

The Directors Interview: Mark

Michael: Mark, when Marcus first approached you, what did you think he had in mind?

Mark: To be fair with you, I had no idea. I had no idea what was going to happen. I thought it would just be a chat over Zoom, and I would get 70 quid for a 30 pound [minute] chat, and I could get some really good groceries and make some nice food. That's what I initially thought, because, when we first met, we went to Greenwich Park, and we went up the hill, down the hill, and then over to the naval college. That was amazing. Before that, I was walking a lot, trying to lose weight. So, I thought, 'Well, I'm going to see if I can out-exercise Marcus,' because I'm a bit of a git that way. So, we went up the hill, down the hill, and he was pretty knackered. I'd got my little ego boost. The whole conversation was really good. It was about, basically, my experiences, and what he wanted from it. One thing that stuck to my mind is, at the time I'd just got a new girlfriend, and we talked about what it would be like if I was homeless. Would she still be interested and I had to steal a loaf of bread from the local supermarket, and we lived on the street. She said, 'Yes, I'd be fine.' So, that conversation was really a get to know you, and it was really about our interests, and it just was an organic thing.

Michael: Did you feel that Marcus' interest was genuine from the start?

Mark: Yes.

Michael: You had no problem accepting what he wanted to do, and understanding why he wanted to do it.

Mark: Yes. He came out with, basically, why he wanted to do it, which, on reflection, I guess, would be something like, 'More empathy towards those with schizophrenia, and more awareness of schizophrenia'.

Michael: So, de-stigmatise-,

Mark: Exactly.

Michael: I think that's the main thing that we'd wanted to know. He's an artist, but do you think what you experienced working with him had therapeutic benefits as well?

Mark: Well, it brought back a lot of memories. I wouldn't say they were therapeutic. I'd say that it's, kind of, more hard work than anything. I mean it wasn't hard work, nobody made it difficult, but it was recalling the situation of very, very, very, very, very, very hard times, and reliving that was a little bit dark.

Michael: Given that Marcus was taking on the burden of experiencing it, did that unburden you at all, during the day?

Mark: No. If anything it made me feel pretty shit. For example, walking up the hill and giving abuse, and Marcus being me, and seeing that-, when I went home, I felt pretty bad. I felt like a bit of a bastard, to be honest.

Michael: What about when you saw the final film, the edited 27 minutes? Did you feel differently about it?

Mark: Well, I thought it was really good, in terms of the awareness of what people with my affliction go through. It's kind of like trying to explain to someone-, this is my mum's expression, so I'm stealing her thoughts, but it's kind of like trying to explain to someone who's never had a cold what a cold is. It's, kind of, trying to explain what psychosis and schizophrenia is to someone who's never had that before.

Michael: There's a tone at the end, which is almost cathartic, where it's over, something has happened, something is over, and there's a certain sense of peace. Do you think that's what you wanted to portray?

Mark: Well, the thing about schizophrenia is that, for some people, it's over, and for some people it continues for life, like hearing voices. I haven't had voices. For me, it wasn't over. It was just the start of a new life. Before I became sick, I arguably had an excellent life. I had a lot of friends and I had a good career, and then suddenly I became sick and then all of that just disappeared. It just disappeared, and then the madness happened. That basically happened over two years. It's sort of like trying to get your life back together after what happened, and it's going to be a completely different life. So, no, it definitely isn't over.

Michael: How would you describe the end, when Marcus is still-, there seems to be a kind of calmness.

Mark: It is a calmness. There's definitely a calmness. I remember when I was very, very sick, and we went to Arizona to stay at my mum and dad's house, and eventually I got medicated. I remember just sitting at the window, and this is in the forest, and the snow was landing on the pine trees. I was sitting there at the window, just watching the snow fall onto the pine trees, and I was just having that moment of calm after the madness.

Michael: It feels like a parallel experience, the water lapping at his hands. It's a very good ending to the film, but, of course, the experience doesn't end.

Mark: It doesn't, no, not at all. Your whole life changes after that, and instead of thinking that you'll be able to step back into the same career that you had before-, it's not going to happen. Well, it didn't happen for me, and I don't think many other people have that experience, that after that life is perfect again, because it's a totally different world. The physiology of your brain is different. The way that you view the world is different. The way that your friends, your peers, your colleagues view you is completely different. It's definitely not the end. It's the start of a new life in a way.