

An Angel behind the Camera, Filming *Angels in the Dust*:

An Interview with Activist Filmmaker Louise Hogarth

Interview by Tonya Huber-Warring

*AIDS has orphaned more than 14 million children worldwide—the equivalent to every child under five in America with no one to watch over them.*¹

South Africa, a country with the highest incidence of rape and child rape in the world,² has the fifth highest prevalence of HIV in the world, with 1.1 million AIDS orphans.³ The UNAIDS Global Report reveals 370,000 AIDS-related deaths in South Africa in 2003.⁴ Given the numbers of people infected and dying, South Africa is regarded as having the most severe HIV epidemic in the world. This pandemic is estimated to be several years away from peaking in terms of the numbers of projected AIDS-related deaths with a projection of 75-100 million affected by 2010.⁵

Against this statistical background, nearly 60 children are raped every day in South Africa and the age range of the child rape victim is significantly found to begin at six or younger.⁶ A growing body of medical and research evidence suggests the problem is much larger and more pervasive than the already staggering numbers would suggest. While 21,000 child rapes were reported in 2001, for instance, according to the South African Police Service, only one in 35 child rapes is reported, suggesting the number could actually be closer to 735,000.⁷

What Does a Teacher Committed to Culturally Responsible Pedagogy Do with Such Overwhelming Data?

Multiculturalist G. Pritchey Smith (1998) in *Common Sense about Uncommon Knowledge: The Knowledge Bases for Diversity* details theory and research relevant to preparing teachers for effectively educating ALL students. As Smith admonishes:

If preservice and inservice teachers study the appropriate bodies of literature, they will understand that norms for human growth and development vary from culture

to culture and that much of the traditional knowledge base studied in the psychological foundations courses is Anglocentric or Eurocentric and not necessarily appropriate for interpreting and understanding the behavior of culturally diverse pupils of color. (p. 27)

Counseling research affords a rich, if often untapped, source of information on the sociocultural contexts of human growth and psychological development beyond the western tradition. Unparalleled, however, are the most recent issues evolving in South Africa for victims of child rape surviving in a nation spiraling out of control in the HIV/AIDS strangle-hold. Teachers have a dual responsibility in this regard: (a) to authentically educate their students about the HIV/AIDS pandemic; and (b) to be prepared to work with students and families impacted by the two-headed snake of HIV/AIDS and child rape.

What Does a Critically Conscious Citizen Do with Such Overwhelming Data?

Activist filmmaker Louise Hogarth decided it wasn't enough to send money. With her camera and commitment to nurture positive change, Louise went to *Botshabelo* (a Tswana word meaning "place of safety") in South Africa, a place for children who have been orphaned by AIDS, starved, raped, and—often—forgotten.

Opened in December 1990, by Marion Cloete and her husband Con, Botshabelo has become an island of compassion and humanity in a country struggling under the weight of apartheid's legacy: poverty, violence, lack of education, and inadequate health care. Encompassing the orphanage, a school, and an organic farm (though they lack the water to maintain the farm), Botshabelo provides food, education, hope and therapeutic healing for hundreds of children, of whom more than 90% are rape victims and more than 25% have HIV/AIDS. While nearly 200 children are



Title frame from Louise Hogarth's *Angels in the Dust* film.

in “foster” care at Botshabelo, as many as 250 other children come to the orphanage on a daily basis for education and food.

Interview

Huber-Warring: The issue seems monstrosous, Louise, what do you hope to accomplish through your film?

Hogarth: Awareness of the AIDS orphan crisis; promotion of Marion’s therapeutic work with these children; interruption of the victim-perpetrator cycle; consideration of the spiritual dimensions of death and dying; and a testament to the difference one person, Marion, makes when spiritual choices are followed over material possessions and gain.

Huber-Warring: When I was reviewing the program description, I was surprised to see a picture of elephants and a segment devoted to these creatures. What is the connection?

Hogarth: I’ve filmed a segment about a famous incident in South Africa. A culled herd of young orphaned elephants became uncharacteristically violent during their *teen* years, rampaging and killing each other and other animals at a sanctuary until adult elephants were placed with them to teach them how to relate to each other and their world. The elephants then became peaceful and behaved more appropriately. The message is recognized by

these children when they visit the elephant sanctuary. Like all the therapeutic activities at the orphanage, the children learn how to journey along the road to healing and break the cycle of abuse.

Huber-Warring: Your film trailer captures the plight of these fragile child victims—these “angels in the dust” as Marion calls them. Their stories would be too painful to listen to, but as I watch your film and listen to their stories, I realize with what horrors they must cope, so how can I turn away because it is too painful for me to bear the anguish they must endure daily.

There is Little Lebo who was brought to the orphanage by her grandfather. She had been gang raped by three men who then carved their initials in her head, threatening all the while to return and fetch her if she ever told anyone. I understand Marion had to work for a year and a half to be able to touch Lebo’s head with a comb—offering therapy to help her to sleep at night without fear of the rapists coming for her.

Then there is tiny Bafana who at three was raped so violently that the attack tore his rectum and caused his “whole anus to come out when he went to the toilet.” The pain was so severe that at 5 years of age he had just started to walk again.

These young children have not only endured the trauma of rape, but physical, violent, perverse abuse, as well. Then, one in four is discovering she or he has been



Lebo from Hogarth’s film.

infected—at birth or through rape—and is HIV positive, as well.

Hogarth: These are deeply wounded children. Marion and her husband and daughters are working miracles. I believe Marion’s approach to healing can provide a model for other communities struggling to reclaim children from violence. I love Marion’s work because she is breaking the cycle of perpetrator, victim, perpetrator—a central theme I am trying to address in my work.

Huber-Warring: Your documentary captures the poignancy of the situation and the Clote family’s response. Can you explain Marion’s model for those who haven’t yet had the benefit of seeing the trailer for the documentary?

Hogarth: Marion reports her original thinking that the angels at Botshabelo were the caretakers, but she came to realize that the small children, face down in the dust and needing to be helped to their feet, were the real angels. Anyone who has been raped feels dirty all over. So part of her counseling approach is to help the child find the one place the rapist didn’t get to—a little toe, an ear—to find the place that isn’t “dirty.” Another part of her approach is sound and feeling modality therapy. The children are asked to go the place that hurts and find a sound that comforts them. In the documentary *Little Lilian* shares her sound and healing movement—she explains it is “Mommy’s sound”—the sound she associates with her deceased Mother that takes her to her “place of safety.”

Many of these children have already



Orphaned elephants shown in Hogarth’s film.



Children playing in the dust with toys at the Botshabelo orphanage.

been orphaned by HIV/AIDS and then are additionally traumatized by rape. To then discover that the rapist or rapists infected them with HIV/AIDS epitomizes the severity of the victim/perpetrator/victim cycle exponentially escalating out of control in South Africa. Consider that in 2005 AIDS had already orphaned 14 million children. The estimate is that by 2010 in South Africa alone, 26 million children will be orphaned by AIDS.

Huber-Warring: HIV/AIDS isn't a new topic for you, Louise. Your other films, *Does Anyone Die of AIDS Anymore?* and *The Gift*, each tackle the issue of AIDS, while your other current project, *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*, explores gays in the military.

Hogarth: I have always believed that we need to look at the truth, and then change the reality, to contribute to the evolution of our society. I started in television, but soon learned that the medium works on the premise that it's "cool to be CRUEL"! TV often shows people in their worst light. I wanted to raise people up!

I plan to follow the day-to-day life of a gay service member deployed to the frontlines of a war zone as part of my upcoming film *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*. This parallel project, currently in pre-production, will mark the first time a filmmaker has documented the first-hand experience of gay personnel deployed abroad and liv-

ing under the military's ban on lesbian, gay and bisexual soldiers.

Huber-Warring: You have two major film projects underway, and you have been working on *Angels* for more than a year. What's stopping you from releasing the film?

Hogarth: I founded Dream Out Loud Films (www.dolfilms.org) as a non-profit,

independent production company based in Los Angeles and South Africa. Dream Out Loud specializes in true stories about people and events focusing on social and human rights issues and is dedicated to the creation of media projects that touch hearts, change attitudes, and foster positive change. There's no money to support such projects, so a lot of energy goes into securing the finances to produce these works.

Huber-Warring: You have had lots of international interest in the film, as well as interest from Hollywood.

Hogarth: Though we don't typically screen works-in-progress, commentaries and commendations have been coming in from viewers of the trailer at a film festival in Wales, and I've also been invited to submit to the annual Media That Matters Film Festival in New York.

A really exciting development has been the support from actress Charlize Theron, who has graciously offered her time and energy, contributing the voice-over narration for *Angels in the Dust*. In her letter of support, she wrote:

I have viewed the promotional DVD for your documentary *Angels in the Dust* and was very moved by the Botshabelo story. I am inspired by the Cloete family who have sacrificed their material wealth and have opened their hearts to hundreds of South African orphans and children in need to provide them with food, clothing, medical care, shelter, schooling and, most importantly, love and healing of their hearts. . . . The work



Looking out from a classroom at Botshabelo.



Digging graves for the ongoing burials; funerals are a weekly social function at Botshabelo.

that this family is doing is crucial, and I commend you for telling their story. HIV/AIDS and the alarmingly increasing cases of rape are wreaking havoc on my country.⁸

Huber-Warring: Outstanding! Charlize Theron is an incredibly talented actress who began her career as a model in her native South Africa before capturing audiences in the United States. She brings an international fan club to this topic.⁹

How can others support the *Angels in the Dust* film documentary project and the Botshabelo orphanage?

Hogarth: Since working on this documentary, I've been made aware of how many people are working to protect the children. An anti-*virgin-rape* campaign in South Africa is critically important. A current petition campaign contains a powerful, shocking story, and the fact citizens are petitioning the government is compelling. The petition was sent to me while we were working on this article and has been making the rounds until they have enough signatures to send to Child Protection Services. In part, the petition reads:

Last week a three-year-old girl (in Athlone) was beaten and raped. She is still alive. The man responsible has been released on bail

yesterday. He is walking the streets. . . . You may have already heard that there's a myth in South Africa¹⁰ that having sex with a virgin will cure AIDS. The younger the virgin, the more potent the cure!!! This has led to an epidemic of rapes by infected males, with the correspondent infection of innocent kids. Many have died in these cruel rapes!!

Recently in Cape Town, a nine-month-old baby was raped by six men. The child abuse situation is now reaching catastrophic proportions and if we don't do something, then who will?¹¹

When I received the petition, hundreds of people had already signed it. I posted the petition on my BLOG.

Another issue that people need to be made aware of is the failure of prevention around the world. I read last week that Zimbabwe received an award for their campaign: *It's not negative to be Positive*. I'm sorry, but it is negative to be HIV positive. The *Love Life Campaign* (huge in South Africa), funded by the Kaiser Foundation, is a splendid example of this failure. The campaign's "Love Life—Get Attitude" billboards appear everywhere in South Africa, but many people admit to having no idea what the message is about.

The Dream Out Loud Films website

(<http://www.dolffilms.org>) provides links to hosting fundraisers to finance the documentary (<http://www.angelsinthedust.org>). I provide host kits that include a 10-minute promo from *Angels in the Dust* and ideas for hosting these events. I see the events as opportunities for people to come together to learn more about the orphans of AIDS, but the bigger picture is people coming together in cross-cultural dialogue to promote global citizenship and action.¹² Marion says it best: "Do you have something better to do with your life than to help children survive what has happened to them on this continent?"

Notes

¹ Apathy is lethal. United Nations Foundation. Retrieved September 28, 2005, from <http://www.apathyislethal.org/index.asp>

² Earl-Taylor, Mike. (2002). HIV/AIDS, the stats, the virgin cure, and infant rape. In *Science in Africa Africa's First on-line Science Magazine*. Retrieved Sep 27, 2005, from <http://www.sciencein africa.co.za/2002/april/virgin.htm>

³ Global Aids Program. Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Disease Control and Prevention CDC. Retrieved January 22, 2005, from http://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/od/gap/countries/south_africa.htm

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Joseph Edelheit. (2007, January 16). *AIDS in India*. PowerPoint presented at Faculty Workshop Days, St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, MN.

⁶ Earl-Taylor, Mike. (2002). HIV/AIDS, the stats, the virgin cure and infant rape. In *Science in Africa, Africa's First on-line Science Magazine*. Retrieved Sep 27, 2005, from <http://www.sciencein africa.co.za/2002/april/virgin.htm>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Charlize Theron, September 16, 2005. Personal communication.

⁹ Recognition for Charlize Theron includes



A grandmother and her granddaughter.



Three children at Botshabelo.

her recent Academy Award nomination for Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role for *North Country* (2005) and her leading role in *Monster* (2003), based on a true story, which epitomized her range as an actress, and earned her a series of awards in 2004: Oscar Award for Best Actress in a Leading Role; Broadcast Film Critics Association Award for Best Actress; Independent Spirit Award for Best Female Lead; The Berlin International Film Festival Silver Berlin Bear for Best Actress for *Monster*; and Golden Satellite Award for Best Performance by an Actress in a Motion Picture, Drama, for *The Cider House Rules*. Awards for Charlize Theron. Retrieved October 8, 2005, and January 22, 2007, from <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000234/awards>

¹⁰ Sex with virgins to cure AIDS. Retrieved October 9, 2005, from <http://www.truthorfiction.com/rumors/a/aids-virgins.htm>

The Johannesburg, South Africa, city council conducted a three-year study of about 28,000 men. They found that one in five believed in the virgin-AIDS cure. The fallout from that is

a rise in assaults of women and children, some of whom contract AIDS themselves. The belief in the virgin-AIDS cure is not restricted to Africa. According to a Knight-Ridder report from Mark McDonald in January of 2000, it is also helping fuel an increase in child prostitution in Cambodia. McDonald says there are many Asian men who believe that having sex with a virgin will cleanse their AIDS. The same is true for India, according to the Fall, 1995 *Harvard AIDS Review*, and Jamaica, according to the Ministry of Health in Jamaica. The belief in curing AIDS by having sex with a virgin is apparently an outgrowth of a long-standing belief in many cultures, including Europe, in the restorative and healing powers of virgins and having sex with virgins.

¹¹ For an example of the story as it has been circulated, see *Women and Children in Portions of Africa Are Being Sexually Violated by Men Who Believe That Sex with a Virgin Will Cure Their AIDS—Truth!* Retrieved January 22, 2007, from <http://www.truthorfiction.com/rumors/a/aids-virgins.htm>

¹² One keen example of the cross-cultural dialogue and efforts being made can be found at St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, MN, where students from the Organization for the Prevention of AIDS in Africa (OPAA) are working with students from other countries to educate about the AIDS pandemic and raise funds for Africa. OPAA members provided more than \$1,000 for the children of the Botshabelo orphanage after viewing Louise Hogarth's documentary trailer for *Angels in the Dust*.

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