



# Hold Me Tight, Let Me Go

a film by Kim Longinotto



**"Mixing ferocity with tenderness, delicacy with tenacity ...  
a docu of uncompromised integrity and edge-of-the seat drama"**

- John Anderson, *Variety*

**"DISTURBING, DEEPLY MOVING  
and even at times, darkly comic ...a very strong piece of work"**

- David Jenkins, *Time Out London*



Women Make Movies • 462 Broadway, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor • New York, NY 10013  
Tel: 212.925.0606 • [www.wmm.com](http://www.wmm.com)

## Synopsis

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"For the forty children who call it home, Mulberry Bush is their last chance. Excluded from school for extreme behaviour, and often having suffered severe emotional trauma, they are given three years at the Oxford boarding school to try to turn their lives around. Acclaimed documentary maker Kim Longinotto has once again turned her compassionate lens onto people living in extraordinary circumstances. The fragile young boys at the heart of her film lash out in shockingly extreme ways - hitting, swearing and spitting their way through the misery of their blighted childhoods. Endlessly patient and determined staff members verbally reason with the boys, whilst often having to restrain them physically. HOLD ME TIGHT, LET ME GO is ultimately a heartbreaking, engrossing study of dysfunction - of what happens when families break down. It also pays witness to the tremendous influence that adults hold - for bad and for good - upon growing children."

- Carol Nahra, *Sheffield Film Festival*

## Festivals

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For the most updated list, visit [www.wmm.com](http://www.wmm.com).

- International Documentary Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) - **Special Jury Prize**
- Britdoc - **Best British Feature Documentary**
- Birds Eye View – **Best Documentary**
- Britspotting British & Irish Film Festival, Berlin – **Best Documentary**
- London Film Festival
- Sheffield Film Festival



Credits

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2007, 100 MINUTES, COLOR, UK

**PRODUCTION MANAGER**

Jane Bevan

**EXECUTIVE PRODUCER FOR THE BBC**

Richard Klein

**EXECUTIVE PRODUCER FOR FILMS OF RECORD**

Roger Graef

**SOUND**

Mary Milton

**EDITING**

Ollie Huddleston

**CAMERA, PRODUCING & DIRECTION**

Kim Longinotto



Filmmaker Kim Longinotto and Sound Recordist Mary Milton



## Director Biography

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Internationally acclaimed director Kim Longinotto is one of the preeminent documentary filmmakers working today, renowned for creating extraordinary human portraits and tackling controversial topics with sensitivity and compassion. Longinotto's films have won international acclaim and dozens of premiere awards at festivals worldwide. Highlights include the Prix Art et Essai and Special Mention Europa at the Cannes Film Festival for *Sisters in Law*, Cinemas Amnesty International DOEN Award at IDFA and Best Doc UK Spotlight at Hot Docs for *The Day I Will Never Forget*; the Grand Prize for Best Documentary San Francisco Int'l Film Festival and Silver Hugo Award at the Chicago International Film Festival for *Divorce Iranian Style*; Best Documentary at Films de Femmes, Creteil for *Dream Girls*; and Outstanding Documentary at the SF Gay and Lesbian Film Festival for *Shinjuku Boys*.

Longinotto studied camera and directing at England's National Film School, where she made *Pride Of Place*, a critical look at her boarding school, and *Theatre Girls*, documenting a hostel for homeless women. After the NFS she worked as the cameraperson on a variety of documentaries for TV including *Cross and Passion*, an account of Catholic women in Belfast, and *Underage*, a chronicle of unemployed adolescents in Coventry.

In 1986, Longinotto formed the production company Twentieth Century Vixen with Claire Hunt. Together they made *Fireraiser*, a look at Sir Arthur Bomber Harris and the bombing of Dresden during WWII; *Eat the Kimono*, about the controversial Japanese feminist performer Hanayagi Genshu; *Hidden Faces*, the internationally acclaimed, collaborative documentary with/about Egyptian women; and *The Good Wife of Tokyo* about women, love and marriage in Japanese society. Throughout this time, she made a series of ten broadcast and non-broadcast videos on special needs issues, including *Tragic But Brave* for Channel 4. With Jano Williams, Longinotto directed the audience pleaser DREAM GIRLS, a BBC-produced documentary of the spectacular Japanese musical theatre company; and *Shinjuku Boys*, about three Tokyo women who live as men. Next, she made *Rock Wives* for Channel 4 about the wives and girlfriends of rock stars, followed by *Divorce Iranian Style* with Ziba Mir-Hosseini, about women and divorce in Iran. She then made two short films for the *Best Friends* series on Channel 4: *Steve & Dave* - about two friends who work as a drag act and *Rob & Chris* about two homeless young men. Her next film, *Gaea Girls* made with Jano Williams is about women wrestlers in Japan. *Runaway* was also made with Ziba Mir-Hosseini and is set in a refuge for girls in Tehran. Her film *The Day I Will Never Forget*, about young girls in Kenya challenging the tradition of female circumcision premiered domestically at Sundance in 2003. In 2005 her film *Sisters In Law*, set in Kumba, Cameroon, premiered and won two prizes at Cannes.



Press Quotes

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"Mixing ferocity with tenderness, delicacy with tenacity ...  
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- John Anderson, *Variety*

"**DISTURBING, DEEPLY MOVING** and even at times, darkly comic ...a very strong piece of  
work... Kim Longinotto is one of the finest filmmakers working in the UK today"  
- David Jenkins, *Time Out London*

"★★★★ **HARROWING**... an honest and heartfelt look  
into the issues that colour the lives of those that call this place home"  
- Carrie Bailey, *Epoch Times*

"**REMARKABLE** ... shot with clarity and human kindness."  
- Jason Solomons, *The Observer*

"**MOVING AND REWARDING**...sensitively filmed...shows [Longinotto's] skill  
at capturing the humanity of people and situations in an extremely accessible manner"  
- Paul Griffiths, *Eye for Film*

"★★★★★ Brave...Wonderful...Go see this film."  
- Peter Wintonick, *POV Magazine*





## Hold Me Tight, Let Me Go

November 16, 2008

Acclaimed documentary film-maker Kim Longinotto (*Sisters in Law*, *The Day I Will Never Forget*) brings us an incredible film about a unique last-chance boarding school that uses hug therapy to modify the behavior of troubled children. The Mulberry Bush in Oxfordshire looks after and teaches children who have been expelled from regular schools for extreme behavior. The three-year programme gives them the chance to turn their lives around and re-enter the regular school system.

Longinotto spends a year at the school following the progress of four charming but troubled boys. All have severe problems with anger and violence; they punch, kick, spit and curse at the remarkably patient teachers who are trained never to raise their voices and who encourage the students to express their emotions. The film compassionately captures the battle these children go through to give voice to the hurt they carry inside. It is a sensitive and heart-wrenching study of the results of family dysfunction and also stands witness to the effects—bad and good—adults have on growing children.

Mulberry Bush is not an average school. It costs 113,000 British pounds a year and is highly selective. But you don't get there by being super rich. Each child is carefully chosen and paid for by local education authorities hard strapped even to buy enough books for their normal classrooms. They pay for these children for one reason only: they have no idea what else to do with them.

This film explores the remarkable relationships which are formed between the staff and children. We are drawn into the arduous and emotionally charged process of trying to break the kids' violent and self-destructive patterns of behavior.





December 10, 2007

By John Anderson

A Women Make Movies presentation of a Films of Record production, in association with the BBC. Produced by Roger Graef (for Films of Record), Richard Klein (for the BBC). Directed by Kim Longinotto.

**Mixing ferocity with tenderness, delicacy with tenacity, "Hold Me Tight, Let Me Go" grapples with the subject of the Mulberry Bush School, an Oxford education/treatment facility for emotionally disturbed children. Although the subject matter could have resulted in an exploitative, sensational and/or superficial film, helmer Kim Longinotto's gift for unobtrusive observation and unblinking purpose makes for a docu of uncompromised integrity and edge-of-the seat drama. Limited arthouse exposure seems likely, but "Hold Me" should thrive on the festival circuit, and may even become a kind of touchstone of child psychology and progressive education.**

The knotty ethical issue that arises here is the exposure onscreen of some extremely troubled children -- all boys in this case -- who display a virtually uncontrollable, feral anger under stress and make the work of their teachers and counselors seem nearly miraculous. Writhing, spitting and striking out against their supervisors, the kids are never punished, per se, but instead are safely restrained and consoled until they regain something close to composure.

The teachers are saintly in their tolerance; the children are wild in their wrath. The effect is that of a trip into a frighteningly unhinged world where any sense of control is always a few small steps from disintegration.

Should the kids even be onscreen, despite the obvious consent of the parents who appear in the film? Arguably, yes; the details of their pasts are never revealed (there are certain allusions to histories of domestic violence and abuse, but no hard facts), and the kids are portrayed not only at their worst, but also at their best: The violence a boy is capable of is never construed as his true nature, but as something to be overcome.

Longinotto takes a snapshot approach, skipping from confrontation to confrontation, cutting to some pastoral landscape so viewers can catch their breath before plunging back



## Hold Me Tight, Let Me Go

into the fray. All this provides a breathless ride through the atmosphere, techniques and personalities at play at Mulberry, where the staff-to-student ratio is 108 to 40. It doesn't seem like enough.

"With a few words, I could change the world," says a pugnacious charmer named Alex; with a few pictures, "Hold Me Tight, Let Me Go" is trying to do the same.

Production values, especially Longinotto's virtually combat-style photography, are superb, although subtitling would make certain scenes more intelligible.



Filmmaker Kim Longinotto



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# The Epoch Times

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## Movie Review: 'Hold Me Tight Let Me Go'

By Carrie Bailey  
October 21, 2007

Mulberry Bush is a boarding school in Oxford for children suffering from severe emotional trauma, whose truancy and aggression has got them expelled from previous regular schools (sometimes on numerous occasions). No longer able to attend with other "normal" children, this is their last hope for gaining an [education](#) before they are released into the world.

Director Kim Longinotto presents a harrowing film of the other side where normal child behaviour includes screaming, spitting, violence and emotional outpouring. Not what you would say a normal teacher/pupil relationship is by any standards.

Each day teachers and pupils go head to head; the former battling physical abuse and the type of insults that would make even a sailor blush, while the later struggle to survive in an environment which demands responsibility and accountability.

The children in this film are very real and although Longinotto invades their personal space, following each child as they cope with stress and loss, she still manages to present an honest and heartfelt look into the issues that colour the lives of those that call this place home.

Although rough around the edges the film paints a very moving picture. Sensitive to the conditions that led the children into this place it manages to show them in a humane and loving light – each with their own unique personality – and revealing deep down that they aren't unrepentant misfits but souls that are crying out for help.

The teachers are the heroes in this film. Patient to the point of being almost inhuman, they deal with tantrums that would have the rest of us running towards the hills, spending long hours talking, restraining, educating and healing these emotionally battered little ones.

As one boy said, "With a few words I can change the world" which is indicative of the morals and values that are instilled in these children. For without understanding, without love and without accountability they would just become more lost and aggressive souls, withering beneath the burden of a society that does not understand.

**Four stars out of five**





**Movie review**

**Author: David Jenkins**

There can be no doubt of the fact that Kim Longinotto is one of the finest filmmakers working in the UK today, and this film (which comes hot on the heels of last year's outstanding 'Sisters in Law') certainly gives credence to the notion. Training her camera on the staff and pupils of Oxford's Mullbury Bush School for children with acute behavioural problems, she manages to tease out a disturbing, deeply moving and even at times, darkly comic portrait of an institution which is seen as a last chance saloon for its many troubled pupils. Avoiding sensationalism by tastefully editing out scenes of violence and dispensing with the forced narrative arc which seems de rigueur in most documentary films these days, Longinotto's gentle struggle to inject subjectivity into the form means that the viewer is (for once) allowed to read the material as they wish. A very strong piece of work.

