

# Grow Magazine

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**W**hen Gough – just one word, like Pink or Madonna – was 12 weeks old he suffered a brain haemorrhage and a stroke, which, along with other health issues, left him blind in his right eye and with very little sight in his left. Encouraged by a former primary school teacher, Gough, who grew up as David Gray before becoming a one-name man, learned to believe that his disability was nothing more than merely an annoyance and would go on to pursue careers in scriptwriting, acting and travelling the world performing comedy.

After taking his stand-up act on the road in both the UK and Canada, Gough returned to Australia with the dawning realisation that he was sick and tired of feeling unemployable due to his disability. He decided to plough all his experience into starting his own production company – Beernuts Productions. He became the first legally blind person to write, produce, edit and star in a feature film, *I Will Not Go Quietly*.

Now with a other projects under his belt, as well as many comedy shorts, this Gold Coast-based filmmaker is keen to share his experience and distil in everyone the importance of never giving up on your dreams.

**grow: Stand-up, producing, writing – you’ve had a diverse career. How did you end up starting your own production house?**

I feel that everything in my life has led to this. Making films was always the goal, I just had to figure out how to do it and had to go through a load of different avenues to get there. That’s why, to me, it doesn’t seem so diverse. I wrote for radio and, as it was mainly commercial and promos, and there was a lot of directing of voice talent, [this] has proved to be helpful with the directing I do now. I was also writing and performing my own stand-up routines, which has given me a lot of experience in writing and performing.

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**You took the stand-up overseas; what did that experience teach you?**

I spent three years taking my stand-up overseas and loved it. I gained so many life skills. Not being able to see makes a lot of everyday things very difficult, and so you must learn how to use your ears a lot more. When I was younger, I had taken part in Orientation and Mobility (O&M) training, which taught me how to use public transport, how to get from point A to B safely and how to navigate my way around a city I was not familiar with. When I was overseas, I started using all these skills and because I was out there performing comedy I learned how to read an audience, which has been very helpful in the work I do now.

**Why did you stop doing stand-up?**

I really wanted to start my own production company. I had been writing scripts and sending work out to producers, but after three years of getting nowhere, and receiving a lot of rejections, I decided to do it all myself. So, I stopped doing stand-up and started to put all my energy and focus into Beernuts Productions.

But I did see firsthand that I was not getting the same opportunities as others. I felt, and still feel, that some people don't have a great understanding of disability and what it means or, rather, what it doesn't mean.

**Your first feature addressed the topics of disability and mental health. What was the inspiration behind that film?**

In 2010, I decided to make the mental health and disability documentary *I Will Not Go Quietly*, which came from a place of frustration due to people not understanding what my disability meant for them and me. I did everything myself, which proved the point that, despite me being blind, I can still make a film. I used myself as an example and went out and interviewed psychologists, neurosurgeons, schoolteachers and those who work in disability about disability.

**Do you have any training as a filmmaker?**

Nothing official but plenty of on-the-job experience. Doing stand-up comedy was my training in writing and performing, and directing voice talent, which is what I did in radio production, has also turned out to be a very important part of what I do now. When I finished high school, I was just happy to get out there and learn on the job. At 19, I joined an acting agency and had a couple of TV acting gigs and took note of what was going on. Since then I've found scriptwriters who have helped guide me in the best way to write.

**How have you adapted to traditional filmmaking techniques?**

Well, my computer speaks to me, which helps me with my writing as I hear how things sound when they're read back to me. Dialogue is such a huge part of what I do and so important to me

that I use this to my advantage. When it's time to shoot, I work with Simon, who is my sighted guide, and I tell him how I want things to look. There's a lot of trust there and, between us, we work it out.

**How is your relationship with Simon and the rest of the crew? Do you spend a lot of time explaining what you want?**

We have production meetings beforehand, and I go through with him quite explicitly what and how every shot needs to be, so he knows what we're doing. He will then tell me of any obstructions on set that may stand in the way of making my vision a reality. He does such a fantastic job as, before meeting me, he'd never done anything like this before and had worked for about 15 years for Channel Seven doing commercials. He now has a freelance production company, but has adapted the way he works for me and does a tremendous job. I do try and stick with the same crew as they do a great job and understand how I need to work.

**Your father was a working comedian; comedy is in your blood. Do you think you'd ever do more dramatic work?**

Yes, I'd love to. I have done a couple of more dramatic pieces, but most my work is still within comedy.

**How do you encourage people with disabilities to join your industry?**

It's an industry that people with disabilities can and should get into; there's a fantastic Disability Film Festival that runs in Melbourne that proves that. I do anything I can to encourage people not to be disheartened by any knockbacks they get, and I would be more than happy to have individuals with a disability on my crew. ●