One Stop Doc Shop

Episode 2 – Waad Al-Kateab

Introduction

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

Hello and welcome to *One Stop Doc Shop*, a podcast that celebrates and encourages diversity in non-fiction filmmaking. In each episode, a guest filmmaker will share their secrets on how to make award-winning documentaries.

I'm your host Angela Clarke, and this series was made possible with the support of Screen Alliance Wales, Ffilm Cymru Wales and BFI Network funding from the National Lottery.

My guest today is multi-award winning Syrian activist and filmmaker Waad Al-Kateab. Her first feature length documentary, ***For Sama***, filmed over five years captured her life in Aleppo under the Assad regime.

Released in 2019, the film received a six-minute standing ovation and picked up the best documentary award at the Cannes Film Festival. In 2020 it was shortlisted for an Oscar, and made BAFTA history by racking up 4 nominations and scooping up Best Documentary Film Award.

Waad has also received personal multiple recognitions for her work as an activist and filmmaker, including the IDA Courage Under Fire Award.

We talk about what it was like learning to film in a hospital, in the midst of a revolution, as well as exploring what compelled her to capture the smaller, more intimate moments of family life with her husband Hamza, and her daughter Sama.

Waad also discusses how long it takes to edit down 500+ hours of footage, and what fuels her continued desire to raise awareness of the issues in Syria.

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

Waad, Hamza & Sama

Waad, Sama & friends

Hamza, Sama & Waad

If you want to watch Waad's award winning film, or get involved with Action for Sama click here.

Angela Clarke - Hi Waad, thank you so much for coming on to the One Stop Doc Shop today.

Waad Al-Kateab – Thank you so much it's my honour.

Angela Clarke - Like everyone else, I was completely blown away by ***For Sama*** when I saw it in 2019. It was, and still remains one of the most powerful films I've ever seen, and I've re-watched it many times and it doesn't lose any of its impact, so I'm delighted you've agreed to share your process on the podcast.

Waad Al-Kateab - Yes and thank you so much first for these lovely words, it really means so much to me.

Angela Clarke – So ***For Sama*** was your first ever feature documentary film, and obviously to say that it gathered enormous press attention is an understatement. I know lots of people will be familiar with your work, but just in case there are some who aren't, could you give me an overview of what the film was about?

Waad Al-Kateab – The film is my story, told over 5 years in Aleppo, Syria. It's about the place I lived, and where I dreamt of having freedom, for a new county. It's almost 10 years ago that we started protesting, so we are almost approaching the 10th anniversary of the start of the revolution. The film is about the life and death, the difficult circumstances, and the dark situations that we lived through. It's about the resilience of the Syrian people who lived under all of these circumstances, and how they still held on to a dream of living in peace.

Angela Clarke - The film is just remarkable in itself and if you haven't seen it people need to watch it and I can direct them at the end where to go if they haven't seen it. But what is remarkable to me, and I didn't know this until recently, but you didn't start out studying media or journalism did you? You started studying economics and marketing at Aleppo University. So how did you end up getting involved in filming protests, how did that come about?

Waad Al-Kateab – Yeh, I mean I'd always dreamt of being a journalist and I remember when I was like 15/16years old, you know that age when we all start to think, 'Okay what does the future hold, what do we really want to do?' And in Syria this question about what you *really* want to do, it's not always an option that is going to be fully available to you.

Sometimes you have to think in a very traditional, very classic way because there is no freedom to doing anything. Everything is really risky and dangerous and so I had this long conversation with my parents about me going to journalism school and they were like, 'No, no, no, no, no', because I was a very kind of

headstrong girl, and they were very worried because they knew it would end up with me in prison if I became a journalist.

So they said, 'Go do anything else', and when you finish you can leave, leave Syria and travel to Germany, or to any place you want and do journalism there. That was kind of like the common dream held by everyone from my generation. We will go to Germany or to some other countries outside, and that was my plan. So I started doing economics, and then in my third year, one year before my graduation, the revolution started and I just found myself like so many other people feeling that we belonged to this country; we had dreams and wanted to do something. We wanted to be able to change our lives, we felt that we're citizens, that we're human beings and so we joined the protest.

We started protesting in the street and for me part of my role was like how I can be more useful to the revolution? How can we make sure that everything we are doing now is captured forever, and is recorded as evidence of everything that was happening in Syria. It was just by filming, as so many other activists do – so we started filming on our phones at the beginning.

At the time, we were trying to develop things like our equipment, our knowledge, our skills and so it ended up after 5 years of doing that, I was displaced from my country, a place where I dreamt of living, but I ended up having all of this treasure, like over 500 hours of footage that documented everything that happened, documented the war crimes, documented the hope, the dreams that we had on camera, and that is how ***For Sama*** *(the film)* was made…

Angela Clarke - And so in those early days why did you choose to shoot on a mobile phone? What was the reasoning behind using phones?

Waad Al-Kateab - It was just something that we had to do and that was the only way to do it. The regime was threatening anyone who was trying to do anything against them like doctors, filmmakers, or people who were speaking out, so it wasn't really an option to have a proper camera at the protests because if they saw you using that, you might be killed in an instance.

So we started to find alternative ways and like something positive was starting to come out of social media and online technologies and things. So we started to film with our phones because using a phone is not something they can accuse you of, it's not like its bad or illegal to use you know! It's my phone, but if they found a video or a picture that would obviously be the end of your life, but in general this is something you can kind of hide behind. So we used our phones, and we also started to sometimes take just sound recordings too – like the sound of the security forces when they were coming to arrest someone. Even to get a picture, like an unframed video, which is bad quality, this was something that was very important to do because we didn't have any other choices.

Angela Clarke - When people get into filming, and start to learn to shoot action, I mean just how difficult is it to do that, when your first time doing that is filming in the middle of a revolution under attack? What kind of things were you filming when you first started, and how did you evolve through that process to capture more and more footage that you thought might be useful?

Waad Al-Kateab – Yeh the funny thing was at that time, I didn't know what a 'wide shot' meant, what a 'close up' shot meant! We didn't care about framing shots or checking to see if that was the right framing or not, if that was a good shot or not. We were just trying to record everything, and that is why I use the word *record* a lot because it doesn't matter what you are capturing in this kind of situation.

The events themselves were very, very important and we were trying just to survive in the moment, both as people but also to preserve this footage, preserve this material because it's evidence. We didn't really care about how we did that at the time. At that time, all of this material was being published outside Syria, even by very big journalists and broadcasters like CNN and Channel 4 and the BBC, all of them were broadcasting this material because that was the only footage coming out of Syria.

You know this is a very military country, under the regimes control and there are people protesting and people are being killed, so it doesn't really matter about the quality of these pictures or how the stories were being told. It's just important to gather evidence of what's happening. But at the time when we started, and especially when I moved to the eastern part of Aleppo, when the area was out of the regime control, then I had more freedom to look at what I was doing and to look at the human stories.

I had the chance to speak with people to kind of like, you know to work on delivering more classic news reports where you have an array of wide and close up and medium shots with a normal voice over on it, to explain these stories. And with time, we started to understand all of these things. We started to work more in line with, kind of following what outside journalists or channel filmmakers were doing.

We wanted to learn how to draw more attention to what is happening because at the time when the revolution was going on, the violence was also very high, and things were more complicated so we needed to keep as much attention on our plight and it wasn't about the individual stories themselves, it was about the quality of the footage and this is something I feel very bad about when I talk about it, but that was the reality you were dealing with. You needed people to look at something and to keep watching this because for them it's just like the same things showing again and again.

Angela Clarke - I think throughout the film there are some really powerful, some really moving and some really upsetting things to watch and I think, like one of the early scenes once you start to meet Hamza and you are starting to embed within the hospital and the doctors, you go down to the river where its quite apparent there are lots of bodies that have been disposed by the regime. You know its really harrowing to watch and I wondered as a filmmaker how is that for you to film?

Waad Al-Kateab – Again you know it wasn't something you really have the time to think about. It was, we were just part of the protest, we were part of the resilience of the people who were standing against the regime. You have to live, and you just have to find a way to keep yourself alive and to keep yourself going. And you can see all this violence around you, so you are responsible in one way

or another - you are responsible to keep going you know. You should not give up or turn your back and leave, so all of these things were just a daily thing happening. And day by day, hour by and hour, you can't really think about it, like you can't just take a step back and think about it as one big thing, you are just living through this.

This boy who was killed, it might be your son, it might be your brother, this woman might be you. So there is no way to kind of like you know think about it. I would say we were living day-by-day just trying to find hope from the small things in life. We were living in a place where there was a lack of everything and anything that you can do, even if it wasn't something important helps. So for me like I wasn't a professional journalist, but I had camera, there were small things I could do. I knew some people outside Syria, so these connections I had and this material was something important, even though I didn't really believe that at that time, but at least I was able to do something.

Angela Clarke – Yeh to give you that focus. And so throughout the film it's made up of a composition of things – images and actuality that are unfurling as a result of the regime and also then more personal archive of you and Hamza and you and Afraa - you and your friends and children and stuff, and some of the guys that help you set up the hospital. So what made you film those sequences, what made you film some of the stuff that was more private?

Waad Al-Kateab - I mean I was kind of like, I don't know why but ever since the revolution started, I was always thinking about the background of everything. What is going on behind the scenes? So even in some of the protests, I was kind of like not sure why, but I felt like there is something behind this, there is something very important happening. Telling the story and filming what we were doing, even behind the protest scenes, I was trying to kind of film some of the preparations we were doing. You know when we were like at home writing these big signs or making some of these kinds of signs for the protests and so I was just trying to film this and talk to people.

I would have some of the people's tell their background stories, and why they even began to get involved in the revolution and although I knew that all of this material, I can't use it because of security issues, I thought it's important just to document it anyway.

And when I moved to the eastern part of Aleppo and I started to see life in a different way. I remember that we had several fights between the people in the hospital, even Hamza and some of our other friends. They completely understood why I was filming a massacre, or why I'd film a boy who is being killed or something, but none of them understood at the beginning why I'm filming us whilst we're having a dinner, or why I'm filming when they are going to play football. And they are always telling me like, 'Stop, stop, stop', and I don't know why but I saw something that really amazed me and I was always kind of following my feeling towards these events, even if it is not important at all.

Then the day when Reiz *(a friend)* was killed *(pauses)* I remember exactly, the next day, in the evening, we were sitting altogether and we had just lost someone who was very, very close. Someone that we lived with all the time and I was just showing Hamza and the guys in hospital some of the footage and like it was just

very silly footage you know, like when we were fighting or laughing, or he *(Reiz)* was getting out from the bathroom. It was just nothing really you know, but we were all kind of laughing loudly and at that point it felt like he wasn't even dead, we'd forgotten the whole idea of that.

And I think that was what made us all feel that this life that was happening all around us, it could vanish completely at any second. All of these moments could just disappear – any one of us could disappear. So how can we really keep this story, how we can keep Reiz alive forever? Just by having filmed him, we kept him alive in our memory, and that is the same thing that we felt we wanted to do with everyone. I mean absolutely after that it was very hard, because if they want to play cards at 4am they would knock on my door and bring me to film them and it I was like, 'Please guys not *all* of the time…" *(laughs)* but it was really funny to hear and see all of these things because it was just nice to be part of the memory.

And when I was filming all of this I never thought that first of all I would survive or that I would make a film and use this footage for something big like ***For Sama*** or to talk about making it like we're doing now, because you know I was just living day by day and it never come into my head this could happen. Because the only think I could think about then is that I might be killed and so someone might take this footage and make a film to tell our story.

And then secondly, you know I've never realised it would serve as a memory of a place that we can't go anymore, or of people we are no longer able to see and that is why for me it is more difficult…. *(pauses)* When I'm watching the film now, I always cry at the points no one else cries at. The lovely moments when we laugh, when we are happy...*(pauses)* maybe I can handle all the suffering and all the pain, the painful scenes, all the scenes where there is blood much more than I can handle any of the lovely moments where I know, it's no longer, we can't be there…

Angela Clarke - Yeh I was thinking that - it must be such an odd experience for you to watch it - it's like a big memory isn't it..

Waad Al-Kateab – This is something I don't usually really say, and at the same time maybe it's obvious for so many people but I don't always speak about it. But I'm so kind of like proud I was able to do it to the end, because every day when I was living there, for me that was the end. The last minute, or the last video or the last story! And once I was out *(of Syria)* and I was working on ***For Sama,*** I've never expected that the film would be going around the world like this. I didn't expect the film could be even completed as a story. But now, when I look back at this I'm like how the hell have I done this, how was I able to keep filming everything like this?

And people ask me this and I find answers, but I don't know how – I really don't know how. I don't have a very confident answer to explain all of this. I don't even know how I was even able to relive all of this and watch all of this material again. But the one thing that I do know is that this is very important and I'm so happy that I was able to do it. To deliver our voice this way, in this film and make people not just understand our situation, but also make a lot of Syrian people proud and feel like this is also their story.

Angela Clarke - Yeh and I think that is also what makes the film so remarkable. For so long for here certainly in a lot of our western media and press, especially in the tabloids, people have become dehumanised in the process of talking about refugees and people who are having to flee from trouble and I think that is the thing that the film gives is that sense that people are people and that everywhere we have more in common than we have in differences. Mum's and dads around the world sit and tell their kids stories, and they sit and cook their dinner, kids still play, and just all of those things that are normal to *everyone* around the world – it's just your context looks different that's all.

There are lots of heart stopping, gut wrenching moments of death and pain in the hospital and on the streets all the way through the film that are really difficult to watch but I think for me, as well, one of the things that is also more shocking in away are the smaller moments – like there were a lot of moments in Afraa's house that made me think, 'Oh my god.' Hearing her husband read the story to the kids – you know the story when the bomb hits the house and you relate that back to the stories that you are told as a child which have happy endings and then I think her son talking about when he made the little paper cut outs of his friends who were no longer there…*(pauses)*

Those moments to me were the ones that were almost more upsetting because you are thinking that is just a kid, that's just a kid you know and it's how they see it and I wondered you speak to lots of children throughout the film. What attracted you to the kids, what was it about them and their honesty that appealed to you?

Waad Al-Kateab – Like you can't ignore them, they are a very big part of that community, they are a very big effected part of the whole story. But like also they attract you because they display a lot of normality…. I don't really know the word to describe it, but in the same way that you were shocked with what Wisam said in one of the scenes for example, when he said, 'I don't want to live', and he was crying. I mean I was kind of shocked with that too. I was looking at him thinking, what the hell, what is happening now.

And the only thing you can really do is keep talking to them. They are no longer children, they are adults. They have experienced even more than us and they have been going through this and managing to cope with that. Maybe not *coping* with that, but they have their ways to express and to feel everything. You know children at that age, I mean I remember when I was like Sama's age or whatever, I didn't care about the whole world outside, I was just thinking about my toys and my room and that was it.

But it's just amazing to see like how they understand things and for example Naya at the end of the film when she says, 'Aleppo has gone…', I mean when I heard her behind the camera saying this I was like, 'What!' I mean she is just 4 years old, actually she was 3 not even 4 years old but she understands. And it's just amazing and hard and difficult all at the same time and yet with all of this you look at Wisam and Naya, who are very lucky at the end. Sama who is also very lucky too, and you look at the other millions of Syrian refuges who are in camps now and they still are managing to stay alive and do amazing stuff and it's just very sad….

At the end of the day we started the revolution to try and secure a better future and a better life for all of us, and for our children and so that is what we hope at the end for all of these children to have a better life, to have safety, to have great opportunities for them in the future…

Angela Clarke – Absolutely, everybody deserves to have that in life it's the bare minimum. As you film, all the way through, the longer that you are there and the more that you are filming in the hospital and the more the revolutions attacks are becoming greater – you start to ask a lot more questions or have more of a dialogue with the people who are coming in to the hospital and that itself is a really tricky skill to develop isn't it. Because when people are going through moments of grief and trauma and personal pain, it's hard to make that judgement call as to when you speak and when you don't, when you interrupt and when you don't. How did you find that process?

Waad Al-Kateab - So I will answer this as if I'm still living there *(in Syria)* and not as though I'm in the moment here because for me so many of the decisions or questions regarding filming this footage was done that way because at that time I felt like I was trapped in Syria with those people in that moment, because I felt at that time I'd never survive. So for that reason, there were so many things that I did then purely in the moment.

If at the time I'd been able to look into the future, and see where I am now, and how things turned out, there are so many things I would never have maybe filmed or would never have spoken about or even thought about. But in that situation, when you are living that life sometimes you don't even care about recording for recording itself, but it's more just to keep going or keep living. That is when you make all of these decisions out of nowhere – at that moment that is all that makes sense to you. What makes sense to you and what makes sense to other people, it's very complicated even to try and analyse it today.

But the only thing at the time for me was I am living here and this mother could be me and this daughter or son could be Sama and so you know I have just to do what I have to do, without really thinking about this. And in situ, in Syria, the people around you judge you in this same way. They don't think about you being this filmmaker who has come in to film and then you're going away again. They knew me – you know I was living inside the hospital too and Sama was also around all the time so they kind of knew that we are all in this together and everything we are doing, and they are doing, was just always with the best of intentions from all of us…

Angela Clarke – Yeh so it comes to the end of 2016 and you are forced to leave Aleppo and you eventually get into the UK and you've been working with Channel 4. A lot of us have seen some of the news clips you had sent over during that time, and so you talk about the fact that you have all got all this footage, about 500 hours, and that you want to do something with it. You meet Edward the co-director – and so how do you even start with all that? It's quite raw, you've just come out of a situation where you have been living in fear of your life, how did you begin to edit that process down?

Waad Al-Kateab – I mean there are several important points to mention when we talk about how the film was made and all of the edit process etc. I mean at the beginning, I wasn't able to do anything by myself or alone, I didn't even know how to do it, so for me when I met Edward and we talked about the project, we were both just trying to understand where we meet in the middle, and work out what we both believe in etc. I felt that absolutely I couldn't do it alone, not emotionally, and not as an experience. The second thing to say is I really trusted the people who were behind the news, the people at Channel 4 News so I was quite relaxed because I knew that everything I was doing will end up the way I want it because of my experiences of them over the last few years.

The other thing was the moment I left Aleppo I was kind of thinking about like maybe not doing anything at all. Maybe not even being a journalist, or working in the media because I felt quite desperate and disappointed by the whole world, the international community and the people who had seen my news reports. And so by the time we'd fled Aleppo, I'd lost a lot of hope. But then at the same time I felt that I have all of this material and I'm able to tell the story – and if I didn't tell this story – people won't know what is happening.

I was also witnessing a lot of the propaganda from Assad and Russia talking about the people in Aleppo being terrorists and like so many different, contradictory reports from what we have seen with our own eyes and so I had to stand up and say, 'No, I'm not just telling a story - I have *evidence* about all of these crimes'. So I decided I have to do the film, and maybe I'm just doing the film for myself or maybe for Aleppo, maybe for the people we lived with. But that said I never expected that the film would be shown anywhere else other than on Channel 4 - which at that point would, in itself, have been an amazing achievement.

But for me also, I thought okay maybe Channel 4 cares about the film but I didn't know if an audience would care about it or not. So at the time I just try doing what I have to do and I tried in my own way to find hope to keep the memories alive and to keep meaning in my life in a way after Aleppo.

And the whole team on the film, I'm so grateful to all of them because they weren't just treating it as a project or a business opportunity. Everyone who worked on ***For Sama*** was really displaying a lot of passion and were really caring about the story and about me and about Syria so that gave me so many good feelings through the whole process of the film.

It was very difficult, and very challenging but also very useful for me to kind of process everything. Like when we came to the UK, and we were trying to settle down and we were finishing editing the film and getting it ready for release – Edward and I were told to prepare ourselves, that possibly not everyone would care about the film, we had been told that a lot throughout the editing. So even Edward didn't have high expectations about how it might be received.

We didn't know a lot about feature documentaries or cinema and it was same with Channel 4 because they were a TV channel, and so we were trying to look by ourselves regarding what paths films like this could take into festivals, or into cinemas with a theatrical release. So we tried to look for some festivals and we got accepted into South By South West first, and even on the day, when the film

was out, we were sitting alongside the audience watching their reaction, trying to read what people would say about it and how many people would leave the cinema.

It's not just the meaning behind the story that's difficult but also how tough is it for people to see that – and so we were just shocked that no one left and people even stayed to watch the whole Q & A. People were coming afterwards to ask us many things – like what can we do – what do you want us to do, how can we be involved etc, and that feeling stayed with me for another couple of screenings.

We were always terrified that people would not like it or people would not be engaged with it, even when we were like at Cannes Film Festival but you know every screening, I got more confident and I got more feelings of hope that people care about this, people want to do something. But the amazing thing for me on the other hand was the Syrian people and how they received the film, and how they were very proud of the film and I mean that was totally different level of hope and confidence.

Angela Clarke - I think that one of the things that makes it so, so powerful is the way you do the voice over in it and the fact you author it and it's kind of like a combination of you writing a love letter to Sama *(daughter)* and almost feel quite diary-esq in tone. Your voice adds such a huge power to it – especially when you watch all the scenes at the beginning where there is such hope and you are out protesting and everyone feels enthusiastic and like change is maybe going to come and you are with your friends. And then as you say, that shift when friends start to be lost and as you go along and hope starts to fade a little bit, when did you decide you were going to do the voice over the way that you did…?

Waad Al-Kateab - So we kind of decided about the voice over from the beginning. We thought lets try it this way because when you have over 500 hours you don't even know where to start, so we needed something to build upon. Ed recorded a long interview with me over 5 days, and I tried to speak about everything just to find like a basic storyline. Even for me, it wasn't clear at that point in time, although I lived the whole story and I knew everything - it wasn't clear to me what are the most important things we need to reveal. Where should we start – where should we finish? So we're kind of like just trying to build this story and the voice over was something we said okay lets do it this way.

So we went through the whole film with the initial voice over on it, but the final voice over that's currently in the film was recorded just a couple of days after the picture edit was completed. The edit was finished but neither of us were 100% confident about the original voice over. We both felt like there is something that needs to be pushed more and so I got 2/3 days alone at home, just watching the film as it was, in its final version and I was sitting watching just knowing deeply in my heart that this is my last chance if I want to say something else, to give something more to the film, to my life, to Aleppo, to Sama.

I need to write something really meaningful, and I need to be really, really honest and this question of being really honest was there from the early days. So I wrote something down, and then Edward and I, we sat for two days and we tried to make the language suitable for the film between English and Arabic. I wasn't speaking perfect English and Ed doesn't understand Arabic so we had to find a

common dialogue between us and moved between both to find a way to make it right and perfect for both audiences. And then we recorded it and so recording that voice over at the end was maybe as just hard as the whole process of making that film because I wasn't just relieving this and being there. I knew that if I failed in doing this, it was so hard and so it was a really big responsibility.

Angela Clarke – It's so poignant and so beautifully delivered though you can feel like it sounds like you are speaking from the heart and also what I think works with it is the fact that it sounds like you've almost, not stepped back from it but you've had time to digest what has happened and live with it and then looking back in you know to give narration and reflect yourself on the moments you almost didn't have time to reflect on as they were happening.

So obviously the film we know has been a huge success and off the back of that you set up Action for Sama *(charity)* – was that always in the back of your mind that you wanted to do something beyond the film to help raise awareness, to help people petition to help get Assad be tried for his crimes etc? Was that always there from the beginning or did that evolve once you realise that the film had resonated with an audience…?

Waad Al-Kateab – I think I never expected the film would ever be seen by so many people, so for me I just wanted to tell the story, and to make it accessible for people. For me, that was the highest achievement I thought I could do. And then when we started seeing festival responses and heard from people and gathered awards, and more countries were translating it, then we felt that we have to do something more. We felt we needed to do something to be able to give answers to all the people who came up to us and said we want to do something tell us what we can do. We felt like we had a responsibility to answer their questions, because you can't just leave people upset and angry with a bad feeling toward what happened without trying to help them feel at least like they are doing something.

And also on the other hand, we wanted to make the Syrian people who felt the same as I had felt, of being abandoned or like no-one cares about our lives to feel that from people from outside our country do really care and that is what I've seen in my own eyes and that was what I had wanted to see so that was why we stared Action For Sama – to give answers to all the amazing questions that we were asked. We also started to kind of play around more with the idea of why the whole film was made. We wanted people to understand more and we wanted people to raise more awareness and also we wanted people to literally do something and to feel this connection and so it was just an amazing step forward. We are still alive and we are doing something – we still have a responsibly to the story…

Angela Clarke – And so what is next on your agenda then? I hope you are not going to tell me you are going to go back and finish your degree in marketing and economics – and that you are going to do some more filming? *(guest and host laughing)*

Waad Al-Kateab - I wish, I loved that before.

Angela Clarke - What have you got planned?

Waad Al Kateab - There is so much to do next! I'm still struggling to organise my time and find a way of sorting out where to begin but there are a couple of stories which I'm developing now because you know I learned so much from this experience and I want to keep going with this. I want to tell more stories.

I want to help other Syrian people tell their own stories and so I have one film with one other filmmaker, a Syrian filmmaker, who has a story and she also wants to tell it, so I'm trying to work together with her to find a way similar to what happened with ***For Sama*** but with a totally different subject/topic. And then there are another two projects which are still developing; one related to refugees and the other one is also related to Syria so I'm trying not to step too far out from that experience and but it's also something really new and a totally different level of filmmaking.

Angela Clarke - Well I'm sure you will crack it. And how are Sama and the family?

Waad Al-Kateab – Yeh they are great - not really now with the lockdown - but they are much, much more happy, settling down in the UK. They speak English - Sama and Taima both do. Sama started school last year and she is coping with everything you know….

Angela Clarke - Well that is exciting I'm glad. And I was wondering when I was watching the film do you or Hamza ever hear from any of the patients that came to the hospital that had treatment?

Waad Al-Kateab – Yeh so for a while Hamza stayed managing the hospital even when we were outside in Turkey. And then when we first came to live in the UK, he was one of the guys on the board. The hospital has a board of 5 people and so for a while he was one of them, but just a short while ago he kind of took a step back from this responsibility and he's just started a Masters Degree in public health. But the hospital still functions in Idlib now. I mean we watch the Facebook page of the hospital and there are a lot of people who there who are still our friends. We congratulate them when they have new kids or get married or something like this – but you can't even leave behind this kind of family and so we are in touch with so many people.

Angela Clarke - Yeh I can imagine and the footage as you say it was a visual diary for you but it will also be a visual diary for lots of other people who have maybe lost other memories along the way and there are things for them to capture and share in the film.

What advice would you give to somebody like you that was starting out again wanting to do something similar to what you did then at the very beginning of the process? What would you say to any aspiring filmmakers that were about to start that journey…?

Waad Al-Kateab - I mean I think the only thing I can tell people to do is follow their feeling - to follow the thing that they believe is important and just to

keep going, find hope, find your way and just be strong - as much as you can be. You know this is not an easy thing to do, but also care about the people around you, take strength from them and give them strength, give them what they need. It's all about life and it's all about hope and there are so many hard things in this life and but at the end the only thing that will be left is the story – so tell your own story in your own way…

Angela Clarke - That is great advice, Waad thank you so much for taking the time to talk today, I hugely appreciate it. And if there are any listeners that haven't seen ***For Sama*** then you can go to the *Action For Sama* website and I believe you will find links to the film there. And if you want to do any more to help raise awareness of the injustices still sadly being carried out on the people of Syria then go check out the various ways you can show your support – all of the information is on the website – well good luck with all your future projects…

Waad Al-Kateab - Thank you so much…

Angela Clarke - I can't wait to see them and I hope you and your family and friends and all the other displaced Syrians around the world are able to return to live in peace in your country soon…

Waad Al-Kateab - Thank you so much, thanks.

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