A Story “For the 25”

by Kathryn Palczewski, Professional Writing, 2013
When Professional Writing students Logan Stark, Lexi Dakin, and Rebecca Zantjer met in their Introduction to Multi-Media course (WRA 225) in Fall 2012, they could have never anticipated what was to come less than a year later: their own documentary film receiving national attention.

After working together fall semester, the three decided to take Advanced Multi-Media (WRA 425) in spring 2013. They needed a project to work on for the entire semester, and, after Logan showed them a short film he produced a year earlier, they were inspired to take the story further. The six-minute film tells the story of fellow Marine Kevin Frame of California, who had a bullet strike his helmet and rip through its insides, without striking his head. Logan had made that film in 2012 in a journalism class.

Rebecca who is from Delton, MI, says, “When Logan showed us his video, Lexi and I said, ‘Logan, this is an incredible story, we should go with this.’”

Logan explains, “At that point in my life, I wasn’t really telling a lot of people about my past. But then, finally becoming comfortable with Lexi and Rebecca, I told them about it and showed it to them. That’s when we became passionate about the project and really started getting into it. It was probably one of the hardest things I’ve ever done.”

Logan says that the differing perspectives of the three filmmakers were also helpful in getting the film “right.”

“I think what really drove the film was that Rebecca didn’t really have anything to do with that world—and then, Lexi’s father is in the military, and then, me being in the military, so we kind of had these different points of view, and when we got together and started working on it, we were able to communicate that through the film,” he says.

AFGHANISTAN DEPLOYMENT

Now 26, Logan enlisted at age 20, and served as a U.S. Marine in Sangin, Afghanistan, starting in 2010, with the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment. His battalion suffered the highest casualty rate of any in the Marine Corps, losing 10 comrades in the first week, and 25 overall.

“We took a lot of casualties, pretty quickly, and had to come to grips with the fact that we may not make it home.”

Logan, Lexi, and Rebecca’s 48-minute documentary film, “For the 25,” named in honor of those 25 fallen soldiers, tells their story through interviews and war footage. It also addresses post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among soldiers and those returning from war. It steers away from politics, though, concentrating on the fallen 25 and the first-hand memories of fellow soldiers who survived.

“Initially, Logan didn’t want to be interviewed,” says Zantjer. “But Lexi and I thought his story needed to include him. We managed to get him to sit for an interview, and before long, he realized we were right.”

Adds Logan, “How can I ask my friends to do this if I’m not willing to step up and do it myself?”

CAL CLASS WAS CRUCIAL

A class project turned into so much more, Logan explains, “Having the opportunity to take WRA 425 was everything. [“For the 25”] definitely wouldn’t have turned out the way it did without it.”

The team explains that they owe much of their success to their professor, Dr. Bump Halbritter. Logan says, “He knows how to get the best work out of his students with an equal mix of pushing you and letting you find your own way, mixing instruction with freedom. He truly helped us shape what this turned out to be.”
“When I got out of the military, I had the opportunity to go to college wherever I wanted. I was always a Michigan State fan growing up. My house is all State. To have the opportunity to come here and use the GI Bill to get my education was kind of a no-brainer.”

Rebecca agrees, saying, “Taking the class within the College of Arts and Letters was crucial. It isn’t a journalism project and it isn’t a multi-media project, it’s writing. It’s a story.”

As for Lexi’s contributions to the film, Logan and Rebecca couldn’t say enough about their Hastings, MI native teammate’s commitment to the film’s authenticity and attention to detail.

“Lexi definitely took the lead in quality control. She made sure that all of the transitions were clean and precise. If something wasn’t right, Lexi made sure we worked on it until it was.”

Rebecca adds that up until four weeks earlier, Lexi had been applying for book publishing internships and jobs. She has now switched completely to film and video, and was actually unavailable for the MUSES interview because she was doing a video internship.

Beyond the creative enjoyment of making the film, Rebecca says that she and Lexi were honored to have worked on it. She says that while the men honored in the film are all soldiers, they are also men: “people that anyone can relate to.” And, through the film’s interviews, the team tried to show that humanity in each of them.

“Humanizing these soldiers as people first and not just these nameless, faceless individuals was actually the most surprising thing for me. To me, that ended up being the most incredible event,” says Rebecca.

ALWAYS A SPARTAN

Logan says he has found his place at Michigan State University and in the Professional Writing program. A native of Greenville, Michigan, about a half-hour’s drive northeast of Grand Rapids, he explains that he has always been a Spartan.

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As for choosing Professional Writing, Logan explains, “What I love about Professional Writing is it’s kind of an in-betweener, a cover-all major. When you go to apply for a job, they may not know what your degree program was, but Professional Writing is adaptable. It’s a communication degree, it’s a writing degree; you can really do a lot of things with it.”

A VIRAL, LIFE-CHANGING FILM

After being on YouTube for about a month as of mid-June 2013, “For the 25” has reached more than 45,000 views. The film has been featured in USA Today, the Detroit Free Press, on WKAR TV Current State program, has had attention from The Huffington Post, and been screened in post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) hospitals across the country.

Logan says, “I’ve been getting calls and messages saying, ‘I haven’t talked to so and so for a long time, and he’s calling me; we’re reconnecting.’” He continues, “Bringing people together was a major goal that Lexi, Rebecca, and I set from the beginning.”

To see this inspiring film and learn more about “For the 25,” go to youtube.com and search for Logan Stark For the 25 or visit: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GkpNZWf8lw0