



"THE RECIPIENT OF
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MANY..."

PAT FISKE
sound recording
[1980s]

INTERVIEW WITH PAT FISKE

At this year's Australian International Documentary Conference, held in Perth from March 6–9, Pat Fiske became the third recipient of the Stanley Hawes Award. Sharon Connolly, head of Film Australia, made the presentation with these words:

I'm delighted to present the third Stanley Hawes Award, which we hope has now become a feature of the Documentary Conference. It carries a prize of \$5,000, is awarded to an individual for his or her service to Australian documentary and is presented in honour of Film Australia's former Producer in Chief, Stanley Hawes, who presided over Film Australia for more than twenty-three years. Stanley – a follower of Grierson – created at Film Australia and its otherwise named and constituted forebears, a training ground for documentary film-makers. And – it's worth noting on International Women's Day – he gave many women rare opportunities to direct.

These days, Film Australia plays a very different role in the documentary sector, delivering between 40 and 50 percent of direct Commonwealth subsidy to documentary production by commissioning documentaries under the National Interest Programme, and supporting the documentary sector by maintaining its historic film archive, a distribution service for FA and independently produced social documentary and by providing facilities to production service companies and to film-makers. Nowadays it is, perhaps sadly, mostly left to film schools to train future generations of film-makers.



For All the World to See
Pat and her desire for
expansive views. Pat Fiske
(director) and Erika Addis
(Cinematographer)
Annapurnas, Nepal.
Photo: Jonathan Chester

inset: *Coal is Coal*, in
the Hunter Valley (never
completed). [1980s,
photo Carole Reiff]



However, there are also individuals who make enormous contributions to the development of their fellow film-makers. The recipient of today's

award is one such person, a woman widely known for the encouragement, support, advice, assistance and friendship she has offered to many in this room and to many more beyond it. And it's particularly appropriate that I should be presenting the Award at a lunch sponsored by the American Film Institute, for the recipient is herself one of the best cultural exchanges we've ever had with the USA. Pat Fiske came to Australia from the USA in 1972 looking for adventure and believing she could get work as a speech pathologist. Australia would not accept her American credentials and instead she ended up becoming involved in the women's movement, the BLF, Green Bans, photography and making films. Among those for which she is well known are Woolloomooloo, Rocking The Foundations, For All The World To See and Following The Fenceline – many of which have won significant recognition in the form of awards and the respect of audiences around the world. Most recently Pat produced *Business Behind Bars*, a two part series directed by Cathy Scott, which explores the issue of private prisons, those in the U.S. and Australia, run by corporations also responsible for the management of some now notorious Australian immigration detention centres.

I first met Pat when she recorded sound on my very first documentary. Like so many film-makers she has supported, encouraged and advised, I had cause to be hugely grateful for her patient assistance and advice. Despite my inexperience and awkwardness, Pat never made me feel patronised – and she got great sound.

Pat has also offered much to the documentary through her active involvement in ASDA, the Documentary Conference, the Film-makers' Co-op, Filmnews and through her work as a sometime lecturer at AFTRS [Australian Film Television and Radio School] and most recently as a documentary consultant with SBS Independent (SBSI).

The panel which determined who would receive this Stanley Hawes Award could think of no finer recipient than the girl who came from Minneapolis to Australia and grew to be the woman and the film-maker who, like her great friend and subject, the late Fred Hollows, helped the world to see something more about Australian life.

When she returned to Sydney, Pat sat down and talked to Tina Kaufman and fellow documentary-maker Gillian Leahy, about her life and her films.

WHY DID YOU COME TO AUSTRALIA, AND HOW DID A SPEECH THERAPIST BECOME A DOCUMENTARY-MAKER?

I was living in California, working as a speech therapist in Stockton, and my boyfriend got a job in Melbourne, teaching. I had always wanted to come to Australia – in fact, when I was about nine or ten, I had written to the Australian consulate, asking about an assisted passage! They wrote back and said I was a bit young, but sent me lots of information. I'd also met an Australian woman who'd married a US soldier, and I used to follow her round, listening to her voice – I was fascinated, I'd never really heard an Australian accent before. I was so intrigued by Australia that when my boyfriend asked me to join him, I thought 'Oh yes, I could be a speech therapist there, no worries'.

I got a rude shock when I got here, when they wouldn't accept my credentials. I tried for about eight months – we were living in Upway [in the Dandenongs outside Melbourne] but we did a bit of traveling, when he had holidays from school. We went to Queensland for a week, and we had six weeks in New Zealand, did all the walking treks and had a great time – that's where I first met Fred Hollows – and I only had one job offer in that time. It was a live-in situation, and I decided I couldn't do it, that I'd have to get a secretarial job, but that night I had a huge fight with my boyfriend,



PAT FISKE directing in Kathmandu, Nepal.

and went out the next day and booked a ticket home. But a friend I'd met here said 'You're halfway across the world, don't go home – stay and explore Australia'. I decided I'd do that, then go on to Indonesia, Asia, the world – and then home. I cancelled the ticket, visited some friends in Canberra for a couple of days, and hit Sydney at five o'clock on a Friday. I had a couple of phone numbers – the youth hostel, and Fred Hollows' work number. I rang Fred, and said, 'It's Pat Fiske'. Dead silence. 'Remember the Copeland Cubs?' I asked. 'Where are you?' he barked, and I realised I didn't have a clue (I'd been dropped off by this truckie). I had to ask someone in the street, and Fred said 'Stay there!' He came and collected me, took me for a drink, listened to my story ('I knew you'd leave him', he said), found me a place to live, bought me a pushbike, took me under his wing. And from that I got involved in the women's movement, the Builders' Labourers Federation, and, really, never left Sydney.

WELL, THAT'S HALF OF IT – NOW, HOW DID YOU BECOME A FILM-MAKER?

It was as if I'd moved from seeing my life as being a speech therapist, then getting married and having kids, to being in the women's movement and suddenly – anything's possible! I moved into a communal house in Camperdown, and one of the women there was a stills photographer, which was something I'd always wanted to do, so she taught me, we set up a dark room, and I started taking photos, for *Tribune* and other left publications and covering women's movement issues. Then someone else in the house was doing a 16mm film workshop, and she suggested I do it too. That was the Blinky Bill Workshop, with Matt Butler, in 1974, at the Sydney Film-makers' Co-op. So I learned how to make films.

AND YOU MADE YOUR FIRST FILM, BURSTFORTH ...

Yes, that's right. By then I was a builder's labourer. I'd done some secretarial work, which I hated, but one of the other women in the house, Jan Reid, was a builder's labourer, and she said, 'You can do this work', so I did. I met Denise White, who was involved in the Randwick Resident Action Group, at the film workshop, and we realised that no-one had made a film on the BLF and the Green Bans, and we started that process. So – six years later ... *Woolloomooloo*. When we started editing the film, the segment that concentrated on Woolloomooloo and Victoria Street just grew and grew – and of course we had the most footage on that Green Ban, so that became the first finished film. I went back to the States for a year with *Woolloomooloo* – it was in a couple of festivals there and I screened it with film-making groups whose films we had at the Co-op – Kartemquin in Chicago and Women Make Movies in New York – and with Ruby Rich at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. I showed it at the National Film Board of Canada, and then in London with a whole programme of Australian features and docs.

YOU'VE SKIPPED THE RECEPTION WOOLLOOMOOLOO GOT IN AUSTRALIA – IT MADE QUITE AN IMPACT.

Yes, it did. The film's as rough as guts, but it only cost \$13,000 to make, as well as some money that came from Roelof [Smilde] and Darcy [Waters] [two punting members of the Sydney Push] who, whenever they won at the races, would pay our current bills – that happened a few times. But we got two \$5000 grants and one \$3000 grant from the Australian Film Commission – those were the days when they actually gave grants. Yes, the response to the film was really good – most of the universities bought it, it had a successful theatrical season at the Co-op, and it had a very successful distribution.

AND IT WAS ABOUT THIS TIME THAT YOU BECAME A SOUND RECORDIST?

Well, I went to more workshops, and made a couple of short films – *Burstforth* was one, and one I made with Gillian Leahy, *Hearts & Spades*, and *Ladies' Rooms* with Susan Lambert and Sarah Gibson. That was the first time I had to be in front of the camera, and it was a bit confronting. Everyone else could talk about having their own room and what it meant to them in a very articulate way; I was really tongue-tied. But what came out of it for me was the realisation of what never having had a room of my own meant – I'd slept in the dining room at home until my brothers got married, and I'd never had one place to keep all my things. So I realised that it was now really important for me to have a room of my own, although I actually didn't spend much time in it – I didn't know how to spend time in my room. I was involved in film-making, both my own and other people's, as well as making *Woolloomooloo* – little bursts of editing when we could find an editing room for free, like Peter Gray's in Yurong Street. And other films were being edited there at the same time.

AND SOUND RECORDING?

Initially I had wanted to be a cinematographer but it was a popular choice, not so many wanted to do sound and I thought ... sound ... speech therapy ... there's some connection really. And when Cathy Gollan and I were sharing a house in Glebe and she was working in radio and I was making films, a Nagra 3 came up for sale, so Cathy and I bought it together – she never used it, actually – and I was using it to record on my films, and then people began asking me to record for them. While I was away overseas with *Woolloomooloo*, I made a decision to learn a lot more about sound recording. I made a concerted effort to spend time with people like Laurie Fitzgerald [sound recordist/mixer extraordinaire, now technical support at University of Technology, Sydney]. If I had any problems while sound recording I'd ring Laurie – I'd be in a phone box with my tool kit and the microphone or the headset or whatever, and he'd talk me through fixing it, and we never had a failure. So I always had that backup, or if I had any questions – one time I was working and I had this hum, I couldn't get rid of it, no matter what I did, so I rang Laurie, and he said, 'Where's the nearest electricity sub-station?' and I found out it was next door. He said 'Don't worry, the hum's on the playback head and it won't be on the tape'. And he was right. So I learned by doing and watching, hanging around sets and asking a lot of questions, and trying to put myself out as a boom operator so I could learn on the job – I worked on *Wrong Side of the Road* as a boom swinger with Lloyd Carrick and then I was offered a job on *Starstruck* with Phil Judd through Richard [Brennan].

WHAT CAME NEXT? ROCKING THE FOUNDATIONS?

After we'd finished *Woolloomooloo* Denise and I parted company. I was a lot closer to the BLF guys, and *Woolloomooloo* was what she had wanted to make anyway, so we decided I would make the film on the BLF on my own. And that took another six years.

WELL, THOSE WERE THE DAYS OF NO REAL BUDGETS, AND MAKING THE FILM ON A SHOESTRING. NO TV PRE-SALES – YOU'D BE LUCKY IF YOU GOT A TV SALE AFTER THE FILM WAS FINISHED.

Director/Sound recordist
Pat Fiske and
cinematographer Erika
Addis filming in Nepal
in NEPA (Nepal Eye
Programme Australia) eye
camp in Tupche, NEPAL
[photo: Jonathan Chester]



Also the union got taken over and I lost my job as a builder's labourer. The government offered me the opportunity on the NEAT Scheme to go back to university and get my Dip Ed – I could teach speech therapy in schools with that. So I went back and studied to teach infants at Sydney Teachers' College. What that actually allowed me to do was teach swimming – I taught swimming for four months of every year, and I could work on films for the rest of the year. I did that for four years, with a bit of relief teaching thrown in. And I gradually added sound recording to my money-making. *Rocking the Foundations* was interrupted a lot by sound recording jobs – there were a lot of women's films being made, and I even got to go to Melbourne quite often. I miss that. By a stroke of good luck, I ended up working with Stewart Young as editor on the film, and he became a hard taskmaster. During the editing, Robyn [Tracks] Davidson rang – there had been a plan to make a film of her taking the camels back to the desert, but it had fallen through – but she was going to take the camels back anyway, with some rich Americans paying for the trip, and she wanted me to come. I said to Stewart 'I've got this great opportunity ...' He said, 'If you go, you'll never finish this film, and I won't cut another frame'. So I stayed put and we finished. I knew that the film was an important piece of Australian history, and it was important that I get it right. I didn't want to use narration, and that's another reason it took so long, because we tried to make sense without narration. But we couldn't. Then I wanted a woman's voice to do the narration, because there are so many men in the film, and we tried all kinds of women, and it wasn't working, until finally someone said, 'Oh Pat, why don't you do it?' I didn't think I could do it, with an American accent – it's Australian history, after all. It didn't seem right. I resisted for a long time, until Stewart said 'Let's just try it' – at least there was a reason for me to be there, it was my interpretation. Graham Pitts helped me write the narration, which really worked for the film, and Bob Connolly helped with the opening narration, and it works, it's so poetic.

After I finished, I felt as if I'd been living in the early '70s for twelve years, and suddenly it was 1985. The early '70s were exciting, it felt like a revolution was going to happen any day, we were constantly on the streets fighting for something or other and I lived that over and over while editing those two films. When I finished *Rocking the Foundations* I felt like Rip Van Winkle, that I'd been asleep for all that time and life had passed me by. People were talking about postmodernism, and I didn't even know what that was.

AUSTRALIA DAZE NEXT – THAT HAPPENED PRETTY FAST, DIDN'T IT?

I got drunk one night on sake with Dennis O'Rourke – well, there were other people, but by the end of the night we were the only two left. We were complaining that nothing was happening for the Bicentennial. Curtis Levy had tried to get a film up, had had the promise of funding, and then they [the Bicentennial Authority] had reneged when they realised it was political. So we talked about doing a film that would undercut all the razzmatazz and devised this whole idea. We called each other the next day and confirmed that we were both interested, and within days we had the AFC and the ABC and Channel Four, and a budget of about \$350,000. Then Dennis dropped out, as he had the world to travel, and left me

holding the baby. I kept trying to get more money, and then got Graham Isaacs involved, and we got money from the state funding bodies, but we had to lower the budget slightly.

WHY WAS IT SO EXPENSIVE?

We had sixteen of our own crews shooting 16mm film from midnight to midnight on Australia Day, 1988. There were three ABC crews and we had access to their footage, and we had about four or five video crews out shooting stuff – we ended up with so much footage! We asked radio stations to send us about an hour of audio tape from sometime during the day, especially talkback, and we could also use anything that was shot on the harbour, for nothing. We had tons of stuff. I had two editors, Denise Haslem and Tim Litchfield, and Tim worked on the footage shot between midnight and ten in the morning and then from four to midnight, and Denise worked on the middle of the day footage, because most stuff happened in the middle of the day, and then we put it all together.

I'd wanted to make a film about Fred Hollows for a long time, but whenever I asked he just yelled, 'What do you want to make a film about me for? You should be making a film about Eritrean women!' But when he got cancer I raised it again – I said, 'Somebody's going to make a film about you, so it may as well be me', and he begrudgingly said okay. That was before he became Australian of the Year and used that like no other had before him, so it all worked out perfectly. Initially I wanted to make the film in Eritrea. I wanted Eritrea to be the spine, to ask him things while he was working there, about his work with Aborigines and about his work in Nepal, and then go to those places, and link it up with archival footage and footage I'd shot. But about a month before we were to go to Eritrea, the doctors discovered a secondary cancer in his brain. And I had a slight problem with the ABC; they said, 'It's not the film we agreed to', until someone said, 'Oh, if he's on his death bed, let her make it'. But I had to change my idea of the style. After he'd had the tumour zapped he felt better, and I could sit him down for about an hour and interview him, but it was difficult, because he'd get



HOW LONG DID THAT TAKE?

About two months, perhaps a little longer.

SHORT, COMPARED TO YOUR PREVIOUS FILMS.

Oh, incredible. But I had a proper budget, and a production manager. And the shoot went well – I think there was a little problem with one camera. Everyone knew what they were doing and where they were going. Some of the pieces didn't work, and we had to expect that. We spent eight days looking at the rushes. There were specific questions we asked, about racism, about Aborigines, about multiculturalism, about a lot of things, and the racism was so ugly. I really enjoyed making that film. I love the editing room, I love the editing process.

WHAT CAME NEXT?

exhausted. We had initially put off going to Eritrea for a month because the Eritreans asked us to and it was a godsend really because he ended up recovering enough to go – it was difficult, though, because Asmara is 8000 feet above sea level, and breathing was hard for him, but you couldn't keep him down. And then we went to Nepal, and then to Bourke. He lasted for five years. The Fred Hollows Foundation had been set up, and the lens factories established in Eritrea and Nepal, there had been an interview that Ray Martin had done on Channel 9 the week before, and then my film was screened nationally on the Tuesday night, and he died first thing on the Wednesday morning. People were in shock – they'd seen the film the night before, and they turned on their radios to learn he'd died that morning. But he just let go – everything was in order.

THAT FILM WAS QUITE A WHILE IN THE MAKING, BECAUSE OF THE CANCER AND THE TRAVELING? AND IT WAS VERY IMPORTANT FOR YOU, BECAUSE HE WAS THE FRIEND WHO MADE YOU STAY HERE, WHICH LED TO YOU BECOMING A FILM-MAKER?

Yes, it was almost three years altogether. I had so much respect for the work he was doing, I didn't mind that he could be a sexist pig sometimes – it was fun to argue with him, we had a lot of arguments. I'd climbed with him for six years, on different mountains in New Zealand, and there weren't many women around, and some of the guys might give me a hard time – you know, like 'What are you doing here?' or they'd start a fight about women, and I'd be arguing back, and suddenly Fred would be there, quoting Shulamith Firestone, Juliette Mitchell or someone. He'd done all the reading – he could preach it but he'd never practice. At other times he wouldn't say a word. I had a fight with this one guy, he was a real arsehole, and Fred just sat there., didn't say a thing – I was thinking, 'You jerk, why don't you help me?' The next morning, some people came into the hut and said, 'Fred, there's someone hurt on the track, can you come quickly?' He turned around and said 'Pat, grab your Swiss Army knife and let's go'. This guy I'd had the argument with said, 'Oh, I'll go too'. Fred turned to him and said, coldly, 'And what could you do?'

trying not to cry' as I burst into tears. Then they cleaned me up and I had the two doctors arguing whether they should use stitches for the cuts – all they had was a needle and cotton – but luckily Keith Power won and they didn't, they just taped me up. We had to walk for two days to get out of there, we slept on the beach that night, then hitchhiked up north, walked into Welcome Flat and over the Copeland Pass, went to Mount Cook. Fred was often behind me niggling at me, urging me not to fall behind. More than once I felt like hitting him with my ice axe. I didn't realise until later that he was really worried I'd get septicaemia.

WE'RE TALKING ABOUT THIS FOUR INCH CUT RIGHT ACROSS YOUR KNEECAP! YOU'RE STILL CLOSE TO FRED'S FAMILY, AREN'T YOU?

Yes, I was there for all the kids' births, and I'm godmother to Anna-Louise. They're like my family, I see them every week and have always had Christmas with them. It's something that gives me a



FOR ALL THE WORLD TO SEE (Bower Bird Films) Prof. Fred Hollows speaking to Sanduk Ruit and others. Kathmandu, Nepal.

OVER THE YEARS PEOPLE HAVE ADMIRER YOUR REAL GRIT – NOT JUST WORKING AS A BUILDER'S LABOURER, BUT YOUR CYCLING, YOUR RUNNING, AND ESPECIALLY YOUR CLIMBING. ISN'T THERE SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED WHILE CLIMBING IN NEW ZEALAND WHEN YOU CUT YOUR LEG OPEN?

Well, I had my glasses on, and it was really steamy, they were fogged up, and I thought I saw a track, a black track. One of the guys had waited for me and signaled with his ice-axe, I thought he signaled to go around, but actually he signaled to come down to where he was. So I stepped on what I thought was the track and it was a big crevasse, and I fell about nine feet, got wedged in, and my ice-axe flew up and cut my face – a big cut on my eyebrow, and cut my knee open. I realised I couldn't climb up or down, so I just threw myself down an embankment. And then I had to walk down, and there was a river that I had to cross quite a few times, so that cleaned the cut on my knee, but I didn't realise there was blood all over my face, so when I reached them, they all looked at me and came running, 'Oh my god, what happened to you?' and I said 'I'm

sense of continuity. Because there's one thing that doesn't sit right with me, and that's that you can't make a living out of making documentaries. You have to have lots of things on the go and be prepared to do other types of jobs. You suddenly become aware of your lack of security – I'm fifty-four now, and I have little superannuation – at least I own my flat. It's a continual struggle, and it doesn't seem to matter that you have a track record. People who are younger, first time film-makers, often seem to get a better chance at things. With *Leaping Off The Edge*, a half-hour film for SBS I recently made with Nicolette Freeman, we had 75 percent of the budget and went to a government funding body. Although both of us have a track record, they wouldn't give us the \$25,000 to make up the rest of the budget. Now that's wrong, if you have a pre-sale and 75 percent of the budget, it should be easy to get the rest of the budget. What it means is that we haven't been paid – I've made another film without being paid, although I swore I'd never do that again. That's what's disappointing – that it's still such a struggle!

1973 Produced, directed and edited *Bursiforth*, a four minute film about nature taking over the city. Made in conjunction with the Blinky Bill Film Workshop at the Sydney Film-makers' Co-operative.

1975 Co-produced, co-directed and co-edited *Hearts and Spades*, a 10 minute drama about relationships. Made in conjunction with the Women's Film Workshop at the Sydney Film-makers' Co-operative.

1977 Co-produced, co-directed and co-edited *Push On*, an 8 minute documentary on a bicycle rally across the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

1977 Co-produced, co-directed and co-edited *Ladies' Rooms*, a 20 minute look at four women's rooms. Made in conjunction with the Women's Film Workshop at the Australian Film and Television School.

1973-1978 Co-produced, co-directed and co-edited *Woolloomooloo*, a 75 minute black

& white social and historical documentary detailing the redevelopment of Woolloomooloo and Victoria St. from 1969 to 1977.

1978 At the AFI Awards, *Woolloomooloo* won a special award in the documentary category 'for its deeply committed presentation of an important social document', and was a finalist for the 21st Annual American Film Festival, 1979.

1980-1985 Produced, directed and scripted *Rocking the Foundations*, a 90 minute black & white documentary on the history of the NSW Builders' Labourers Federation from the 1940s to 1974 with particular emphasis on the years 1970 - 1974 and the Green Bans.

Rocking the Foundations was selected along with other Australian films to screen in the 'sidebar' at the United States Film Festival, January 1986, and was

nominated in three categories at the AFI Awards – best film, best screenplay and best editing. It won best screenplay and best editing, and also won best new independent Australian film at the Adelaide Fringe Film Festival, 1986.

July 1986-July 1987 Recipient of a Documentary Study Fellowship from the Australian Film Commission for travel for six months to look at what was happening overseas in terms of documentary.

1988 Directed and co-produced *Australia Daze*, a 75 minute documentary covering events on Australia Day 1988. The film creates a kaleidoscopic insight into Australia's diverse culture and searches behind the official curtain to reveal the thoughts and attitudes of ordinary Australians. It won the award for best editing at the 1989 AFI Awards.

1995 Directed and co-wrote *Doc*, a 56 minute tel-

PAT FISKE FILMOGRAPHY

ON THE OTHER HAND, IT'S THE EXPERIENCE YOU'VE GAINED THROUGH YOUR FILM-MAKING THAT ALLOWS YOU TO TAKE A JOB LIKE THE ONE AT SBS AS COMMISSIONING EDITOR FOR DOCUMENTARY.

I've learned a lot from working at SBS and been able to be very helpful to film-makers as well, and being a film-maker is definitely an advantage. To be Documentary Consultant for that period – fourteen months, for me - and then to go back to film-making has been really important, because I've learned so much. In teaching as well – I'm currently teaching at AFTRS – I've learned how much I know, how much I can help, and how easy it is to solve problems. It's fascinating, sometimes, when students come to you, and you say, 'That's a problem? Why don't you just do this?' It's been very rewarding, working at SBS. Seeing a project all the way through, being able to have input. I've learnt how to write really tactful rejection letters.

HAS THERE BEEN ANY PROJECT YOU FEEL PARTICULARLY PROUD OF?

Oh yes – *A Stranger in the Family*, Sally Browning's film about autism, is fantastic. There have been others, but that one really stands out. Some of them aren't finished yet, of course. Barbara Chobocky's film on Yvonne Kenny I've seen some of – it's going to be good.

IT'S NOT JUST YOUR EXPERIENCE OF FILM-MAKING THAT HELPS, THOUGH. IT'S THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING IMMERSED IN IT, AND INTERESTED IN IT, AND WATCHING LOTS OF OTHER FILMS AND TALKING TO OTHER FILM-MAKERS. YOU HAVE THIS WHOLE

VOCABULARY IN YOUR MIND – YOU PICK UP THINGS, SEE WAYS TO SOLVE PROBLEMS. EVEN IF IT'S NOT A PROBLEM YOU'VE ENCOUNTERED BEFORE YOURSELF, YOU'VE SEEN THE SOLUTION BEFORE SOMEWHERE. YOU'LL THINK OF A FILM TO REFER THEM TO.

That's true. Sometimes you'll even surprise yourself – 'Where did that come from?'

SO WHAT DO YOU THINK THE SOLUTION TO THIS INABILITY TO EARN A PROPER LIVING IS?

Well, it's a problem across the arts, isn't it? No, I don't have any solution, really.

NOW, YOUR NEXT FILMS WERE *DOC*, FOLLOWING THE FENCELINE, *BUSINESS BEHIND BARS*, AND *LEAPING OFF THE EDGE*. SO WERE THERE ANY THAT PRESENTED PARTICULAR CHALLENGES, OR YOU LEARNT SOMETHING NEW?

All of them, really. *Doc* [Evatt] – well, it was the first time I'd made a film about someone who was dead, and it was the first time I'd used stylised pieces – not really re-enactment – to illustrate scenes from someone's life. It was interesting, I'd been to a play at the Opera House – I can't even remember what it was – but there were these two white curved boards that moved around the stage, and they projected slides and moving footage on them. When I sat down to think what style I wanted to use for *Doc*, I remembered that. I wanted to use slides on white boards and stylise them to illustrate the stories that people tell about him. We had a couple of sets, one like a hotel room, with all his books, and one with a lot of

evision documentary on Doc Evatt focusing on his work at the UN for Film Australia. Doc was a finalist in the 1996 ATOM Awards, and Highly Commended, Dendy Awards, Sydney Film Festival, 1996. It won Bronze World Medal, History and Society category, New York Festivals (Television Programming).

1993 Directed and co-produced *For All The World To See*, a 73 minute film portrait of the life and work of Professor Fred Hollows.

For All The World To See won best documentary at the 1993 AFI Awards.

1994 Co-edited book *Memories of Fred*, a collection of stories about Fred Hollows by the people who knew him.

1996 Produced, directed, cinematographer and sound recordist *Following The Fenceline*, a 50 minute documentary on a group of women who rode motorcycles around Australia

promoting breast cancer awareness.

Following The Fenceline won the 1997 Melbourne International Film Festival Award for Outstanding Achievement in a Video Production.

1997 Directed *Night Patrol*, a 30 minute documentary about a group of women elders in the Yuendumu (NT) community who formed a 'night patrol' to do something about the drinking and grog running.

2001 Produced *Business Behind Bars*, a two-part documentary about the private prison industry in the USA and Australia with Catherine Scott directing.

Produced *Profits of Punishment*, the international version of *Business Behind Bars: Part One USA*.

Business Behind Bars received mention Prix International de Television de Geneve at the North South Media Festival in Geneva, March 2001

2001 Co-directed *Leaping Off the Edge*, a half-hour documentary on the Women's Circus in Melbourne.

Sound Recordist on *Woolloomoolloo, Waterloo, Size 10, It's A Long Ten Minutes, It's Harder Than You Think, Giving Up is Breaking My Heart, Spy in the Family, On Guard, A Most Attractive Man, The Wedding Traps, Red Matildas, Point of Departure, Pursuit of Happiness, On the Road With Circus Oz, Doled Out, Age Before Beauty, For Love Or Money, The Last Whale, Bon Bons and Roses For Dorothy, Pram Factory, Ways of Thinking, Heroes of Our Time, Talking Broken, Tighrope Dancer, Tenderhooks, Sadness, Calcutta Christmas, Servants of the Ancestors.*

Boom Operator on *Going Down, Wrong Side of the Road, Starstruck.*

1999 AFI Sound Award for *Sadness*.

music stands and a few instruments, and we had these three flat white boards and six projectors, synchronised. It was a logistical nightmare to get them all the right colour temperature and all that stuff, but we did it. That was a real learning experience – how long it takes, what I should have done – I had it all in my head, I didn't have it down on paper. I should have done storyboards. But cinematographer Erika Addis helped me through.

THIS IS PROBABLY A TRICKY QUESTION, BUT HOW DO YOU APPROACH THE CREATIVE PROCESS FOR DOCUMENTARY? YOU HAVE THE IDEA, THE SUBJECT, HOW DO YOU WORK OUT HOW YOU'RE GOING TO DO IT?

Well, for me, what I do is just think about what might work best for that subject, that kind of film. With Fred, I wanted to go to Eritrea, I wanted to do more observational filming, asking him about the past while observing the present; I thought that would work really well because he was able to talk even in the middle of an operation – I knew that. But with *Doc*, which would have to use a lot of archival footage – newsreel footage, home movies – I felt that I wanted to stylise the whole thing, shoot the interviews against a black background, and have the moving images at the side, set at the side.

THIS WAS COMPLETELY DIFFERENT FROM ANYTHING YOU'D DONE. HOW DID THIS COME TO YOU? I MEAN, SEEING THE PLAY GAVE YOU A TECHNICAL ANSWER TO HOW TO ACHIEVE IT, BUT WHERE DID THE IDEA OF MAKING SUCH A STYLISTED FILM COME FROM?

I'm sure I was informed by a number of other films, but I'm not sure what, exactly. I was actually asked by Film Australia whether I was

interested in making the film on Doc Evatt – because it tied in with the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations, and I was thinking, well I've heard of him but I don't know much about him, really, but the more I read about him the more interested I became. I was intrigued by the contradictions in the man, the referendum on communism, and I realised what an extraordinary person he was. David McKnight and I wrote it together, which was a really rewarding experience, and as we did that, I began to conceive how to film it, what might work.

WITH FOLLOWING THE FENCELINE, BECAUSE THEY WERE GOING ON THE TRIP, THE IDEA OF A ROAD MOVIE VERITE STRUCTURE WOULD BE PRETTY AUTOMATIC? AND OF COURSE, THE DIGICAM ARRIVED AT JUST THE RIGHT TIME TO USE IT ON THE FILM.

But I had no intention of doing *Following the Fenceline* by myself, initially. I tried to raise the money, I had a producer on board, we went everywhere to find the money. We got knockbacks everywhere, even government health departments. I mean, wouldn't it seem like a great way to get the word across – a bunch of women on motor bikes, an adventure going round Australia, talking about breast cancer? But no-one could see it. I'd met the women, I'd kept in contact with them, and finally I said, 'I can't get the money to do it', and they said 'Come anyway!' They said, 'You don't have to pay for anything, we'll pay for the petrol, and we'll be camping out', so I thought, 'I'll do it!' I borrowed some money, bought a Sony 1000, a little DV camera, and some radio mikes. I had done some shooting over the years, shot some of the footage for *Rocking the Foundations* when I had to beg, borrow and steal to do things fast, and I was a sound recordist. From my experience, it was much easier for me to become a one-person team – that is, in terms of

being able to operate the camera and do the sound recording, I think it's an advantage being a sound recordist, in that I didn't have to worry about the sound, I only had to worry about what was in the picture. I think for a cinematographer it would be harder. You need to be concerned about all the visual effects – focus, framing – while with the sound because I knew what I would need, I could just boom and shoot. I became better and better at shooting – I only got the camera two days before I left, and learnt to use it on the road. It was difficult. I would probably do it again, never say never, but I was on the road for eight weeks with them, and it was often sixteen hours a day. We went all the way around from Sydney to Alice, to Broome, to Geraldton, down to Perth. I had shot around forty-eight hours, I knew that I had a film, and I was so tired, I could have died. I'd had one day off in that time. I was continually looking for shots, for moments. They'd have morning tea somewhere, lunch somewhere else, afternoon tea, dinner – they were meeting with groups, doing things, it was on all the time. I had planned to mainly follow Ramonda, who was the initiator of the ride and quite an amazing person, and then she broke her shoulder three days in. I thought, 'Oh my god, maybe I should just go home!' It meant I had to follow more people, because it wasn't clear who was going to take over as the main through line, so it made my work a lot harder. Luckily, Ramonda came back in Darwin, but she wasn't riding any more, she had to ride in the support vehicle.

SO ALL THE TALK ABOUT DV, ABOUT ONE PERSON FILMING, HOW SIMPLE IT IS – YOU WOULDN'T AGREE THAT IT'S AS EASY AS THEY CLAIM?

No, it's not easy at all. It took me two months to recuperate. I went to the ABC when I got back and showed them the footage because they had asked me to, and they said no. I was so tired that I couldn't be enthusiastic, couldn't say, 'I've got a really good film here! I know it's going to work'. I just showed the rushes, and I suppose it looked like a bunch of women on motor bikes. I knew that I wanted to make it in-your-face, but I couldn't put that across.

WHICH IS WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT THE FINISHED FILM. YOU DIDN'T HAVE A TV SALE AT ALL?

Oh yes, the ABC bought it as soon as they saw the film. One of the other problems I had was that the bikes are really fast, and I was either on the back of a bike, trying to get some of the scenics, or I'd be driving the support vehicle, because Maureen, the driver, couldn't drive fast enough. So I'd drive far enough ahead to find a good spot, and set up, and sometimes they'd go sailing by and they would never come back. And I'd have a tantrum by the side of the road – it was very stressful. But I made some great friends. People were so fantastic, so giving. I was nearly at the end of my tether when we arrived at this small town in WA, and women came from everywhere, even three hundred miles away, and put on this play, and I went into the men's toilet and I just cried and cried. I was so exhausted, so emotional, I was crying, 'These women are so wonderful, I'm so glad I'm a woman'. The fenceliners taught me how to ride a bike, and made sure I got my permit in Cunnamulla, and then my license in Halls Creek, and the next day they put me on a 1000cc bike, and I'm thinking, 'Wow, this is why people ride

motor bikes!' But I haven't ridden a motor bike since I came back. It's too dangerous in the city – I'd do it in the country.

NOW YOUR NEXT VENTURE WAS PRODUCING THE TWO-PART PROJECT, BUSINESS BEHIND BARS? THEY'VE BEEN ON TELEVISION ALREADY, HAVEN'T THEY? I MEAN, THAT'S ONE OF THE THINGS WITH MADE FOR TV PROJECTS, YOU DON'T GET SO MUCH OF A CHANCE TO SCREEN THEM, THEY GO TO AIR AND THEY'RE GONE. THAT CAME UP AT THE DOCUMENTARY CONFERENCE – WHEREAS BEFORE A DOCUMENTARY WOULD GET A SEASON AT THE CO-OP, OR WHEN IT WOULD GET RENTED OUT TO COMMUNITY GROUPS YOU MIGHT GO ALONG AND TALK AND HAVE DISCUSSIONS, AND THOSE FILMS WOULD HAVE ANOTHER LIFE. THESE DAYS THEY GO ON TV, THEY MIGHT GET REPEATED, BUT THAT'S IT.

Well, even if they went straight to television, but there was more awareness, they'd get reviewed, discussed, talked about. But most of the TV writers aren't interested in documentary.

POPCORN TAXI IS DOING SOMETHING IN THAT AREA, AND THE OCCASIONAL DOCO GETS A THEATRICAL SEASON AT THE CHAUVEL OR THE VALHALLA. LOOK AT CUNNAMULLA.

I rang Popcorn Taxi and asked if they were interested in screening a two part doco on prisons, and they said 'Send us the tape', and when they'd seen it they rang back and said 'Let's do it, it's great'. People will get to know it as a venue – you don't get paid, but it's a good experience and it's important to be able to discuss films somewhere.

OF COURSE, SOME FILMS ARE STILL BEING BOUGHT BY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND STUDENTS STILL GET TO SEE THEM, AND THEY ARE USED IN POLITICS AND SOCIOLOGY COURSES, SO THEY GO ON AND HAVE ANOTHER LIFE.

With *Business Behind Bars*, when the first part screened on SBS there was quite a bit of press and it rated through the roof, for SBS, but with the second part, there wasn't as much publicity, and it didn't rate quite as well.

THERE'S ALSO THE PROBLEM, OF COURSE, NOW THAT YOU REALLY HAVE TO HAVE A TV PRE-SALE TO MAKE A DOCUMENTARY, AND IF YOU HAVE A SOCIAL ISSUE PROJECT, WHO WILL BUY IT? THE ABC, PERHAPS, BUT MORE PROBABLY SBS, AND THEN YOU KNOW YOU HAVE A MUCH SMALLER AUDIENCE.

It's a world-wide problem, trying to sell social issue documentaries – you have to be much more subtle in how you pitch them and in how you make them. You have to be less overtly political these days, more circumspect. There's the docu-soap that Hilton Cordell are making on NIDA, I've seen a little of that, and it looks as if it's going to be a great series, and it will be on commercial TV. I'd consider doing something like that.

BUT GIVEN YOUR PAST HISTORY OF MAKING FILMS ON POLITICAL, SOCIAL DOCUMENTARY ISSUES, ON THAT QUESTION OF MAKING A LIVING, HOW MUCH DO YOU HAVE TO SOFTEN THE SUBJECT MATTER?

Business Behind Bars, which I produced and Cathy Scott directed, that works, but it doesn't hit you over the head. It's more a personal thing, there's no narration, and there's no obvious point of view. Well, there's obviously a point of view – it's anti-private prisons, but it doesn't say that. You get to know people, and feel for them, it works in a different way than I would have made something like that years ago. People more or less hang themselves.

AND PERHAPS THAT'S AS MUCH THE PRODUCT OF A WIDER FILM VOCABULARY, AND MORE SOPHISTICATION. LOOKING BACK ON THE HISTORY OF DOCUMENTARY IN AUSTRALIA, FROM THE DAYS OF CURRENT AFFAIRS PROGRAMMES AND CHEQUERBOARD, WHEN YOU CAME TO AUSTRALIA, THROUGH THE YEARS OF INDEPENDENT FILM-MAKERS AND THE CO-OP, AND FILMS LIKE WOOLLOOMOOLOO AND ROCKING THE FOUNDATIONS, NOW WE'RE IN A PERIOD WHERE THERE'S LESS SUPPORT FOR THAT SORT OF FILM-MAKING – YOU CAN'T GET GRANTS, IT'S VERY HARD TO GET FUNDING. THERE'S BEEN A DRAMATIC CHANGE FROM THE DAYS WHEN YOU COULD GET SUPPORT TO MAKE THOSE FILMS, BUT THEY RARELY SCREENED ON TV, TO NOW, WHEN YOU HAVE AN INDUSTRY THAT'S REALLY BASED ON TV SALES, WHEN MOST DOCUMENTARIES ARE MADE FOR TV. WHAT HAS THAT CHANGE REALLY MEANT?

I was part of the concerted effort that was made to get Australian independent documentaries on TV, way back. Tom Haydon, Graham Chase, Curtis Levy, Martha Ansara – a whole group of us had meetings with the ABC, put lots of pressure on them. It was a huge, prolonged fight. All their documentaries were in-house then, and they weren't buying any Australian independent films. But I think other things have come into play since, there have been other changes as well. It's been a slow and complicated process. Like style, the observational style – things have changed because of the people who choose the documentaries, and their likes and dislikes. Mike Rubbo would have had a lot of influence when he was at the ABC. There's been the introduction of the docu-soap, that's become popular. So it's more complicated.

BUT THE AGENDAS ARE SET BY THE BROADCASTERS?

Absolutely. By the fact that you have to have a pre-sale to even get money from the AFC or the state bodies, let alone the FFC – or even Film Australia, for that matter. There used to be ways of making a film without that pre-sale, but it's really really hard now. And it's really hard to sell one-off documentaries, especially overseas. One way to survive is to put together a series, like Hilton Cordell usually do. But then you've got that infrastructure, and there's a lot of pressure to make enough money to pay all the employees and expenses, let alone yourselves, and I don't want that. I want to be able to survive, on my own and working with others – life's too short for all that pressure.

WE'VE GOT YOUR LATEST FILM STILL TO TALK ABOUT – LEAPING OFF THE EDGE ...

It was a film that came out of Canada. Sophia Bisonette, from Canada, had the idea of making a film about the March of Women 2000 Against Poverty & Violence, so they decided to approach a

woman film-maker from each continent to each make a ten to fifteen minute film, and put them all together, plus all the marches and make a feature length documentary. They chose six film-makers, one from Africa, one from Argentina (although she made her film in Ecuador), one from India, Australia, and from the USA, from Boston – we decided we had to have one from the States and the film had to be about poverty. Five of us went to Canada to discuss the project, and decided we'd make a six-part series as well. We came home and put in three ideas – I worked with Margot Nash and we researched three possibilities, and one was the women's circus in Melbourne, which they chose. The women's circus was started initially, and still continues, for women who have been sexually abused and incest survivors; women over forty, and women from non-English speaking backgrounds are in the priority groups. We got a pre-sale, and I got Nicolette Freeman involved. I asked Nicolette to produce and to co-direct because she was in Melbourne anyway and she could be doing a lot of the work when I couldn't get down there. So we co-directed, which was a really good experience. And it was great to work with the circus – I did circus training .

YOU'RE ALWAYS SO PHYSICAL, PAT!

If I didn't do physical things, I think I'd be really depressed.

YOU'RE CURRENTLY TEACHING AT AFTRS. HOW ARE YOU FINDING THIS?

I've got a really good group of students. They're divided into four groups to make five minute films. Each group pitched two ideas each, and all eight ideas were really interesting. One of the pitches was to make a film about a Holocaust survivor living in Sydney – they hadn't met anyone, they were just going to find someone. There were two of them, a male director and producer, and when they did their research, they got a name from the [Jewish] museum – this was after they did their pitch – and went and interviewed her. The producer came and sat down in my room and said 'I've just had the most amazing experience of my life!' This woman had really opened up for them, it had been really hard for her, and they were so moved – and that's what making documentaries is all about. Most of the students there want to do drama, of course, but some of them do get turned around by documentary, when they get into it. I love to see that.

YOUR LIFE HAS BEEN TURNED AROUND BY DOCUMENTARY.

I love making documentaries. It's work that I know has an effect. Dennis O'Rourke once said to me, 'I came into film-making for the love of film, Pat, but you came into it from politics, for what you can do'. And he's right. I believe the work I do is worthwhile, that the films I make can make a difference. I believe they have a life, out there. That's why I can make films often without being paid, because it's the life of the film and the feedback that I get that makes it worth it, despite the struggle.