

**Welcome to Alibi Investigations!**

**You are now part of our community.**

**Please post your name and country in the chat so people can get to know you.**

**And if you already have a podcast then post the link.**

**This is our first group training in investigative podcast creation.**

**This will be followed by arranged one-on-one mentoring sessions for us to talk about your investigative idea and for you to learn more.**



Presented by  
Founder and  
Executive  
Director of Alibi  
Investigations,  
Paul McNally

# CREATING THIS COMMUNITY

- Our goal is to build a powerful community of African Investigative Podcasters.
- We want you all to connect with each other on the Google Group and share insights and ideas.
- We want to be a public force for good on the African continent.
- We want you to feel that this training is the start of something bigger. We want to connect newsrooms, journalists and editors together so more collaboration can happen.
- We are passionate about investigative podcasts and we believe that they can help distribute impactful journalism across Africa.
- Producing your work as an investigative podcast can also allow African stories to reach an audience internationally.
- So, think of the people on this call and the people in the future who will join the Google Group as teammates.



# WHY INVESTIGATIVE PODCASTING?

- It is a way to reach people that may not have the time or literacy to read a long investigative piece.
- It is an opportunity to grow the investigative podcasting scene in your country and maybe be a pioneer.
- It is a way to tell a complicated story over multiple episodes and keep a listener “hooked”.
- It is a way to have much more “space” to tell your story and to get DEEP into the details.
- It is a way for your listeners to get into the characters and motivations of those involved.
- Podcasting is a growing medium internationally and in Africa, but investigative podcasting has been neglected on the continent.



# INFORMATION ABOUT ME

- My name is Paul McNally, I'm the Executive Director and Founder of Alibi Investigations.
- You can email me at any time at **paul@alibipodcast.com**.
- I have been an investigative journalist for 18 years.
- I started Citizen Justice Network at Wits University. It's a project that trains community paralegals to be radio journalists.
- I am the Co-Founder of podcasting company Volume and I have produced many podcasts. Notably, the investigative podcast series Alibi and Too Many Enemies and the conversational show The Witness.
- I have written a book about police corruption and drug syndicates in Johannesburg.
- I started the non-profit Alibi Investigations to help people turn their investigations into podcast series. So we can grow the medium in Africa.



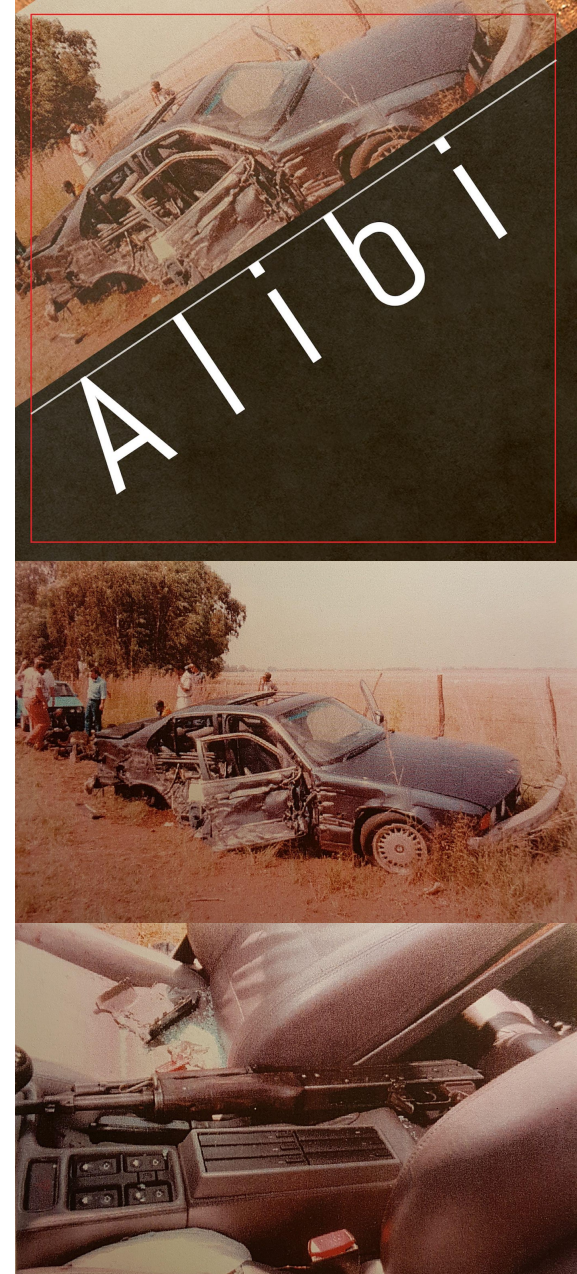
# GOALS OF TRAINING & MENTORING

- This training is going to be a mix of **group training sessions** and **one-on-one mentoring**.
- You will have a good idea of which stories can be turned into investigative podcasts (and which ones can't).
- You will be able to start scripting an investigative podcast.
- You will be able to conduct open ended interviews that will work to get the best audio for your podcast.
- You will start to have the skills necessary to do basic sound editing.
- You will learn about using music, voice over and the correct equipment.
- You will learn how best to mix, master and clean up your audio.
- You will learn how best to promote and market your podcast.



# CHOOSING THE CORRECT STORY

- Listen to as many investigative podcasts as possible.
- Your story needs to be the type of story you are desperate to tell for many hours. It needs to be meaty enough to justify the length of a series.
- It has to have the potential for impact and be under-reported in the rest of the media.
- It has to have strong characters that are interesting.
- Your reporting needs to give you access to good quality audio and interviews - if you don't have the audio you can't make the series.
- It needs to be surprising and it needs to tell an intimate story about real people about also talk to a wider issue that is important for all of us.
- You can think of your investigative podcast like a multi-part TV documentary that is told with audio.



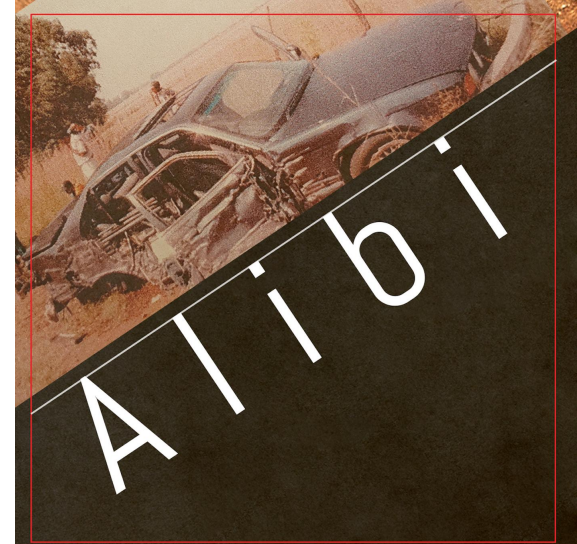
# ABOUT THE PODCAST ALIBI

- There have been two seasons of Alibi. With a third in production.
- The first season was about a possible wrongful conviction. The subject's name was Anthony De Vries, he was from Ennerdale in Johannesburg, South Africa. When I met him he had been in jail for 17 years, claiming to have been innocent for the entire time.
- The second season was about the assassination of a high school teacher called Priscilla Mchunu. She was killed in front of her class in the surrounds of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal, also in South Africa. The key to that story was finding Siya and his father, the student who witnessed the murder and the cop who was trying to solve it.



# RESEARCHING AND BEING ACCURATE

- Even though it is a podcast you have to follow the rules of investigative journalism.
- You have to protect your sources.
- You have to give right of reply.
- You have to make sure your facts are accurate and verified.
- Just because you are telling a story that focuses on character and interviews doesn't mean that you can take everything that people tell you as fact.
- Report against your story - don't take the easy route.





# COLLECTING AUDIO IN THE FIELD

- Collect audio that will immerse the listener in a scene - get your microphone close to environmental sound.
- Record everything all the time. The moment you turn your recorder off something will happen.
- If you feel like you want to narrate an incident as it happens then go for it - to give it atmosphere - but it is better to ask someone else (one of your characters) to do this instead (so you get their perspective).



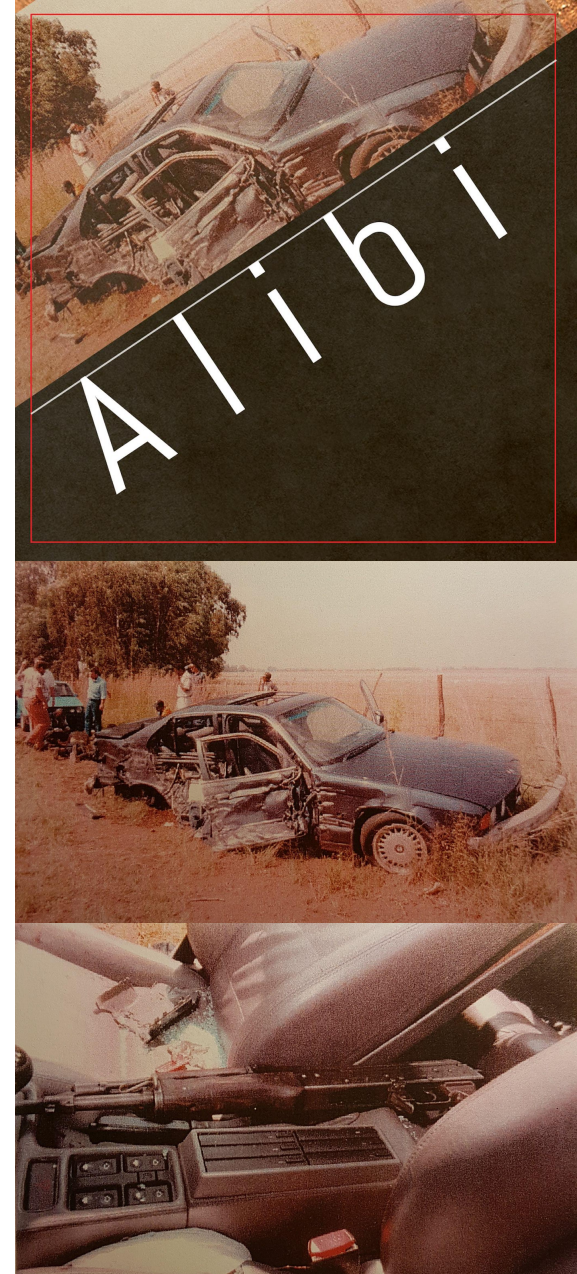
# FIELD RECORDING EQUIPMENT

- Use a setup that works for your taste and budget.
- Digital audio recorder.
- Smartphone.
- Extra microphone (shotgun).
- Lapel mics.
- Headphones.
- Quality bag.



# INTERVIEWING: SOUND QUALITY

- When doing an interview with a source make sure the environment around you is as quiet as possible.
- If you want atmospheric sound then record this on a separate track so you can choose to bring this in at a different time.
- What are the challenges for remote recordings (using a computer)? What software can you use to improve the quality? How do you get a person to open up under these conditions?



# INTERVIEWING: CONTENT

- You are trying to get a character's description of events as well as the facts.
- Ask how something made them feel?
- If they say they stopped for lunch ask them to tell you exactly what they ate.
- Try not to rush them and be prepared to interview them multiple times.



# THE POWERFUL USE OF TIME

- The important tool you need to make use of in podcasting is Time.
- The medium is linear, so largely people won't go back and check something again if they haven't understood.
- But the advantage is that the story will always keep moving. It can't be stopped. So you can use time by setting up narrative questions for the listener about the story. A classic example is a man wakes up and the house is too quiet. You immediately want to know *why* the house is quiet. And while the listener waits for an answer that builds tension. And tension keeps a listener interested.
- So be conscious of having questions open for the listener, these can be BIG, like: "Did he commit the murder?" Or small, like, "Where will he find that document?" And know that this constant questioning and answering pulls along the story.



# WHAT ARE THE STORY'S MAIN POINTS?

- It helps to plan your story like you would a puzzle.
- What is the micro one line pitch? What is the macro greater societal story?
- Who are your main characters?
- What are the main themes for your episodes?
- What are the main scenes within each episode?
- What is the ending that you aiming for, what are we building towards and what ending will you be happy with?
- What are the twists and cliffhangers? How is each episode going to end and start?



# SCRIPTING - PART 1

- Scripting is the most important part of this whole process.
- You need to write with as few words as possible and in a way that sounds natural (for your voice).
- Don't be afraid to fully describe the places and people in your story - write with all your senses (e.g what did a place smell like?)
- Write like you are telling a good friend the greatest story of your life.
- Always be looking to the future. Remember what we said about time.
- If a section is a huge tangent and you think it will confuse or diffuse the tension that you are building, then cut it and flag it as something you will come back to later - listeners like to know that there is more to come and what they can look forward to.



## SCRIPTING - PART 2

- Confusion is your enemy, interject with voice over and explain what a source is saying if it is important. If what they are saying is not important then cut it out.
- Ask other people to read your scripts and listen to your audio to make sure they understand what you are trying to say.
- Think in scenes - like a movie, one piece of evidence leads to looking for another and then another.
- Always be clear about your goal of the series, the episode, the scene.
- Take photographs when in the field - this will help you when you are trying to describe where you were.
- Recording dummy voice over can really help, just in to your phone, so you can do a rough edit to see if you are going in the right direction.





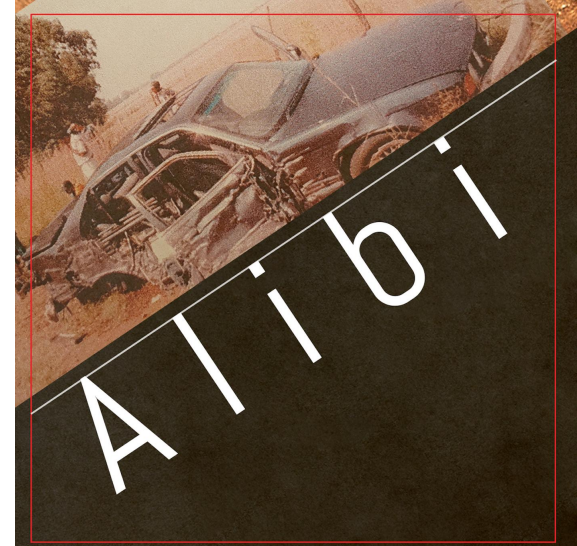
# EDITING YOUR SERIES

- Take time to listen to your audio repeatedly.
- You are searching for the best clips from your interviews to mix with your voice over and tell a story.
- Listen to other podcasts and take note as to how they are edited. What are the transitions like?
- You want a smooth flow: fade clips in and out.
- Build a scene with your atmospheric sound and voice over.
- Think cinematically, like there is a camera moving through your story.
- You don't want silent patches, but give your audio space to breath - for an important moment to have impact.
- Always be looking at ways to change what your listener is hearing - don't stay on one voice for too long. This is not talk radio.



# HOSTING / VOICE OVER

- You, as the journalist, are a character in your investigative podcast series.
- Your journey through the investigation can be a good guide for your listener. As you discover facts then so do they.
- When you express emotion in your voice then your listener relates and feels that emotion.
- You can decide how “human” you are going to be in your voice over. Are you going to be like a newsreader? Or like a journalist on a mission, uncovering details?



# STUDIO RECORDING

- You need a studio or a quiet space to record your voice over.
- You need to speak in a relaxed, yet expressive voice.
- Use a pop filter and test it to see if it works.
- Take breaks, because you might not notice but your voice changes the more you use it.
- Consistency is key - you want to use the same environment AND the same equipment for all your voice over recording.



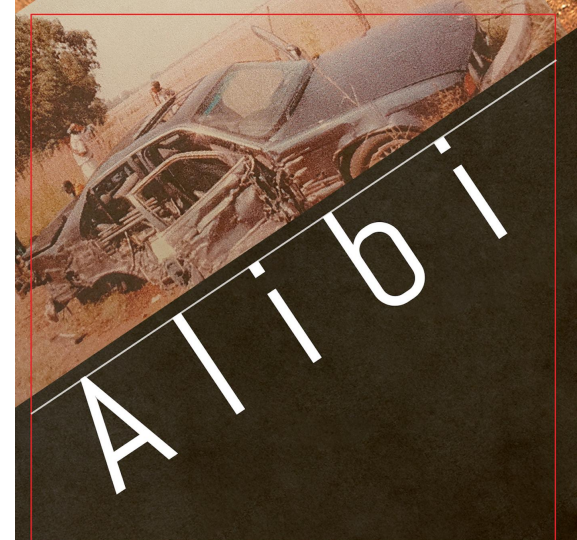
# STUDIO EQUIPMENT

- Computer
- Internet access
- Microphone
- Microphone stand
- Headphones
- Audio interface (to plug a mic into and then plug into the computer)
- Soundproofing (or cupboard)
- Audio editing software



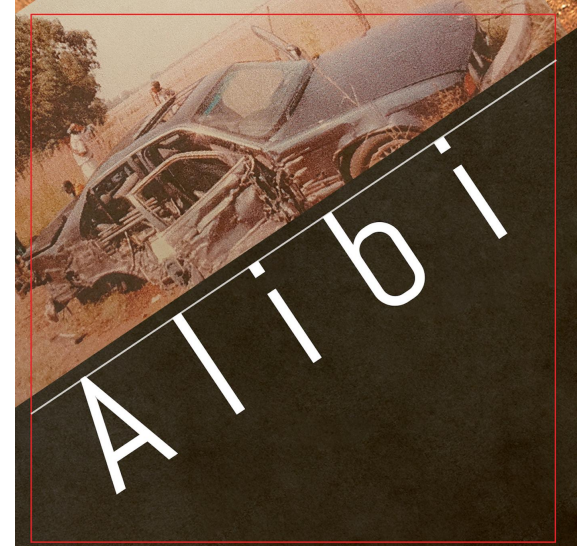
# USING MUSIC

- Music is a powerful, manipulative tool to use in your series.
- Importantly, music can be used to enhance the emotion you want your listeners to feel. But if you used poorly, it can ruin your series. Choose appropriately.
- Do not use music so it plays all the time, use it sparingly and be okay with patches which are just people speaking.
- Don't let the music overpower the speaking.
- You can look for music which is free to use at <https://freemusicarchive.org/> or on YouTube. You can use a program called "YouTube to MP3" by MediaHuman to convert a YouTube video to an MP3
- You can build a library of music for your series, so there is familiarity and when a certain emotion is needed then you use a certain track.



# MIXING, MASTERING & CLEANING

- Spend time making sure the audio levels across your different clips are consistent.
- Programs like Izotope RX can clean background sound from your recordings. However, it can't do magic (rather get the cleanest sound when you record as possible). When recording, don't think: "I will just fix it later".
- You can use EQ filters on your audio in order to get the best possible version for your listeners.
- Pay attention to the loudness of your episodes.
- Listen to your episodes on different devices and in different environments, not just off your computer with good headphones.



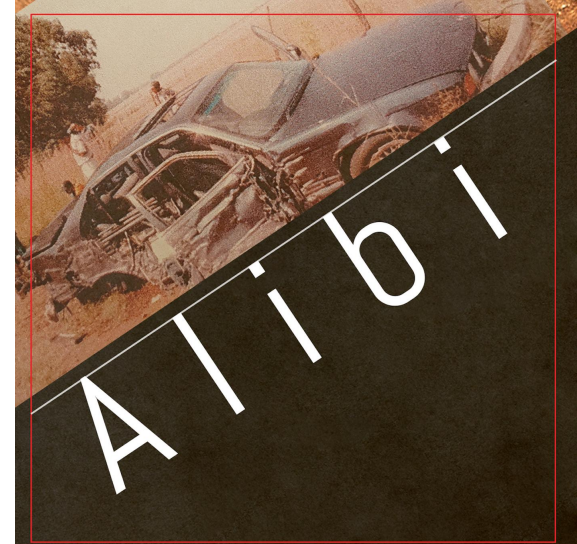
# CHECK WITH EDITORS AND LAWYERS

- It is important to know when you might be sued.
- Legal help and scrutiny of your story does not stop you from getting sued, but it can prevent you from losing your case in the event of being sued.
- Make sure you have your editors and managers supporting you if you are dealing with difficult material.
- Only fight a lawyer's advice if you feel incredibly strongly about it.



# RISK ASSESSMENT & SAFETY

- We are partnering with the Committee to Protect Journalists for them to do risk assessments on your stories.
- We want to make sure everyone is safe.





# PROMOTING YOUR SERIES

- Choose your hosting platform, like Captivate or Iono or Afripods, and upload it.
- Then register with all the directories and platforms.
- Build a rating on Apple Podcasts and Spotify by encouraging people to give you a rating (and write a review).
- Partner with a local or community radio station and try to get the show broadcast. Or just clips from the podcast.
- Look for a large website or news outlet that could help with distribution (to embed the audio on their site).
- Appear on other podcasts as a guest in order to promote the series.
- Use social media, but know that people will rarely click, but search in their app later.



# NEXT: ONE-ON-ONE MENTORING

- This is just the start of your training and mentoring with **Alibi Investigations**.
- The next step is for each of you to start having one-on-one sessions with me. These will be done over **Google Meet**.
- You will book the sessions with **Calendly**.
- We will talk about your story and the details of what it will take to turn it into an investigative podcast series.



# THANKYOU

- Book your **one-on-one session** with me at <https://calendly.com/alibi/>.
- If you would like a virtual certificate for this training session please get in contact with me and I will send you one.
- Share the Google Group link with any journalist that you think would like to join our community (we will be doing another session like this in the future).  
<https://groups.google.com/g/alibiinvestigations>
- Email me directly at [paul@alibipodcast.com](mailto:paul@alibipodcast.com).
- Follow Alibi Investigations on Twitter  
<https://twitter.com/alibipod>

