

SCREEN AUSTRALIA AND REBEL FILMS
in association with FILM VICTORIA present

THEN THE WIND CHANGED



ONE SMALL COMMUNITY'S DIFFICULT BUT INSPIRING RECOVERY FROM A
DEVASTATING AUSTRALIAN FIRESTORM

Written & Directed by
Celeste Geer

Produced by
Jeni McMahon, Rebel Films

*"Closer than you'd ever want to get to an inferno.
So close that you'll forget you're not a local"*

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SYNOPSIS

SHORT DESCRIPTION

Life after the firestorm.

LOGLINE

One small community's difficult but inspiring recovery from a devastating Australian firestorm.

ONE SENTENCE SYNOPSIS

After a small village is destroyed by a catastrophic firestorm, survivors begin the work of recovery as they set about rebuilding their homes, their lives and their community.



SHORT SYNOPSIS

On 7 February 2009, Australia suffered its worst natural disaster in recorded history. A firestorm of cyclonic fury swept across Victoria and 173 lives were lost. Nowhere was the destruction more terrible than in the tiny hamlet of Strathewen. Filmmaker Celeste Geer is a member of that community, and almost before the flames had died down, she knew she was going to document its recovery. Over the next two and a half years Celeste follows a handful of individuals as they struggle to rebuild their shattered lives and find solace in unexpected places. THEN THE WIND CHANGED is a mélange of compelling home footage, delicate observation and thoughtful meditation. It is a story of heartbreak and love, redemption and resilience.

LONG SYNOPSIS

On 7 February 2009, Australia suffered its worst natural disaster in recorded history. A firestorm of cyclonic fury swept across Victoria and 173 lives were lost. Nowhere was the destruction more terrible than in the tiny hamlet of Strathewen, only 40 km's from Melbourne.

Survivors were linked by trauma, unimaginable grief and the weighty task of trying to understand what had happened to their worlds. There was no roadmap for recovery from a disaster of this size and no instruction manual on how to respond. Then after the shock of survival, just as the adrenalin was finally depleted, the real work began.

Local resident and filmmaker Celeste Geer interweaves her own family's story with the experiences of five other families and individuals from Strathewen in an intimate exploration of post disaster recovery. In a mélange of compelling home footage, delicate observation and thoughtful meditation THEN THE WIND CHANGED documents the extraordinary spectrum of human responses to the firestorm that swept through one valley. It is a story of heartbreak and love, redemption and resilience.

Each of the central characters has been challenged to find new ways of living in a radically altered physical and emotional landscape. Whether they have lost loved ones, homes, their beloved natural environment or their children's innocence, each is being tested in ways they could never have imagined. The physical tasks of rebuilding houses, the local school and a market garden are set against a complex psychological backdrop: raw and fragile moments are captured as parents try to hold their family together in a tiny caravan during winter; while down the road love blossoms unexpectedly, and unlikely creative projects bring people together. And all the time, these ordinary people who found themselves in the centre of an extraordinary event, offer generous insights into their struggles as they rebuild their lives and their community.

Filmed over the two and half years following the fires, THEN THE WIND CHANGED shows human being's amazing potential to manage adversity and rise from despair

BACKGROUND TO THE BLACK SATURDAY FIRESTORM



As problems associated with global warming intensify around the world, some regions are already experiencing an increase in catastrophic natural disasters. Forest fires cause destruction in many parts of the world, however the fires in Australia are becoming more ferocious and occurring more frequently due to the country's mostly hot, dry climate. Certain native flora in Australia have evolved to rely on bushfires as a means of reproduction and fire events are an interwoven and an essential part of the ecology of the continent.

The Black Saturday bushfires were a series of bushfires that ignited across the Australian state of Victoria on and around Saturday, February 7th 2009, during extreme bushfire-weather conditions, resulting in Australia's highest ever loss of life from a bushfire. 173 people died as a result of the fires, another 414 people were injured and over 1600 residences were burned.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I was still gripped by post disaster shock when I started filming. Amidst total chaos the camera gave me purpose, a slight distance and a reason to really look closely for the first signs of new life. Seeing the extreme situation I was experiencing as a story was initially a coping mechanism that enabled me to keep functioning.

A bushfire exposes everything. Just as the bush is robbed of its complex undergrowth, people too are left unmasked. Watching the people of Strathewen come together and try to fathom a future together continues to be a fascinating and deeply moving experience. Living in this extreme landscape and bearing witness to regeneration is a privilege. As a member of the Strathewen community and a filmmaker, I am both an observer and a participant in the difficult task of recovery. This dual role has brought with it a great sense of responsibility to tell this story in a way that will honor its complexity.

The resilience that I have seen exhibited in so many guises since the fires that has kept me grounded throughout this project. I am continually inspired by the generosity and openness of the many people who share their stories. My desire to celebrate their strength and courage has driven the film.

My aim has been to guide an audience gently, to lead them past the devastating headlines, beyond the dramatic bushfire and survival footage, into the experience of recovery. So often we watch other people's disasters unfold from afar. These natural disasters seem to be happening with increasing frequency and ferocity around the world. Each tsunami, earthquake, hurricane or flood reminds us again of the powerful and random forces of nature. As death tolls escalate, we are in danger of becoming immune and desensitised to the fragility of human existence and the meaning of each of the lives that is lost. I want to remind us of this fragility and to call into question our eternal struggle for control over our lives and our environment. It seems that now, more than ever, we need to be looking at the essential tasks of learning how to live in our environment while respecting the impressive force of nature.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Within weeks of the Black Saturday fires, director Celeste Geer picked up a camera and started shooting her immediate environment. Fellow filmmaking friends and colleagues assisted her in these early days by recording some key events, the landscape's rapid changes and the raw emotions of neighbours and friends in the community.

Initially it was an instinctive response to try and make sense of her drastically altered reality. As time progressed, the strength of the material became apparent. It was more than just a therapeutic exercise – there was a film in the making.

Producer Jeni McMahon of Melbourne company Rebel Films came on board in September 2009 and the project was one of only four films to receive funding from Screen Australia's Special Documentary Fund in 2009. Up to this point Celeste was financing the filming, so the Screen Australia investment allowed her to employ camera people in a more regular capacity and she conducted many interviews and filmed many community events over an 18 month period until she started to see particular themes emerge and her focus started to narrow on certain individuals / families within the community.

Shooting on P2 cards meant that Celeste was constantly importing, organizing and reviewing her material and through this process of refinement, the strongest material started to rise to the surface. Importantly Celeste spent 4 weeks with editor Tony Stevens reviewing material and working out what was missing 5 months before the major edit was scheduled to commence. In this time Tony and Celeste cut a 10- minute trailer for the film and, together with cameraman Brian McKenzie, developed a comprehensive plan for the remainder of the shoot. This trailer was instrumental in attracting the interest of the ABC, who came on board weeks before the edit was due to commence and commissioned the project as a 57 minute film for their Sunday night programme "Compass" which focuses on belief and values.

Throughout the fourteen week edit Tony and Celeste reprised their strong creative collaboration that was forged ten years ago when they worked together on Celeste's first broadcast film, *Mick's Gift* (2002). Composer Greg Walker created a number of themes for the film in early musical sketches, which Tony and Celeste worked with throughout the edit. Greg's ability to convey a rich emotional palette with his music was instrumental in creating a subtle yet visceral soundtrack for the film.

Due to the longitudinal nature of the film, Celeste continued filming throughout the editing process to ensure certain critical events, like the completion of the building of a house, could be included in the film.

RESPONSES TO THE FILM

“Celeste documented our activities, thoughts, struggles and strengths over the last 2.5 years to make a program that opens a window onto our experiences post-fire; cleverly constructed to create just enough viewer discomfort to elicit some understanding of the horrors we experienced. An important Australian story told first hand and from the heart” Bron Sparkes, film participant



Celeste Geer and Bron Sparkes, August 2011

“...a wonderfully intimate journey – raw, emotional but full of hope” Quentin Fogarty, filmmaker and former Public Affairs Manager for the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission

“Closer than you’d ever want to get to an inferno. So close that you’ll forget you’re not a local”
Adrian Hyland, Author *Kinglake 350*

CREW BIOGRAPHIES

CELESTE GEER – Writer / Director / Co-producer

Celeste is an independent filmmaker based in a small bush town just outside of Melbourne Australia. Recently she has written and directed *Then The Wind Changed* (ABC TV, IDFA 2011), *Veiled Ambition* (SBS TV), winner Human Rights Award Melbourne International Film Festival 2006 and *Mick's Gift* (ABC TV 2002). *Then The Wind Changed* is the first film that Celeste has co-produced. A graduate of the VCA, School of Film and TV (1999), Celeste has also worked at AFTRS developing curricular for the Centre for Screen Business. Her documentaries are intimate, character based films that explore the complexities, humour and frailties of the human condition.

JENI MCMAHON - Producer

Producer Jeni McMahon established Rebel Films in 1999 with director David Batty and has established a reputation for creating a diverse range of highly successful, award winning documentaries with a uniquely Australian focus. She has a passion for telling stories from remote indigenous Australia including the iconic and hugely popular *Bush Mechanics Series* and *Going Bush* with Olympic gold medalist Cathy Freeman and AFI award winning actor Deborah Mailman. Jeni has collaborated with some of Australia's most esteemed documentary filmmakers such as Brian McKenzie, David Bradbury and David Batty as well nurturing several award winning emerging directors. Award winning films include *Veiled Ambition*, Best Short film promoting Human Rights at the 2006 Melbourne International Film Festival, *Marree Man* , Finalist at the 2007 Mipcom Mobile and Internet TV Awards, *Halal Mate*, 2007 United Nations Media Peace award nomination, *Desert Heart*, *Love's Harvest* ADG Award 2009, and *Pride of Warriors* 2010 ATOM award and 2010 Human Rights Film Festival Award Australia. Along with *Then the Wind Changed*, Jeni's most recent credits include executive producing *On Borrowed Time*, (MIFF 2011) with Academy Award nominated director David Bradbury. She has just finished shooting a dramatized documentary about the last massacre of indigenous people in Australia in 1928, known as the Coniston massacre.

BRIAN McKENZIE – Camera

Brian McKenzie is one of Australia's esteemed documentary filmmakers known for his pure observational style and interest in the drama of ordinary life. Since the 1970s, his work has screened in cinemas, on ABC and SBS television. His portrait of alcoholics in "I'll be home for Christmas" (1984) has been studied in schools across Australia. "On The Waves of the Adriatic" (1991), a portrait of a gang of misfits in suburban Coburg won the grand prix at Cinema du Reel in Paris. He has written and directed feature films (drama) and worked at the ABC overseeing breakthrough programs such as The Bush Mechanics series, Wedding in Ramallah and the evening classics slot, Stranger Than Fiction. In 2008 McKenzie won the Australian Directors Guild Award for Best Direction in Documentary for "Love's Harvest", a 4-part series about organic farmers that was hailed by The Age as "visceral and heartbreaking...great Australian stories".

TONY STEVENS – Editor

Tony is one of Australia's most respected and experienced drama and factual editors. His credits include the documentaries *Hunt Angels* (AFI Winner 2006), *Vietnam Nurses* (AFI Nominee Best Editor), *Revealing Gallipoli*, *Two Men and a Baby*, *Mao's New Suit*, *Muddy Waters*, *Seed Hunter*, *Eye for Architecture (John Gollings)* & *Murder in the Snow*. TV Dramas include *My Worst Best Friends*, *L'il Horrors*, and the feature film *Road to Nhill*.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION FOR PROGRAM

Program Duration: 57 mins (Versioning negotiable)

Delivery Format: HDCam

Production: March 2009 to June 2011

Post Production: March 2011 to August 2011

Director and Co-Producer	Celeste Geer
Producer	Jeni McMahon
Editor	Tony Stevens
Composer	Greg Walker

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A Rebel Films Production

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