

'Nurse Maggie' Press Kit

Project Title:	Nurse Maggie
Length:	51 minutes 35 seconds
Shooting Gauge:	Mini DV
Finish Gauge:	Digital Betacam / DVC Pro 50
Format:	Anamorphic 16:9 PAL
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"Nurse Maggie follows the uplifting story of 'Maggie Sister', an Australian woman who, through working with India's most reviled outcastes, has confronted and overcome her own traumatic past.

Nurse Maggie One Paragraph Synopsis

'Nurse Maggie' is a poignant documentary that looks at the extraordinary life of Australian nurse and 'Order of Australia Medal' recipient, Maggie Sister and the work she undertakes with India's most reviled and outcaste people. The film works on two levels. Primarily it delves into Maggie's chequered past, examines what motivates her, and what drives her to do this confronting work. Secondly it takes a physical journey with Maggie through the most inaccessible and marginalised areas of India. The physical and emotional journeys are inextricably entwined. As the film unfolds it becomes clear that through helping others Maggie has been able to emotionally transform her own tumultuous life and discover a true sense of self-worth.

Nurse Maggie 300 Word Synopsis

Australian, Maggie Sister has lived a tough life. From the death of her father as a small child, through two failed marriages (one abusive), a stint in a mental institution and the contraction of lung cancer, she has always had to struggle. Despite this, she has emerged from the debris of her past to find fulfilment and happiness in herself through the work she does in India.

Motivated on the one hand by a desperate wish to gain her caustic mother's approval and on the other by an urgent need to escape her, Maggie found herself fleeing to India for a one-off nursing stint in the isolated and socially reviled leprosy colonies. Here she discovered strong parallels with her own life; a lack of belonging and sense of isolation. Now, Maggie's one-off stint has become her lifetime's work.

Over the years her work has expanded to involve other Indian outcastes including AIDS orphans, tsunami victims, sufferers of severe physical and mental disabilities and tribal mountain villagers.

The physical journey Maggie undertakes to India is inextricably linked to her emotional one. This is not a film about a benevolent western 'do-gooder' but the story of a complex woman struggling to find her own sense of identity and self worth in the only way she knows how; through looking after other people who, like her, are battling to overcome massive social and emotional obstacles. Maggie gets back from them just as much as she gives and in doing so, she has found the sense of belonging and peace which eluded her all her life.

Maggie's dry sense of humour, irreverence and crusty no-nonsense attitude contrast with her emotional vulnerabilities and deep insecurities and make her an intriguing and compelling person to watch.

In 2000 the Australian government awarded Maggie the 'Order of Australia' medal for her humanitarian work in India. However, for Maggie her greatest achievement has simply been learning to like herself and to accept the past that has brought her to the place where she is today.

Nurse Maggie 500 Word Synopsis

Set against the rich and colourful tapestry of India, 'Nurse Maggie' follows the life-journey Australian nurse Maggie Sister. The film weaves together two distinct but inextricably linked stories – that of Maggie's tumultuous personal history and her work in the poorest and most marginalised areas of India. The resultant documentary is a deeply intimate and complex account of Maggie's life, which is narrated by her personally.

The film opens in Jhan Jhur Leprosy colony amidst a vibrant and joyful welcome parade by the colony members to welcome Maggie back into their midst. Jhan Jhur colony was one of the first colonies Maggie ever went to in India 18 years ago. Her initial fears about encountering people with leprosy were quickly forgotten when she was eagerly embraced by a community who never have visitors and are outcast, reviled and stigmatised by mainstream society. After years of nursing in the colony an easy friendship has flowered between Maggie and the leprosy patients. This friendship has helped to change and mould Maggie's life in ways she never expected.

As the story develops Maggie's painful past is slowly unfurled so that by the end of the film the psychology of what motives and drives this remarkable woman are laid bare. These revelations are carefully divulged at critical, relevant and significant moments during her physical journey throughout India. There are strong parallels in the lives of the people Maggie helps and her own personal struggles.

Maggie's work in India allows the viewer entrée to people and places that are normally inaccessible. We are taken up into the remote tribal areas of Orissa, which can only be reached by hiking up a narrow mountain track. The villages are extremely basic. Mud huts are made of cow dung and straw and there is no electricity. Children are not named until they reach the age of four or nine because the infant mortality rate is so high that parents cannot be sure their children will survive. When Maggie first came into these isolated mountains she was the first white person they had ever seen and a scout had to be sent ahead with a photo of her so that the tribes would not be frightened by her strange appearance.

The massive social and medical issues confronting the tribal people are overwhelming. However, Maggie has gradually come to understand that, "When you go into a third world situation you realise you can't solve all their problems. The best you can hope for is to improve the quality of their lives."

In 2000 Maggie was awarded an OAM by the Australian government for her humanitarian work in India.

'Nurse Maggie' is a poignant, at times funny, and intriguing look at the life of a remarkable Australian woman. Maggie's desperate need to be liked, her insecurities and fractured past have combined to drive her life in an extraordinary direction. With great irony, it seems that she has found the love and acceptance she craves amongst India's most unloved and unacceptable people.

Director's Statement

In February and March 2005, we shot 'Nurse Maggie' in Broome and India. Filming took us into leprosy colonies, tribal villages and the devastated tsunami affected southeast coast.

The subject of the documentary, Maggie Sister, came to our attention over three years ago. Whilst doing some research on 'leprosy' we stumbled across a newspaper article about the government awarding Maggie an Order of Australia Medal (OAM) for her great humanitarian work with leprosy patients in India. Intrigued we followed the leads and ended up developing a strong relationship with this remarkable woman.

The more we got to know Maggie the more we felt she had a story worth pursuing. On a personal level she has led a colourful life and it has shaped her into a very complicated and interesting woman. During the filming of 'Nurse Maggie' we sought to find out what motivates her and to learn why she does what she does.

For over two months we followed Maggie across eastern India, filming as she worked with tsunami victims in Tamil Nadu, tribal people in the remote Raghubari Mountains, HIV orphans in Andhra Pradesh and leprosy patients in the poorest areas of Orissa.

We were extremely fortunate with Maggie because she trusted us and consequently made herself, her private life, emotions and psyche very accessible. She also turned out to be great in front of the camera and very eloquent when expressing herself - which was a great relief.

With the filming undertaken by a crew of only three, we were able to keep the whole production low key and unobtrusive. This meant we were able to access places and people we might not otherwise have been able to with a larger team.

During our time filming 'Nurse Maggie' in the tsunami affected villages, we were given extremely disturbing footage of the immediate after effects of the disaster. Some of this material has been included in the story and gives one a real sense of the horror these people lived through. Through Maggie and her work in these villages we saw the post-disaster effects and the very real sense of fear the coastal villagers now have of the sea.

After the tsunami the Tamil Nadu government decreed that nobody could live within 200 metres of the beach, and in some places even further. For all the fishermen who inhabit the coastal fringe this is a ridiculous and clearly impractical law. As one fisherman said to Maggie, "What are we supposed to do - catch a bus to the beach to go fishing? And what about our boats?"

This may just be a knee jerk reaction by the government but Maggie was faintly suspicious that the government may be seeing the tsunami as the perfect excuse to reclaim the beautiful coastal areas and sell them off to commercial developers.

Just about every person we encountered in making this film was having to or had overcome some form of adversity. The leprosy patients lived with both the physical deformity and the social stigma of the disease. The tribal people scratched out an existence in poverty and were ill-equipped to deal with the rapidly encroaching 21st century. The tsunami survivors were struggling to rebuild their lives. Eliazar overcame the ostracism from growing up branded as the child of lepers and Maggie has had to overcome a violent past and struggles physically on a daily basis with the effects of lung cancer. We were constantly astounded and humbled by the acceptance, resilience and courage we encountered during the making of this documentary.

Key Creative Biographies

Producer / Director: Jonathon & Rebecca Heath

Rebecca and Jonathon Heath produced, directed and filmed 'The Drover's Dilemma'. The documentary was shot in the Australian outback over a six-month period and was broadcast on SBS as part of the 'Inside Australia' series in 2003.

The filmmakers are regionally based in North Western NSW and it is from here they run their production company 'Heathfilm'.

Editor: Fiona Strain

Fiona Strain originally trained at AFTRS and has been editing documentaries and dramas for the past 20 years. Some of these include:

- PACIFIC STORIES, a series of interviews with filmmakers for ABC2;
- 4 WHEEL DREAMING, 2 X 26 Minute Documentaries, DIRECTOR Michael Butler;
- HEARING JAMES, 26 Minute Documentary, DIRECTOR Cath Moore;
- REEF DREAMS, Documentary Series, 4x half hour episodes, DIRECTOR Paul Roy;
- THE RIDDLE OF THE BRADSHAW, 53 minute documentary, DIRECTOR Paul Roy;
- DIVERTED TO DELHI, 53 minute documentary, DIRECTOR Greg Stitt;
- KIMBERLEY COPS, Documentary Series, 4x half hour episodes, DIRECTOR Paul Roy;
- MY MOTHER, MY SON, 26 Minute drama, DIRECTOR Erica Glynn;
- CLEVER COUNTRY, 55 minute documentary, DIRECTOR Bruce Petty;
- SPORTZCRAZY, Documentary series, 8 x 1 hour episodes, DIRECTORS Mark Lamprell and Marcus D'Arcy.

Fiona was also an editing lecturer at AFTRS from 1995-2001 and the director of a short course entitled Demystifying Post Production from 2001-2005.

Advising Producer: Gregory Miller

Gregory Miller acted as a 'sounding board' for the newcomer director/producers on Nurse Maggie. Gregory is a director of FILM PROJECTS PTY LTD and past Chairperson of the Australian International Documentary Conference and member of the SPAA / ASDA Documentary Council. He has also been a board member of the Australian Screen Directors Association. (ASDA)

Some of Gregory's documentary and drama credits include:

- BESIEGED -THE NED KELLY STORY, feature documentary, co-production with Telwell Films Ireland, Director/Co-producer;
- SHARK TRACKER, Australian/French Co-production with MVC France, Associate Producer;
- KING OF THE MARKET, 52 minute documentary, SBSi, Producer;
- IT DOESN'T KILL YOU, SBS TV, 5 x half hours, Producer;
- CIRCUS, Documentary 52 min, Producer/Director;
- WORLDS APART, SBS TV, 21 min Drama, Producer;
- LIFE CHANCES, 56 min Documentary, SBS, Co-Director/Co-Producer.

Credits List

- 1 Produced, Directed & Filmed by Jonathon & Rebecca Heath
- 2 Editor - Fiona Strain ASE
- 3 Many Special Thanks to Maggie Sister
- 4 Special Thanks to Eliazar T. Rose & New Hope Rural Leprosy Trust
www.newhopeaustralia.org
- 5 Production Assistant - James Heath
Advising Producer - Gregory Miller
Sound Mix - Mike Gissing, Digital City Studios
Translations - Nadarajah Kanapathy
Legal - Troy Peisley, ICQ

Special Thanks to
Ruth T. Rose
Allan McMullen
M. Siva
N. Shakuntala
David Raju
Bibhuti Bindhani
K. Patro
K. Sridha
Jhan Jhur Leprosy Colony
George Manning and ABC Kimberley

Radio sound bites courtesy of ABC Radio

Tsunami footage courtesy of Eliazar T. Rose

OAM photographs courtesy of Des Birt

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- 6 A Heathfilm Production, **LOGO:** Heathfilm, www.heathfilm.com.au
- 7 Produced in Association with SBS Independent, **LOGO:** SBSi, Commissioning Editor, SBS Independent, Trevor Graham
- 8 Produced in Association with the Australian Film Commission, **LOGO:** AFC
- 9 Produced in Association with the New South Wales Film and Television Office **LOGO:** NSWFTO
- 10 © 2006, Australian Film Commission, New South Wales Film and Television Office, Heathfilm