

Transcript of the BBC Radio 4 clip (Front Row) about Life in a Day 2020

But we start on the 25th of July 2020 when people all around the world, film themselves and their families, their neighbours and their workmates doing whatever they happen to be doing all on the same day in a time of global pandemic.

The Coronavirus literally ruined my whole life.

0:20

I was planning on going to Sayflags having a sleepover with Paul and suddenly the coronavirus hit and then life was ruined."

"When's your birthday Bud"

"August 8th"

"How old are you going to be"

"100"

"I'm an antique

0:42

"Just have a good life, and take care of yourself truly and be lucky."

To the stars of of Life in a Day 2020 - a truly global filmmaking endeavour shot by 1000s of people, produced by Ridley Scott. It's directed by Kevin Macdonald whose debut feature one day in September won an Oscar for Best Documentary in 1999 and who went on to make acclaimed films including Touching the Void, The last King of Scotland, and State of Play

"Kevin, welcome to Front Row."

1:12

Your new film is a sequel of sorts, isn't it? You made the original Life in a Day 10 years ago and I think that film really struck a chord with people. Did you always intend to revisit the idea with with Life in the Day 2020?

Well, we had such a good time making the first one and it was the first movie of its kind then, 10 years ago the first one - they call now UGC movie user generated content movie, which is a short way of saying, "I don't have to do very much work and somebody else films it", well that's was not quite true, because there's a lot of work in it, but we made that in 2010. It was so much fun.

We talked about doing another one but we never actually got around to it until last year in March, the producer Jack Arbuthnott, phoned me up and said, "Now is the time to do it, 10 years this year. If we don't do it now we're never going to do it. And of course there was a small matter of the pandemic, which we thought, you know, wisely, would be over in two or three months and by the time we got to July, we wouldn't have any pandemic that wouldn't be what people were filming. Of course, it's a lot of what people are filming if not exclusively.

So you started planning at the beginning of the year. So you knew there was a possibility of this but you had no idea that this diverse cast of people that you brought together, would all be living under the same pandemic. That wasn't the idea - to document the pandemic to start with?

No, not at all. And of course, there is stuff to do with the pandemic in there in and it casts a long shadow over it but there's also all the political disturbances going on. There's there's a lot of stuff, blm stuff, black lives matter stuff. There's a lot of pro and anti Trump protests and that kind of thing...so it turned out to be an incredibly eventful day - the 25th of July, which is that was the filming day, everyone had to shoot on that same day.

You got over I think over 300,000 video submissions from people who had recorded... I mean that's incredible... what was the remit that you sent out? Were there certain themes that you wanted people to address? Were there certain directions that you gave people?

Well I just asked for honesty. I asked people to fill their lives honestly. I think we're obviously nowadays living in a world where social media dictates a certain kind of falseness to the way people present themselves some of the time. The classic selfie which somebody takes 300 of to get the perfect, the perfect angle with the glint in the eye or whatever. I wanted to do something that's the opposite of that which is about authenticity, more of a kind of home movie aesthetic. And, you know, so I also asked people questions. I said can you answer these questions you know if you have time and the questions were.

3:47: What do you love? What do you fear? what would you like to change in the world? And what do you have in your pockets? So we got some very interesting answers all of those and those are sort of woven through the through the film.

That's really fascinating so we get a snapshot of people's lives. I've always been really fascinated to know where listeners are, you know what they're doing when they're listening to front row. I'm just gonna start or throw out here and experiment, I want to see how willing Front Row listeners are to turn their cameras on themselves in the way that you managed to do with all of those people to share aspects of their lives so here's the challenge to listeners.

I want you to get the smartphone out to shoot a few seconds. Right now, Let's say up to 10 seconds of footage, as you're listening to front row a burst of video that tells us something about your life, and then post it on Twitter using the hashtag myfrontrow, or one word hashtag my front row. Do that right now wherever you are. We want to hear from you possibly in the background. I've got my smartphone here rolling in the studio. I'm going to upload mine in a moment but Kevin back to your film, of course, the beauty of this of the process that you embarked on is, is the singular nature of one person filming their life. So there's a great intimacy to the footage that you got back isn't there?

Yeah, I think there's a kind of intimacy that you can never get in a traditional documentary sense when you've got a cameraman or a director or whatever there. People will really show you the most intimate places in their homes and do the most intimate things. So we have for instance people proposing to other people, and then being rejected. We have somebody splitting up from their partner, we have a very devastating moment where a woman who filmed for the first film in 2010 shows us the urn where her son now is. She starts off, she starts off with filming of the TV, a clip from the 2010 film, and she says that was my son in 2010, this is him now and there is an urn with his ashes and he died of COVID, in February and in America so people share the most intimate things, and in a very unshowy, unglamorous totally authentic way.

But let me just ask you about that moment Kevin because that was really heart stopping. It's a really quite shocking moment when did you....how. Did you get back in touch with that woman or did she volunteer to you that there was a very poignant, very heartbreaking twist to the story to the fact that her son had been in the film 10 years before, and had died....very recently.

Yeah, I got in touch with everybody I could from the first film... people I still had the emails for. I got in touch with them and said we're doing another one we want you to be the first to know and there, there were two people That woman Suzanne, and then there's a Japanese family who featured strongly in the first one and they both sort of make reappearances little cameo appearances again. I actually ... when I saw Suzanne's clip, I was pretty much in tears because that clip in the original film was this joyful, funny, kind of silly moment of a mother yelling at their teenage son saying, get out of bed, you're going to waste your life. What are you doing? And he sort of gets out and he's this sort of hulking teenager, and it's a sort of something that everybody recognises obviously. And there he is now... he was wasn't even 25 and he's passed away. And I got in touch with Suzanne and I said, "Do you really mind if we show this?" and she said no "I want this as a memorial to my son." And we've actually dedicated dedicated the film to him, to Alex.

Since 2010 technology, of course, has come such a long way. It's more democratic arguably now more available than it was before. So we see drone footage in the new film, GoPros, that really high definition footage as well as smartphones. How much did this change...the, the way that you were deciding what to put in and the kind of submissions that you were receiving?

7:51

Well, I think the quality just technically is extraordinary. I mean there's material in there which looks like it could have been filmed professionally and some of the sound is so incredible.... the sounds of crickets or waves or these beautiful things that people have captured. Camera phones have come so far. In the first film, everybody was filming the wrong way around you know, the sort of vertical mode rather than horizontally, and they were, they weren't you know they didn't notice that the air conditioning was blowing in the background, but these days we're all directors, everybody is sending video messages. So we all know the basics, you know how you know what backlight looks like... it makes us look a bit younger.... to shoot in a quiet spot, all those sorts of things and there are some amazing shots, I think, I think, arguably, you could say that there were shots in this film, which you could never ever do professionally, or you would spend hundreds of 1000s of dollars trying to achieve, just because you can do them with the size of that camera, and that you know there's a phone, you can do shots that Steven Spielberg would struggle to pull off.

That's really interesting. Did you learn anything as a filmmaker from this kind of production that you might then transfer to the regular method of moviemaking, you know whether you're moving into the next feature film, the next documentary that you might do?

9:06. Yes, I mean I think you do, I think you.... there's a beauty to the spontaneity of it and of course then you want to try and take that into a feature film or into a more conventional documentary but it's hard to do to capture that real spontaneity that you get when you're with people who know you very well and they're members of your family or whatever. And when the camera is so small and unobvious to people around you, but also the performances, you know, I've got a feature film coming out in a month, called the Mauritanian it's got Jodie Foster and Benedict Cumberbatch - amazing actors in it, but there are performances in this documentary which put a professional actor to shame but when you see somebody struggling to hold back tears when you see somebody, the joy in a child's face...you notice that, you know, there are subtle little things that an actor can't that these people going through the real experiences can so yeah it's, it's definitely influenced me in some way.

And you were telling the story, I mean as you say unintentionally of the COVID pandemic and we see people all over the world wearing masks and dealing with what's going on but of course, this is a year of such huge seismic political change as well and we see Black Lives Matter protests, we see climate change and how it's affecting people.

I mean really badly in some cases ...people filming their communities being washed away - all sorts of political upheaval. And I think there's also an awareness of mental health, mental welfare welfare as well. Were you in the edit suite trying to bring all of those themes and try and give a digest of 2020 in that way. Well, in a way, but obviously you don't want...

10:49 I've tried to listen to what the year was telling me or what the day was telling me you know and not come in with too many preconceived ideas, of course, that's ultimately impossible. There's no such thing as objectivity, but there are definitely things which I saw in the material that I hadn't considered at all. I mean you talked about climate change, I hadn't thought that we would be able to show climate change in a film which has shot over one day, but actually it was so clear and powerful... the floods, the baking heat on farms when the soil is blowing away these sort of things that are for the people who are trying to farm or live in those conditions are absolutely devastating. They were obvious when you, when you looked at the film and then there were lighter things like, you know, all the women giving birth in the middle of the night, which is what the film starts with, this sort of montage of women giving birth around the world in the middle of the night set to a song, a sort of Schubert song being sung by a Nigerian doctor in a hospital in Lagos, of all things. He's singing in German Schubert and it's just the surrealism of that... the beauty of the strangeness of reality that I find totally captivating

Absolutely! and there's a montage-like approach and you're jumping from subject to subject although I think they're kind of grouped thematically throughout the 90 minutes or so of the film. I mean, it was a real sort of visual juggling act i presume that you are having to perform in the edit suite.

Yes, I mean, we're trying to make a film that I think has a has a very basic narrative.... it's just midnight to midnight. And then within that we have a secondary narrative which is childbirth through to old age and your clip that you started with your man that's about to be 100 giving life advice and that's sort of towards the end. And then you have characters who come in and then reappear, you know, two, three times. Thinking particularly of the man and his dog who we see many times and at the end we understand why this dog is always with him... the enormous significance that this dog has to him. So there, there are things to sort of keep you going as an audience to feel "Oh, This person is reappearing... The story is going somewhere".

It's absolutely fascinating...I urge everybody to watch it, I think it's available from this Saturday on YouTube as a YouTube originals film Kevin isn't it.

That's right, yeah,

Life in a Day is the film. It's life in a day 2020 I should say. It is on YouTube. This Saturday thanks very much to Kevin McDonald.