 10 that end probably will be dictated by where you are with the with the money that you've been given to do the edit that you're doing.

But sometimes there will be moments where you think I don't know I can do anything different with this, I feel we've explored all possibilities. How do you come to that conclusion, and when do you know that point is upon you?

Alice Powell - I mean I think you do often get to a point where you're sort of…. *(trails off)* I think when you can watch the whole film and not sort of pull a face at any point, that's a good time. When there's nothing that makes you sort of go gggrrrhhhhh,… *(Alice makes a big, loud groan)*

Angela Clarke – *(laughing)…*

Alice Powell – That's the best noise I could make! *(laughing)*

Angela Clarke - Very technical, that was great! *(laughing)*

Alice Powell - You sort of know deep down that there's probably something you can do to make that moment work a bit better. Sometimes there are always parts of every film that aren't as smooth as you'd like them to be, and you absolutely know that you have been around the houses and done the absolute best that you can do with the material that you have. And there's always going to be some moments in the film that you think, well, it's not quite right but nobody else will ever notice. But I know that it's not quite right. But you've tried multiple ways to solve something or whatever.

Angela Clarke – Yeah…

Alice Powell - And it sort of just is what it is. But in terms of being finished like you say often it's because you know it must be finished, because you've got to be done. But what I would say is that there's a lot of times when I think if you can possibly build into an edit, and it's hard with schedules, but if you can build in a period of reflection, so that you've sort of…

I mean there's a lot of jokes about picture lock, because picture lock is this sort of mythical thing that never seems to happen. You say we're locked and then two weeks later, you're back making changes. But I think it is a useful thing to say you're done. But then maybe give it a week or two and watch it again and there will sometimes just be something to change. Like on ***Seahorse,*** we did that. We finished it and then we left it and I think it was quite a few months actually and then we came back. It was whilst we were cutting ***Game of Thrones*** and we went back to the start, and we just shaved about 3 minutes off the beginning of the film, and it was so much better.

And we just couldn't quite get there at the time when we were finishing it. And that's my experience on a lot of films where we've come back and it's not always long, it's usually only a day's work. It doesn't take that long. Because it's usually about taking things out. It's very rarely about putting things back in. It's just that last little thing. I've had some time to think about it and we don't need that moment that we thought we really needed or whatever.

But it is hard to build that into a schedule and on that it was lucky because we were working together anyway on the other film so we could just make that work. But that's the tricky thing because I think it is hard when you're hurtling towards a Tx date or somebody screaming at you saying this must be done on this day. And with ***Game Of Thrones*** that was how it was. We had to finish on a day and then we were done and that was the end of it. We might have wanted to make changes after that, but we couldn't because it had to go through the online and was being shown, so we couldn't do anything about it.

I guess that's the difference between something that's for TV sometimes compared to if you're making a more independent film where you've got a bit more control over the distribution and how it goes out. I mean I wish I could say that you just finish on a day and then it's done but unfortunately that's rarely the case.

Angela Clarke – Yup, tap dance away feeling really pleased with yourself thinking that's it all complete…(*laughing)*

Alice Powell - You always come back and move something around or cut a little thing out and you know and with ***Seahorse*** it was the best thing to do, but I think it's also fair to say that the beginnings of films are absolutely the hardest bit to get right. 100%. Because if you don't set the film up properly, everything else just suffers I think, and the beginning is always the bit that we come back to the most. To the point where now, on a lot of the films that I work on, even when we're start cutting, we don't even cut the beginning. We sort of …

Angela Clarke – Yeh cut that at the end…

Alice Powell – Yeh we start about 10 mins in and build the film up and we cut the end and then we come back and do the beginning properly because sometimes you can only really judge what the beginning should be once you know how the end is going to feel.

Angela Clarke - Yeah and carrying that tone throughout the course of the film. It gives you the tone of your piece and then also as you say it's those moments of reflection. What do I need to let people know about that character before we set them on a path or make a judgment one way or they exactly or the other type of thing.

Well just before we wrap up then, I was going to say one of your films has just premiered in San Francisco. I think last year, I can't remember when you edited this, but it's called ***Donna*** by Jay Bedwani and so that follows quite a well-known trans act in San Francisco, a trans campaigner Donna Persona and that comes out soon here, I think it's in the cinemas here soon...?

Alice Powell - Yes, it does yeah.

Angela Clarke - Do you want to tell us a little bit about that film then?

Alice Powell - Oh yes, I love that film. I love Jay. He's a wonderful filmmaker based in Cardiff. That was a funny one from a scheduling point of view. We cut the trailer for that film; I can't even remember when, years ago we cut it. I'm sure people who are involved in documentary know this. But in case they don't, to get a film made, to get the money you tend to have to make what they call a teaser. But when I say teaser, it's not really a teaser because they tend to be around 10/20 minutes long. There is sort of expectation that the filmmaker has already filmed some stuff with the character or characters and then you cut together some scenes to give funders an opportunity to buy into what you're making.

So anyway, so we cut one of those together. It was fun and great and then off the back of that Jay was able to secure the funding for the film. And then unfortunately when he actually came to edit the film, when he'd shot it all and had everything, I was not available to work on it and so he worked with another wonderful editor, and they worked together and did a wonderful job on the film.

They got it to a certain stage and then realized that there was more filming needed. They were in that position of needing somebody to come in and finish the film. Jay came to me because obviously I'd already had a relationship with the film and knew the character and to a certain extent knew quite a lot of the material that had been shot. He came to me, and I

was available now, and so we did the latter part of the edit which involved a bit of a back and forth because I think if I remember rightly, we edited a bit and then we stopped because he went back to San Francisco.

Again, we had a discussion like what do we need to get to finish this film? We didn't have the ending, so we sort of spent a few weeks working out where the story was, what was working about it, what wasn't working about it and what he could do to bring the film to an end.

Angela Clarke - Yeah because that was a classic unfurling narrative as well...

Alice Powell - Absolutely yeah.

Angela Clarke - With somebody that's got much like a lot of the themes within ***Seahorse*** or people going through individual things themselves that they're trying to process and when you get that, it can be complicated…

Alice Powell - It was a more complicated journey and talking of ***Seahorse*** because **Seahorse** obviously is about somebody trying to become pregnant, becoming pregnant and then having a baby. So that you've got an inbuilt structure, again like the ***Game of Thrones***, you've got an inbuilt narrative to structure your film around whereas with ***Donna*** it was a lot harder because the journey that she was going through was a bit less linear.

You know she was sort of reconnecting with members of her family. She was getting involved in activism and she was helping to write a play so there was stuff happening, but it wasn't quite as linear as having a baby which is a one-way process. So, it was a slightly more complicated edit from that perspective, but we were able to have a look at where the film was at and think about some of the scenes that it would be useful to get with ***Donna*** who it must be said is a very lovely subject and has a beautiful relationship with Jay as well. Which is what I think comes through in the film as well. He's so careful with her and so sort of like…

Angela Clarke - Yeah, there's a real respect.

Alice Powell - Yeah, he's really loving, but he doesn't cross the line. He doesn't sort of go over into that territory, but it's just a very respectful relationship. And I don't think you could have made a film in any other way about Donna because she's a very particular subject and I think that relationship is what sees that film through.

Angela Clarke – Yeah.

Alice Powell - So, we were able to sort of build on that relationship and create the finished film which we're all so proud of and it recently screened at the Castro Theatre in San Francisco. Unfortunately, I couldn't be there. I was very sad about that because I would have loved to be there. But, yeah, that's an amazing theatre as well.

Angela Clarke - Yeah, one of those proper old, beautiful art deco cinemas, exactly.

Alice Powell - And anyway, so yeah, that was a real joy to be a part of and I was so happy that having not been able to work on it you know at that point, that I was able to reconnect with it. But again, like I said things happen for a reason and the work that Jay and Anna did on the film is amazing and we were able to build upon that and use the elements that they had done so I'm sure it wasn't detriment to the film. It's all part of the fabric that brings a film together.

Angela Clarke - That's the thing, there are always journeys in the edit that are easier than others and it's usually largely dictated by the kind of material and I guess when working on docs where you are dealing with people when you're talking about a very vulnerable moment in somebody's life, those things take time to be able to build that rapport and feel that you can dip in and out, and it isn't something that you can always just go well we have to capture that today. Sometimes things don't always work out that way.

Well, thank you so much for your time, Alice, it's been lovely to speak to today. And for any of you that haven't seen any of the other films that we've referenced they are on Alice's website - Alice Powell.co.uk. You can go on and you've got the links to all your films there, so thank you so much. It's been insightful to speak to you and thanks very much for sharing all your knowledge and tips.

Alice Powell - Yeah, it's a pleasure. A real pleasure. Thank you very much for asking me.

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