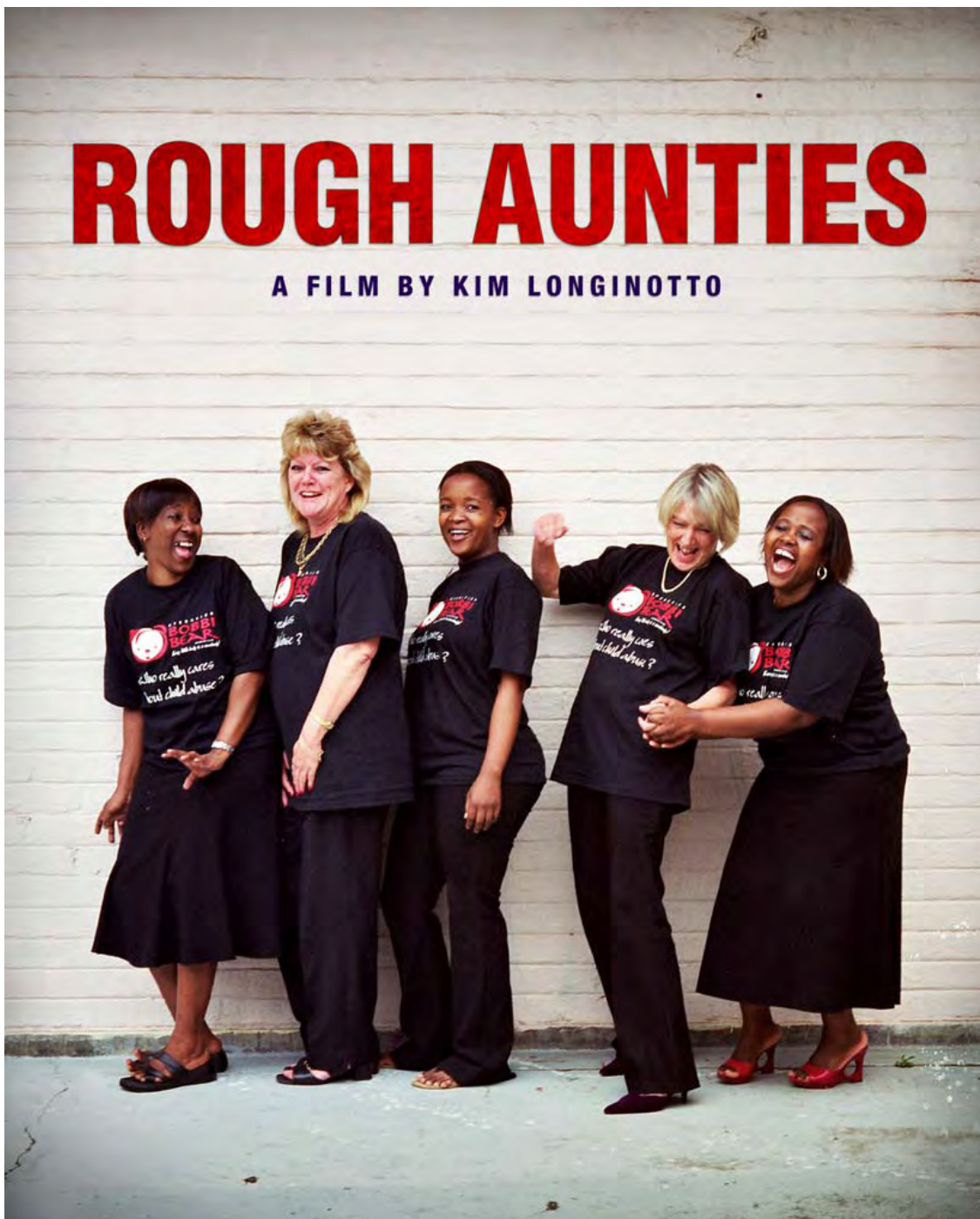




ROUGH AUNTIES

A FILM BY KIM LONGINOTTO



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SYNOPSIS



Photo: Courtesy of Women Make Movies

Fearless, feisty and resolute, the “Rough Aunties” are a remarkable group of women unwavering in their stand to protect and care for the abused, neglected and forgotten children of Durban, South Africa. This latest documentary by internationally acclaimed director Kim Longinotto (*Sisters in Law*, *Divorce Iranian Style*) follows the outspoken, multiracial cadre of Thuli, Mildred, Sdudla, Eureka and Jackie, as they wage a daily battle against systemic apathy, corruption, and greed to help the most vulnerable and disenfranchised of their communities.

Despite the harsh realities of violence, poverty, and racism in the women’s work at the Bobbi Bear child welfare organization and in the heartaches of their personal lives, the portraits that emerge on screen are filled with grace, wisdom, friendship, and a deeply stirring conviction. Neither politics, nor social or racial divisions stand a chance against the united force of the women. Once again Longinotto has managed to bring us an intimate portrait of change from Africa, this time from post-apartheid South Africa, a nation being transformed with hope and energy into a new democracy.

Rough Aunties was acquired for broadcast by HBO Documentary Films, and was produced by Rise Films.

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CREDITS

2008, 103 MINUTES, COLOR

DIRECTOR/ CINEMATOGRAPHER

Kim Longinotto

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Peter Dale

PRODUCERS

Teddy Leifer

Paul Taylor

ASSISTANT PRODUCER

Rebecca Lloyd-Evans

EDITOR

Ollie Huddleston

SOUND

Mary Milton

Steve Cookman

Andy Dark

VISUAL EFFECTS

Justin Eely

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

Katherine Grincell

Pentti Turenen

TRANSLATORS

Betty Dlamini

Ezra Tshisa Sibanda

WORLD SALES/SCREENING COPY

Rise Films

INVOLVED TV CHANNEL

Channel 4

FESTIVALS & AWARDS

- Sundance Film Festival, **World Cinema Jury Prize in Documentary**
- Hot Docs, **Top Ten Audience Favorite**
- Big Sky Documentary Film Festival, **Best Feature**
- Durban International Festival, **Amnesty International Human Rights Award**
- True/False Film Festival, **True Vision Award**
- Heartland Film Festival, **Crystal Heart Award**
- Chesapeake Film Festival
- Facets Cinemaeque
- St. John's International Women's Film Festival
- International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA)
- AFI Dallas Film Festival
- DOXA Documentary Film Festival
- Sarasota Film Festival
- Full Frame Documentary Film Fest.
- Rochester High Falls Film Festival

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DIRECTOR'S BIO

Internationally acclaimed director Kim Longinotto is one of the pre-eminent 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, including the World Cinema Jury Prize in Documentary at Sundance for **ROUGH AUNTIES**. Highlights include perhaps one of her best known works, **SISTERS IN LAW** (2005), winner of a 2008 Peabody Award and two Cannes awards, including the Cannes Prix art et Essai Award; **THE DAY I WILL NEVER FORGET** (2003), which won the Amnesty International DOEN Award at IDFA and Best Doc UK Spotlight at Hot Docs; the recent **HOLD ME TIGHT, LET ME GO** (2007), winner of the Special Jury Prize at the International Documentary Film Festival, Amsterdam (IDFA); The BAFTA Award-winning **DIVORCE IRANIAN STYLE** (1998); **DREAM GIRLS** (1993), winner of Best Documentary at Films de Femmes, Creteil; and **SHINJUKU BOYS** (1995), winner for Outstanding Documentary at the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Film Festival.

Longinotto studied camera and directing at England's National Film School (NFS), 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 following film, **GAEA GIRLS** made with Jano Williams, was about women wrestlers in Japan, and then **RUNAWAY**, also made with Ziba Mir-Hosseini, was 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. More recent films include the highly acclaimed **SISTERS IN LAW**, about female justices in Kumba, Cameroon, and **HOLD ME TIGHT, LET ME GO**, about troubled children at England's Mulberry Bush School.

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ROUGH AUNTIES

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WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT ROUGH AUNTIES

"A surefire Oscar nominee for doc next year.... Masterful, gut-wrenching, uplifting.... A great story here to which every person can relate. Even though South Africa has so many specific issues, this movie is universal and somehow, more relevant than ever."

David Poland
Hotblog

"Inspiring...exemplary.... A doc of complete wonder, it makes so many other documentaries seem so self-indulgent."

Charlie Phillips
Sheffield Int'l Documentary Film Festival

"Unnerves and inspires in equal measure."

David Ng
Sundance Film Festival

"A rare movie, one that balances tragedy and a sense of empowerment, compassion with outrage."

Tom Hall
Indiewire

"Completely amazing and inspiring...[an] unwavering and unbiased look at tough subject matter [that] definitely should be seen."

Nathan Truesdell
All These Wonderful Things

"The emotions are raw and right on the surface in this doc.... The camera never flinches."

Hank Sartin
Time Out Chicago



Photo courtesy of Women Make Movies

MORE INFO

Hi-res photos are available for download on this film's web catalog page at www.wmm.com.

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film&festivals
The place where filmmakers and cinema lovers meet

doc talk

Kim Longinotto



In a career spanning over 30 years, pre-eminent documentary filmmaker Kim Longinotto has earned an almost unparalleled reputation for directing some of the most intimate, extraordinary and heart-warming of human portraits. Always working with a tiny crew, and often shooting in the most difficult of environments, Longinotto tackles controversial and challenging topics with sensitivity and compassion, employing only the very purest of observational techniques. Her multi-award winning films continue to screen around the world to both critical and popular acclaim and her work has paved the way for a new wave of female documentary filmmakers currently enjoying a level of success that eludes their counterparts in Hollywood.

By Christiaan Harden

In 2008, Longinotto traveled for the very first time to her ancestral home of South Africa to shoot *ROUGH AUNTIES*, a powerful and moving account of five courageous women – Mildred, Studla, Thuli, Jackie and Eureka – behind Bobbi Bear in Durban, a nonprofit organisation that counsels sexually-abused children and works to bring their abusers to justice. Recipient of the World Cinema Jury Prize for Documentary at *Sundance '09*, the feature-length documentary is also an insightful portrait of change in post-apartheid South Africa. And for Longinotto, the experience laid a very big familial ghost to rest.

How exactly did the film come about and what was it that attracted you to the story?

When Paul Taylor was in Africa filming *WE ARE TOGETHER*, he heard about Bobbi Bear and suggested that they have a film made. They're very smart women

and immediately saw how a film could help promote their work. Paul and I then travelled out there together and I instantly fell in love with Mildred. She's just so wonderful. Very calm, gentle and loving, but also very strong and funny. I knew as soon as I met her and the other Aunties, that I wanted to make a film about them.

It's already been very well-received, but how did the Aunties react when they first saw it?

Before the film was finished we sent DVDs back to South Africa, so that everyone involved could take a look and see if there was anything they desperately wanted removed. Fortunately, they were completely happy and didn't want a single frame changed. They absolutely loved being at *Sundance* too. At the end of both screenings, the audience stood up and gave Mildred and Thuli a standing ovation, then lots of things would happen in the lobby afterwards. At the end of the first screening, a psychiatrist turned up with his daughter and she ran into Mildred's arms. This girl had been raped and Mildred counselled her in the freezing cold on the pavement. It's always like that being with those guys, you just sort of lurch from one emotion to another. One minute your laughing with them because they're such fun and the next minute, somebody's sobbing on Mildred's shoulder.

Did you worry at all while filming that the camera's presence would affect the young victim's willingness to open up?

I said to the Aunties right at the very beginning, if it ever seems like we're getting in the way, just tell me to stop. A couple of times Thuli said 'this girl isn't talking, she's not opening up, maybe it would be better if you go out of the room'. We would leave the room immediately, but on each occasion, Thuli told us afterwards that it didn't seem to make any difference one way or the other. Nami, for example, the girl who had never been listened to before and who had never been to school,

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ROUGH AUNTIES

A FILM BY KIM LONGINOTTO

I think she found being filmed a great comfort, that at last she was being listened to. At last she was getting help and being seen as somebody important.

Is that something you've found making your other films?
It seems to happen all the time. In *THE DAY I'LL NEVER FORGET*, one girl talked openly on camera about being raped by an old man and she had never once mentioned it to a social worker before. I think people find there's actually a point in telling people about these sorts of things on film. It means they have witnesses.

Your camera work always seems very instinctive, even when you're working with foreign languages. How do you manage it?

Sometimes I'll use a translator, but not in the old-fashioned sense, because it would mean having to keep stopping and starting so they can tell you what's happening. But with *ROUGH AUNTIES*, things were happening so fast, we didn't bother with a translator at all. If any of the characters were speaking Zulu, I would just follow the emotion. Also, because the nature of the scenes were so intimate, suddenly talking in English in front of a Zulu kid would have been horrible.

Why do you think there are so many more successful female documentary makers, than there are female Hollywood directors?

I can't speak for anyone else, but for me it's really simple actually. The thought of having a whole big crew and having to tell lots of people what to do, just fills me with horror. With *ROUGH AUNTIES*, there was just the two of us, so it was very quiet and simple. I can't bear fuss or a lot of noise and panic. I also agree with Cara Mertes, director of the documentary film program at the Sundance Institute, that to some extent, men probably tend to gravitate towards fiction films because it's a lot more glamorous and the financial rewards are much bigger.

Do you think there are any barriers for emerging female documentary makers?

I don't really know. I don't think I've ever found it harder because I was a woman, the problems I experience are mainly because I choose difficult subjects. *DIVORCE IRANIAN STYLE*, for example, took 18 months to get off the ground because it just wasn't thought of as being an interesting enough subject, and that it would also be incredibly hard to make.

And what is it that draws you to such big, challenging subjects?

It's really because I think there are all these amazing people out there, doing amazing things. We rarely get to hear about them though because our media is so

www.filmandfestivals.com



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obsessed with all these other things, celebrity culture in particular. There's so many people who are just famous for nothing and rich just because they happen to be born into the right parents. Then there's people like Mildred who have had such a tough life, basically growing up as a slave in a white family. She's struggled all her life and yet no one has ever said to her, 'Mildred you're amazing'.

I understand that making a film in South Africa was somewhat of a cathartic experience for you personally?

Yes indeed, it was quite an extraordinary experience actually. I grew up with a South African father and he was a prism through which I viewed the country. Because of this, I'd always associated white South Africans with certain things, and that's probably why I've never even visited before. However, as soon as I arrived and met those five extraordinary women, I realised that there are many thousands of good people in the country, who don't share my father's views. Making this film allowed me to lay a huge, suffocating ghost to rest.

www.roughaunties.com

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film festivals 29

Jan 24, 2009

SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL

by David Ng

Q&A: Rough Aunties

Rough Aunties IS AN OBSERVATIONAL DOCUMENTARY THAT BEARS PATIENT WITNESS TO THE BEST AND WORST OF HUMAN NATURE. TWO "AUNTIES" FEATURED IN THE DOCUMENTARY ANSWERED AUDIENCE QUESTIONS FOLLOWING A RECENT SCREENING WITH THE FILM'S DIRECTOR, KIM LONGINOTTO.



You don't want to mess with the women in charge in [ROUGH AUNTIES](#), the new documentary that tells the story of Operation Bobbi Bear, the South African aid group dedicated to rescuing and helping abused children.

Taking life's blows with a thick-skinned matter-of-factness, the five "aunties" who run the organization are a fascinating quintet of protagonists whose tough-love (at times confrontational) approach to their work unnerves and inspires in equal measure.

Rough Aunties is an observational documentary that bears patient witness to the best and worst of human nature. Mostly, we watch the aunties at work as they seek out child victims of rape, AIDS, and physical abuse. Their jobs are complicated by the fact that certain tribal cultures frown upon sexual frankness, often necessitating creative techniques and forceful action to help victims.

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(“Sundance Q&A” Sundance Film Festival cont...)

At its heart, the documentary is about finding alternate families to fill the void when your blood relations betray you. The aunties of Operation Bobbi Bear form their own extended family, enduring their personal tragedies as a cohesive, expanding unit.

Two members of Operation Bobbi Bear – Thuli Sibaya and Mildred Ngcobo – answered audience questions following a recent screening. They were joined by the film’s director, Kim Longinotto.

Q: How many children do you help a year?

Sibaya: It’s a difficult question to answer. We are just a bunch of women. Per month, I have 20 cases. We can’t calculate, but it’s a lot. I’m still sitting on cases from as far back as 2002.

Q: Do you ever receive threats for the work you do?

Ngcobo: Yes, all the time. But if we don’t do the job, no one will do it.

Q: Was it difficult to work with the camera around you all of the time?

Ngcobo: With Kim, the children didn’t even notice the camera because she would sneak around the corner. And we didn’t even notice her. We were too worried about the children.

Q: Where does Bobbi Bear get its money?

Longinotto: Sometimes the South African government asks to give money, but the group is careful to not accept so it can be in a position to criticize the government if need be. Mostly, they work on donations from various sources.

Q: The movie criticizes aspects of South African social services. How do you feel about the system?

Ngcobo: It’s a corrupt system. They don’t understand the reality of families. Their mission statement is to re-unite families. We believe that some families should not be re-united.

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When Lou Met ... Kim Longinotto

Feb 29, 2009

By Lou Bolch



Broadcaster and journalist Lou Bolch interviews Kim Longinotto, one of Britain's top social documentary makers about her work and what she is trying to achieve.

The interview is followed by three of her films - *Divorce Iranian Style*, *Sisters in Law* and *The Day I'll Never Forget*.

In **When Lou Met ... Kim Longinotto**, the filmmaker talks about the extraordinary people she meets in her films and how she tries to enable their voice and strength to shine through.

Illustrated by clips from each film, the interview reveals what Kim is looking for in particular scenes that tell her characters' stories in such a powerful way.

Also discussed are **Hold Me Tight, Let Me Go** and her latest film **Rough Aunties** about a remarkable group of women who care for the abused and neglected children of Durban, South Africa.

Rough Aunties won the World Cinema Special Jury Prize for documentary at the **2009 Sundance Film Festival**.

"I like it when a documentary has the same constraints as fiction, when it doesn't have to give you a lesson or teach you what to think and is just an emotional experience," says Kim.

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Mail & Guardianonline

"Rough Aunties, Big Hearts" January 31, 2009

By Niren Tolsoy

There are squawks of excitement and a liberal use of expletives in the Bobbi Bear office in Amanzimtoti, south of Durban, as film director Kim Longinotto calls from London.

Her documentary, *Rough Aunties*, an intimate portrayal of some of the women who work at Bobbi Bear (a NGO that deals with child abuse cases) won the Sundance Jury Prize for Best Documentary in the World Cinema category last week.

Longinotto has just informed administrative director Eureka Olivier that two of the film's protagonists, Thuli Sibaya and Mildred Ngcobo, were sitting a row behind Hollywood A-lister Robert de Niro at the awards ceremony in Utah.

There is a collective swoon and enough drooling to stick together the pages of *You* magazine -- mixed with a dose of hard-nosed reality: "Ja, but how much money will we get out of this? We need R4-million to build a new safe house for our children," says Olivier.

If Olivier, all lacquered red fingernails and limping-bouffant-with-mullet, appears harshly focused on the bottom line, she must be forgiven. Film festival baubles are "fabulous", but the children remain the bottom line for the remarkable women of this organisation.

Started by Jackie Branfield 20 years ago, Bobbi Bear intervenes in child abuse cases at the point of rescue: counselling children, ensuring that post-exposure prophylaxis is administered if needed and following up on court cases by badgering the criminal justice system when necessary.

The film, shot over 10 weeks last year, follows five of these formidable women -- Olivier, Branfield, Ngcobo, Sibaya and Sdludla Maphumulo -- as they cuss, chain-smoke, weep and laugh their way through the nightmarish world of child abuse in South Africa.

The documentary also captures the bond between these women and their own tragedies. During shooting Maphumulo's son drowned -- it is alleged because of illegal sand mining along the Illovo river -- and Olivier's relative was murdered in a house robbery. They banded together on each occasion.

For Longinotto, a Brit, the women's story "is a metaphor for a new, young democracy. The legacy of Nelson Mandela is embodied in these women and their relationships with one another," she says.

Her film also highlights some of South Africa's post-1994 failures: a criminal justice system that is overburdened and ineffective in providing succour for child abuse survivors, a faltering public health system and rampant crime.

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(*"Rough Aunties, Big Hearts" Mail & Guardian cont...*)

It highlights the country's inability to deal properly with the apartheid-inflicted trauma and emasculation as evidenced by the number of abuse cases that Bobbi Bear deals with: "We have hundreds of cases because we follow them through the courts over the years that prosecution takes, but each of us [in a group of 11] get about two to three new cases a week," says Branfield.

Some abused children are as young as two years old. She says: "It's always a relative or someone close to the family. In my 20 years I've had only one stranger rape case," says Branfield.

Following the women on night-time police raids, during counselling sessions and at funerals, Longinotto's camera is never intrusive: "I became an honorary member of Team Bobbi Bear," she says.

"I kept my distance and wanted to shoot them quite gently without any gratuitous zooming and rushing around. I tried to be as inconspicuous as possible and never asked them to repeat anything," she says of the difficulties of bearing witness without affecting the subject matter.

Poignantly, Maphumulo is close to tears when she hears that a particular case appears to be in perpetual adjournment after two years and that the docket has been lost by the police. Ngcobo comforts a mentally disabled child -- who was previously raped -- after learning that she was raped again by her grandfather the previous day.

But as Longinotto says: "It's not all doom and gloom -- it's actually quite an uplifting story." The humorous moments point as much to Longinotto's sensitivity to cultural miscegenation in the new South Africa as to a particularly South African forthright garrulousness.

When Sibaya confides in Branfield that she is leaving her "psychologically abusive" husband of 15 years for another man, the conversation has a maternal feel imbued with a sense of Zuluness. Branfield commends her for not having done it earlier and Sibaya replies: "You would have kicked my bum."

"I would have kicked your arse from here to Cairo," says Branfield.

Longinotto is a veteran documentary filmmaker with a filmography including *Divorce Iranian Style* and *The Day I Will Never Forget* about female circumcision in Kenya.

On the film's conceptualisation, she says: "I was asked to work on the project by Paul Taylor of *We Are Together* [a film about a South African HIV/Aids orphanage choir] and went over to South Africa to meet the women. I thought they were quite an extraordinary group of women -- it was very inspiring and very humbling."

Festival circuit

With a win at the Sundance Film Festival under its belt, *Rough Aunties* is already garnering worldwide interest and looks set to travel to several festivals this year. "I've had very positive feedback from film festivals in Israel, Greece, France, Hong Kong and Australia -- it has been overwhelming," said director Kim Longinotto.

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("Rough Aunties, Big Hearts" Mail & Guardian cont...)

"The film deals with universal concerns, so it has that appeal. After a screening in Sundance a doctor of psychology came up to me and Mildred [Ngcobo, a rough aunty] and his daughter fell into Mildred's arms and started telling her about her own experiences of abuse. Mildred started counselling her there on the street. It was extraordinary," said Longinotto.

As for when local audiences will be able to see what all the fuss is about, Monica Rorvik of the Durban International Film Festival said: "Discussions are under way with Kim and we would like to have the film screened at festival later this year."

Culture barrier

Rough Aunties opens with a quote from former president Nelson Mandela: "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way it treats its children". The teddy bears at the Bobbi Bear office in Amanzimtoti reveal South Africa's shame. The child support officers at Bobbi Bear use these teddy bears to comfort rape survivors and cajole them into communicating their violation. On each, Band Aid plasters and scribbling in black permanent marker on various parts of the body tell stories of abuse: "*Hy het my geslaan. Ek het gehuil.* [He hit me. I cried.]" "He put his lollipop and his fingers in me." "She put matchsticks in my cuckoo [vagina]."

Sdludla Maphumulo says abuse happens across racial lines but it is particularly hard for Zulu children to talk about their abuse because of both cultural issues and the stigma attached: "In Zulu culture children can't talk about their private parts -- they will be considered dirty. So a five-year-old child can't tell a big Zulu policeman, a stranger, about her rape. With these teddy bears it is easier for them to communicate to us what has happened," she says.



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By Tom Hall

SUNDANCE 2009 | SUFFER LITTLE CHILDREN

Death and suffering are the worst things we can imagine for our families, and yet, they are always there, floating around the periphery of life, dreadful possibilities that no one in their right mind would ever say aloud. For me, the death or suffering of a child is probably the most frightening of the myriad of possible horrors; a profound interruption of the cycle of life, a seemingly unknowable verdict on the family itself. I can imagine that, as a parent, it must feel something like being trapped in Kafka's *Castle*; torn from the life you've worked so hard to create for yourself, dragged through an incredible ordeal you can't believe is happening to you until you are forced to simply assume the blame for the consequences of an action you cannot understand. While a parent feels so deeply for their child, wishes nothing more than to protect and comfort them in the face of suffering, it is the helplessness, the powerlessness to stop the hurting that, I think, would tear me apart.

The complex relationship between parents and the suffering of their children has been the subject of no less than four films in the first three days of my festival. Not to make too much of it, but as a relatively new parent of a six month old, my boy who I miss dearly as I type these words hundreds of miles away from him, these movies have marked me deeply, forcing me to confront my own worst nightmares while trying to think critically about the films themselves. It is virtually impossible for me to do that; I sat in front of my screen for about 90 minutes this afternoon, trying to put things into words, and I was unable to get started. A few hours of small talk and thinking about other things, and now I am back here trying again. My apologies if things get, well, introspective...

...The sexual abuse of children seems to be an epidemic in South Africa, and in Kim Longinotto's extraordinary *Rough Aunties*, a group of tough-minded women set about the task of protecting the rights of sexually abused children through their organization [Operation Bobbi Bear](#), which advocates for victims rights and criminal punishment in a patriarchal and corrupt system. The women themselves are exceptional, rough and tumble and no nonsense, and Longinotto's handheld style is a perfect match for the immediacy to their mission. Unlike the

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(*"Suffer Little Children"* Indiewire cont...)

patient gaze she displayed in last year's incredible ***Hold Me Tight And Let Me Go***, Longinotto's work on ***Rough Aunties*** whips and pans, complimenting the drama by placing the audience in the middle of some of the most awful, painful conversations an adult could ever have with a child.

After establishing a sort of pattern among the Bobbi Bear workers, ***Rough Aunties*** takes a terrible turn into the personal tragedies of the women themselves; A murder and the accidental death of a child provide not only an opportunity to stare more deeply into the well of strength the aunties exhibit, but also showcase the incredibly powerful sense of community and family that has grown among the women themselves. It makes perfect sense, but it is still incredibly powerful to see how the women of Bobbi Bear draw their strength from one another, rising each day despite the horrors of sexual violence to which they bear witness. ***Rough Aunties*** is a rare movie, one that balances tragedy and a sense of empowerment, compassion with outrage.

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Wednesday, 04 February 2009

Media Club South Africa

[ROUGH AUNTIES TO THE RESCUE](#)

By Janine Erasmus

Rough Aunties, a documentary about a group of South African women who work with the police to bring child abusers to book and put young victims on the road to healing, has taken the world by storm, winning a top prize in the 2009 Sundance Film Festival.

The documentary was produced by veteran filmmaker Kim Longinotto, whose previous work includes *Divorce Iranian Style*, *Gaea Girls* and *Sisters in Law*. While *Rough Aunties* lacks a formal dramatic structure it presents a hard-hitting real-life view of the activities of the women, all of whom are involved with Durban-based child welfare organisation Bobbi Bear.



The film won a Grand Jury prize at this year's Sundance Film Festival, which was founded in 1978 with Robert Redford as chair. The festival has earned a reputation as a top showcase for new independent films.

The Grand Jury Prize, for the best independent feature film, is the centrepiece of Sundance. The prize is awarded in two genres - documentary and dramatic - by a panel of the nominees' peers. The categories are World Cinema Documentary Competition, World Cinema Dramatic Competition, Dramatic Competition, and Documentary Competition. Grand Jury winners are regarded as the best from the independent film community that year.

Rough Aunties scooped the award in the World Cinema Documentary category and has been tipped as a worthy contender in the documentary category at next year's Academy Awards.

The film also screened at the 2008 International Documentary Festival in Amsterdam, to great acclaim.

SHIELDING THE VULNERABLE

Rough Aunties follows the work of a group of feisty women over a 10-week period as they take a stand for abused children in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, conducting harrowing interviews with the young victims, arresting molesters, and finding themselves in the midst of personal tragedy.

The Bobbi Bear organisation was established by Jackie Branfield, originally from Zimbabwe. Herself a victim of abuse as a child, Branfield became an anti-abuse activist some two decades ago when she was approached through her church's youth group to help those with problems. She realised that helping others was a way to move forward

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(*"Rough Aunties to the Rescue" Media Club South Africa cont...*)

from her own experience, and it wasn't long before she was counselling abused women and children from many surrounding areas and from as far afield as Johannesburg.

Called to a police station in 1994 to assist with a rape case, Branfield witnessed how the level of communication between a police officer and a victim could have a huge impact on the final outcome, when the case's young victim was unable to state what she had experienced. There and then Branfield decided to do something about it.

Her challenge was to ensure that accurate information was gathered and clear legal evidence noted without compromising the care and support for the victim. It was necessary to find a means to coax information from children while not adding to their ordeal in any way.

Branfield eventually settled on the beloved teddy bear as a medium through which traumatised youngsters could tell their stories. Children who are unable to voice their experiences use the bears to indicate what their abusers have done to them, by drawing with a marker or placing Band-Aid strips on the parts of their little bodies that were violated.



The bear is part of a kit that Branfield and her crew give to young rape and abuse victims. Children also receive a small pair of panties or underpants, a sanitary pad, tissues, wet wipes, sweets and a cold drink, gloves, a notebook, and a pen and marker. There is another kit for adults, and one for children who need to go into protective care.

OFFERING HOPE TO YOUNG VICTIMS

At Bobbi Bear Branfield is assisted primarily by Nontando "Studla" Maphumulo, Mildred Ngcobo, Thuli Sibiya and Eureka Olivier. The women and their other colleagues work with one male police officer who helps them track down and arrest abusers.

Rough Aunties painfully highlights the inadequacies of South Africa's criminal justice system in punishing and incarcerating those who hurt children. The country's justice system is severely overburdened and there is a tragic tendency to pay scant attention to social issues. Sentences for abusers can be laughably light and in many cases the abuser is simply released back into society.

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(*"Rough Aunties to the Rescue"* Media Club South Africa cont...)

But organisations such as Bobbi Bear offer care, compassion and hope for victims. Asked how many children they help every year, Sibiya replied, "It's a difficult question to answer. We are just a bunch of women. Per month, I have 20 cases. We cannot calculate, but it's a lot. I'm still sitting on cases from as far back as 2002."

The job demands a great deal of courage and fearlessness. The women have received threats but, as Ngcobo put it, if they don't do the job nobody else will.

Bobbi Bear is currently trying to raise around R4.1-million (US\$400 000) to build a safe house where children can be kept in safety for longer periods, although still on a temporary basis. Information can be found on the [website](#).



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ROUGH AUNTIES

A FILM BY KIM LONGINOTTO

HOT DOCS AUDIENCE BREAKS RECORD; VOTES "THE COVE"

by Peter Knecht (May 11, 2009)

A scene from Louie Psihoyos' "The Cove." Image courtesy of Hot Docs.

Hot Docs wrapped up its most successful festival to date this weekend in Toronto, with audience numbers reaching an estimated 122,000. This marks a rather astounding 42% increase over 2008's fest. Hot Docs, which ran April 30 to May 10, featured 266 public screenings of 171 films. A record number of screenings - 107 - went rush and the box office saw a 25% increase in public pass sales.

"Our guest filmmakers consistently rave about what great audiences we have in Toronto, and we are thrilled that record numbers turned out to see their great films," said Chris McDonald, executive director of the festival.



After the final screening yesterday, votes were tallied for the Hot Docs Audience Award. Louie Psihoyos' "The Cove" - a powerful and gripping intervention to end the dolphin slaughter in Taiji, Japan - was named the winner (just as it was [at Sundance](#)). Here's the full top ten audience choices that Hot Docs released this afternoon:

1. **The Cove** (D: Louie Psihoyos; USA)
2. **65_RedRoses** (D: Philip Lyall, Nimisha Mukerji; Canada)
3. **Inside Hana's Suitcase** (D: Larry Weinstein; Canada, Czech Republic)
4. **Best Worst Movie** (D: Michael Paul Stephenson; USA)
5. **A Hard Name** (D: Alan Zweig; Canada)
6. **Over The Hills and Far Away** (D: Michel Orion Scott; USA)
7. **Winnebago Man** (D: Ben Steinbauer; USA)
8. **Burma VJ** (D: Anders Hogsbro Ostergaard; Denmark)
9. **Rough Aunties** (D: Kim Longinotto; UK)
10. **Prom Night In Mississippi** (D: Paul Saltzman; Canada)



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By Kvoynar

SHORT TAKE: ROUGH AUNTIES

Well, now I feel like I have a completely frivolous life. I just came from the press screening of **Rough Aunties**, a documentary about a group of women in South Africa who work with the police to bring child abusers to justice and help hurt children heal. Director **Kim Longinotto** doesn't follow a strict dramatic structure with the film; she simply takes her camera and follows the women behind the child welfare group Bobbi Bear -- Jackie, Eureka, Mildred, Thuli, and Sdudla -- and the one white male police officer assigned to help them track down and arrest the adult abusers -- as they interview abuse victims, arrest perpetrators, and deal with tragedies that affect their own lives.

The result isn't the most beautifully shot theatrical doc you'll ever see, but these strong, feisty women are inspiring as they work to help the young victims who come into their care. David saw **Rough Aunties** in Amsterdam [and raved about it](#), and while I'm perhaps not quite as completely over the moon about it as he was, there's no doubt it's a powerfully affecting film about a group of women who are fighting to make a difference in the lives of the kids they work with.

Batting two-for-two on the first full day of Sundance ... a pretty good start to the fest. More to come later, after I gulp down some dinner to keep going for my next screening, **Humpday**.

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By Nathan Truesdell

JANUARY 27, 2009

SUNDANCE 2009: ROUGH AUNTIES REVIEW

Last week in Park City, I was privileged to attend a screening of **ROUGH AUNTIES**, the latest FILM from documentary veteran Kim Longinotto (**HOLD ME TIGHT, LET ME GO; SISTERS IN LAW**, etc.). this observational piece follows the women OF Operation Bobbi Bear in Durban, South Africa over a 10-week period: Jackie, Mildred, Studia, Thull, and Eureka, hard-nosed and courageous women who have dedicated their lives to helping the abused and neglected children of the region.

First off, lemme just say, wow, only 10 weeks? The ladies deal with so much tragedy over this period that I'm left with a hopeless feeling for the world. Multiple rapes, a murder, a drowning and the abandonment of a child are just a few of the scenarios that the tough-skinned women must face during this two month period. We witness both the worst and the best of people, all in a very short window.

The opening scene throws us directly into the world of Bobbi Bear as Mildred, a thirty-something South African native, kindly, but systematically, gathers information from a child victim of rape. Mildred shares a teddy bear with the child and asks her to describe the incident by placing band-aids on the parts of the bear where she was violated. We, the audience, sit on the floor right in the midst of the discussion. The film pulls no punches. It is an extremely delicate situation that is a testament to not only Mildred's professionalism and courage, but also to that of the filmmaker.

It is completely amazing and inspiring to watch the women work and the extreme lengths to which they go to protect the children - from going on police raids, to cleaning up crime scenes, to offering up their own money and homes. This is true dedication; a job that most folks just

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(*"Sundance 2009: Rough Aunties Review" Wonderful Things cont.*)

wouldn't be able to do. Longinotto's complete access allows us to see and deal with the entire picture of their lives, even when the picture is not one that we want to see.

This film can be very hard to watch due to its unwavering and unbiased look into such tough subject matter, but it definitely should be seen. While I wasn't able to watch all of the World Cinema Competition titles during my short time in Park City, I can say that it doesn't surprise me that ROUGH AUNTIES won the World Cinema Documentary Grand Jury Prize.

EDITOR'S NOTE - NATHAN TRUESDELL IS MY FILMMAKING COMPATRIOT ON BOTH OF MY CURRENT FEATURE PROJECTS. THIS IS HIS FIRST CONTRIBUTION TO THE BLOG. FULL DISCLOSURE: PAUL TAYLOR, ONE OF THE PRODUCERS OF ROUGH AUNTIES, IS ONE OF THE FILMMAKERS WHO WORKED WITH NATHAN AND I ON OUR **CONVENTION** PROJECT.

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ROUGH AUNTIES

A FILM BY KIM LONGINOTTO



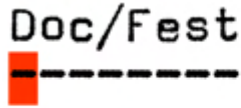
[SUNDANCE 2009: "ROUGH AUNTIES" REVIEW - WRITTEN BY MATHIUS MACK GERTZ](#)

Jackie, Mildred, Eureka and Thuli are the women behind Bobbi Bear, a nonprofit organization based in Durban, South Africa, that counsels sexually abused children and works to bring their abusers to justice. Born out of recognition of cultural stigmas that discourage reporting abuse and inadequate methods of communicating with young victims, Bobbi Bear developed a method of letting children use teddy bears to explain their abuse. Since 1992, the multiracial staff has become the fearless and powerful voice for those victims who would otherwise continue to live in fear, powerless against their oppressors and ignored by the legal system.

The subject matter of this non-fiction film is powerful and well done. No less fascinating is the relationship between the Zulu and Afrikaner women of Bobbi Bear. United in their anger and pain, they transcend cultural differences to do a hard and necessary job. There is much to compare culturally with communication styles between women in the United States. Stoic Black women who have been taught to be tough and suppress their feelings, and by connection their voice, compared to white women taught to relate to emotions and take every opportunity to share their feelings. The journey these women take together is both painful and hopeful as they strive for empowerment for their young victims and themselves. Compelling non-fiction story telling. Very well crafted. Four Stars.

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Sheffield. IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE  INDEPENDENT

“What I Liked at IDFA”

By Charlie Phillips

First mention has to go to [Rough Aunties](#), the new film from Kim Longinotto. It's a tearjerker, and no mistake - tears were jerked throughout the entire film, it's a very sad documentary, but equally inspiring, so the tears are worth it. The Rough Aunties are a group of dedicated women in South Africa attacking child abuse, often confronting offenders themselves, taking abused children into their own homes, and defying their own personal tragedies. It's not simply their work which makes them so admirable, but also their collective spirit, forming a public front of female self-dependence in a country where women are often expected to be silent Mothers and nothing else. These women are revolutionary, particularly their founder Jackie who, in one remarkable scene, takes to spontaneously presenting a feminist take on development to a group of local women, assuring them that men will do nothing about injustice. And as usual, Kim Longinotto's abilities as an ob-doc maker are exemplary, giving us access to some of the cruelest and most harrowing scenes you can imagine for a documentary, but always with kindness and for a reason. A doc of complete wonder, it makes so many other documentaries seem so self-indulgent.

“Rough Aunties and We Live in Public Takes the Prizes”

by CHARLIE PHILLIPS

Good news from the awards-giving at Sundance with the [prizewinners](#) including [Rough Aunties](#), the new film from Kim Longinotto.

As I said after IDFA, this film simply will make you weep, not just because it's sad at times, because it makes you really believe that there are some truly good people in the world who take your breath away. Kind of contradicts what I said last week about never totally liking people in most documentaries!

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The Hot Blog

Movie City News

“The Two Big Take Homes of IDFA”

By David Poland

...The other film is, if they jump through the right hoops and don't get caught airing on television too early, a surefire Oscar nominee for Doc next year. Kim Longinotto's **Rough Aunties**, an IDFA World Premiere, is an emotionally overpowering look at a group of women in South Africa that serve as a support system for abused and molested children called Bobbi Bear. These are not just chattering class aspirants to do-gooding. These are serious, grown-up women who see the world well beyond their yards and are unafraid of getting their hands dirty in order to help others.

There is also one male in the gang... a policeman assigned to the group, it seems, who goes out on calls with them and processes their claims against the abusers. He is a classic big, chunky, white cop guy. And you can see all the pain in his eyes that the women feel. He is a generosity in the film by Longinotto... one of many. She is not trying to sell a narrow point here... she is telling the whole story... and the whole story is like spilled liquid, everything seeping into everything else unavoidably.

One of the most unusual, but fascinating, things in the film are two instances of major stories in the history of the group that are directly connected to two of the “aunties.” And the same passions and caring comes forth in support of the extended family as it does for absolute strangers.

The group is led by a white woman, of some means, but not great wealth. She started the organization on a thin shoestring. Her right arm is another white woman, who serves as the manager of the operation. There are many people working/volunteering for the group, but three women, all black, are the next tier of leadership in the group. Each has their own issues and history. Each exposes the strong, bloody, beating hearts that they bring to the organization.

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Longinotto is of the Masyles camp of "as it happens" documentary. There is no clear story structure or time frame for the film. There are no gimmicks... no voice over... no talking heads. But amazingly, it feels like you have experienced, by the film's end, a pretty complete range of the effort. There are shootings, beatings, rapes, and most importantly, kindnesses.

The movie is also a sure-fire remake as a feature film, guaranteeing at least one Oscar nomination for the white female leads, and as likely, for the supporting actresses. Judi Dench constantly came to mind when looking as the head of Bobbi Bear, Jackie Branfield, though Ms. Dench is probably too old for the role now. Maybe Helen Mirren and Julie Walters can team up again. And the fact that these white women are truly color blind in South Africa... this is a key to

this doc and any remake. It can't ever be maudlin or self-satisfied. These women are rough aunts indeed. The honest, not "dramatic" portrayal of the black women who are hands-on co-leaders of this group... it's everything. It is their world that these white women have walked into with some great intentions. It's a really tough line to walk – and every sentence in this graph that delineates races makes me a little itchy – but as I see in so many films that have a heavy element of race in them, good intentions can become too much drama and not enough real. This doc is magic because you know what is in the hearts of these people.

After the screening, the "rough aunts" were there for a Q&A. We were in the second row, just feet away. And they were so happy and proud to be there. But when Jackie made eye contact with me, as I was smiling, I was so uncomfortable, because the only real thing I could do would be to walk up to her and hug her and cry and thank her for doing what so many other people just talk about. And this is true for all of these women.

One thing I can do – and you can too – is to make a donation to the organization [at their website](#). They are trying to raise \$400,000 to build a house to serve as longer-term, but still temporary housing for victims, where they will be safe and not have to be shoved back into an uncaring system – as all government systems of size tend to be – while they are still just starting to regain their strength after suffering serious abuse. This should be something that can be funded, even in this economy, quickly. When the movie hits the world, I suspect they will have the funding for a second building or maybe a third.

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(“The Two Big Take Homes of IDFA,” The Hot Blog cont.)

You may know Kim Longinotto from her earlier films **Sisters in Law** (Oscar short-listed, but not nominated) and **Hold Me Tight, Let Me Go**, amongst others. She found a great story here to which every person can relate. Even though South Africa has so many specific issues, this movie is universal and somehow, more relevant than ever. Great work.

Keep an eye out for this one. The title is a distraction from the masterful, gut-wrenching, uplifting tale inside. Distributors should buy it and someone will almost certainly make a feature film out of it.

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“Film Review: Rough Aunties”

By Hank Sartin

October 1-7, 2009

The emotions are raw and right on the surface in this doc about five women who work at a child-welfare organization in South Africa. Longinotto puts us on notice in the very first scene, when a girl who can't be more than ten uses a stuffed bear to show how she was raped. The camera never flinches, even when it feels as though we should look away, because Longinotto wants to make sure we fully understand the soul-crushing nature of the problem, the better to see how amazing this community of activist women is.

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"Rough Aunties"

By Bill Stamets

October 2, 2009

A mentally disabled girl is raped by her grandfather. Another girl is raped by a neighbor. An uncle beats his niece. A 2-year-old boy is sodomized by his father. A young mother abandons her infant under a tree. An older woman "indecently penetrates" a girl.

With sensitivity and sympathy, Kim Longinotto documents South African women aiding children.

Longinotto observes Operation Bobbi Bear, based in Amanzimtoti, as its staff counsels and protects these abused children. She portrays three black and two white women from the privately funded group that functions like a family -- a healthy one, unlike the others seen in the film. The staff comes to the aid of one staff member when her 7-year-old son drowns and to another when her relative is slain in a robbery.

No narrator or outside authorities add to this intimate documentary. As director and cinematographer, Longinotto shot discreetly for 10 weeks. The patient *verite* pacing is set by the women doing their admirable work, not by the filmmaker making her point about South Africa's epidemic of sexual abuse.

From film to film, Longinotto is likewise admirable for her keen-eyed, low-key advocacy for women. This Londoner earlier made "The Day I Will Never Forget" about Kenyan girls resisting genital mutilation, and "Sisters in Law" about a Cameroon judge and prosecutor protecting other women in court. She also co-directed two documentaries about women in Tehran fleeing abusive families and marriages.

Longinotto is a role model for engaged filmmakers, just as the heroines of "Rough Aunties" are exemplary defenders of sexually abused children.

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