

[Please note: unless otherwise stated, the following text is excerpted from the *Through My Eyes* television mini-series press kit. Used with permission. Running for nearly four hours, the series was broadcast in Australia in November 2004, in New Zealand in August 2005, and is now available on DVD. All photos are our own, used with permission.]



Miranda Otto, Lindy, Craig McLachlan

Lindy Chamberlain

played by Miranda Otto

For actress Miranda Otto, most recently familiar to Australian audiences for her portrayal of Eowyn in the “Lord of the Rings” trilogy, playing Lindy Chamberlain was a big challenge: “I’ve always been attracted to strong roles, and Lindy is a really strong person. Even if she hadn’t been to start with, I think everything she went through would have toughened her up. But there is still something about her that’s a mystery, and that’s why she fascinated people then and continues to fascinate them now. People think they know her, but very few people know her at all.”

“In playing Lindy, I didn’t set out to make people like me - there’s too much of that in acting. But I did try to show there’s much more to her than just the media representation of her. The mere facts of her story are extremely moving, and when you look at how they

were contorted and distorted it shows the extent to which the public thought they knew something about her, when they didn’t really.”

Miranda went through the massive amounts of research that had been gathered by the writer/producers, Tony Cavanaugh and Simone North. “I read all the transcripts from the hearings, we pored over interviews and TV footage, and I read Lindy’s book. We must have done something right, because one day Lindy was looking at footage she didn’t know was from the series, and she actually thought it was her and Michael.”

“First and foremost, she was a really good mother, and she was always much more concerned for the people around her than for herself. It was really hard for her to see what her children were going through, and that pain toughened her up. But people never thought about her as a mother. It was always about how she dressed and her reserved quality. I don’t think people ever understood the practical nature of Lindy either. There was a part of her that said “I have to get on with my life and look after my kids”, and the media managed to turn that against her.”

Miranda remembers meeting Lindy for the first time, “I was quite nervous about meeting Lindy at first because I didn’t know what she thought about being portrayed - if I were her, with films and books and television being made about me, I’d be really apprehensive. But she has a great sense of humour, really wicked and she made it really easy. We spent a few mornings together, and I wish we’d had longer.”

Over a long shoot the toughest, emotionally, was in the court. “The most impactful moment was when the jury walked in and just looked at me in the box. It was shocking, hard to believe, but I could understand how they delivered a guilty verdict after hearing the summation from the

prosecution - it was just so persuasive. When she's sent to jail people in the court stand and cheer, while others are yelling that it's wrong. My head was just racing, thinking about the practical side of what that would mean for her with two small children."

"I did a lot of research to adopt some of her physical characteristics. Lindy really sat back from things, arms crossed, her head back slightly defensively. She sees and watches everything. She's intensely aware of what's going on, and there are moments when the energy is just pouring out of her."

"There aren't really any bad guys in this", says Miranda. "Everyone is just almost pathetically human. People said and did certain things with small human motives, and they combined to one outcome."

"When you're working with the best people, it always lifts your game. It was great there were so many fantastic actors prepared to lend their weight to the series. All the roles are important - some of them might be small, but they are incredibly pivotal and significant to the story."

It was her first time working with Tony Cavanaugh and Simone North. "I think you gravitate toward people who are passionate. They put so much themselves into this project - three years of research and effort. It was amazing how much they knew."

And with director, Di Drew, "I actually did an exercise at NIDA with Di. She was an absolute tower of strength during this project. It wasn't an easy shoot. She had to manage more than 130 people, and even though it was hard to get into a rhythm, she made everyone feel immediately part of it."



Michael Chamberlain – played by Craig McLachlan

‘Judge ye not, lest ye be judged’ ... so said Jesus Christ according to Matthew’s gospel. Mark touched on it also. And it’s a pretty sound concept really, even if you’re not of the ‘Christian’ persuasion. Like, ‘Do unto others.....’ it’s a thoroughly decent, fair and balanced concept, uncomplicated and at the very least surely worth consideration. Unfortunately, generally speaking I think it’s reasonable to suggest it’s a notion not many of us subscribe to. Twenty-something years ago, a young mother of three and her (then) husband appeared on our television screens recounting a nightmarish incident concerning the disappearance of their youngest child. A beautiful nine week old baby girl named Azaria. We sat comfortably in our lounge rooms, glued to

the evening news as the young woman, who’d been camping with her family at Ayers Rock (Uluru), described how she’d seen a Dingo come out of the tent where Azaria had been sleeping in her bassinet alongside her older brother. With something in its mouth it vanished into the pitch-black darkness of the desert night.

At this point we sat forward in our Jason recliners, perhaps put our beers down for a second and tried to digest what we’d just heard. The nightly news journalist went on to report that she’d been barbecuing a short distance away with her eldest boy and her husband Michael, a Seventh-day Adventist Minister. Many of us then I suspect returned to our beers, sat back in our comfy chairs and thought, ‘That’s a bit weird’.

And so it began. We all became authorities and experts on everything from canine behaviour to post-natal depression overnight. Pubs, homes, the workplace even schools became courtrooms. We seemingly arrived at our verdict long before Denis Barrit, who presided over the first inquest arrived at his. And of course most of us disagreed with his ruling. Debate, opinions, finger pointing and fist fights. Gestures of support and hate mail. Relentless hounding and sensational fabrications. A young family, torn apart.

I was fifteen when Azaria disappeared and at thirty-eight I’m portraying Michael Chamberlain in the Liberty/Beyond produced mini-series which sets about telling the true story. I have to say it’s been an extraordinary experience on so many levels. Certainly meeting Lindy was a crucial ingredient in preparing for this journey thoroughly as an actor. I know Miranda (Otto) who so brilliantly captures Lindy in our production would agree. But delightfully something else was born out of our coming together. Beyond answers to an actor’s many questions. Friendship. Lindy, Rick and I connected in a very open and comfortable way and if the planets aligned in such a fashion that I was destined to do this job just for that reason, I’m glad of it.

Strong and determined, that’s Lindy. Loving and generous absolutely. Armed with a razor-sharp mind and a knock-out sense of humour she’s definitely wonderful company. But it’s her enormous and enviable capacity to forgive that is so striking.

This is Lindy’s story..... judge ye not indeed.

[from his forward to Lindy’s book *Through My Eyes*]

Ian Barker QC

played by Peter O'Brien

Lindy's Prosecutor in the Trial

A brilliant orator in court, he was a wizard at playing the room, bringing the witnesses to the jury box and, during his opening address, actually taking a dingo skull and snapping it as he spoke. Barker succeeded in convincing the jury that “the dingo story is preposterous, not capable of belief.”

Ian Barker was Solicitor General to the Northern Territory in 1979 when a little-known civil case was brought before the Supreme Court; a young girl had been savaged by her next door neighbour's pet dingo, on the outskirts of Darwin. Hearing the claim of compensation from the girl's mother Judge Forster found that “the dingo is inherently dangerous to man” and went on to find that “its owner or keeper had an absolute responsibility if it did injury.”

Mister Barker is now a highly sought-after QC.

“I'm always very careful not to say he was obsessed or driven”, says Peter. “He genuinely believed Lindy Chamberlain had murdered her child, and so it became for him a trial of intent - as prosecuting QC, he intended to find her guilty. He wasn't evil, he wasn't manipulative, he wasn't vindictive. He was simply determined to find a line of logic that would get a conviction. He was someone who was paid to do a job, and he did it really well.”

“Barker is a confident man. He's thorough. He went back to his hotel room every night and ran through facts, evidence, procedures until he knew them so well that it seemed to the jury that he was having a conversation with them.” “And he could also be quite naughty. He used lots of theatrics in the courtroom, and he did things like deliberately mispronouncing Azaria's name. He used sarcasm to make things the defence were saying sound preposterous: that's also what a lot of the public were thinking, so it worked.” Playing a real person had its challenges for Peter. “I've never met Barker, and I wasn't cast on looks, but there were certain things about his physicality I adopted. There's a looseness about the way he sits and moves, and in the way he conducts himself during the summation, that shows he's very confident in himself. And that confidence had the effect of removing doubt in the jury. You try to put your own personality into it.”

“Barker endeared himself to the jury. They felt like he was talking to them: he didn't use convoluted language, and he certainly used a degree of theatrics, including a memorable incident where he walked around with a dingo skull. He shows it off in such a way that it's like a little puppet, a toy - it's not a killer. He managed to lead the jury without being seen to lead them.” Unlike the character he plays, Peter has a different opinion to Lindy's guilt: “I never thought Lindy Chamberlain murdered Azaria. I was travelling through Alice at that time, and I was amazed by all the rumours and innuendo. There was all this stuff about how Azaria's death was a sacrifice - I mean, you have to ask why? Why would Lindy have sacrificed her child? I was staggered by how people jumped on the bandwagon with these holier-than-thou opinions.”



'Aidan', Di Drew, 'Reagan'

Di Drew - DIRECTOR

“Through My Eyes” is a story of astounding complexity. It has 156 speaking roles and settings ranging from Australia’s red centre to London academia. At its heart is the disappearance of nine-week-old baby Azaria Chamberlain from a campsite at Ayers Rock. But this production reveals what came before Azaria’s disappearance - and the motivations that caused the maelstrom that came after.

For director Di Drew, it’s important the story is finally told. “Now that we have the privilege of hindsight, we can see the scope of the injustice

that’s been done. People were driven by rumour, innuendo and suspicion. It is one of the great mis-carriages of justice ever seen.”

Di met Lindy Chamberlain several times, firstly to establish herself in Lindy’s eyes as a director of integrity and honesty, but ultimately building a friendship founded firmly on trust. “I was delighted by Lindy’s openness. The first thing she said when we met was ‘Good, you’re as short as me’, and we went about seeing who was taller. Lindy is one of the great icons of our time, and I had to bring that character to life. The public perception is that she’s cold and hard and had no emotion. I had to peel back the layers of Lindy to show that there is a soft centre, that at the heart of her, she’s just like you and me. I mean, how would you be if you had to face the horror of your baby being eaten by a dingo?” “We shot one scene with Lindy at the Rock - it was so powerful I’ll never forget it. It was a close-up, and when I spoke about Azaria, the pain in her eyes was just staggering.”

“Through My Eyes” tells multiple stories. It has courtroom drama, inquests, a touching domestic drama, complex forensics, a jail sequence and violent dingo attacks. It traces events at the Rock before Azaria disappeared to the Royal Commission which finally exonerated her. Drew describes it as ‘real story’ telling - a production that demands the rigour of a documentary and the pace and narrative pay-offs of traditional drama.

“There was no room for embroidery at all. It was critical that the cast remembered they didn’t have the benefit of hindsight - they were driven by belief or personal need, for the protection of someone or something. I had to watch them all the time to make sure their agenda was true to what it was at that time.” Similarly demanding were the challenges of working at Uluru. The production is the first drama given permission to shoot there since the handover. She worked closely with elders from the Mutitjulu community, who provided a detailed brief of what could and couldn’t be shot, and were present during filming. At Uluru, Di shot what she describes as “the most profound image” in the production. “There is a baby on a sandhill, surrounded by aboriginal kids, in the red earth, and the baby started to cry. It’s a very powerful image, and has an incredible presence.”

“I visited Lindy at her home, then flew to the Rock. I understood then that this is why we are captivated. It’s the Rock. If the baby had been taken by a dog from a backyard, this never would have happened. “I was talking to Lindy when we couldn’t shoot because it was raining, and said ‘Shame about the weather’. She said it was the same sort of weather on the day they left after Azaria disappeared. As they went the sun came out, and a rainbow appeared. She said when people ask her if she will get a headstone for Azaria’s grave, she says she doesn’t need one. She has that rainbow.”

The Mutitjulu Community

For the first time since hand-over, a film drama was allowed to shoot at Uluru. Wayne Howard, the CEO of the Mutitjulu community that resides at the base of the Rock, and has a spiritual and traditional ownership of Uluru, recounts the process:

It started with a phone call from the Public Communications officer, Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park, saying she had a couple of people over at the office wanting to talk to the community about a film dealing with the Azaria case, asking basically can you deal with it?

The first meeting with Simone was a swapping of information which elaborated on my local knowledge of the case. It was exciting to think the story might get a second chance and confirmed what I knew to be the case, but added to this, Simone's research was able to add further dimensions to the story that I knew well. From 1980 to 85 I lived with my wife Claire at Docker River, so when the event took place we were close to Uluru. At the time the Docker River Social Club owned Ininti Store and the BP garage, which were the only commercial outlets at Ayers Rock that were not resorts. There was a close relationship between Anangu from Docker River and Mutitjulu Community. I became involved in the case through the team that the Seventh-day Adventists had helped Lindy and Michael. I had interviewed Nipper for them to confirm his story and had been asked if I would translate if needed. Added to this contact, Dennis Barritt's son was teaching at Docker River. I had discussions with Des Jnr and Des Snr over the years, so I had contact with people who were closely involved in the event. And I continued to tell people about the injustice of the situation and the ingrained racism that afflicted the case and, in the end, justice.

Then there was the story of Anangu who lived at Uluru, and what they believed after all these years. Norman Tjalkalyiri's house still had the bench and tables from the site (where Azaria was taken) and it was one of the tourist sites that were pointed out to visiting government officials. A bit like a monument to the event, like the Dog on the Tucker box, it marked a modern site of significance that dealt with a mystery... but the staging of the event was the strong point: it was at Australia's spiritual icon, Uluru. Added to this potent mix was the Anangu Tjukurpa mythical Story of Kupangu, the Devil Dingo.

Old Nipper was successfully portrayed as a blind old drunk; he was not vindicated, none of the trackers were. A lot of work was done between the community and Simone, initially explaining the facts of the tracking that was done by Snowy (Nui) and other Anangu that night and the following morning by Barbara, Nipper and other Anangu on site. Interested members of the community came out to a second meeting. Tony & Simone had photos taken at the time and other memorabilia to do with the case at Uluru. Descendants of Nui and Nipper's wife, Barbara, wanted to see the story of the tracking that they and their family members had assisted with, come through in the story. Barbara in particular wanted Nipper's work to be vindicated. There was a reticence by some individuals saying: leave it, that it is finished now. But when questioned, in the back of their minds was mistrust for the European law and white fellas, the possibility that it might come up again and they may get into trouble.

Other more interesting phenomena were told. The story of the Ngankari (witchdoctor healer, Tjunku) who sees the spirit of a young white kid playing at the end of the day and crying as the other kids went home to their parents was relayed to the group by Todd Jingo in the second meeting with interested community members. This sent shivers down the spines of the people present. Death and the spiritual side of the smoking was talked about. A recent death of a young petrol sniffer (Norman Tjalkalyiri's grandson) within the same vicinity of the tent site where Azaria was taken all seemed to be woven into the story, the mystery of the disappearance and tragedy that followed, still being perpetuated within the same vicinity 20 years later. It was powerful stuff.

In this collaborative production I hope the real story of our racist dismissal of the Anangu evidence will be re-enacted to liberate the truth.