

LONGFORD LYELL LECTURE

Thursday 2 December 2004

**Shine Dome, Australian Academy of
Science, Canberra**

*If it was easy they'd have girls doing it: A Life in
Australian Film*

Sue Milliken

Preface

The ScreenSound Australia Annual Longford Lyell Lecture was established in 2001. It is named in honour of two significant pioneers of Australian cinema, Lottie Lyell and Raymond Longford.

By our choice of speakers for this lecture series, ScreenSound Australia, the National Screen and Sound Archive aims to recognise the significance of Australia's contemporary filmmakers, whose work not only contributes to the nation's cultural heritage, but also draws international praise for Australian films. It is hoped that over time, as the lectures accumulate, they themselves will become significant documents recording Australian cinema history; and adding to the overall cultural heritage that the Archive is so committed to preserving and sharing.

Raymond Longford (1878 - 1959) and Lottie Lyell (1890 - 1925) were the foremost creative partnership in the pioneering years of Australian cinema.

Of their more than 25 films together during our silent era, only five titles survive today in the Archive's National Collection. The earliest extant footage from their films is *The Romantic Story of Margaret Catchpole* (1911). Also remaining are some fragments of a short bushranger narrative *Trooper Campbell* (1914), much of their controversial melodrama *The Woman Suffers* (1918) and their classic contribution to Australian cinema *The Sentimental Bloke* (made in 1918 and released in 1919).

Surviving nearly complete is *On Our Selection*, which Longford filmed on location in 1920 while Lyell was ill with the tuberculosis that took her life at the early age of 35.

Lyell's contribution to the partnership, which was both personal and professional, was on screen as Australia's first true film star; as well as behind the camera as producer, editor, scriptwriter and co-director.

Longford was ever an advocate for an Australian film industry, although his own career declined after Lottie's death. He spoke passionately on behalf of Australia's cinema at the 1927 Royal Commission on the Moving Picture Industry in Australia.

Both Longford and Lyell had professional stage careers before turning to the new medium of filmmaking. Together they formed a popular and critically acclaimed partnership which gave us the very beginnings of our national heritage in cinema culture.

Marilyn Dooley
Senior Researcher
National Screen and Sound Archive
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I chose my title in tribute to Lottie Lyell and the McDonagh sisters, and to Elsa Chauvel - and to all the great women of the modern film industry – such as the esteemed Jan Chapman, one of my predecessors in these lectures – and to the many other women working in the business, of whom more later.

It's an expression I sometimes use to the men on a production when there seems to be an insurmountable problem and everyone is getting bogged down. I say come on guys, if it was easy, they'd have girls doing it. It always brings them up short, they don't know whether to take me seriously or not, but it usually has the effect of making them laugh and somehow the problems get solved.

I clearly remember my first visit to what was then the National Film Archive in 1975, to research the Vietnam War for *The Odd Angry Shot*. The archive was jammed into a tiny office somewhere here in Canberra, and the corridors were piled with overflowing boxes of film. There was no space and no money, and the staff was in despair. On that visit we also went to the War Memorial, where they showed us a bunker-like room, full of nitrate film from they didn't know what wars, which had never been catalogued. I had assumed that there would have been proper historical archiving of our film heritage, and I was shocked at what I saw. I have ever since been a dedicated supporter of the archive.

So it is a privilege to be asked to give the 2004 Longford Lyell lecture.

I suppose I could call myself the lucky filmmaker – although, of course, luck is what you make it.

I was lucky because I fell into filmmaking by being in the right place at the right time. I have lived and worked through all the government subsidy structures of the past thirty years, as well as from time to time taking the Yankee dollar, and just at present I am thinking a lot about where the Australian film industry, in its fourth decade of revival, is at.

I got my start in the business at the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) in 1965, after a few unfocussed years which included learning to type – a much maligned skill until the arrival of the computer – and contributing articles on a freelance basis to newspapers and magazines.

I loved the ABC. In a way it taught me everything. Wearing my temporary typist hat and gloves I travelled around a number of departments, including the architects' office at the height of the Opera House construction crisis. Tapping away at my memos, I watched as the revolving stage in the opera hall was scrapped and junked in favour of a pipe organ and ABC concerts, and as Utzon's dream gradually turned into a great Australian compromise.

I spent some time writing on air promos and eventually I talked my way into a job as a script assistant, working for producer/director Tom Haydon in the TV Education department, round about the time that the ABC, not for the last time, ran out of programme money. For several months I painted the house and went to the beach, checking in now and again to pick up my pay and to wait for budgets to come through to make some shows.

When Storry Walton was given the green light to produce a documentary on the Sidney Nolan retrospective exhibition at the Art Gallery of NSW I asked for the job of production assistant and spent several weeks in the company of Sid, his wife Cynthia, and George Johnston and Charmian Clift, who were writing the narrative on the artist's career. This was 1967; it was Nolan's first public return to Australia since his catastrophic falling out with his patrons John and Sunday Reed in 1948. Sunday Reed had been, as the world now knows, Sid's lover in a ménage a trois, and Cynthia Nolan was John Reed's sister. Looking at that documentary now, Nolan often looks uneasy in public situations, but there is not one mention of what had been the most powerful creative relationship of his life. As if that wasn't fascinating enough, the Nolans and the Johnstons had been friends through the Johnstons' time living in the Greek islands. Charmian had written a wickedly nasty portrait of Cynthia in her novel *Peel Me A Lotus*, and Cynthia was waiting to get even. Tension was in the air, and I was making the shot list.

A cameraman I knew at the ABC was a friend of Jill Dempster, now Jill Robb – one of the great women of the industry, who produced films such as *Careful He Might Hear You* and *The More Things Change*, and who was to become the first chief executive of Film Victoria. Jill was associate producer at Fauna Productions, working on the *Skippy* TV series with Joy Cavill and Lee Robinson. *Skippy* needed a continuity girl for a couple of weeks while their regular girl got married. My friend suggested me, and I got the job. The ABC, probably pleased to get a salary off its payroll, gave me leave of absence. I could come back whenever I liked.

What I knew about continuity you could write on a frame of 16mm film. I just figured it couldn't be too hard and with supreme confidence I turned up on my first day, dressed in all the wrong clothes and without a clue. I had a truly terrifying time, an ignorant newcomer in a tough professional drama crew. But I stood up for myself, learned fast, and survived. When the regular

continuity girl came back, I was kept on to do various bits and pieces in the office while they shot a feature film. What I didn't learn about film production at the ABC I learned on *Skippy*, and I will always be grateful to Jill and Joy for the opportunities they gave me.

Eventually I returned to the ABC and armed with my new drama experience, I got a job as continuity in the drama department. I worked on such long forgotten shows as *Pastures of the Blue Crane*, *Delta*, and *Dynasty*.

It was round about now that we started talking – dreaming, really – about making feature films, and about putting Australian stories on the big screen. It had been done in the past. With the optimism and determination of our generation, we set out to do it again.

Tom Jeffrey, one of the ABC directors for whom I worked and who would later become my husband and partner for more than 25 years, was secretary of the Directors' Guild and always working away at lobbying the government for support to make feature films. Tom was one of the tireless group which included Tony Buckley, Joan Long, Tim Read, Michael Thornhill and many others who backed up the much more public efforts of Phillip Adams and Barry Jones, to get the government to establish a fund to make features. I don't count myself among them, although I was there in the background and I did attend the famous demonstration against Jack Valenti, head of the Motion Picture Association of America, who scuttled out to Australia to protect the US studios' interests the minute it looked as though there might be a tiny bit of competition in the Australian market.

I left the ABC after six years at the end of 1971 and started freelancing. Jobs were few and far between. I did a few months on *Spyforce*, Roger Mirams' World War 2 TV drama series, where money was so tight that the Japanese army only had one rifle, which had to be passed along as each soldier ran past the camera. I was often out of work. One day I was typing invoices in a factory in Mascot, feeling glum and thinking that my brief career in showbusiness was over, when the phone rang and Hector Crawford was on the line. "Miss Milliken", he said. "Would you be available to come to Melbourne?" "Oh Yes Mr. Crawford" I said. "Could you be on a three o'clock plane?" "Yes Mr. Crawford." It was ten o'clock in the morning, I had only been at this job since 9 am. I picked up my handbag, went in to the bemused man for whom I was doing the typing and said, "I'm sorry, I have to leave." I just remember his uncomprehending look as I raced out the door and headed home to pack. That night I was on Phillip Island taking over as continuity on an American telemovie called *The Hands of Cormack Joyce*.

I worked on series, pilots, short dramas for Film Australia, TV commercials, anything going. One day I was again unemployed, sitting at home this time, when John Daniell, who ran a studio in Neutral Bay called APA, called and asked me if I could come in and look after the Sydney office of a Walt Disney movie which was shooting in the upper Hunter. When I got there I found that things were not well on location. The film was called *Ride A Wild Pony*, but the kid had fallen off the pony on the second day and wouldn't get back on

again. People were leaving, there was an irascible English director, and soon I found myself on location and in charge of the shoot. It was a big film for its day; the budget was, I think, a million dollars, which would be about fifteen million today. It was here that I discovered a talent for organisation, which got the film back on the rails and helped to get it shot on time and on budget. Forsaking the all weather world of the film crew, I moved into the comfort of the office and became a production manager.

By now Tom had also left the ABC and whenever we weren't working we were looking for material to make a feature film, and trailing around the distributors and legal fraternity trying to raise money. We were depressingly unsuccessful.

In 1970, as a result of all that lobbying, John Gorton had set up the Australian Film Development Corporation, the AFDC. That was The Beginning.

There had been overseas films shot here intermittently, such as the first film I ever saw, Harry Watts' *The Overlanders* and later, *The Sundowners*, *On The Beach* and the wildly successful *They're a Weird Mob*, but apart from rare productions by a few brave souls like Tim Burstall, and Lee Robinson working with Chips Rafferty and the indomitable Joy Cavill – Australian films produced by Australians had been impossible to finance.

Now films were being assisted into production by the AFDC and its companion the Experimental Film Fund, and the comedies *Stork* by David Williamson and Tim Burstall and *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* by Barry Humphries and Bruce Beresford, were getting made and finding a delighted audience. Peter Weir's *The Cars That Ate Paris* took a darker spin on the Australian comedy and found its way to the Cannes Film Festival.

In 1975 the AFDC metamorphosed into the AFC, the Australian Film Commission, under the chairmanship of ex ABC executive Ken Watts, with a larger budget and proper staff to run a funding organization – including John Daniell as general manager.

In 1976 Joan Long asked me if I would take over as production manager on *The Picture Show Man*, which she had written and was producing. Up to my taking over *Ride A Wild Pony* there had never been a woman production manager, it was historically a job for a bloke. However Joan had had a falling out with her first production manager, and someone must have told her to call me.

Joan was a stalwart of the revival of the industry. A writer and director with a distinguished career in documentary at Film Australia, she was the screenwriter of *Caddie* and she wrote, produced and directed *The Passionate Industry*, one of the series of historical documentaries which revived the first flowering of Australian film for a modern audience. She was a tireless worker for the Writers' Guild.

Her determination to make *The Picture Show Man* was a tribute to the silent era. She had raised \$700,000, a startling amount of money for the time, and put together a splendid cast, which included Jeannie Drynan, John Ewart, and as the two duelling showmen, John Meillon and Rod Taylor.

Looking back from where we are now, I think that Joan should probably have directed *The Picture Show Man* herself. Today she would be both encouraged and supported to do so. But there hadn't been a woman director since Paulette McDonagh, and Gillian Armstrong was still two years away from directing *My Brilliant Career*. *The Picture Show Man* isn't often mentioned in the popular writing about the revival of the industry, but it is a sweet and affectionate tale and it preserves in aspic a period in our film making evolution. The film contains a scene, which I would like to show you now, as it is a little gem of writing and performance. John Ewart, the travelling piano tuner who has joined up with John Meillon's picture show, calls to tune the piano of lonely country widow, Jeannie Drynan....

Screening clip from *THE PICTURE SHOW MAN - The Piano Tuner*

Around this time I read a novella about a platoon of the Special Air Service in the Vietnam War, called *The Odd Angry Shot*. It was written by a wild Vietnam veteran called Bill Nagle, whom we assumed had been in the SAS but eventually it turned out he had been an army cook. Nevertheless, a cook with an ear for the vernacular. The story was told from the soldiers' point of view and was sardonically anti-war. We acquired the rights and Tom wrote the screenplay adaptation.

We made this film in 1978, which was only four years after the end of the war, so feelings were still very strong. The book said everything you needed to know about the misery and alienation of fighting a war which should never have been fought in the first place. It was also acerbic and funny, and it was this aspect of the piece, which we emphasised to wary investors as making the story accessible to an audience.

We financed *The Odd Angry Shot* with money from the AFC, from Greg Cooté at Village Roadshow, and from a consortium of private investors attracted to the project by a scheme dreamed up by our lawyer, which gave them some fairly innocent tax advantages. Although legal at the time, this scheme was later retrospectively disallowed and our investors lost their tax deduction. They got their money back on the film, and in due course a share of profit, but they never came back to film investment.

After months of perseverance, we got the co-operation of the army, although the army hierarchy was very nervous about anything to do with Vietnam. The soldiers, on the other hand, couldn't have been more helpful. We shot for six weeks at the Land Warfare Centre at Canungra, in the hills behind the Gold Coast. The film is recognised by soldiers in all sorts of places around the world as one of the best films ever made about how a war is fought.

The cast included the late and much loved John Hargreaves, Bryan Brown, Graeme Blundell, and the legend himself, Graham Kennedy. It was Tom's idea to cast Graham, he wanted a name and he wanted to cast against type for Harry, the regular army sergeant whose life outside his job was one of loneliness and loss. In fact, we didn't realise how close this was to Graham's own persona, but when it came to the physical difference between a TV superstar and an SAS soldier, there was quite a gap. Nevertheless, Graham put up with the training and the running around without complaint. He was always on time and he always knew his lines, he gave his all, and he set a standard of professionalism for the young actors on the film who regarded him with respect and affection. Graeme Blundell has recently written Kennedy's biography.

Screening clip from *THE ODD ANGRY SHOT - I'll have \$2000 when I get home*

While film financing had been difficult enough, even with help from the Film Commission, it had been made possible by using the tax advantages I mentioned, and a modest number of films were being made. But when the tax scheme was closed down it really affected production. For a few years there was a lot of development but not much action.

Then in 1981, the Government introduced the legislation known as "10BA" after the division of the tax act which it came under, with a 150% tax write off and a 33% tax rebate on income. The eighties had arrived, money poured in, there were drawers and drawers full of unproduced scripts, and the industry took off like a bushfire.

"10BA" has had a very bad press and there's no question a bit of bad stuff went on. Nevertheless, it came along at exactly the right time to take the industry to another, more sophisticated level. And it produced the film, which was at the time the biggest single earning motion picture in the history of cinema – *Crocodile Dundee*.

A lot of good films, some very successful ones and some stinkers were made during the roller coaster years of "10BA", and, like Zelig, I was there.

In 1980 I had met with an Englishman called Richard Soames, who ran a company called Film Finances. Film Finances did not, as its name somewhat confusingly suggests, finance films. It guaranteed completion and delivery, providing reassurance for investors who understandably never want to write an open cheque. Film Finances was bonding an American-financed film, which was shooting from Melbourne to Perth, and they needed someone to keep an eye on it. This was not producing, but it needed a producer's and a production manager's skills and experience to understand what was going on and to deal with problems if they arose. It was something different, I was out of work again, unable to finance any of our own projects, so off I went in yet another direction.

Soon after, the “10BA” legislation came into being. From ten films shot in 1979 and eleven each in 1980 and 1981, the industry went to thirty-four features in 1982. Now we were in a sophisticated financial world and they all needed completion. Richard and I barely had a conversation about it; I just went to work for Film Finances. From Mataranka to Melbourne, from Emerald to Meekatharra, I covered the country. It was often a nightmare, too, because in the first couple of years there just wasn't enough talent and experience available to service all these films. People were going from unit runner on one film to second assistant on the next to production manager on the next – often in the same year, and they hadn't a clue what they were doing. The same could also be said of me, when I started being a completion guarantor. There was no school for completion guarantors, and not much instruction from head office. I just made it up as I went along and it seemed to work.

For five years I worked for Film Finances more or less full time, occasionally pulling in an experienced production manager to give me a hand. At the same time I was a feature film representative on the council of the Film & Television Production Association, subsequently The Screen Producers' Association – SPAA – often fighting with the unions over just about everything, and lobbying government to hold on to the tax incentives. Somewhere in all of this Tom and I produced a small film called *Fighting Back* for Adams Packer.

In 1985 Bruce Beresford sent me a script which he had adapted from a novel by a Western Australian writer called Nene Gare and asked if I would produce it for him. I had long admired Beresford's work; he seemed to me to be the best of the new wave directors, with his consistent seamless style and story telling ability. However, apart from a brief visit to the set of one of his films for Film Finances, I had never met him.

The film was *The Fringe Dwellers*, a fictional version of people Nene had known when she lived in Geraldton. The story of the Aboriginal Comeaway family and their ambitious daughter Trilby, it was to have an unexpected effect on my life. I had worked with Aboriginal actors a couple of times, briefly, but like most white Australians, I had only a peripheral knowledge of Aboriginal people.

Through *The Fringe Dwellers* I came to know the closeness and warmth of the Aboriginal community, the strength of its culture, its love of music and laughter, and to have admiration and respect for the courage and spirit of Aboriginal people.

The Fringe Dwellers was an Aboriginal story told by white filmmakers. There is nothing wrong with this, but it made me realise that it was time for indigenous Australians to find their own vision on film, to be able to tell their own stories. Since then, I have worked wherever I can to support this happening.

The All-Aboriginal cast of *The Fringe Dwellers* included Justine Saunders and Bob Maza, dancer Kristina Nehm and Ernie Dingo. Kath Walker, Oodgeroo

Noonuckle, played a cameo with great zest. The film was shot in Murgon, in Queensland, and our extras came from Cherbourg just outside Murgon.

The film was nominated for best picture at the 1986 AFI awards, and was Australia's official entry in the 1986 Cannes Film Festival.

Screening clip from *THE FRINGE DWELLERS* – Mollie's soliloquy

From this time on, I stepped back from my hands-on role with Film Finances, retaining overall responsibility but employing experienced line producers to handle the day to day.

Following *The Fringe Dwellers*, Bruce and I spent a frustrating eight months trying to make *Total Recall* for the legendary Dino de Laurentiis. Dino had set up an Australian film company and we had taken him an Australian script. But he switched projects on us at the last minute, wanting Bruce to direct this big special effects picture to open his new Gold Coast studios. Intrigued by the challenge, Bruce agreed. Unfortunately this was 1987. The money bubble burst and as Dino released a series of box-office disasters from his American slate, the house of cards slowly folded. I spent a particularly painful SPAA conference that year, at Surfers Paradise, which included a tour for the delegates of a set for *Total Recall* in one of the recently completed stages at the very new studios. As the conference attendees were being ushered through the set with one of Dino's employees spruiking the merits of the studios and the film, I was on the phone to the latest finance executive of his sinking empire, trying to find out whether we were already shut down or not. We were.

Dino eventually sold the rights to another company, which subsequently made the film with Paul Verhoeven and Arnold Schwarzenegger. It was a spooky experience to watch a film which you had almost made, still containing flashes of Bruce's light and elegant script, made by someone else, rather like the man who dreamed he had been to Mars and then found out that in fact, he had.

The eighties was a crazy period for more than just the film industry. But the production roller coaster, fuelled by the vast amounts of cash flushing through the economic system, did not really last long. The 150% tax deduction was reduced to 133% in 1983, and to 120% in 1985. The film industry has never attracted corporate investment in any substantial way, and the money coming into films was mostly from what have come to be known as "high net worth individuals". In 1987 the top marginal tax rate was lowered from 60 cents in the dollar to 49 cents, and the stock market crashed. Serious producers usually took two or sometimes many more years to develop and finance a film, and for them the era passed quickly.

By 1989, "10BA" was no longer working and only nine features were produced. And now there was all this new infrastructure to support. The industry was in trouble again.

The arrival of the Film Finance Corporation in 1990 came as a relief to producers. Its essentially simple premise – that you went into the market place, secured up to half the budget, and assuming the deals were legitimate, the FFC came in with the rest – meant you knew where you stood, you had stable rules to work with, and as it turned out they stayed in place for longer than any other subsidy system to this day.

With the creation of the FFC, the Australian Film Commission ceased mainstream funding and became the development arm of the federal funding agencies.

My first film with the FFC was an unlikely one, The Australia /Canadian co-production, *Black Robe*. Bruce Beresford had been asked to film an adaptation of Brian Moore's novel set in 17th century Quebec, about a Jesuit priest who journeys up the St. Lawrence river to investigate what has happened to a mission which has not been heard of for some time. Being such an indigenous production the Canadian producer was having trouble completing the finance – a familiar story. He asked me if we could provide some finance from Australia, as the director was Australian and he wanted to do post production there. We worked out a scenario which fitted the guidelines and which, in addition to all the editing, sound and final laboratory work being done in Australia included taking ten Australians to Canada including the very young and unknown Aden Young to play the boy who accompanies the priest.

I have never made a film in more challenging conditions than *Black Robe*. The priest's journey starts in late autumn, and continues until he arrives, deep in the winter, in the frozen world of northern Quebec. We too began filming at the beginning of the winter, and we shot in sequence – something that is usually impossible because of the combination of costs and logistics. The weather paralleled the requirements of the story almost perfectly. Which meant, it got colder and colder, and for the second half of the shoot, the temperature never rose above freezing. It snowed exactly as the priest is abandoned on an island in the river and left to die by his Indian companions, and from that point on the sun came out only once – as the camera craned up at the very end of the film to find the cross on the church in the desolate mission where everyone is dead from disease.

There aren't a lot of laughs in *Black Robe*, but it is an exquisitely beautiful film, and I think one of Bruce's best. It won best picture and best director and many other awards at the Canadian film awards. Its beauty and its starkness are demonstrated in the following scene, where Father Laforgue finally arrives at the mission. The dying priest is played with great sensitivity by Frank Wilson, unrecognisable from his role in *The Club*, and the amazing set was designed by Australian Herbert Pinter. The snow is real:

Screening clip from *BLACK ROBE* – Fr. Laforgue arrives at the mission

In 1992 I was asked to become a member of the Australian Film Commission. When chairman Chris Noonan resigned to begin directing *Babe*, I was

appointed Chair. I had one of the most productive working relationships of my career with the then chief executive of the AFC, Cathy Robinson. We had a very high quality group of commissioners including screenwriter Laura Jones, director/cameraman David Parker, and casting whiz Liz Mullinar. The first indigenous Commissioner, Bob Maza, was appointed during this time.

It was a lively period and we made a number of innovations, which made the AFC a more relevant organisation. A priority of mine was to free up the bureaucratic processes involved in providing development assistance to filmmakers. Process is an inevitable part of dispensing government funding, but, like a little vine you buy in a pot, unless you are constantly vigilant it can sneak up and choke you to death.

In 1992 I received a script from John Duigan, with a note, "Sue, do you think we could do this?" The script was *Sirens*. I read it and I was amused by John's elliptical view of sexuality, and intrigued by the prospect of doing something about Norman Lindsay. The story is about an English clergyman who is asked by the bishop to try to persuade Lindsay to remove a provocative painting, *The Crucified Venus*, from an exhibition. The clergyman and his wife visit the Lindsays at Springwood and while being spectacularly unsuccessful in persuading Norman about anything, find their own relationship turned topsy turvy. It's a fictional tale woven around Lindsay's family, art and philosophy.

Hugh Grant, moments before he became an international superstar and forever out of reach, played the clergyman, and the three models who tease and provoke the young couple were played by Elle Macpherson, Kate Fischer and Portia de Rossi, a trio of very gorgeous, very smart girls. Sam Neill gave his interpretation of Norman Lindsay, and Pamela Rabe played Rose, with Tara Fitzgerald as the clergyman's wife.

Sirens was a charmed production. Working in the Blue Mountains in May, with several weeks at the Normal Lindsay gallery which was closed to the public and converted into to designer Roger Ford's vision of Lindsay's world, with a director as talented as John Duigan, was just great fun. The film was picked up by Miramax during production and this brought many adventures with the legendary Harvey Weinstein, including a screening at the Sundance Film Festival. The film is of course widely remembered for its nudity, which is in fact less provocative than rather chaste.

Screening clip from *SIRENS* - Campion argues with Lindsay in studio

One day I was in Brisbane for a meeting at Film Queensland when two writers asked to see me. They took me down a corridor and without explanation, handed me a walkman. One of them put the earphones on my ears and said, listen. What I heard was a woman's voice: *'Close your eyes and try to imagine it is Christmas, 1943. You are a prisoner of the Japanese, in the jungle. You've been there for two years. You are starving. Your friends are dying. You have no way of knowing if you will ever see your family again.'*

One night, you gather in the compound. You are wondering, will the war ever end..."

Playing segment from *SONG OF SURVIVAL* – Largo from the New World Symphony

The voice I heard was Sister Vivian Bullwinkel, sole survivor of the massacre of twenty-one Australian nurses by the Japanese on Banka Island, Sumatra in February 1942. She was introducing a concert of vocal orchestra music recreated from the original scores, in Perth in 1990. Vivian had been imprisoned in the women's camps in Sumatra in which the music without instruments was created by two English musicians, Norah Chambers and Margaret Dryburgh.

I knew a little of the story of the nurses, but nothing of the vocal orchestra, which I immediately saw as the way to dramatise the story. I knew that Bruce Beresford, with his love of music and his sensitivity in directing films about women, would be interested in the idea.

The genesis of production of *Paradise Road* was convoluted but it ended up with Village Roadshow Pictures. Greg Coote and I produced. One of the great things about making this film was meeting a number of the survivors of those camps, and getting to know them. Their inner strength, and their love and support for each other after nearly fifty years, was inspirational.

On set, we had nineteen female actors, and that in itself was an experience. Normally you could expect quite a lot of bad behaviour from so many actors in an ensemble piece, each vying for their moments on screen and the director's attention. What made a difference on *Paradise Road*, I think, was that the cast was constantly reminded that they were portraying an episode of human suffering so profound, and examples of courage so extraordinary, that their own worries were insignificant.

Screening clip from *PARADISE ROAD* – The attack.

The girls did their own stunts – into the sea off Port Douglas.

This was the film which launched Cate Blanchett's international career. Fox searchlight had pre-bought the film, and they approved Glenn Close to play the violinist who collaborates with the musical missionary, played by Pauline Collins, to create the music without instruments. But Fox wanted anyone but an Australian to play the Australian nursing sister, who was inspired by Vivian Bullwinkel and her fellow POW, Sister Betty Jeffrey (author of *White Coolies*). "What about Kate Winslet?" they asked. "She's a New Zealander. Won't that do?" "No she's not a New Zealander, she's English. She was in a New Zealand film." (*Heavenly Creatures*). We persisted, and Bruce met and screen tested a number of Australians. One afternoon he came in and said; "I've just seen Cate Blanchett. She's the one. She's amazing." He held out, and eventually Fox gave in. This led to their approving Cate for *Oscar and Lucinda*, and the rest is, as they say, history.

In the modern industry, casting is an ongoing nightmare. Distribution is obsessed with marquee names, even in the smallest films. And there are only so many marquee names to go round. And then they have to be right for the part – although that is often a secondary consideration, amazing as it sounds. Things have changed a lot since *Paradise Road*, and now we have a growing number of Australian actors who qualify as marquee names, but they only retain this status by working in Hollywood, so it's not easy to cast them in every Australian film.

Since *Paradise Road*, I have found myself once again working in television. I produced a mini series adaptation of George Johnston's novel *My Brother Jack*, which brought me full circle. Once again I am working with Bruce Beresford, developing a mini series adaptation of Henry Handel Richardson's novel *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*.

Then there are the pictures I didn't make. And the ones I leave off my CV. Producers always develop a lot of ideas and it is a combination of luck and circumstance, which dictates which ones get into production. On my list of regrets is a movie adaptation of Jimmy Chi's musical, *Bran Nue Dae*, which I worked on for five years with Nadia Tass as director, and *The Women In Black*, a story of the impact of the first wave of migrants on the old Australia in the fifties, which Bruce Beresford and I have been working on for about seven years so far.

Finally, I want to pay tribute to some of the women of the modern industry, whom you don't get to hear about - the ones who keep the show on the road and who have built a tradition of excellence in managing films since the day I stepped on the set of *Ride A Wild Pony*, taking over a crew I didn't know, and a production in chaos, nearly thirty years ago. People like Carolynne Cunningham, first assistant director on all three of *The Lord of The Rings* – four years, running the set for Peter Jackson. Anne Bruning, my production supervisor on *Paradise Road*, now Line Producer on Peter Jackson's mega-million dollar *King Kong*; Antonia Barnard, Line Producer on *The Quiet American*; Carol Hughes, Unit Production Manager and Associate Producer on *The Matrix*; Barbara Gibbs, Unit Production Manager on *Babe*; Helen Watts, who line produces for Bryan Brown; Tatts Bishop, Unit Production Manager on *Stealth* and *The Quiet American*. These women could run Australia. And they all started out on small Australian films. They have great creative instincts, brilliant organising skills and nerves of steel. As you can see from their credits, they are increasingly forced to find work outside the local industry. They hope as much as I do that that will change.

Because right now, getting quality Australian films financed is as tough as it's been since I started in the seventies.

But then if it was easy, they'd have girls doing it.

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SUE MILLIKEN began producing in the late 1970s with her then husband, Tom Jeffrey. Together they produced "Weekend of Shadows" (1977), "The Odd Angry Shot" (1978) and "Fighting Back" (1981).

In 1980 she set up the Australian operation of the completion guarantor, Film Finances. She acted as Film Finances' representative for five years, building it into the most successful completion guarantor in Australia. Her company, Samson Productions, has managed Film Finances' Australian activities for almost twenty-five years.

In 1985 she produced Bruce Beresford's "The Fringe Dwellers", Australia's official entry at the 1986 Cannes Film Festival, which was nominated for best picture in the 1986 AFI Awards.

In 1990/91 she was Australian producer of "Black Robe", the first official Australia/Canada feature film co-production. "Black Robe" was nominated for ten AFI Awards and won Best Film, Best Director and several other major awards at the 1992 Canadian Genies.

In 1992 she chaired a review of the West Australian film industry for the W.A. Department for the Arts, which set wide-ranging recommendations for a revitalised film industry in that state. In 1994 she produced the feature film "Sirens", starring Elle Macpherson and Hugh Grant and directed by John Duigan and in 1995, "Dating The Enemy", starring Guy Pearce and Claudia Karvan, directed by Megan Simpson for Total Film & Television.

In 1996/97 she produced, with Greg Coote, "Paradise Road", directed by Bruce Beresford, for Village Roadshow Pictures and Twentieth Century Fox. "Paradise Road" starred Glenn Close and Cate Blanchett. In 1999 she co-produced "Sydney - Story of a City", a large-format ("Imax") documentary on the history of Sydney for the millenium.

From 2000 to 2002 she provided production services and acted as either producer or executive producer on 66 episodes of the science fiction TV series "Farscape", produced in Australia for the Sci Fi channel on the USA cable network in the United States. During this period she also provided production services for a remake of the Rogers & Hammerstein musical "South Pacific" for Disney/ABC.

In 2001 she produced the mini series "My Brother Jack", directed by Ken Cameron, for the Ten Network. "My Brother Jack" was nominated for 7 AFI Awards and won Best Telemovie/Miniseries, Best Actress in a Telemovie or Mini Series (Angie Milliken). William McInnes won a Logie for Best Actor and Russell Bacon was awarded Cinematographer of the Year by the ACS for his cinematography.

Sue Milliken is a past President and Vice President of the Screen Producers' Association of Australia. She was made a Life Member of the Association in 1991. She is a former Chairman of the Australian Film Commission. She served for five years as a member of the Federal Government's appeals board for censorship in Australia, the Film and Literature Board of Review. She is currently a member of the board of Screen West.

In 1993 she was awarded the Australian Film Institute's Raymond Longford Award for her contribution to the Australian film industry, and in 2003 she was awarded the Australian Government's Centenary Medal.

2004

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Black Robe –still by Takashi Seida

Samson Productions

Documentation Collection, ScreenSound Australia

P1

Sirens – still by Robert Mcfarlane

Samson Productions

Documentation Collection, ScreenSound Australia

P2

Lottie Lyell

Portrait from the Longford Documentation, ScreenSound Australia

Longford and Lyell on screen together

The Romantic Story of Margaret Catchpole 1911 frame enlargement

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Raymond Longford

*Portrait from the Longford Documentation, ScreenSound Australia**A Maori Maid's Love 1916*

Still from the Documentation Collection, ScreenSound Australia

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Sue Milliken - Photo courtesy Ms Milliken