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## gough: First legally blind filmmaker to create a feature film independently



Emma Purcell • 25/01/2021



Simply known as gough, this blind man from Queensland Australia is a Jack of all trades – comedian, writer, producer, editor, director and actor. He made history as the first legally blind person to create a feature film unassisted, but in order to get ahead in the entertainment industry, he had to go it alone.



Our writer, Emma Purcell, got the opportunity to interview Gough and ask him about what it's like living and working as a filmmaker with sight loss and the launch and success of his company Beernuts Productions.



## Gough living as a blind person



What is your eye condition, how long have you been blind and how much vision do you have?

As an infant I had a haemorrhagic stroke, which is a bleed on the brain. I was only a few weeks old, so obviously I have no memory of this, but I was quite ill for a short time. Thankfully I recovered, the only lasting major injury being my lack of eye-sight.

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*I am now classified as being legally blind, no vision in my right eye and low vision in my left, so I do have a small amount of vision. In short, the eyes are actually fine, it's a brain injury.*

Do you use mobility aids or assistive technology to carry out tasks?

I do wear glasses, which makes it possible for me to read print and I have a program on my computer, which makes my computer talk to me/read what's on the screen, which is crucial, especially when it comes to writing my scripts and conducting my business.

When directing my actors, I can't see facial expressions or body language, so I do have a sighted guide on set to help with this. But being legally blind, I am very good with people's tones and inflections and I find that if someone is verbally delivering the lines correctly then their face and body will be doing what it should, so to speak.

“

*There is no doubt it can be frustrating at times, both in my work, not being able to see through the viewfinder properly when shooting and at times struggling in the editing booth.*

Also, in the community, the signage not being at a readable height or size causes difficulty when out and about. But thanks to great orientation and mobility training from Guide Dogs Queensland (note – I don't use a guide dog) I am able to negotiate my way around life reasonably successfully.



# **gough starting out as a radio producer and comedian**

**How did you become a radio producer and where did you work?**



I finished high school, I wanted to work in the creative industries. Radio seemed like a good option to me as I enjoyed editing and putting together comedy audio pieces in my own time.

So, I was able to get a job as a commercial and promo producer and worked at a few different radio stations doing that job, putting together their ads and promotions. I look back at that time as conducting my apprenticeship as I had to direct voice over talent and edit audio files, which is similar to what I do now.

**How did you start out as a stand-up comedian and what have been your favourite shows to perform at?**

When I finished high school, I started doing some stand-up comedy in local bars and clubs and really enjoyed it. My material was more the two-line zinger/jokes style, which people may say is a bit old fashioned, but I enjoyed it.

Back in 2003 I took my stand-up comedy show on the road and toured the UK, USA and Canada for three years. That was a wonderful experience for many reasons. Mainly because it taught me a lot of life skills (fending for myself). Plus, I think travelling is a wonderful cultural experience, where you can also learn a lot.

## **gough becoming a filmmaker**





### **What inspired you to become a filmmaker?**

As a child I loved writing stories and scripts and continued doing this throughout my teenage years and into my twenties. Finally, I thought to myself, I want to get these scripts I'm writing made into "something".

So, in 2006 I started up Beernuts Productions, my production company with the goal of turning my writing into an actual film or TV show or whatever the story could be.

### **What is the meaning behind your name "gough"?**


gough was a nickname given to me in my teenage years. I am a huge fan of the Australian band The Whitlams who are named after former Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam.

So, when I'd come home late at night after a good time at the pub, I'd put The Whitlams CD's on very loudly and everyone would say "gough is back in the house." So, all my mates started calling me gough, then when I started up Beernuts Productions, I thought why not just go with "gough" – so I did.





What was it like making history by becoming the first legally blind person to create a feature film unassisted and practically how did you accomplish this?

 In 2010, after trying to get my scripts made into films etc. for over four years, it became apparent to me that despite my initial interest from producers/networks etc. once they found out I couldn't see, they suddenly lost interest in me and my work.

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*But I still wanted to get my work produced. I thought what kind of film can I make that is cheap and something I can do myself without hiring any actors or crew and the idea came to me – a documentary.*

So, with the savings I had in the bank, I bought some basic film equipment and made a full-length feature film about the very important subjects of disability and mental health.

Using my own story as a template and interviewing 24 different people from a range of backgrounds, including school teachers, psychologists, a neurosurgeon and even comedians, over the course of three months I slowly pieced the project together.

Filming it was tricky as looking through the view finder, while doable is very hard for me and not perfect. The equipment was basic in nature and I had an IT man show me how to use it.

“

*Once I had all the footage, I treated it like a very long radio commercial. I pulled all the quotes I wanted out and then pieced the film together like putting together a jigsaw puzzle.*

Now-a-days on set I have a sighted guide who helps me with the filming aspect and also in the editing booth to assist with any cuts that are more visual in nature.

The film is called *I Will Not Go Quietly* and is free to download directly off the Beernuts Productions website.

**gough launching Beernuts Productions**





**When was Beernuts Productions launched and how did you come up with the name?**

Beernuts Productions started in 2006, but our first film wasn't made and released until 2010. Since then, we have gone on to make 20 more films along with 14 audio downloads (20-minute-long comedy sketches) and five books and we've just recently launched our own podcast, which is very exciting.

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*When I came up with the name “Beernuts Productions” I wanted to come up with something fun as most of Beernuts Productions work is comedy based, so I figured “drink a beer, eat some nuts and have a laugh with some of our films.”*

**You've worked with some of Australia's finest actors, artists and production crew. Have you worked with any well-known stars?**





Our budgets are small, so currently we can't afford to pay the Chris Hemsworth's of the world, that said, I'm sure he'd love to be a part of one of our films – "wink".

But I honestly believe that the talent around in the community, if you just look for it, is huge and I'm always thrilled with the people I end up working with. After all, I'm very fussy and wouldn't work with someone who doesn't deliver high quality work.

**Your streaming service has a range of content from movies, TV, audio, podcasts and books. Which area is your particular favourite and why?**

Film was the original reason I started up Beernuts Productions, but as time has gone by, I have found myself branching out into other forms, such as audio files, which has been really fun and challenging.

“

***Writing and producing an audio sketch is very different from a TV sketch and it does require your skills and thoughts to be shifted, which I quite enjoy. I hate the thought of becoming stale.***

**Does your content contain accessibility features such as audio description, captions, subtitles and/or sign language?**



Being legally blind myself means the films are not visual in nature and are very character driven and dialogue heavy. Making them very accessible to all.

podcast does feature interviews with disability experts, such as a representative from Guide Dogs Australia and an orientation and mobility expert. Plus, an interview with a deaf lady who has also featured in one of our films. So, I try my hardest in incorporating disability content whenever I can, and budgets allow.

**How has Beernuts Productions benefited or been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic?**



Throughout 2020 I still had access to my recording studio, so I had to put the films on hold for a few months and I got stuck into making more audio content, which was not the plan for 2020, but turned out to be really fantastic.

“

***We ended up producing six new audio pieces, which I'm very proud of. Then as Australia opened back up, we were able to start on the films again, but with reduced actors and crew.***

This also meant I had to use scripts that did not require lots of actors or locations, which was challenging, but again doable and we ended up producing four films last year.





Personally, I find subscriptions and logins annoying and frustrating to use on websites. So, I made the decision that Beernuts Productions is a “download” as you go service.



People just simply visit the [Beernuts Productions](#) website, they can click around and download or stream whatever piece of hilarity they so choose. Plus, we are accessible on all formats – Androids, iPhones, PCs and Smart TVs.

**What advice would you give to other disabled people wanting to become filmmakers, writers, comedians and/or radio producers?**

They will come across a lot of misinformed people, as disability awareness and education is sometimes sadly lacking in the community. But you cannot let the ignorant comments or behaviours of some stop you in achieving your goals.

There is always a way around the problem. For me it was producing and distributing my own work, which wasn't my original intention and not the normal way films get made, but looking back, I'm pleased with that outcome, because now it means I am fully independent and not answerable to anyone.

No third party tells me what I can produce and what I cannot. No one interferes with the content I produce, and no one puts their hand in my pocket to take a cut. So sometimes what can start out as discouraging can work out for the best.

You can find out more about gough by visiting [Beernuts Productions](#) and following the company's social media channels on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [YouTube](#).

Interview by Emma Purcell – follow her blog [Rock For Disability](#)

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**Emma Purcell**

News Editor, Freelance Journalist and Blogger at Rock For Disability. Loves live music, comedy, acting, chocolate and a Harry Potter fanatic.

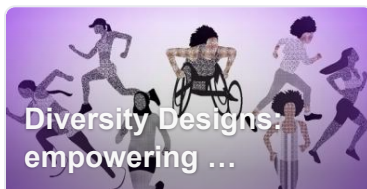


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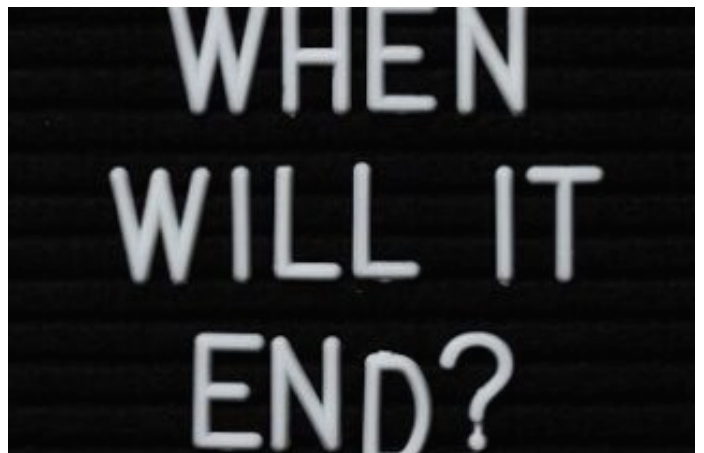
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