

Sarah Taylor:

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Chris Mutton, CCE:

The mentee has a lot to offer the mentor. I think that's maybe a misconception about mentorship is that it's a top-down approach. And it's somebody who's, I'm going to show you, you know, I'm going to teach you X, Y, and Z. But, I think one thing that's come across really obviously in all of the conversations we've had here is that openness and honesty, and it has to be a two-way conversation.

Brina Romanek:

Feeling like you have a safe space to make mistakes and to play. You know? Because I think, end of the day, one of the most fun things about editing is that you get to play.

Ricardo Acosta, CCE:

I would use one word, is empathy and respect. And also, knowing that you are working with a very particular part of our being, which is our fragility, our insecurity, our gift as artists. The fact that none of those things are absolute, but they're all part of our humanity.

Sarah Taylor:

Hello and welcome to The Editor's Cut. I'm your host Sarah Taylor. We would like to point out that the lands on which we have created this podcast and that many of you may be listening to us from are part of ancestral territory. It is important for all of us to deeply acknowledge that we are on ancestral territory that has long served as a place where indigenous peoples have lived, met, and interacted. We honour, respect, and recognize these nations that have never relinquished their rights or sovereign authority over the lands and waters on which we stand today. We encourage you to reflect on the history of the land, the rich culture, the many contributions, and the concerns that impact indigenous individuals and communities. Land acknowledgements are the start to a deeper action.

Today's episode is part three of our four-part series covering EditCon 2022, Brave New World. Documentary editing is a craft of perpetual learning. Not only do our tools change constantly, but so do approaches to storytelling. Mentorship has long been at the heart of developing the next generation of talent in all mediums, and documentary is no exception. It can be difficult for new and aspiring editors to gain access to the suite, to sit, watch, listen, and learn the intangible skill of editing. Pull up a seat as two apprentices interview their mentors on their approach to storytelling and the importance of passing the torch to the next generation.

[show open]

And action.

This is The Editor's Cut.

A CCE podcast.

Exploring, exploring, exploring the art of picture editing.

Chris Mutton, CCE:

Welcome to Learning from the Best. My name is Chris Mutton. I'll be your moderator for our panel today. We have an exciting discussion lined up that will hopefully bring out a better understanding of mentorship. Mentorship can be kind of hard to define, comes in many forms, from mentors who follow a lecture format in a large group all the way down to one-on-one mentor pairs. So today we'll be hearing from two such pairs. We'll start off with our first group, hear about their experience. Then we'll move on to our second group. And lastly, sort of bring everybody together for an informal round table discussion. And I'll be taking a backseat for the most part.

We're going to try something a little new and have our conversations led by our mentees. In our first group, we have multiple award-winning documentary filmmaker and editor Michèle Hozer. With over 40 documentary editing credits, including the critically acclaimed *Shake Hands with The Devil* and her directorial debut, *Sugar Coated*, she is a mainstay of the Canadian doc world in Canada. Michèle is joined by her mentee, Brina Romanek, a documentary filmmaker and editor of the Lifestyle documentary *Radical Retirees* and editor of the doc feature *a Cure for the Common Classroom*, which she edited with Michèle's guidance. Welcome Michèle and Brina.

Michèle Hozer, CCE:

Hi, thank you.

Chris Mutton, CCE:

In our second mentorship pair, we are joined by Ricardo Acosta, CCE. Also a household name in documentary editing in Canada. Ricardo won the CCE award for best editing in documentary for *Marmato* in 2014, and is the editor of acclaimed films *15 to Life*, *The Silence of Others*, and *Herman's House*. He's joined by mentee and documentary editor Jordan Kawai. Jordan holds his master's degree in media studies from Ryerson and has assisted and edited documentaries including *Bangla Surf Girls*, in which Ricardo served as mentor and story editor. Welcome Ricardo and Jordan. And just to start things off, Jordan, how did you meet Ricardo and how did this mentorship begin with you guys?

Jordan Kawai:

I first met Ricardo when I was in graduate school at Ryerson, the documentary media MFA. And Ricardo was brought in for a class critique and I shared a piece of my film and had Ricardo give me some criticism about it, which was the very first time I met him. And then fast-forward two years later, I met Ricardo again in a job opportunity where I would be assisting Ricardo in a film that was produced by the NFB. And at that time it was called *Hispaniola*. The name later changed to *Stateless*.

Chris Mutton, CCE:

Awesome. How was it like to have Ricardo look at your work?

Jordan Kawai:

I mean, it was one of those interesting things where I-- it was kind of like, foreshadowing a lot of the conversations that were to come. A lot of things surrounding, yeah, simplicity and minimalism and that, and one of the mantras that I kind of, like I always tell Ricardo, at the beginning of every project, I write at the top of my notebook which is "Surrender yourself to your footage." And that was one of the first things that he had said to me, and that was something that I kind of brought forward later in all my projects.

Chris Mutton, CCE:

Excellent. All right. I'll let you take it away. Go for it.

Jordan Kawai:

Yeah, So Ricardo, when we first met, we had-- it was an interview for the project Hispaniola. And at that point in time I was assist editing on a few projects and a lot of them—a lot of my role at that point was moreso coming in and making sure, as assistant editor, that the project was—you know, the wheels were all oiled and it was all afloat. And one of the first things that you said, was kind of like, music to my ears, I was pining for an opportunity to work collaboratively and kind of, shadow an editor and director. And, I don't know if you remember saying this to me, but you said you didn't want, an assistant editor who was just going to be a ghost in the room, and you wanted someone who was kind of there for the process. And, I was wondering how that kind of came to be and why that's what you wanted at that point in time for that project.

Ricardo Acosta, CCE:

You know Jordan, for me, as I had said to you before, I was a wonderful slave slash assistant editor for a while before I started editing my films. But I also was a very privileged assistant editor because I was able to observe and participate of the creative process-- on the creative process of the filmmaking. And the storytelling, in the editing suite, and being able to-- to be there, in situ, when the director and the editor and the producer were discussing the story. And I have realized that, in the times of digitizing footage, the role of an assistant editor has been diminished to someone who come, in a very impersonal way, when you are not around, to prepare the material for you.

It was becoming more and more a lonely job of an editor with a footage and a director, but where is the assistant on that? And also, where is the assistant that is also a wonderful filmmaker who I can perceive as a great editor, you know-- in progress and where that editor will find the role models, the place where that young assistant can learn how to conduct and how to be, and how to-- what is the role of an editor in the editing suite. That's not something you learn in a school, at Ryerson. That's something that you have to learn also, assisting other editors. I think.

And you know, I saw on you, from the beginning, that the light of a filmmaker, of someone who took his job and his dream of telling stories very seriously. And the way you talk about editing, I went like, "Okay, this is a fantastic opportunity." Because a lot of people do not have that drive. And for me it was very, very special at that moment to say, "Okay, here is someone who can also be my buddy in the editing suite."

Jordan Kawai:

What I really appreciated early on when I was working with you, Ricardo was watching rushes together. And I think as someone who was kind of new to that realm and new to that industry of just... Well, I kind of-- What I learned from screening live with you and you would start watching rushes and you'd hit that space bar, pause it, and then you would ask me, "What is the heart of this scene for you?" And I think throwing that question and always having that ability to stop and pause and really be on the ball of figuring out if you shake this down, what it is at the heart of something or the spirit of something.

Ricardo Acosta, CCE:

At the end of the day we have to deal with tools of dramaturgia to put together a story and it's a four-minute story. What is the heart of that? What we are doing, we might be wrong, we might be having challenge in finding what is the best. But we have to really be brave and go for it. And based on that thing that we find that is the heart and the most meaningful, build around that. Which is what we

did in that scene, also, no? Start embroidering around that idea. How do we present that? Because for me, ultimately, it's a choreography that is not dictated by the brain only, but also by the emotion of the moment of the story that we are trying to tell. And also of the character. What the character needs and not so much about what I want the character to do, sometimes.

Jordan Kawai:

This was part of a film where that character's arc didn't actually make it into the feature film. It was actually-- That whole character was then used for a short film that I edited later, which ended up being the opening scene in a different variation way for that film. But it was interesting because there was a lot of elements and a lot of devices that were also part of the feature. And one of them being the use of radio. And I remember Ricardo, early on, one of the obstacles was how to give a lot of the backstory and context of what was happening, between Dominican Republic and Haiti, and this idea of using radio not just for context piece, but to show some of that temperature of what some of the antagonism between those two countries were. So this idea that radio is something that is pepper corned and interwoven throughout the entire piece. For this particular scene, I remember it being more of an exercise about visual storytelling and that's one of the things that I was really excited about when Ricardo and I worked on this was to not use any voice at the beginning. The radio wasn't used at the beginning and just try to create a story of one of the protagonists' father living in Dominican Republic and he was born in Haiti and just showing his daily routine of going to work in the sugar cane fields.

Ricardo Acosta, CCE:

One thing that we do is spend a lot of time also talking, and for me, it's very important that my assistant editor or the associate editor is part of those conversations when we are looking at rushes of footage and then sharing with the director what I saw. What I saw sometimes could be a little bit different to what the director saw and he compliments that, but also to what I can foreshadow in the scenes that we find very powerful and how the story we want to tell can be enhanced with the elements, the jewels of this—you know-- that are hidden within the footage. And one thing for me that was very important always was there is a subliminal character of hate here, which is on the way in the radio wave. And that it was a thermometer, as you said, of the temperature of the hate speech and the hostility against Haitians in the country.

I always remember we spent a lot of time also talking and sharing with you with what I call the rituals of the footage of the character, of the subject, of the story. And what is the impression that we are painting with a scene that will then become part of a bigger impression that we are painting with the whole story and the whole film. And one thing that I find with you, that we are very much enjoying in our collaboration, is how you understand that and how you incorporate that. We also have these conversations about... It's complex because sometimes young editors have a hard time having something emotionally because they come from a brain is sometimes perception of everything is about the intellect and not about the emotion. And I come from a different kind of experience with you where I always said to you, it's more about what you don't see and what you feel, the way you are trying to compose.

And it's also always for us not about the trend, but about the essence. And those are things that we, Jordan and me, spend a lot of time talking about when we're editing and sharing. Sometimes, I also like to do something like, when I'm cutting something and I think I'm excited about it, I will ask him, look what I did. And this idea of sharing like a tutorial, and a discovery with a friend and it's also about sharing with him why I made the choices that I made. Why? Because I think that all I can share in my mentoring of someone who I think is a great editor on his own and it's a little bit of my own creative process and my fears and my accomplishments, but there is no book about that.

Jordan Kawai:

One thing I think I've gleaned from you, mainly from your relationships with directors, but also I feel that towards you as well is this, is how trust plays in that relationship and how you build that and how that can really obviously really shape a film because it's a process to begin with.

Chris Mutton, CCE:

I think that's really a hard thing to teach. Right? And it's interesting because there's so many hard skills to editing, but one of the soft skills is all the people stuff in the edit suite and how you deal with a director in the edit suite and how you deal with their emotions as they look at their film coming together and maybe what their expectations were against what's happening can be very emotional for them. And that kind of skill is so different from Codex and hard drives and all that other stuff that's in the background. So it's interesting. I think that is a really important part of mentorship is those people skills.

Ricardo Acosta, CCE:

So we are collaborating in a film called Betrayal right now and there's a scene where the director is on the scene. The first time she met the subject, the subject used to be in Canada. He got evicted from Canada and now he's living in a country in Africa. And the first time that she met the subject is there, in Africa in a refugee camp. And when I was looking at the footage I see that moment, which was filmed in a very informal way because no one ever thought that this going to be part of the story, where she said to him, "Oh nice to meet you." And then he said, "Finally. Nice to meet you." And has been talking to each other for so long. But that is on camera, in the center of camera. And then what I have for the next 40 minutes, it's a very raw but honest and warm situation where this man, our main subject is showing to her the refugee camp and talking about, since they have happened to him, that we may know more or not prior to that scene.

So it was very interesting because it was like, okay, this is going to be a very difficult conversation to have with the director to say, okay, we can make a very evasive scene where he's talking to a ghost and using shots that are not our best. Or we can try to make a scene that is very warm and authentic where you are on it. I knew that was going to be a conversation that was going to be very difficult. But before that, I also shared this with Jordan and asked his opinion. And we both said, okay, let's prepare each other. And I said to Jordan, "Okay, please support me on presenting this case to the director."

Chris Mutton, CCE:

Backup.

Jordan Kawai:

Yeah.

Chris Mutton, CCE:

What was the reaction? How'd it go?

Jordan Kawai:

I think it's ongoing, I would say. Ricardo?

Chris Mutton, CCE:

Oh, okay, all right. Yeah, it's not quite there yet, eh?

Ricardo Acosta, CCE:

I think that everybody felt the strain of it and the authenticity and Jordan did a great job on putting together a scene that we have choreographed and discussed. And I think it opened a whole new avenue for us also to feel more empowered about how we are going to deal with similar situations through the whole story.

Jordan Kawai:

Yeah, and it's interesting, Ricardo, that is an example. Because we talked about the idea of surrender yourself to the footage. And I'm thinking about it more and another thing in that example, but in previous films too, where I've watched you challenge the footage and I think that means also challenging the director on some of the expectations of what a scene may or may not be. And I find that kind of interesting. What is that dialogue and having that confidence to A, try something but B, to challenge what that scene can possibly be. And I think the one you're bringing up as an example of that, for sure.

Chris Mutton, CCE:

Thank you very much for the discussion. Hang tight for a bit. We're going to bring you back in just at the end for a sort of round table chat about mentorship. Now we'll bring in Michèle and Brina.

Hey, how are you guys doing?

Brina Romanek:

Good, how are you?

Chris Mutton, CCE:

Excellent. Welcome back. Now something that not everybody listening today probably knows is that you guys met through the CCE mentorship pilot program, which started in 2019. So maybe Brina, tell us a little bit about that experience and how you were paired with Michèle.

Brina Romanek:

I was working as an assistant editor at the time and I was already a member of CCE when I got the email. And I really felt similar to what Ricardo was mentioning in terms of this idea of that sometimes the assistant editor is the ghost. I felt like the ghost. And I had made a couple of my own films and I felt like I needed to learn, but I needed someone to help me push my own boundaries. So I applied, and I got accepted, and I found out that I was paired with Michèle, who I then very quickly went and googled.

Chris Mutton, CCE:

I'm sure you were pretty happy when you googled her.

Brina Romanek:

Pretty pleased. Pretty pleased. And very intimidated.

Michèle Hozer, CCE:

Nah.

Brina Romanek:

Starting off, Michèle, I'm kind of curious. I know we've talked a little bit about your beginnings, when you started editing and learning from other editors, but I'm curious to know what your experience had been with your own mentors and what made you want to be a part of the program?

Michèle Hozer, CCE:

Well, like Ricardo, I always thought it was important to have an assistant editor in the room while we cut because it could be a lonely job. And I think it's our obligation to... I mean someone taught me, so I think we should keep that going. And so I always kept editors or assistant editors for most of my work. Many producers and director thought, "Are you crazy? It costs too much to have a full-time assistant editor." And by the end of the project they always loved the assistants way better than they loved me. And they realized, certainly in a documentary setting, how important the assistant editor is because they know everything about the film very intimately. The assistant editor knows the timeline, knows all the problem shots, knows the music. And when it comes to posting and putting all that together, the assistant editor is key.

And the assistant editor, if they're a good assistant, helps smooth the waters, calm things down when the editor and the director are fighting or there's tension in the room, the assistant editor can always come and help keep those things afloat. But in terms of our CCE, I don't know, I got an email that said, "Would you, you be interested in mentoring?" And I thought, "Okay, why not?" I didn't know what it would entail. I had no clue that you and I would still be working together on the Buffy film.

And I remember meeting you, do you remember that meeting? We were at Insomnia, I don't know, three days before the first lockdown.

Brina Romanek:

Yes.

Michèle Hozer, CCE:

And I remember reading your CV and I thought, "Oh wow, she's 27. She's directed a few shorts already." And I thought to myself, "Oh my God, here she is, someone to replace me. Here we go." And I remember that was my first impression in meeting you. I don't know, what was your first impression?

Brina Romanek:

As I mentioned to you before, I definitely sweat right through my blouse. I was very nervous. And you were asking me questions that I don't think I had been asked in a while. Very direct questions about what I wanted to do and where I wanted to go. And I wasn't even sure whether or not those are maybe things that I kept inside, but I wasn't sure that I had the confidence to just blurt out. And so I felt a bit like I was in the hot seat, but in a good way. And I left the meeting feeling excited. But also I had been given the opportunity to think more specifically about how I wanted to grow. I think that that was a good start to our relationship.

Michèle Hozer, CCE:

Yeah. And I think you were interested in documentary and I think that's important. I get a lot of people who come and they want to be fiction writers or dramatic editors or even directors and it's like, "Why are you coming to me?" But you were very persistent and I think, what did we meet every month or something like that?

Brina Romanek:

Yeah, I think at the beginning it was, we'd have at least a phone call a month. And at first, you watched the films that I had made and gave your thoughts and feedback. And I remember very clearly, you watched my film, *A Portrait of Pockets*. And afterwards you gave me this note, which I still think about all the time when I'm cutting.

Michèle Hozer, CCE:

I hope it's a good note.

Brina Romanek:

You said really think about when you are giving breath in between the phrases of what your character is saying and when you are making it a full cohesive run-on sentence, let's say. And you were saying there were some moments in that film where I had split up and given too much breath in between phrases from the main character of Charmaine and so we lost some of the meaning of the scene. I think it was a very good note. I think about that a lot when we're cutting now. I'm often thinking about, "Okay, is this an idea that is more clearly comes across when we hear the whole thing? Or is this one of those ideas that we need a moment to pause and breathe in part of what's being said before we can hear the rest of it?"

Michèle Hozer, CCE:

Yeah. Yeah, you're right. We did that yesterday on a scene. When do we let Buffy Sainte-Marie say everything she says, and when do you give the pause, right?

Brina Romanek:

Yes.

Michèle Hozer, CCE:

That takes time to figure out and you just re-listen to your scenes over and over again. We've been working together for what, two years now? Almost two years. Right now we're cutting Buffy and now Brina's taken my place. She's the editor or co-editor with the director Madison Thompson. Yeah. And I'm story editing with her and maybe giving you too much of a hard time, Brina.

Chris Mutton, CCE:

That's great. I mean just like Ricardo and Jordan, you guys are now colleagues, which I find is fascinating. It's great.

Michèle Hozer, CCE:

Yeah, working that scene. Today, you were pretty tired, was it two days? Two days, we've been working on the same scene?

Brina Romanek:

Two and a half. And today it was down to the really minute, minute. And there's a moment where I was like, "Oh my gosh." But then-

Michèle Hozer, CCE:

I was a moment there when I gave you a note and you were going, "Oh, for fuck sakes. Really? She's not happy?"

Brina Romanek:

But when I went for a walk and came back and watched it was like, "Yep, it made a big difference." As stubborn as I was feeling in the moment.

Michèle Hozer, CCE:

I think what was great about this mentorship program... We did a movie club at one point, watched movies and talked, and then I got a call from these producers that I knew and the filmmaker was stuck. They had an assembly, they just couldn't do the story that they really wanted to do. The film was in trouble, would I cut it? And I'm at a stage in my career where I want to do other things. I don't want to necessarily work seven days a week or five days a week on a project. And I said, "Look, I'll story edit. I've got this young mentee, she'll cut it and I'll story edit it. And I promise you'll love it." And I gave you a call, Brina.

I wasn't sure you were completely on board. I mean, I don't know, you were very quiet.

Brina Romanek:

Well, I had another project that I was doing currently, but I really wanted to do it. And so I expressed that to you, there's a bit of a scheduling conflict. And you said, "Well go talk to your parents." So I got on the phone and I went upstairs because I was quarantining with my parents. And I told them about it and my mom goes, "Well you're certainly going to work really hard, but it'll be worth it." So then I called you back and I said, "Okay." And away we went. And I'm sure Michèle, you'll probably attest to this too, but I'm curious to know, because the beginning was a little bumpy. We had to figure out how we were going to work together. And I'm curious to know from your perspective what your expectations were going in. Because I know that I had specific expectations, and it wasn't necessarily quite like I thought it was going to be, in some ways. And so I'm curious to know if you had any expectations going in?

Michèle Hozer, CCE:

Oh no, tell me yours first. What did you expect?

Brina Romanek:

Well, I think that when we started, I had in my brain that we were going to look at the material and we were going to talk about it and then I was going to go away and have to cut something and sort of prove to you that I could cut. And then we would look at it and discuss and go from there.

And instead, which I am so appreciative of, is you really took the time to first of all, say "When we start cutting, because I am teaching you a certain method of how I organize the project and how I cut. And I'm going to ask you to also follow that method so that I can show you the way that I work." And it was very specific. Right from the beginning I went, "Okay, this is going to be a very detailed approach." Which I'm very appreciative of.

Michèle Hozer, CCE:

Yeah, I'm not sure if I had a clear idea of what we were going to do, but I knew I was going to be very hands-on at the beginning. Because I had sold this to these producers and I thought, "Fuck, I hope this is going to work out. I hope I don't end up working more than I have to." Or who knows. I thought I knew

you and I knew you were very talented and stuff, but I wasn't completely convinced that I had done the right thing.

Well, you know, it's that, as I said, you promised the moon in the beginning and hopefully you can deliver. But it worked out. Brina, I think you have enough confidence in who you are and you're very open to trying things. It was bumpy in the beginning. Just for the audience to know, it was in the middle of Covid still, we shared a screen, we both had clones of material. You had your drive, I had my drive. Whatever we added in the day we would share, so we were always having the same timeline. And then the first thing you cut, I think I took it over right away, which was really bad. But I didn't know how to explain. It's like, "Oh shit, let me just show her and she'll get it."

And then because also I live in Prince Edward County and the internet is so slow, the lagging thing really was problematic. But we worked it out. We started sending quick times and I think at one point you even said to me, "Is this what's going to happen all the time? Are you going to just take away my edits? Is this..." So I learned to back off. But also, you picked up very quickly. And after we worked really hard for the first act or so, for the first 20 minutes, then I was really hands-off. And then what we would do is we would talk about the scene in the morning, you would pull the selects, you would cut, call me at lunch if you were in trouble. I was out in the field doing, planting my flowers. And then by the last act I was really hands-off, right?

Brina Romanek:

Yeah. And I will say that, thinking about that, in terms of Buffy, one of the things that you've been talking about right now to me is that we're taking the time right now to find the rhythm and to figure out what the rhythm is. And because we did the last film together and I experienced how it's that slow turtle start and then you just get on going and you just go, and I don't know if it comes across this way to you, but I feel like I have a more patience and understanding and "Okay, we have to be slow and deliberate right now and not to stress about the time and just to make sure that we're finding it."

Michèle Hozer, CCE:

Right. Yeah, it's always slower in the beginning. Always much slower in the beginning. And I think, for me as an editor, there's a couple of things that's exciting us about being a mentor. One, you are not just teaching the technical, but you have real-time experience of saying, "This is how you do it" because we're working with the material together. And sharing that experience is completely different than just editing. For me, there was an excitement that all of a sudden, I'm doing something different with the work. I'm not just cutting.

And also, working with someone from the younger generation, you have a different sensibility than what I have. And as an older editor, you can easily get used to mining from the same pot that you've always, "Ooh yeah, I did this trick on this film. Let's go back to this. Let's go back to this." With you, you challenge and you give me a different perspective. Because the language of film changes over time. There's new shortcuts, there's new ways of expressing things, there is new styles. And working with you has allowed me to be on my toes and not sit back and say, "Oh yeah, I did it all." No, you challenge that. And I think that that's great. And by the end, the director and producer stopped talking to me, right? After the wrap cut, that was it. I was out of the picture.

Brina Romanek:

With your flowers.

Michèle Hozer, CCE:

With my flowers, yeah.

Brina Romanek:

That's another thing which I think I'd love to have you chime in with me on, is my growth, in terms of learning from you about transitions, because that was probably my biggest learning curve. And one of the things that I'm still really focused on working on and getting better at is transitioning between scenes and sometimes even moments.

Michèle Hozer, CCE:

And I think that with time you'll feel more comfortable with that. But I think that, as an editor, and you've got a feature film, there is this feeling of wanting to reach the end. You want to get to the end, you've got the weight of the film on your shoulders, and transitions take time. You have to let it breathe. But there is this constant momentum to move forward because of "Oh my god, I've only cut two minutes in the last three days. Are you kidding me?" And I think that transitions, as I said, are separate. They're like putting peaches together. You just sometimes have to undo things and let it sit. Let words reverberate onto other scenes.

So yeah, we talked a lot about that, using sound in transition. There was an important one in the film, just for the audience. It was a character-based film on alternative education. And we had three or four characters. And midway through filming, they too got caught into Covid like everyone else. And that transition was the hardest for you, right?

Brina Romanek:

Yeah, it was really hard. And I remember when I first started cutting it, I did this weird kind of fade out thing and I showed it to you. And you said, "You don't have to stick to what the footage is giving you. You can throw something in there and kind of turn it on its head." And you made these suggestions of sound effects that, if you were in this scene, you wouldn't think that belonged. And I remember you first mentioned that I thought, "She's crazy. What's she talking about?" And it was this... What's that book called? The Art of the Cut. And they talk about the fact that you're kind of a dream state, so it's almost real, but then you have the power to bring things into play that wouldn't actually happen in real life. And that was for me the aha! moment of, "Oh, this is what that book means."

Michèle Hozer, CCE:

That's right. And so I think we deliberately build up one of the characters. Again, the film is about alternative education. And each of the characters, each of the kids from the school, had their challenges to overcome. And we deliberately-- we decided to have one of the kids overcome their challenge, just meet their goal and just get to the point of transforming into the character he wanted to be. And for us, if you bring that up high and then when Covid hits, the whole world falls apart. And you needed to find a transition to help you do that, right?

Brina Romanek:

Yes.

Chris Mutton, CCE:

I watched the film over the break and one of the things popped into my head was just how appropriate of a film this is to tie into mentorship, because they talk so much about how everybody learns differently

and you need to have a catered approach to each person. We all have different ways we learn and understand things. So in these mentor/mentee pairs, you've got a unique teaching situation or learning situation where you guys get to know each other as people and your communication styles and how you best learn. And from there, you can really see how it's an enriching process.

Brina Romanek:

Yeah, and I would also say, to jump off that point you said Chris, about learning about each other. It was a nice way to learn about each other because there were so many discussions that came about up about "What were you like as a kid? What were things that affected you in school or things that impacted you in how you learned?" And it was a really great way to not only get to know Michèle as a teacher, but also to get to know her as a person.

Chris Mutton, CCE:

Amazing. Well, it seems like a great time to maybe bring everybody back in. So we'll have Jordan and Ricardo join us again. So to start this off with everybody, I just wanted to ask one question to each of you. And that question is, what does an effective mentorship mean to you? And Jordan, let's start with you. What does an effective mentorship mean to you personally?

Jordan Kawai:

Well, I found it really interesting when Brina and Michèle were talking about part of their mentorship program, watching films together and dialoguing with that. And I think mentorship for me is being in dialogue with what moves you. And I find when you watch a film together, not when you're just cutting, but when you're-- as an audience and editors as viewers as well, of what gets you excited. And I think so much of it as the process of watching a director and editor's relationship. But when I was watching with Ricardo is just seeing that passion come out and then really focusing on that and making sure that that's the center of everything you do, when you're editing at every scene. So being in dialogue with what moves you, I would say is what mentorship means to me.

Chris Mutton, CCE:

And Michèle, how about for you?

Michèle Hozer, CCE:

Wow...

Chris Mutton, CCE:

It's an open-ended question, but...

Michèle Hozer, CCE:

It's a hard one. First of all, the two people need to have a good relationship. I think that's really important. It takes a lot from... You're giving and taking on both sides, it's not just a one-way street. You're not just talking about yourself and saying, "Oh yeah, I did this, I did this." No. I mean the idea is, Brina came in, what can I do to advance and help her in her career? And in bringing what I have learned and what people had given me, how do I give back?

And I think that that's really, really important. And you have to be honest. You have to be honest with yourself. You have to be honest with your mentee. There are times when Brina was very frustrated and

was having difficulty. And so you share your own fears, you share your own struggles. Because even today, you still have them. I mean, how many times do you get a new film and you go, "Okay, that's it. They're going to find out that I can't do this anymore." And to be able to listen. To listen to her, to her ideas, what she brings to the table. And not always try and lead and control the situation. I think that that's really important because they're there. They have a lot to offer as well. So I think it's very much a two-way street.

Chris Mutton, CCE:

Yeah. Excellent. Yeah, I like how you touched upon earlier, too, about learning from Brina and that the mentee has a lot to offer the mentor. And that's maybe a common misconception about mentorship is that it's a top-down approach and it's somebody who's, "I'm going to teach you X, Y, and Z." But I think one thing that's come across really obviously, in all the conversations we've had here, is that openness and honesty and it has to be a two-way conversation to make it work well. Brina, what does an effective mentorship mean to you?

Brina Romanek:

Well, first of all, I think both those answers are so great that it's hard to keep coming up with things. Two things stick out for me. One is a safe space. Feeling like you have a safe space to make mistakes and to play. Because, end of the day, one of the most fun things about editing is that you get to play. And so if you have the space to do that, then it makes the whole experience better. And it probably makes your film better.

And the other thing that I would say is that having a mentor who can see what you're capable of, even when you can't, and so will sometimes push you to places that you don't think you can go to is a very lucky thing to come across and I think makes the growth that much better. I know Michèle has certainly pushed me sometimes and I don't think there's any more pushing that can happen and then suddenly it's like, wow. And we go somewhere completely different.

Chris Mutton, CCE:

That's true.

Michèle Hozer, CCE:

So I wasn't too mean?

Brina Romanek:

No.

Chris Mutton, CCE:

Amazing. And Ricardo, what does an effective mentorship mean to you?

Ricardo Acosta, CCE:

I think everybody has said something very meaningful. For me, really, it's a collaboration. Also, I would use one word is empathy and respect. And also knowing that you are working with a very particular part of our being, which is our fragility, our insecurity, our gift as artists. The fact that none of the scenes are absolute, but they're all part of our humanity. I cannot be the mentor of someone who is competing with

me, or I cannot be the collaborator as an editor, as a story editor, or as writer of a director that is competing.

It's about complimenting. And I always said, "Doesn't matter who had the idea. If the idea works, that's what the story needs and we are happy about it." And that's one thing that I always share with Jordan, for example, and with other editors and directors that I am mentoring about, it has to be always a pleasurable and in collaboration. It cannot be about a clash of egos or a clash of my idea is better than your idea. There's no such a thing. At the end of the day, the movie works or it doesn't. And everybody else ego will banish it out of the screen. And that's something that I love to be able to understand that the mentee really see in me someone that see this... We have to have the same kind of empathy and excitement about finding each other interesting, I would say.

Chris Mutton, CCE:

Yeah, for sure. Do you guys have any questions for each other?

Michèle Hozer, CCE:

I have a question for Ricardo and Jordan. Jordan, I know you just-- was the Surf Girl film the first feature or second feature that you cut? And if so, was Ricardo a mentor on it, a story editor for you? And how did that work?

Jordan Kawai:

Bangla Surf Girls was the second film that Ricardo mentored and story supervised for. The first one was a CBC doc channel piece called Stage: The Culinary Internship. And both instances were actually interesting because Ricardo brought me in for both. And both films were in a spot where they had edited a full rough cut and then they reached a point where they wanted to open it up and to reconstruct and reimagine the film.

So I was brought in for both those pieces and in that situation. The relationship with Ricardo is very much so, again, what I was talking about before, this idea of watching something as a viewer and then having a conversation about it. It was interesting because both those films, you're able to watch a full rough cut and then have a conversation about what you got excited about and what just wasn't holding tension. So that relationship, for that film, really was about reacting to something that was already present. And it was interesting because it kind of gave me a bit of a road map to stand on. And for a first feature to cut, it was also a blessing and curse because you were also trying to completely reimagine something, but at the same time, you also were reacting to something that was already done. And yeah. Ricardo, you have anything? What was it like for you in terms of that?

Ricardo Acosta, CCE:

No. For me, Stage was a very interesting [inaudible 00:48:14] because I was approached by the directors and producer to edit the film and I said, "I'm busy, but I have the magic team for you." Because for me, it was very important to-- I knew that Jordan was ready to do a feature length documentary. But I also knew that not everybody was seeing Jordan as being ready, because that also happens. Sometimes you have an editor in waiting that is still a ghost because the producers that he's working with don't see him as someone that they want to give the chance.

And one thing that we can do, Michèle, me, and editors who are more established and they have done it, is that we can become that signature behind that opportunity. And I saw it as well, okay. And I remember saying, "Jordan, you have to tell me yes about this because this is something nice for you. And these

directors will never hire you on your own because there is this layer of insecurity about who are-- what have you done?" But the deal I have made is that you get me if you get him.

And that was an opportunity that for me was super important to do in that case, because I know Jordan will be able to do it. But I also knew that directors and producer will not be able to hire him. So I have to pitch Jordan to the producer, director. And that was a very powerful pitch and a very important pitch. I was also mentoring the director and the producer because for them was also, in some cases, first time experience of feature length business. And that way there were so many classic mistakes that were made on the first incarnation of the film. And what we were trying to do here also was we are not coming in to follow something that's not working, but we are coming in to reimagine that story with the same footage. And that alone is a very powerful and complicated intervention that when we do it, we have to be able to have the room and the freedom to do that.

And that was a great collaboration because constantly, Jordan and me were talking about, "Okay, first is identifying what are those things that absolutely work from what is there before us and what is not working? What is problematic? What is actually a liability to their story?" And start doing this kind of casting the scenes that are in and the scenes they're out. And then out of that, being left with the bones that we thought, "Okay, this could be the first element to build that story." That alone will have been very difficult for a young editor to do, on his own or on her own, without having someone like Michèle or me or many other editors who can say, "Okay, let's resurrect or reinvent this film together." And how we are going to talk to the director and the producer about this, which are people who had spent perhaps two years working on the same, no working, failing story.

And they has been rejected by everything film festival. And the people are actually very tired about hearing about their story. But then you are coming and saying, "No, there is always a mañana." That that's what we did. And I feel very proud because ultimately, that was a dream for me, to be able to help Jordan to get there with a film that, by the time that we got into the other film, it was different. Because he has so much... He have learned to find his own strength much more than at that time, I think. Right, Jordan?

Jordan Kawai:

Well, the time, yeah. The timing was really interesting for me because as an assistant editor who, as you were saying before, I was getting really comfortable with doing the assist edit role. And a lot of that is some of the IT support. So I do get that. I was having that feeling that I was so hungry to work on something in a full creative capacity, but then it's a dog chasing its tail. When you called me and said, "Oh, there's an opportunity," it's just all of a sudden just trying to find that confidence. Am I actually ready to do that? And I think just by hearing your confidence in me, that definitely was the push. It's interesting, when you get that opportunity, and I'm curious for you, Brina, is that something that "Hands down, for sure, a hundred percent I'm going to take," or do you have that moment of consideration of, "Am I actually ready to take this on and will I deliver?" And I struggle with that. But Ricardo, you definitely helped me find that confidence.

Brina Romanek:

It's very nice to hear someone else... It's a kind of up here feeling that way because I think, I don't know about you, Jordan, but I have had minimal contact with other people in my experience and age group who are assistant editing and moving into editing. Because usually I'm working with a team of a lot of people who are very experienced. Sometimes that second guessing is in the back of my brain. I'm going, "Okay, is this normal? Is this okay? Does everybody feel this way at one point or another?"

So in some ways it's kind of nice to be confirmed that I'm not alone in that feeling. But to echo or answer your sentiments, both times that Michèle has come to me and said, "Okay, here's what I'm thinking," there has been that large inhale and going, "Okay, I think I can do it. I think I'm ready." And I'm curious to know, in your process of working with Ricardo, and I know that Michèle knows this, that I have many days of feeling overwhelmed or I'm not quite sure if I have the chops. And so I'm curious to know if you have had those moments as well when working on both of your films.

Jordan Kawai:

Yeah, definitely. Imposter syndrome is real. I definitely feel that on all the projects at a certain point. But I also find that, in some ways, it's because there's this skill of editing, but there's also just understanding the world that you're entering. And I think that's such a gift about editing is just every project is a whole new realm and world that you're coming into. All this new research, all this new information, all these new contexts. And I think that I convinced myself that fish-out-of-water feeling is normal for every project. And I've started to really just embrace that.

Chris Mutton, CCE:

And who better to learn that from than your mentors, who have that feeling too, I'm sure. And to have that confidence check, the ability to check in with somebody, rather than being on your own and left to just to wonder and have some maybe fear come through your mind. But you guys both have someone very experienced to check in on you, which is fantastic.

Ricardo Acosta, CCE:

I have a question for Michèle and for Brina also about, in this relationship that you have as mentor, mentee and collaborators, Michèle also, how has been the experience of learning? Because sometime, a lot of what I do is also being there for the director as much as for the editor that I am mentoring. And sometime even for the director, the producer, and the editor in different capacities, sometime. But how have you been sharing with Brina that whole idea about how do we deal with this director or this situation or this other? What is your role as an editor? How much active or forceful you are? Or how do you stand as an editor? Because I mean, those things are not written on the wall.

Michèle Hozer, CCE:

No, no. And those are very good questions, Ricardo. And I think, Brina, we're learning this now with Buffy. We're working on Buffy Sainte-Marie. It's a big team. There's way too many executive producers. There's way too much pressure that this film is supposed to be fabulous. And so I want to make sure the scenes that Brina's culling out right now are perfect. Are beyond perfect. Because the team is waiting, they're waiting, and they're just too nervous.

And so, I don't know about you Ricardo, a lot of time, it's just getting that team to calm down. And to say, "We know what we're doing, we'll get it done." Brina, I don't know, but is the amount of pressure I've been putting on you to make sure that, to keep cutting that scene, to make it that there's no structural problems, there's no pacing problems. As you know Ricardo, it's a matter of trust. Can your team trust you because they're going in blindly with you. You don't have all the answers right now. And Brina doesn't have. We'll work it out. And I think on the first film, Brina, it was that first act had to be great, right? We'd show them scenes, but once that first act and they were like, 'Oh, thank God. This is so good.'" And they relaxed. You know that feeling.

Sometimes I work with directors and they're new directors. I worked on one and we had barely 12 weeks to cut a feature. I'll never do that again. No. It's ridiculous. And you could do it on your own. I'm not

following that kind of schedule. But I never worked with a director before and I said, "Well, we don't have time to make a mistake and go, I'm going on the wrong path. You don't have time."

So I cut a scene, like a sizzle reel. I hate that term, but I cut one anyways, just to make sure we're on the same page. But the director took over 10 days to look at it. You know, you give a Vimeo and you see, how come he hasn't looked at it yet? What's going on? And he actually admitted to me that he was afraid to look at it because he thought, "What if I didn't like it?" Thank God he liked it because he would've been in trouble and I would've been in trouble. Because it's, as you know, Ricardo, it's a relationship with between the filmmaker and the editor. It's like you're married for a while and gaining that trust. And I think, Brina, we do a lot of that, how to gain the trust of the filmmaker. And it's an important skill to learn.

Ricardo Acosta, CCE:

And it's very delicate because sometime, at one scene I really feel that I always said we all have to embrace our insecurities, our creative panic, as an asset, not as an obstacle. Because we are human. And nobody has the formula of how to make the movie work. And you probably will agree with me, I cannot work with someone's expectation because that does not give me any tools to make the movie better or worse. I can only work one step at a time with what feels right in front of us at the editing suite. So this idea that somebody is building a film outside the editing suite based on their own pretension, and then projecting that inside then editing suite, can create a lot of demoralizing around the creative process. And for us, it's super important to protect that. It's like, yeah, if you want to go to Sundance, that's your own dream. Please leave it outside the door. I mean, come on.

But I love the idea of be able to share that with my mentees and say, "Yeah, you have the right to push and to exercise those things outside the creative..." That you create the space. Also, this idea that you created space, it's not the office of the film, where people go to do production stuff. It's your sanctuary. You are the boss. Yes. That is important because sometimes people don't see it that way. And then you become an asset to their own world and it's like, "No, no, no. This is my kingdom."

Chris Mutton, CCE:

Yeah. I like that idea of how you have to protect that.

Ricardo Acosta, CCE:

I was one working in a production that was few very brilliant editors. And I came in and when I was the last one who came in and everybody was basically working with the window or with the door open, because the control freak executive producer liked to be going around looking at all and I went, "oh no, that's not me." It was like a fish tank. I closed my door and it was such a shock in the work environment, because it was, "My God-

Chris Mutton, CCE:

How dare he?

Ricardo Acosta, CCE:

And he was like, "Hey, he closed his door." It's like, "Yeah, I closed my door because this is my territory. You're welcome to my editing suite. This is not a chorizo factory, it's my creative space." But it's very interesting because I realize, okay, I am in a situation where there is a bully, but I was not hired to deal

with that. I was hired to try to work on a story. And it was interesting because then I created a trend. All the editors said, "Okay, let's cross the door."

Chris Mutton, CCE:

I'm going to close the... You started it.

Ricardo Acosta, CCE:

And those are things that you have to share. And it's also this idea of that I'm mentoring someone who said, "No, I'm preparing my demo reel and you know what I think about that." And I'm going like, "You don't have a demo reel as an editor."

Chris Mutton, CCE:

Your films.

Ricardo Acosta, CCE:

Whole conversations about what are the trend that you are getting in that's disrespecting our craft. And that's important because when a producer asks you for something like that, you are not obligated to bend to that requirement. And people are still asking for demo reels.

Chris Mutton, CCE:

Yeah. Amazing. And in that case you just send them, "Nope, you want want to hire me, watch my film."

Ricardo Acosta, CCE:

And one day I said, "So you have not that many films on your back, but you also know how to talk. You are entitled to say, let's talk about a story. Because that's what I can offer you."

Chris Mutton, CCE:

I'm afraid we're going to have to wrap it up. This could go on forever. You guys are having an amazing conversation and I think everybody could agree that both of your mentor/mentee pairs are really excellent examples. I love all the conversation around the intangible skills that mentors can pass on to their mentees. Because there's so much more to editing than just what's on the timeline. So thank you to Jordan, Ricardo, Michèle, and Brina.

Michèle Hozer, CCE:

Thank you, Chris.

Brina Romanek:

Thank you.

Ricardo Acosta, CCE:

Thank you, Chris.

Chris Mutton, CCE:

You bet.

Jordan Kawai:

Thank you.

Sarah Taylor:

Thanks so much for joining us today. And a big thanks goes out to our panelists and moderator. A special thanks goes to the 2022 EditCon planning committee, Alison Dowler and Kim McTaggart, CCE. The main title sound design was created by Jane Tattersall. Additional ADR recording by Andrea Rusch. Original music created by Chad Blain and Soundstripe. This episode was mixed and mastered by Tony Bao. The CCE is proud to support Hire BIPOC. Hire BIPOC is the definitive and ubiquitous industry-wide roster of Canadian BIPOC creatives and crew working in screen-based industries. Check out HireBIPOC.ca to hire your next crew or create a profile and get hired.

Speaker 9:

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