

# INFUSING BIOGRAPHY WITH THE PERSONAL

WRITING RUFUS STONE

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## *Purpose*

A recent four-year research project entitled, “Gay and Pleasant Land?—a study about positioning, ageing and gay life in rural South West England and Wales” took place as part of the Research Councils UK funded *New Dynamics of Ageing Programme* on ageing in 21st Century Britain. The key output of this effort was the short professionally made, award winning film, *Rufus Stone*. This article unpacks the evolution of creating the film script, with a particular emphasis on the author’s relationship with the biographies, the filmmaking process and, indeed, his own story.

## *Approach*

Through first person narrative and textural *bricolage*, the author recounts the processes that went into writing the background, treatment and working script for the film. This included sifting through copious data, story meetings, writing back story and collaboration with the film’s director. In the final analysis, the author was dependent on auto-ethnography to bring the biographies of others to the screen.

## *Findings*

Arts-based collaborative efforts require versatility and experimentation in approaches and a willingness to communicate across disciplines. Knowing when to “let go” in partnerships is key to this process.

## Originality/value

The article responds to many of the issues, concerns and questions that have arisen at academic screenings of the film. It provides a valuable starting point for others interested in experimenting with arts-based dissemination of research findings. The originality of the use of auto-ethnography itself to report on this process is consistent with the principles of *Performative Social Science*, on which the project's dissemination is based.

Keywords: auto-ethnography, biography, filmmaking, LGBT ageing, performative social science

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*“Once you’re into a story everything seems to apply—what you overhear on a city bus is exactly what your character would say on the page you’re writing. Wherever you go, you meet part of your story”. –The Paris Review Fall 1972, No. 55*

I was in a panic at the precise moment that I sat down to begin to write the story for the research-based, short film, [Rufus Stone](#). My stress was extreme, anxiety heightened. Behind me, a solid foundation: four years of in-depth research as a basis for a 30-minute movie. Early story meetings with colleagues and the director had come and gone with lively discussions of possible plot twists and turns. Two days of theatrical improvisation were spent in experimentation with some of the data. I had piles of papers, electronic files, audio and video files, précis, notes, outlines and lists of possible characters and potential scenes.

Nonetheless: the infamous blank page was now in front of me. Where to begin?

Start with Rufus. Who is he? Where does he come from? How old is he when we first meet him? What is he doing? Introduce the reader to the main character. Good. Now what about detail? How will you describe his motivation and his actions? How will you know why he does what he does, what he is thinking? How will the audience learn, early on, what his wants are and where he wishes to take them?

At this exact moment, I had a revelation. I began to comprehend that I had to rely on my self, my own background, and my own story, if I was ever to put flesh on the bones of the players and their tales. I always expected that the inhabitants of the film would be “composite” characters—that is, the interwoven and combined biographies of several people whom we had interviewed separately for the study. I then, however, began to realise that my own story was an additional one that I could potentially mine for detail. “Bonus material!” I initially thought. By beginning to recall some of the physical settings (the three-dimensionality) of

various scenarios from my own life, I was able to start to imbue the writing for the film treatment with a sense of place and detail that might otherwise be missing.

But again, where exactly to start? Set off where any good story begins, by telling a tale. Intrigue the audience, invite them in, creating the space that allows them to imagine the scene, allowing them to embellish with their own detail. Lay down the beginning of the arc for the metamorphosis to come and outline the *Gestalt*—the order or agenda informing each life. Do all of this from the very beginning, and you are off to a good start.

And so Rufus Stone came to life:

It is a typical Somerset January day—the frost-hardened ground, brown and grey, mimicking the sky above. Rufus and Ellie Stone take the trail to the rail junction through the bushes, littered with the rubbish that is now frozen into the mosaic of the landscape. The junction holds a special meaning for Rufus.

Rufus is seventeen, his sister Ellie just ten. She loves walks with her brother because he brings his camera and gets excited when he talks about taking pictures. Rufus is her protector—tall, with a shock of curly hair that falls on his forehead—and strong from working on their parents’ farm.

...

Ellie and Rufus sometimes spend their Saturdays in the town selling vegetables at their parents’ market stall. Ellie likes going to town because she gets to dress up. Rufus hates it and just sees it as more hard graft with no pay.

...

Rufus’ mate, Flip, is olive skinned, dark-haired and shorter than Rufus. He is two years younger and lives along the rail line in the nearby village. The boys met two summers ago when Rufus was walking in the hills collecting berries. They have been best mates ever since.<sup>1</sup>

When writing auto-ethnography, I endeavor to remain a minor character and/or a conduit to a time, place, and other people. I prefer to embody each character and imbue them with background and detail from my own experience. I become fictionalized through writing. In terms of visual representation of such stories, I am always the keen observer, allowing cultural images to become private and iconic. These remembered images twist and turn and eventually morph in various ways to be included as my own graphic memories. I aim to be the sorcerer who reminds audience members of their own stories. Ultimately, the film should render poetically the way in which my memories morph and play with our characters’ histories, much as dappled sunlight reveals, then conceals, an idyllic landscape (see Jones 2012a).

I sometimes question if the only story that any of us have to tell is our own, even in our dry research reports recounting the narratives of interviewees. In blurring the relationship between the writer and my characters, who am I? How trans-

parent can I be in telling someone else’s story? The following was written entirely by recalling my own childhood:

It is a memory of a five-year old boy sitting on his grandfather’s lap. Granddad’s hand, rough and worn from working the land, his thumbnail somehow permanently split, reaches into the pocket of his tattered woollen trousers and magically produces a cellophane-wrapped peppermint sweet for the boy. The tall case clock ticks in the background, the same clock that ended up in his parent’s farmhouse hallway. The sound of this clock has always provided Rufus with comfort in times of crisis. It is recollections of his grandfather that most warmly represent the countryside to Rufus.

In this way, the use of a grandfather clock in the film began. In the end the clock became a “character”—representing childhood, rurality, the passing of time and the damaging effects of time passing without resolution.

### MY “GREY GARDENS” SUMMER AND HOW IT FUSED WITH THE STORY



Figure 1. Location of my “Grey Gardens” summer

During this period, I watched HBO’s [Grey Gardens](#) (2009), a television fictionalisation of the well-known documentary of the same name by A. and D.

[Maysles](#) (1975). Both cinematic outputs reminded me that I also have my own story to tell, one that was triggered by the setting of this particular story. In *Grey Gardens*, the neglected grounds had reverted back to untamed nature—the property and estate structures are almost entirely hidden by sprawling overgrowth. This house is particularly reminiscent of a home (see Figure 1.) that a family kindly shared with me one summer between terms at Art College when I had just turned 21. The family was high on social expectations, but at the time, down on its luck. My own narrative, therefore, becomes interwoven due to the similarities with the film. *Grey Gardens* moves me profoundly because of the fact that I found my own story in it *cinematically*.

Indeed, the reminiscing about *Grey Gardens* recalled that particular summer in my young life. 1964 was a summer of love whose soundtrack was *Bossa Nova* by Morgana King. I spent that summer sleeping in an attic room just under the widow's watch of that large grey house. The verandah wrapped itself around the ground floor like an embrace. A large standard poodle bounced freely in and out of the verandah's floor to ceiling windows with their tattered curtains. The family's "open-door" relaxed style made the house a gathering spot for local youth of social standing, mostly in their late teens and early twenties.

It was during this time that I became overwhelmingly attracted to a sixteen-year-old boy who lived nearby. We swam together daily in the overgrown garden's pool behind the house, drank beer, listened to music and talked for hours. Our platonic relationship grew daily, as did our desire to spend every possible moment with each other. When his parents questioned this, he innocently told them that he loved me. His mother responded by threatening to come after me (not only me, but the whole family with whom I stayed) with a butcher's knife. Our reverie ended abruptly and we never saw each other again. My social position and pretence coupled with my romantic outlook had convinced me in my naïveté that anything was possible, even this platonic love. The painful lesson learned that summer was that this was not the case, and never would be. It was '[A Taste of Honey](#)'. It was a summer of beginnings, and an end.

Years later, I listened to the devastating stories from the men in our study who were accused of unsubstantiated sexual acts in their youth, then threatened with incarceration or worse and often shunned by family and community (see Jones, Fenge, Read and Cash 2013). My own youthful experience became a resource that breathed propinquity into such tales as they were subsequently woven into the plot of *Rufus Stone*. The tale of the mother with a knife, full of vitriolic condemnation, made it possible for me to reinvigorate the similar stories that I was hearing for the film.

The naïveté of same-sex attraction and young love, too often forbidden and misunderstood love, was a story reported over and over again in our study and, therefore, became central to the plot of the film. By compositing these stories in

*Rufus Stone*, at last we remember them together, finally gaining strength in each other for something misunderstood and condemned from our isolated youthful experiences.

Close your eyes and recollect this patterned lightness on the patchwork English country landscape and you will see young Flip—dark, tan, laughing—happy to be with you. There has been no other instance in your life like it. You wish that this moment will go on forever, but, even in your youth, you know it will not be so. You have been taught this in songs and they are sad ones.

You and Flip walk over hills towards a wood. This is not a memorised vista, however. It is a recollection of a three-dimensional physicality consisting of the soil under foot, the sound of the swish of tall grass, and the crunchiness of pebbles mixed with earth. The intensity of the English sky's summer blueness creates a light pressure against your skin. The warm country air is more uncontaminated than any you will ever breathe again. His arm around your neck as you walk is the last uncorrupted act of commitment that you will ever experience. This is the purist state of coupling.

You are in the stream at a point where the water, the great purifier, creates a deep pool. The chilly water laps against his body as you graze against it. The surface of the water makes a fluid partition that allows rubbing against his body beneath it seem easier, less obvious, but still dangerous. The pretence is played out above the surface, the risk and the release beneath. If he ever objected ... but he never did. The physicality of your relationship remains in its purist state.

One particularly hot day when they are swimming, Flip doesn't bother to put his T-shirt back on. Rufus then conceals Flip's worn, white shirt in his canvas army rucksack. He takes it home and sleeps with it next to his pillow that night. He can smell Flip on the shirt and this makes Rufus both happy and frightened. Because Rufus is the older of the two, he feels particularly responsible about his growing feelings for Flip. He knows innately that these stirrings could lead to something dangerous or forbidden in his small English country village.

Flip's mother rings Rufus' mother. Her shrill screaming coming from the telephone reverberates around the farmhouse kitchen. His father is uncomfortable situating himself so intimately next to his wife who listens with the receiver away from her ear. She turns her back on Rufus as he stands in the doorway, bracing himself for what his unfounded guilt convinces him is the earthquake to come.

Flip's mother says that she has found the dirty letter that Rufus wrote to her son and knows that Abigail caught the two of them in the stream. She screams down the phone line that he is a filthy unclean pervert and she is coming to their farm with a butcher's knife to sort out the entire family. She is going to make sure that the whole village knows about their evil son and his wicked intentions. She is going to report him to the police for the criminal that he is.

Rufus' mother is crying.

The tall case clock in the hall ticks away its heavy unrelenting passage of time. It seems more strident than ever tonight—even louder than his father's shouting or his mother's weeping.

Rufus senses that tonight is the end of innocent intimacy. It is probably the beginning of something else, but he is uncertain of what that is.

The preceding paragraphs were developed over time and through many transformations, at times working in the dark against unknown forces and circumstances, but still being driven by my Muse to connect, create and invent. This retrospective invention or “musing”, supported by narrative biographical theory, is extended in this case to the illusory biographies of others and constructed within a sense of other as created by an imaginative projection of self onto their worlds (Jones 2012b), creating ‘dialogue(s) which never happened’ (Reisz, 5 Jan 2012). Philosopher Alain de Botton has remarked, ‘Intuition is unconscious accumulated experience informing judgement in real time’ (de Botton 2012) and so we rely upon it—when we are brave enough. Through such a process, our “composite characters” were created from the data, which simultaneously forged the “amalgamated” plot development for the film’s “treatment” (or story outline).

As a story writer, I allowed my self to be “embodied” by my characters, not the other way round. I found that contemporary fiction, more often than academic prose, provided the blueprint for how to say all of this. Although biography and history are often my favourite reads, I found myself returning to fiction and the novel for inspiration when writing the back-story and treatment for the film. Contemporary authors like Michael Kimball (*Dear Everybody; Us*) were very influential in helping me to develop a style of precise, jargon-free (and non-academic) English. The final resource was a trust in my own memories and intuition—a reliance on auto-ethnography as the final piece of the puzzle. This process brought the composite characters to life and enriched the storyline, which was then handed over to the film’s director to create the final script.

One of the frights/delights of writing the treatment for *Rufus Stone* is how easily the character took over when I began to write him. I have heard and read about this phenomenon from fiction writers often, but never experienced it personally before. As researchers, we often (too often?) speak of the “embodied”, but when do we actually physically experience it? I think that I finally have experienced it in writing the story of *Rufus Stone* through developing the concept of a “fictive reality”. Fictive reality is conceived as the ability to engage in imaginative and creative invention while remaining true to the remembered realities as told through the narrations of others. Several, in fact, may recount a similar incident. When these reports are combined into one person’s story, a “fiction” is born. I have learned, in this way, to let the characters lead the writing and come to life through me.

Fifty years later, when Rufus returns to his boyhood village, Abigail, the tattletale from his childhood, is the first to encounter him:

In the adjoining cottage, twitching the net curtains at her window and hoping for a better view of this handsome stranger’s arrival, Abigail White begins to grin. ‘What luck!’ she thinks. Seeing this outsider enter the house next door, she reaches for her trademark crimson lipstick and applies it hurriedly, hikes up her bra straps and throws on a cardy. She is prepared to make her first move.

About to exit through her front door, she remembers, returns to the kitchen and fetches a bottle of Chardonnay to take as a welcoming gift. (As long as she is in the kitchen, she might as well down the remainder of the glass of wine from the first bottle that she opened earlier that morning.)

Fully armoured now, Abigail goes to the cottage next door to meet her new match—or at least she thinks so.

## THE “BACK-STORY” TO RUFUS STONE: THE RESEARCH

Michael Haneke, who directed the film, *The White Ribbon* (2007) reports: ‘It’s very simple to get a cross section of society within a village; you get a microcosm of the social macrocosm’ (Jablonski, 2010). Our film about being gay and living in a rural village tries to do exactly that. This is what we hoped would give it its universality and connection with a wide variety of audiences.

*Rufus Stone* had its beginnings in a four-year project that took place as part of the *New Dynamics of Ageing Programme* (a unique collaboration between five UK Research Councils—*ESRC*, *EPSRC*, *BBSRC*, *MRC* and *AHRC*<sup>2</sup>) on ageing in 21st Century Britain. The project was entitled, “Gay and Pleasant Land?—a study about positioning, ageing and gay life in rural South West England and Wales”. Through an exploration of the recollections, perceptions and storied biographies of older lesbians and gay men and their rural experiences, the project focused on connectivity and the intersections between place, space, age and identity. Connectivity and identity were central concepts within the project, developing an understanding of how sense of belonging may be negotiated within a rural context. Connectivity can be understood as the ways in which individuals identify and connect themselves with others and the ways in which this may be filtered by aspects of their age and sexuality. Identity and the ways in which older lesbians and gay men choose to disclose their sexuality as part of their identity exerts an influence on the ways in which individuals make connections within the wider community.

The biographies of older lesbians and gay men and their rural experiences formed the bulk of the data studied and the basis for the story and characterisation of the film. This project would have been impossible without the active participation of community partners as advisors and participants over the period of the study, many who continue to actively engage in the dissemination phase of the film. The project aimed to empower older lesbians and gay men in rural areas through a collaborative multi-method participatory action research and dissemination plan. The projected impact of the film is to begin to change minds, change attitudes and help to build communities where tolerance and understanding are keys to connectivity and to increasing the value of the social capital of all citizenry in rural settings. By using film and the facility of “entertainment” to suspend disbelief, the potential to change hearts and minds becomes possible.



The Project's conclusions were that older gays and lesbians feel at high risk of isolation in rural areas constructed by sexuality, rurality and ageing—all components which need to be addressed and made more public. Film was seen as providing a medium with potential to impact on the community and invite discussion around these sensitive issues. This is key to changing the “hearts and minds” of many contemporaries of older gay and lesbian citizens, particularly in the often-conservative rural British countryside. This goal has been central to the four years of research and subsequent effort that went into producing the short film.

A professional film company in collaboration with the Project's researchers and advisors produced *Rufus Stone*. The objective of the film was to contribute a dramatic interpretation of the biographies and everyday life experiences of rural older gays and lesbians who were engaged by the earlier research project. The NDA Research Councils UK grant and Bournemouth University covered the costs of producing the film. The film is totally grounded in the data gleaned from biographies, site visits, focus groups, panel analyses of data and theatrical interpretation in order to produce “composite characters” for dramatisation through film.

The film has had substantial “in-kind” support from community groups including *Equality South West*, *Help and Care*, and *The Intercom Trust*, amongst others. These organisations were key in identifying participants for interviews as well as local areas for the film's screenings. Screenings of the film are envisaged very much as a starting points to generate further community action.

*Rufus Stone* makes a significant contribution to the development of the new paradigm of *Performative Social Science* (Jones 2006; Gergen and Jones 2008; Jones 2012a; 2012b; 2012c). *Performative Social Science*, defined as a fusion of art and science, creates an innovative model where tools from the arts and humanities are explored for their utility in enriching the ways in which we research social science subjects and/or disseminate or present our research to our audiences (see Jones and Hearing, 2013). The emphasis on *Performative Social Science* provides a methodological base for a vision that underpins the belief that the film will reach a wide audience and is theoretically based in earlier work by Bourriaud (2002) in *Relational Aesthetics*.

The film has the potential to raise issues of inclusion/exclusion of older gay people in/from rural community and civic life, and as such can be useful in challenging oppressive and discriminatory practices. It is hoped that film will be used as a tool in both rural communities and with agencies working with older people in rural areas to change attitudes towards and perceptions of gay and lesbian citizens (see Jones, 2012c for an elaboration of the utility of *Performative Social Science* to open up channels of communication and empower communities through engagement). Screenings of the film can help to build communities where tolerance and understanding begin to offer keys to connectivity for these too-often isolated, shunned and even harmed individuals. The film is a potentially empower-

ing device for raising the profile of marginalized voices. It has been suggested that through performative outputs the lives and experiences portrayed have a power that is not possible through other forms of presentation and dissemination (Pifer, 1999).

## STORY DEVELOPMENT/SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT

Rather than diving directly into writing treatment or script, I found that developing the history of the characters allowed them to become more rounded and defined in my own mind first. After I had written the background stories, the director, project staff and I are consulted on the “treatment” or plot of the story. As each twist and turn developed, it was my responsibility to ensure that characters and their behaviour were grounded in the research. Fortunately, because of the thoroughness of our investigation, there was a plethora of background and story from which to create composite characters and actions that move the story forward. Because of my familiarity with the research and its biographies, this information had become part of me, “embodied”, in a sense, or at least at my fingertips. It was subsequently turned over to the director to then use his skills and creativity to come up with the best visual/cinematic storytelling from this material.

Letting the characters develop over time and through several versions of the story in collaboration with the filmmaker provides an example of the joint effort necessary in developing a “fictive reality”. One example is Abigail. Her character began from two directions—initially she was the contemporary neighbour of Rufus. The character of young Ellie, Rufus’ sister (who came to me in a dream), was a separate character developed early on. Then, at the suggestion of the director, Josh Appignanesi, Ellie and Abigail became one person and the triangle between the teenagers Rufus, Flip and Abigail was born.

Appignanesi describes the plot outline that was agreed upon in the end:

*The story dramatises the old and continued prejudices of village life from three main perspectives. Chiefly it is the story of Rufus, an ‘out’ older gay man who was exiled from the village as a youth and reluctantly returns to it from London to sell his dead parents’ cottage, where he is forced to confront the faces of his estranged past. Of these, Abigail is the tattletale who ‘outed’ Rufus 50 years ago when he spurned her interest. She has become a lonely deluded lush. Flip, the boy Rufus adored, has also stayed in the village: a life wasted in celibacy (occasionally interrupted by anonymous sexual encounters) and denial (who is) looking after his elderly mother. But Rufus too isn’t whole, saddled with an inability to return or forgive.<sup>3</sup>*

Writing gay characters can be a challenge as well. Because I love history (social, political, cultural) and because it is crucial to biography, it was central to this

film's development. The characters in *Rufus Stone* "came of age" at a time when homosexuality was illegal in the U.K. Although the law changed in 1967, history had a profound effect on the particular generation whose story we tell in the film. In speaking recently with a young reporter from a UK gay news source, the other end of the phone went very quiet when I said, "When they were youths and "coming out" (or not), the term "gay" did not even exist; neither did the concept of "coming out". The young reporter simply had no reference for this. Our story is enriched by these facts; with this knowledge, the characters' actions become more understandable.

Moving our work to arts-based procedures is not a series of isolated acts; it requires an adjustment in how we approach everything in which we engage—including writing for academic publication. I am more and more convinced these days that any academic written texts reporting our efforts at popularizing research should be supplementary papers supporting our productions and certainly not the final results of our investigative efforts. The writing up of our projects should be ancillary to this new performative work; the text should never be the main output. More interesting as documents are the scripts themselves, the notes or the diagrammatic evidence that our projects leave behind as a kind of trail, trace or map. When we do publish, these sorts of records certainly hold more relevance as scholarship (for a full discussion, see Jones 2012a).

## WORKING WITH A PROFESSIONAL FILMMAKER MEANS KNOWING WHEN TO "LET GO"

"I think it takes real courage to develop a screenplay and give it over, before you even really know what it is". —Moirra Buffini, screenwriter, BAFTA Lecture, September 2011.

Josh Appignanesi, London-based filmmaker (*The Infidel*, 2010), was chosen to direct *Rufus Stone* particularly because of his previous short film, *Ex Memoria* (2006), a study of a woman with Alzheimer's disease, funded by the *Wellcome Trust* and produced for the *Bradford Dementia Group*. Shortly after I had viewed *Ex Memoria*, Appignanesi was invited to Bournemouth University to conduct a seminar, being hopeful that this was the way in which I might develop my future work. Afterwards, we chatted about my idea of making a short film based in research. This conversation convinced me of the feasibility of potentially working with Appignanesi on a project at some point. His creativity and enthusiasm coupled with his skill and knowledge of filmmaking promised a film with the potential to be exciting and meet my expectations of creating something unique from research data. This was long before the research project had been decided upon, the funding secured or any of the data collected.

I always assumed that working with Appignanesi meant working with a polished professional who would certainly have his own vision and take on our story. When making *Rufus Stone* was still very much in the “possibility” stages and before funding was secured, I invited him for a second visit to conduct the two-day Masterclass in turning research into film. To be entirely truthful, it was an opportunity for me to ascertain whether we would actually be able to work with one another as well as gain a great deal of knowledge at the same time!

Eventually, and after almost six years consisting of proposal development, securing funding from Research Councils UK and carrying out the actual research—with story treatment in hand, we then went through a bidding process to select a filmmaker to contract to make the short film. Appignanesi was chosen for his skill and experience. The process of our formal collaboration then began.

My own requirement at this stage was to present the treatment and back-up data upon which Appignanesi could to begin to forge a working script for the film. It was important that the final script remained true to the stories that we had been told and reflected, as nearly as possible, the conclusions that had been drawn from our research. This is a tricky stage in the fusion of art and science! Collaboration across the disciplines meant finding a common language and sharing common goals. From my standpoint, it also meant knowing when to “let go”.

Letting go, for example, was as simple as being willing to lose a scene (or even a line) for cinematic expediency, even when the particular scene or dialogue was representative of well-earned research findings. The following scene, for example, contained real gems of research that indicate, in a single interaction, a curiosity typical of “country folk” combined with the isolation created by geography, which we uncovered frequently in the study:<sup>4</sup>

He levers himself up. MRS CARSTON is 65. Her HUSBAND stands some way off on the road, watching and waiting.

MRS. CARSTON  
Hello! Jane Carston.

Rufus shakes without giving his name.

MRS. CARSTON (CONT'D)  
Well we live just across the way  
and... we haven't had anyone in  
here since the last owners sadly  
passed away some time ago so...  
Well, we're the welcoming  
committee! So, "welcome"!

She is robustly middle-class and living the 'country' life.

MRS. CARSTON (CONT'D)  
I brought you some homemade jam,  
shall I just...

...Plonk it down. She gives the place a good looking over.

MRS. CARSTON (CONT'D)  
...and a leaflet about parish  
activities... It's not so often we  
get a new 'incomer' as they call  
them - well I loathe the word!  
Moved here donkey's years ago but  
even then the locals all moaned  
about city folk invading! Pushing  
up prices and whatnot... really!

We've drifted up to the CLOCK with its TICK, TICK and back:

MRS. CARSTON (CONT'D)  
And are your family joining you?

It's all very polite and bustly, but under the chit-chat she's clearly come to check him out.

RUFUS  
I'm... not sure what's happening  
for the moment.

MRS. CARSTON  
A man of mystery! Do I detect a  
slight West Country accent?

RUFUS  
I... Well, yes I grew up... in,  
well, er, near Dorchester.

MRS. CARSTON  
Well I feel I know you already! We  
own the village tea rooms so I'm  
sure I'll see you soon.

And she's gone. Rufus closes the door. He checks the road through the old lace curtain:

*Figure 2: Excerpt from Rufus Stone script*

Because of restrictions on the length of the film, the scene above does not appear in the final film.

In another scene that was shortened in the final edit, Mrs. Carston's blinkered posturing is typical of a rural attitude of many and is reflected in lines which also were partially cut in the final edit of the film:

MRS. CARSTON  
Is there... is there something we  
can do?

RUFUS  
Bit late now. Try fifty years ago.

MRS. CARSTON  
I'm sorry, I don't know you but  
people here don't have a problem  
with...

RUFUS  
With what?

OLD CRONE  
Our Flip were right as rain before  
you interfered with him!

MRS. CARSTON  
(smiles warmly)  
Of course we don't care what people  
do behind closed doors "so long as  
they don't do it in the street and  
frighten the horses" - so to speak!

RUFUS  
Unbelievable.

He strides towards Flip's cottage.

*Figure 3: Excerpt from Rufus Stone script*

These lines were important ones in terms of the research findings and the frequency with which such attitudes were reported by interviewees. The line, 'frighten the horses'—left out in the final edit—is often repeated in interactions as a response when calls for understanding and compassion towards gay and lesbian citizens are made. The fact that a Victorian attitude frozen in time is today seen as an “amusing” response to an “uncomfortable” conversation simply boggles the mind. Nonetheless, I had to be willing to let go of that line in the final edit and trust in the decision-making process of the director.

My interactions and consultations with Appignanesi continued right up to a few days just before the filming began. At that point, I made a conscious decision to let him take over the reigns entirely in order to produce his best possible creative output. In fact later, when people asked what it was that I did on the shoot itself, I replied, “Bring the donuts!” I felt that my job as Executive Producer was to produce the best possible circumstances under which the director and crew could make the film, then not interfere with the creative process itself.

This approach seemed to work and was appreciated. A day or two after the shoot was finished, Appignanesi wrote to me:

*I just wanted to really thank you for giving me this opportunity. Out of nowhere I feel like a real filmmaker again, making the kinds of films I always wanted to make - and I haven't felt that in years, in fact I'd kind of slightly given up on hoping for it.*

*I really appreciate the time, the trust and the freedom you've given me on this, with something you've lived with creatively and professionally for so long. To have had the tenacity to get it all off the ground and then the generosity and cool headedness to bring in strangers in the way you have is something really rare.<sup>5</sup>*

When the first edits of the film came through, I painstakingly went through the film frame by frame, hours on end, looking for continuity problems, checking that the research was adequately represented, and insuring that our final representation made sense as a short story. Back in the saddle, so to speak, I then proceeded with planning a premiere for the film at Bournemouth University and subsequent screenings for academic audiences (including the *Advances in Biographical Methods Research Symposium* at Durham University, May 2012, and a screening at *Cambridge Arts Picturehouse*, Feb. 2013, for the Art and Science Researchers' Forum) as well as gatherings of service providers and users (*ESRC Festival of Social Science* 2012). In August 2012, the film was entered into its first competition, the *Rhode Island International Film Festival* where it received two awards. Plans are in place at this writing for wider distribution of the film in community cinemas, particularly in rural areas of England.

In the end, how much of *Rufus Stone* is my story? This is a difficult question. As an older gay man, of course I identify with the characters. Nonetheless, I grew up in a different country in a different time and under different circumstances. Still, there are similar memories and these were helpful in writing the background story for the film. It also made it easier for me to say to the director, ‘No, they wouldn't react that way, rather this way’.

Like Rufus, I left the countryside for the big city as a young man to find myself. My own narrative inspired the scene with the knife wielding, threatening mother. The two boys frolicking in the water is based on my personal experience during my “Grey Gardens” summer. The ticking grandfather's clock is very much

my memory of sitting on my own grandfather's lap. Crewmembers scouting locations for the shoot might recall my instruction, "Sexy woods! Find sexy woods!" My personal sense of nature as both a source of beauty, yet primal and dark at the same time, has been with me since youth and was conveyed to the director through my initial writings and discussions.

Several conversations about how to portray the physical relationship between the two young men took place between the director and myself. Just before shooting began, I showed Appignanesi a short clip from the Paris Opera Ballet's 2009 production of Roland Petit's (1974) *Proust, a pas de deux* ('*Morel - Saint-Loup ou le combat des anges*') which portrays two young men in conflict, both physically as well as emotionally. Appignanesi fashioned the "mirroring" in *Rufus Stone* of the two younger characters with their older counterparts after viewing this clip. The swimming scene in *Rufus* is also partly based on the physical relationship of the two young men in this ballet.

There are certain experiences (or perhaps "memories" to be more exact) that gay and lesbian people often share in common. In conducting a biographic interview with one of the volunteers, I recall clearly his reaching a point in his story when he was also telling my story. This shared experience reinforces a fact that is so often overlooked in reporting on lesbian and gay experiences: outputs are not simply findings on sexual encounters; they are stories about relationships which are often complex ones with histories grounded in family, community, place and time.

Rufus recalls pushing his sister's pram up dirt paths on the hillside, away from the family farm and the village—as far away as he could get the two of them. He remembers the feeling of searching for his own private landscape where his thoughts could finally be free and be his own.

Later, he remembers walks along the railway tracks with his sister. It's the majesty of the sky and the smell of wild grasses mixed with the scent of oil on the railway sleepers, more than a revisualisation of their footsteps, which provoke his recall.

It is the sounds of the train approaching, spewing and hissing steam—these sounds as much an invasion of their privacy as they portend the thrill of travel to unknown, yet-to-be-seen places.

Rufus imagines one last attempt at resolving his youthful crisis somehow. He knows that he still must seek acceptance in order to love openly and freely amongst his peers in rural England. The law may have changed in his lifetime, but tolerance is still not a legacy for him and his kind and particularly not for his generation in the countryside. This is the kind of open-mindedness that is fundamentally socially constructed by one's peers. Life has taught him this hard truth. In his imaginings, Rufus hopes, at least in his case, to finally make this possible.



This is the way in which our story now twists and turns. By consulting his memories, our Rufus is now gambling on his imagined past. This is probably the bravest risk of his entire life, or the most foolish one.

This is the way in which he decided to return to his village.

## ENDNOTES

1. This excerpt (and those following) was originally written on my [weblog](#). I found this new outlet to be a more personal space for 'academic' writing, providing a breathing space where I could experiment with a fusion of scholarship with drama and fiction.
2. Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC); Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC); Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC); Medical Research Council (MRC); Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)
3. Originally published on the *Rufus Stone* the movie weblog at: <http://microsites.bournemouth.ac.uk/rufus-stone/project-scope/>
4. Figures 2 and 3 are excerpts from *Rufus Stone* (unpublished working script) © Josh Appignanesi and Bournemouth University 2011
5. Personal communication with the Author

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Jones acted as Author and Executive Producer of the award-winning short film, *Rufus Stone*, funded by Research Councils UK. His work has been reported widely in the media, including: BBC Radio 4, BBC TV news, Times Higher Education, Sunday New York Times, International Herald-Tribune and The Independent.

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