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**THE MAN WHO STOLE
MY MOTHER'S FACE**

A Search for Justice

**Co-winner for best documentary feature 2004
Tribeca Film Festival New York
screening on ABC TV
Wednesday, 18 August at 9.30pm**



ABC
Australian Broadcasting Corporation
Television



www.abc.net.au/tv/mothersface

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The Man Who Stole My Mother's Face is a sobering tale of survival, strength, healing and redemption from Australian filmmaker Cathy Henkel. It's her amazing story about hope and love, and ultimately, the search for justice.

Following a traumatic sexual assault on her mother, Cathy returned to South Africa to find and confront the man her mother identified as the attacker. What begins as a quest for justice becomes a revelation about the process of healing.

Succinctly balancing despair and triumph, **The Man Who Stole My Mother's Face** demonstrates what it takes to put her family back together after such a traumatic event.

Without a hint of self-congratulation, it is a story about the need to confront and expose this crime and its impact on the survivors, their families and community. It is also about the power of apology and forgiveness.

Joint winner of New York's Tribeca Film Festival (co-founded by Robert De Niro) for the best documentary feature in 2004, **The Man Who Stole My Mother's Face** reveals a terrible life-changing event.

In 1988, Cathy's mother, Laura, was sexually assaulted and brutally bashed in her home in South Africa by a local white teenager, and, although she identified her attacker from a school photograph, he was never charged.

When her son, Michael, blamed her and her neighbours disbelieved her, Laura's sense of justice was further shattered, and gradually she descended into depression, and withdrew from the world. Fourteen years later, desperate for a way to help her, Cathy returned to Johannesburg in search of answers and some form of justice.

The story takes place in the new South Africa, where the police agree to re-open the case, but there are many obstacles. Eventually Cathy has to take matters into her own hands. This leads to a confrontation with the man her mother identified as the attacker. Cathy also confronts her brother and her mother's neighbours about their attitudes to the crime.

Along the way, Cathy meets many powerful and inspiring people fighting for justice and working to expose this type of crime. One of these is playwright, Bongani Linda, whose girlfriend had committed suicide after she was gang raped. Bongani confronted and killed one of the suspects, and while in prison, wrote a compelling play about sexual assault which he tours to mainly male audiences in schools and prisons.

Sexual assault remains the most hidden and the fastest growing crime in the world. Statistics in most western countries reveal that 9 out of 10 women do not report this crime to police and many do not even tell their families.

The Man Who Stole My Mother's Face

CATHY'S STORY.

My mother lived in Hope Road, a Jacaranda-lined street in suburban Johannesburg. Two days before Christmas in 1988, a 17-year-old white teenager was walking by and asked if he could use her bathroom. He said he had just finished high school and appeared polite and respectable. She let him in. Within half an hour, he had sexually assaulted and savagely beaten her and left her for dead. Her face was smashed beyond recognition. The police didn't take the case seriously, the neighbours disputed her version of events and worst of all, her son blamed her for letting him into the house. Although she had identified her attacker from a school photograph, he was never charged and remained a free man. After the attack, I brought my mother to Australia where she now lives. The wounds she had sustained were no longer visible to the outside eye, but to her they were deep and debilitating and she could not "just get over it". She believed she looked like a monster.

When I proposed the idea of going back to Johannesburg in 2002 to find her attacker and attempt to get some justice, I took a giant gamble. This could either help her to recover from this horrendous event, or it could open old wounds and make it worse. I decided to take the chance. The film charts my journey through the new police investigation as well as my personal attempts to track down the man who stole my mother's face.

The story takes place in the city of my birth, Johannesburg, at a time when South Africa is struggling to heal past wrongs and combat the current epidemic of violence. A new unit had been established in Johannesburg to deal specifically with sexual assault, and the head of this unit authorised the new investigation. My mother's identification of the suspect from the school photograph was sufficient evidence for him, and he assigned the case to one of his most experienced police officers. It quickly became clear, however, that there were major obstacles. All the files and documents relating to my mother's case had vanished without a trace. There were no fingerprints, no DNA samples, and no records of the investigation. The investigating officer who had handled the case at the time refused to co-operate and was unable to provide satisfying answers in relation to the missing files and why the suspect had not been apprehended. I also had to acknowledge the overwhelming workload of the police. The unit had 1800 other sexual assault cases they were investigating, and understandably, many of these had to take precedence over my mother's case.

The extent of sexual assault in South Africa has reached extreme proportions. The almost unbelievable statistics indicate that one woman is raped every 26 seconds. In most cases women are raped by people they know and trust and a large percentage of rape takes place in the home. South Africa has a particular problem at the moment in relation to virgin rape. There is a belief that if you rape a virgin you can be cleansed of HIV and so there is a large increase in child and baby rape. The horror of this crime was personalised for me when I met Glory Legodi and her twin daughters, Sunshine and Angel. The twins had been raped and sodomised at the age of two by a man that Glory trusted as a close friend, and she was now awaiting the trial. In the meantime the suspect had been released on bail, and she lived in constant fear of the threat he posed to her and her daughters. Despite the dangers Glory never gave up on her fight for justice, and she became a friend and inspiration to me during my time in Johannesburg.

As the police investigation bogged down and the sexual assault unit continued to be over-taxed by the huge number of cases they were investigating, I realised that if I wanted closure in my mother's case, I would have to take action myself. With the help of a private investigator, and the name on the school photograph, I found out where the suspect lived and worked. Confronting him was one of the most terrifying things I have ever done and his response, the outcome of the police investigation and the impact of my search on my mother's recovery form the final chapter of the film.

Photographs available at <http://www.abc.net.au/tvpublicity>

The Man Who Stole My Mother's Face

“Cathy Henkel is the storyteller of this extraordinary film and it will pin you to your seat.” - Phillip Adams, Late Night Live

“A really riveting story.” – Actress, Glenn Close

“One of the Tribeca Film Festival’s 25 best.” - The Village Voice (New York)

“A gripping investigative film.” - Hot Docs

The story continues . . . on line at:

<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/mothersface>

<http://www.hatchling.com.au>

Comprehensive coverage includes: Character updates, Audience responses Awards, reviews and celebrity endorsements, Behind the scenes, Extra mini-docs, Footage of Cathy’s return to South Africa again, Additional interviews with Cathy’s mother, Laura Extensive examination of issues related to sexual assaults.

Following the ABC TV screening join the on-line forum featuring Cathy, her mother Laura, and South African journalist and social justice campaigner Charlene Smith at

<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/mothersface>

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Photographs available at <http://www.abc.net.au/tvpublicity>

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