

LANI'S STORY

Written and directed by Genevieve Grieves

PRESSKIT



BLACKFELLA FILMS

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PRODUCTION NOTES

Writer/Director	Genevieve Grieves
Producer	Darren Dale
Production Company	Blackfella Films Pty Ltd
Genre	Documentary
Language	English
Shooting Gauges	HD, Super 16mm, DV, Super 8
Aspect Ratio	16:9
Duration	51'03
Sound	Stereo

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Lani's Story follows a woman's experience of two relationships – one she has to escape to survive, the other she cannot survive without. It is a moving and intimate portrait of a young Aboriginal woman's journey from victim to victor, from a broken and violent relationship to discovering the redemptive power of love. *Lani's Story* also explores the impact of inter-generational violence within a family and community and how the courage of one person can transform the lives of others.

SYNOPSIS

Lani's Story is a film that narrates the experience of one woman but is also a portrait of a family and community coming to terms with violence.

Lani Brennan, a young woman of Aboriginal and Maori descent, was raised in an urban Aboriginal community in Sydney. Her childhood home was filled with love but alcoholism and violence was also part of life. By 13, she was in a cycle of drug and alcohol abuse herself. She ends up in a relationship with a young Aboriginal man from her community and soon becomes trapped in a situation she nearly doesn't survive.

She is subjected to extreme physical and sexual violence at the hands of her partner who maintains a hold over her by threatening her family and through the shame she feels for what has happened to her. Her father, Rory, and mother, Cathy, worry for her safety but are powerless to help her. Some stand by and watch the violence, including Aunty Carol Simon, a community Elder who feels paralysed by fear and by the behaviour that is expected of her, to keep quiet and say nothing.

Lani's partner senses she is going to leave him and a particularly vicious night of violence ensues. It is after this night, where Lani faces death many times that she finds courage to finally leave, works at healing herself and gets sober.

Then she meets John, the man who will become her partner, the father of her children and the reason why she seeks justice for the crimes committed against her. John gradually pieces together what Lani has gone through, he "listens to her dreams" and realises she has not just been physically abused but has also been raped. Despite his own negative experiences with the justice system he encourages Lani to go to the Police.

Lani's family are opposed to her putting her faith in the Courts, it also goes against her own code of behaviour but she comes to a realisation that she must speak up against what happened to her. She makes a full statement to the Police and waits for them to act. It takes 3 years for the

Police to apprehend her ex-partner and she lives in fear, expecting him to retaliate against her and her family.

Finally the day comes when the matter goes to court. Here, she becomes a victim again, forced to relive her experiences on the stand and face the man who attacked her for the first time. But as hard as the experience is, the battle she faces in court each day gives her strength and she is driven to see the process through to the end. That end is a victory for Lani with a 33 year sentence for her ex-partner.

Lani has become a role model for Aboriginal women. She has changed the outlook of women in her own life by finding the strength to stand up against violence. She wins her battle in the courts, she has a home, 5 children and a new life, but the struggle has not ended for Lani. She will never be able to remove the scars she bears, both physical and emotional, and yet her story is one of hope for all women.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

I have long wanted to create a project that explored themes of violence within the home and intergenerational trauma. Meeting Lani inspired me to actually bring these issues to the screen - not only did she have an amazing story to tell, but the courage and desire to share it with a wide audience.

I believe her story goes beyond being a film about domestic violence, it is about the power of individuals to transform themselves and others around them by their sheer strength of will. But it is also a love story and John Duckett, Lani's new partner, supported and believed in her to the extent that she was able to face the challenges she did.

Lani's Story is also a story about family. Cathy, her mother, and Rory, her father, brought a richness and depth to the narrative with their own experiences as well as their perspectives on what happened to their daughter. They are incredibly open and forthcoming, they share their strengths and weaknesses and the journeys they have made through life with absolute candour. Auntie Carol Simon is also integral to the film. She brings light to the issues of violence within a community context, the behaviour that is expected of victims and how one person's transformation can effect those around them.

Making Lani's Story has been an amazing experience for me. As a process it has been as much about developing relationships as it has been creating a narrative for screen. But it has been a difficult story to tell. Domestic violence happens behind closed doors and often stays that way yet is endemic in Australia - one in three Australian women will experience physical violence during their lives, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) women the statistics are even more dire. Recent studies highlight that the rate of violence experienced by Indigenous women is 40 times the national average.¹ *Lani's Story* is an Indigenous story, but it also a universal story that many women can relate to from a range of backgrounds.

The visual style of the film is a pastiche of various formats and styles. The film's Editor, Rochelle Oshlack, and I explored different ways to bring the intimate and personal nature of memory to the screen. So we filmed a multitude of formats to bring the 'now' through the verite material to 16mm material for when our characters are living and remembering their past.

¹ *Domestic Violence in Australia – an Overview of the Issues*,
http://www.aph.gov.au/library/intguide/sp/Dom_violence.htm

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Genevieve Grieves is a film-maker and artist and a descendant of the Worimi nation on the mid-north coast of New South Wales. Genevieve studied Communications at the University of Technology, Sydney and then undertook postgraduate studies in history at the University of Melbourne.

In 2000, she worked at the Koorie Heritage Trust Inc. in Melbourne, an Aboriginal Cultural Centre, where she began as Oral Historian and eventually managed the Oral History Unit and Stolen Generations Programs. During this time she produced the award-winning Mission Voices website and developed an innovative cultural heritage database, the Koorie Heritage Archive, which was also the recipient of an award for excellence in archival programs. She then developed the art and video installation, *Picturing the Old People* (2005), exploring representation of Indigenous people in colonial photography, which won her the Xstrata Emerging Indigenous Artist Award (2007) and has been exhibited nationally and internationally. Her credits in film include Field Producer and Researcher on the First Australians television series screened on SBS in 2008. She was a Researcher and Co-Writer on the series, *Art and Soul*, currently in production for ABC.

Genevieve has just completed the documentary *Lani's Story* for SBS Television. *Lani's Story* the story of an Aboriginal woman's survival of domestic violence. Her other major Directing credit is for content on the First Australians website on which she directed and wrote seven hours of content relating to Indigenous people, history and culture across the nation.

PRODUCER'S BIOGRAPHY

Producer Darren Dale began his career with Australian public broadcaster SBS Television in 1997. He has been a production manager for various SBS TV programs and was associate producer on *Headlines Across Australia*, an Indigenous news and information series. He produced shorts films *Mimi* for director Warwick Thornton and *Flat* for Beck Cole, both of which screened at numerous overseas festivals including Sundance and Edinburgh. He has co-curated the film program for the Message Sticks Indigenous Festival at the Sydney Opera House since 2002.

Since 2001 Darren has been a company director of Blackfella Films, Australia's premiere Indigenous production company and recently completed producing the landmark multi-platform history series *First Australians*, broadcast on SBS in October 2008 to over 2.3 million viewers. In addition to the series a significant interactive website has also been produced in addition to a companion book.

Blackfella Films is currently working on a feature documentary *The Tall Man* to be directed by Tony Krawitz (Jewboy), and adapted from Chloe Hooper's award winning novel *The Tall Man*. Darren is also producing *Mabo*, a 2 x 90 minute mini-series written by Sue Smith (*Bastard Boys*, *Remote Area Nurse RAN*) and to be directed by Rachel Perkins (*Bran Nue Dae*, *First Australians*).

EDITOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Rochelle began her career assisting Editor Jill Bilcock on films such as *Romeo & Juliet*, *Moulin Rouge*, *Head On*, and *The Dish*.

Rochelle has most recently completed editing the feature musical *Bran Nue Dae*. This is Rochelle's second collaboration with film director Rachel Perkins. The first was on the award winning documentary series *First Australians*. From the highly acclaimed TV series 'knot at home' written and directed by young marginalised people across Australia; to working as a Visual Effects Editor in Los Angeles, Rochelle has successfully dealt with a huge diversity of subject matter and differing budget sizes in both drama and documentary, television and theatrical release.

In her twenty years in post production, Rochelle has been instinctively drawn to projects that matter.

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY'S BIOGRAPHY

Bonnie is a cinematographer who works across the fields of drama, documentary, commercial and stills. She has over forty short film credits, many of which have screened at major International and Australian film festivals, including Berlin, Montreal, Palm Springs, Hamburg, Sydney & Melbourne. In 2006 she was one of five Australians selected to attend the Berlin Film Festival Talent Campus. Bonnie has received recognition from the Australian Cinematographers Society on numerous occasions for her work, and at the 2007 IF Awards she was the recipient of the Rising Talent Award.

Bonnie's passion for cinematography began while studying at UTS where she experimented with Bolex cameras, bleach bypass, cross processing and other celluloid thrills. Beginning her professional life as a camera assistant, Bonnie worked with some of Australia's leading cinematographers, including Kim Batterham and Steve Arnold to name just a few. Bonnie has worked on features (*Somersault*, *Beneath Clouds*), television drama (*Fireflies*, *Wildside & Heartbreak High*) and commercials.

In 2005 Bonnie returned to study at the Australian Film Television & Radio School. She graduated with a Masters in Cinematography in 2007.

Since graduating, Bonnie has been shooting both drama and documentaries all around the world from Arnhem Land to India and in between. In 2008 she shot her debut feature film in Iran, for producers Julie Ryan and Kate Croser. *My Tehran for Sale* premiered at the 2009 Adelaide Film Festival.

INTERVIEWEES

LANI BRENNAN
CATHY BRENNAN
RORY BRENNAN
CAROL SIMON
SAMANTHA SMITH
SCOTT JOHNSON
JOHN DUCKETT

CREDITS

Writer/Director	GENEVIEVE GRIEVES
Producer	DARREN DALE
Editor	ROCHELLE OSHLACK
Director of Photography	BONNIE ELLIOT
Music by	MICHAEL YEZERSKI
Sound Designer	LEAH KATZ
Additional Photography	MURRAY LUI KIM BATTERHAM ASC
SBS Executive Producer	JOHN GODFREY
Production Accountant	JILL DURES
Production managers	RHEA STEPHENSON VANESSA BROWN NATASHA CALI
Production Assistant	PEPI KOKAB
Focus Puller	KEIR SUGGET
Gaffer	MICHAEL PICKELLS
Best Boy	SIMON WILLIAMS
Key Grip	AARON REGAN SCOTT BROKATE
Production and Costume Designer	HELEN FITZGERALD
Standby Props	KEVINA JO SMITH
Sound Recordist	RICHARD BOXHALL
Additional Sound Recording	RANIER DAVENPORT
Hair & Make-Up Artist	CAROL CAMERON
First Assistant Editors	JEFF PARKER CHRISTINE CHEUNG
Stills Photographer	MARK ROGERS
Sound Facilities	SOUNDFIRM SYDNEY
Facilities Manager	ASHA ARDILL
Sound Editor	LEAH KATZ
ADR Reacordist	LIESL PIETERSE
Mixer	ANDY WRIGHT
Camera Equipment	PANAVISION (AUSTRALIA) ANN LYONS
Film Stock	KODAK (AUSTRALIASIA) BORIS MITCHELL
Film Laboratory	NEGLAB
Insurance	MOONEYS INSURANCE BROKER
Production Lawyers	RAENA LEA-SHANNON FRANKEL LAWYERS

Title Design

CATHIE BROUGHTON

HD Post Production

THE LaB SYDNEY

HD Post Producer

STEWART DEAN

Colourist

DWAYNE HYDE

Online Mastering

JO SPILLANE