

scottish justice matters

CYBERCRIME





DOUBTING THOMAS

THE INSIDE STORY OF A DRAMA OF VIOLENCE AND REDEMPTION

Thomas McCrudden

AS A BOY from a Glasgow housing scheme I found myself on a stage in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival this year asking society for forgiveness for my past, and acceptance for the man I am today.

The beginnings of the play *Doubting Thomas* came about through chance. I was supporting a man by the name of David Maxwell with my work at Positive Prison? Positive Futures. David had read a story of mine and had passed it on to a friend of his who was Mark Traynor of Grassmarket Projects. Mark then contacted me after reading it and we arranged to meet up in central Glasgow. We spoke about who I was and my role Positive Prison? Positive Futures and my reasons for being involved in it, my past and my time in prison.

If I am honest, I was not sure if I could trust them. It was a while before we met again; still I was going in to this meeting with doubt in my mind, yes about myself, but also for their reason for wanting to work with me. Why me? Those thoughts were dissolved instantly on meeting Jeremy Deller and Mark again. When Jeremy shook my hand and said 'I have a working

title for the play I want to do with you, what do you think of Doubting Thomas?' I smiled as I shook his hand, for I knew then I could trust him to help me tell the story of me and not of my violent past, as this was one of my family's nicknames for me and more importantly it is who I was, and no doubt sometimes still am.

So began the process of developing the play.

For us to show you, the audience in a theatre setting, of the struggle and fight I had for the man I was behind the mask, we started months before the opening night. Jeremy and I spent hours every week in a room with a camera, and my sins, and my understanding of them. We both did not truly know where this would take us. I went back to dark places I had left behind and buried a long time ago, taking Jeremy with me, as I did with the audience during the show. We have to – as a society – go to these dark places so we can learn from them and guide others out.

This affected me in many ways, my self-doubts resurfaced and not at least giving my nightmares a new lease of life. My

family and friends as well as colleagues were witnesses to this. My realisation of this came when my friend and colleague simply said to me I had lost my smile: which was true, I had. Re-visiting your own nightmares can weigh you down to say the least. When we got to the rehearsal stages, it was hard for me at first to watch my life be turned in to scenes for a show, but with Jeremy's skills as a director and his understanding of me, he was able to teach the art of making theatre. Yes, there was more than one occasion I said 'no' to one thing and he would be saying 'yes', but mostly he was right.

I remember Jeremy saying to me, this is a gamble and how brave I would have to be to do the show. I bow to his wisdom for the opening night of the show was the most terrifying night in my life. As I had to face my family with the whole truth about my past, standing there confessing to my sins as my mother and father looked on took all I had. The fear of their rejection was crippling.

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When the show finished and I walked to the back of the stage and cried in to the curtain the cast pulled me back to the front of the stage and to my surprise as well as my son and my whole family most of the people in the theatre were crying with me. That moment of acceptance will live with me forever. People saw me from that night onwards as the man I am today, not for the lost boy I was in the past and this for me is worth more than the phenomenal five star reviews and the award we got for the show. The message was that lost boys like me can be found and can be guided to a better path in life and how society will accept them for who they are not, for what they have done in the past: with the knowledge of knowing that lost boys like me have no control over the circumstances and situations, as well as the environment, they find themselves in.

Even now as I write this, I am smiling from the great sense of achievement I have from putting my journey on stage

and how brave we all were to put our personal nightmares and failings out there to be judged by others. Not just mine: two of the cast in the show I met inside prison as my role as a mentor for Positive Prison? Positive Futures, with two more of the cast having spent time inside prison as well. So to watch as they grow with confidence and self-worth as the show went on was such a privilege for me as a mentor.

I cannot talk about they play and the benefits I got from it to help me on my journey of being a better human being without mentioning Mark Traynor and his mother and sister how both helped raise the money we needed to put the play on, by going to car boot sales and organising a race night: and to all the people who attended the race night I salute you all, without you I may not have got to the back of the stage.

The stage - the theatre - the man who lead me there - Jeremy Deller: in his own right he is a multi-award winning director but for me he is the man who believed in me that I could without any formal training go stand on stage and play myself as part of my journey for acceptance in a world where I felt no connection for most of my life. We went back to places in my mind I had shut out, remembering childhood memories more clearly, and finding out more truths than myths about myself. The biggest struggle had yet to come living through my sins and nightmares to create this piece of theatre, believe me this was not an easy process for both of us, but in the end he did just that and not only that Jeremy's process even though it was hard it gave me the ability to dream with no more nightmares, for now I am truly a lost boy found. So right now, we are currently working on a play for next year's Edinburgh Fringe Festival with the same cast and crew. We all have chapters in our life. There are some we smile about, and others we learn and grow from. Our new chapter begins.

Thomas McCrudden is a writer, actor and mentor who was, in his past, a Glasgow gangland enforcer.

Grassmarket projects Doubling Thomas site: <http://www.grassmarketprojects.com/projects-1>

“Rare, heady stuff, then, which stands on the boundary between art and life, safe consideration and visceral threat.”

Dominic Cavendish

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/the-best-theatre-shows-at-the-edinburgh-international-festival-a/>

“ How did a man so addicted to violence his peers likened him to a fighting street dog get to be standing under the glare of stage lights? Well, as Thomas suggests, it is more of a natural progression than may first meet the eye. For, in his words, he has been acting his whole life, putting on masks and filling roles “none of which was me!”

Eloise Hendy

<http://www.theskinny.co.uk/festivals/edinburgh-fringe/doubling-thomas-last-man-standing-summerhall>

“There is one moment when Thomas McCrudden recalls how he first felt empathy for another human being. If there is a more spell binding moment in the entire Festival this year I would love to see it. Such profound insight can only come from a deep place; long lived experience, reflection and the courage to change.”

Paul Laverty