

Walkey Awards: the future is surely not what we think



by: [Anne Richey](#)

Screen Hub

With journalism reinventing itself before our very eyes, Anne Richey figured the online and student winners of the 2012 Walkley Awards would show us part of the way forward. From Mongolian television to drug addicts in Baltimore, they nailed the need for a sense of adventure.

Miranda Grant was the winner of this year's Online Walkley award for her work as a producer on the Aftermath project for ABC Open. The project looked at how communities recover after natural disasters, with her particular focus being on the floods in Southern Queensland.

The ABC initially looked at doing a one-hour television documentary, but soon realised that the stories were too vast and the experiences broad and unique to each disaster. The online documentary project was therefore developed which focused on the floods, Cyclone Yasi and the Black Saturday bushfires.

Miranda's portion involved following six people in the Lockyer Valley, Condamine and Oakie throughout the year, creating five to seven minute documentaries at key moments throughout their recovery. The stories were then published on the [Aftermath](#) project. The stories are curated through the Beyond Blue stages of recovery.

The project also accepted photographic contributions from the public in the area, and part of Miranda's role was in teaching people how to use cameras and write blogs. During the photo sharing workshops held in the region, Miranda met the future subjects of her documentaries. "They were already willing to put themselves out there," Miranda said. "They felt like they had a story that they wanted to share."

She wasn't involved in the piloting phase, and therefore inherited some of the stories and built up the personal relationship with the subjects. She soon found that they would call her if something was happening – if the petrol station was re-opening for example – helping her to find opportunities for stories. It also provided them with a say in what was filmed, therefore giving them a degree of ownership over the story.

With video technology becoming cheaper and more accessible, it breaks down the traditional broadcast formula and allows a non-linear narrative. Miranda believes that video journalism has a lot of power, but it also needs a description, blog or article to complement the video, "so it becomes quite a holistic experience."

Miranda noted that the Mahon family, six of whom were stuck on the roof during the floods, found the video documentary of their experience to be very powerful. When their house was knocked down, they were able to look back on the videos that Miranda created and "feel that sense of memory and connection." Similarly, Marty Warburton, the service station owner in Grantham, had documented a lot on his mobile phone.

"In terms of the ethics of having a video camera in front of people when they're so raw and vulnerable and expressing very personal experiences, that can go either way," Miranda said. She added that there was no time when she had to turn the camera off because people felt too uncomfortable. She believes this to be the result of the personal relationship that she was able to develop with the people. There was a lot of trust involved.

Marty Warburton told her that he always looked forward to doing the interviews because it was a form of therapy for him. He didn't feel that the counsellors were working for him, but "having the video cameras there and having that sense of testimony and that his story would live for a larger, wide audience, it really helped him to get to the bottom of those feelings...the video camera became a very powerful tool for the way that people felt."

When dealing with people's personal emotional experiences, she knows that there is always a degree of counselling involved. This is particularly the case with longer interviews, when it's not just for a grab or a headline. "You can't just ask people to open up and become raw without seeing it through and without having that extra cup of tea with them and without that follow up phone call just to say 'hey. I'm thinking of you.'"

She was aware that she wasn't a counsellor and didn't have that kind of training, so she was in regular contact with one of the counsellors in the Grantham area asking advice. She was told that she just needed to listen.

During editing, she "wanted to craft the best story in the most respectful way" and didn't want to play up the emotion of it because it was already so evident. ABC Open also provided those working on the project with regular "mental health" phone calls and they suggested that she get a lot of exercise. As a result, she went running a lot.

Prior to working with ABC Open, Miranda was working in Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea, producing a documentary for World Vision on gender and violence. She found it very challenging as she was producing it on her own. She was very fearful when she first arrived but "after working in these communities and interviewing these people, you just realise the humanity and basic struggles and challenges that people face...You don't feel like you're being brave, you're just feel like you're being real and that's a very powerful thing to overcome – your own personal fear around people."

Before Port Moresby, she was living in Mongolia producing a half-hour weekly television program for Mongolian television. There was a team of two, but she describes it as a lot of fun. They were able to go all around the country and produce segments, interviewing Mongolian people who could speak English well, and who were doing interesting things. It was a youth show for people who wanted to learn to speak English. The role was through the Australian Youth Ambassadors program.

While she describes those two roles as being the most formative professionally, she also worked in Sydney doing strategic marketing. Gaining and understanding of multi-platform distribution helped her role with ABC Open. It made her think about what the different platforms are for and how they can be used to the greatest effect. Another of her roles included travelling across Europe as a nanny for a family of street performers.

The nature of journalism is rapidly changing, particularly given the recent announcements from Fairfax and News Limited, and Miranda has heard the suggestion that this could result in a loss of depth journalism. She believes this to be reactionary, noting that on the Aftermath project, it offers more depth than television or print could because of the way it's presented. She also believes that the balance between global and local news is currently in flux, but that local issues are always of interest.

She suggested that aspiring journalists should look at becoming adaptable and multi-skilled producers, capable of working in radio, print or online.

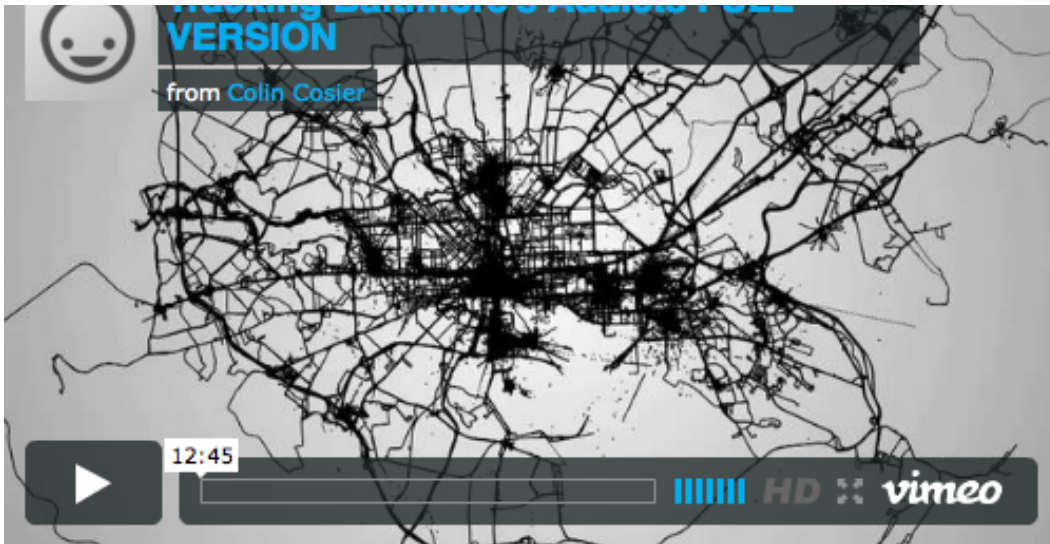
Colin Cosier, the winner of the Walkley Media Super Student Journalist award 2012, was flying to Vermont and didn't find out that he'd won the award until accessing a net kiosk in Dallas 10 hours after the announcement. He admits that he got a little teary reading the congratulatory emails.

The past five winners of this award were all trained at the University of Technology Sydney.

The award was for Colin's Masters major project, the subject being the innovative drug research being done in Baltimore. He initially found the story on an obscure science blog when looking for information about coral reefs, and there found a tiny thread about the Baltimore research. Aside from the blog, it had only appeared in a small local magazine in the area. Colin read enough to find his interest piqued.

The Institute of Health was giving heroin and cocaine addicts GPS's to gain a deeper understanding of what drug use looks like and mapping their activities. The mapping made it a very visual story and Colin therefore found it to be well suited to online video journalism.





[Tracking Baltimore`s Addicts FULL VERSION](#) from [Colin Cosier](#) on [Vimeo](#).

He found the most challenging aspect of the story to be gaining access. He made many calls trying to persuade them that he was genuinely interested in the subject, aiming to gain access to both the researchers and the subjects. Fortunately, his persistence paid off and after their initial hesitation, they were happy for the project to go ahead.

Colin finished his studies around a year ago, and since then has been working as a video journalist for the Sydney Morning Herald. He was fortunate to walk straight out of university and into a job, assisted by some probationary days prior to leaving school. Simultaneously, he's been working at ABC News 24. He believes that he gained this roles as a result of his work on the Baltimore story which they put to air.

Colin admits to always being attracted to video journalism, and finds himself frequently encouraging print journalists to use their iPhones to film. He expects that the frequency of such journalism will increase, with print and video operating more closely in online articles.

He remains a fan of television journalism as well, and hopes to do more work in that area. He believes that "if you can shoot your own stuff, that's an advantage. It's a good skill to have up your sleeve."

With the print media currently undergoing major changes as consumption shifts online, Colin is aware that nothing is guaranteed. "No-one knows where the redundancies will come from," he said, but with skills in print as well as video, he remains optimistic about the future.

Anne Richey

After four years on staff at Screen Hub, Anne Richey is working on her own scripts, far from phones and daily deadlines.