



HERE I AM



THE HARDEST PERSON
TO FORGIVE
IS YOURSELF

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Karen is a beautiful woman with a dark past, but she's got potential and she knows it. Upon her release from prison she realises the hardest person to forgive is herself.

SYNOPSIS

Karen is a beautiful young woman with a dark past, but she's got potential and she knows it. Fresh out of prison, she finds herself on the streets with a burning desire to turn her life around but no one to call for help. Eventually she finds a haven at a shelter for women like herself. With the support of her new community of friends, Karen begins the journey of reconnecting with her estranged mother and her young daughter, and she is soon propelled to face the most difficult truths of her life. But she's determined to never give up. Set and shot in and around Port Adelaide, *Here I Am* is a moving and hopeful story about the strength and resilience of women.



BECK COLE
WRITER & DIRECTOR
HOPE AND
FORGIVENESS



**"A DEEPLY
FELT FIRST
FEATURE
FROM BOTH
ACTOR AND
DIRECTOR."**

SCREEN INTERNATIONAL

FOR THE PAST five years a character named Karen has lived in my head – she is in her mid-twenties, is a daughter and a mother and has just been released from prison. Yet the film is not about prison and I've never wanted it to be. It is a film about a young woman who has made mistakes and is in a very fragile place – on the outside, unwanted, alone and trying in her own way to make the right choices.

HERE I AM has been a long journey for me but the reason for wanting to tell this story has always been the same – I strongly wanted to make a film about a family of women on the brink of no return. A family that had suffered loss, grief, anger and resentment but was glued together by love – and in this story love is a child.

I STARTED WRITING the script soon after I'd had my first daughter. So I was drawn to making a film about mothers and their children. And I also thought that I wanted to deal with some of the difficulties that women have and experience throughout life – particularly women that live an underprivileged sort of life. And I wanted to create a story with a character that showed the difficult side of life but also a journey toward hope and the possibilities of a brighter future.

THERE ARE ALSO many reasons why I needed to tell this story: politically I am concerned about the disproportionate number of Aboriginal people incarcerated in our country; personally I continue to consider my own life as an Aboriginal woman and my role as a mother; and creatively I am driven to create interesting roles and characters for Aboriginal women to play in a story that speaks beyond the realms of race and hopefully resonates with us all as people capable and worthy of love and forgiveness.

KATH SHELPER PRODUCER HUMOUR, FRIENDSHIP AND THE THIRD WHEEL



BECK AND I have been working together on this film during the past five years – intensively in production for the last year and intermittently developing the script prior to that. Whilst the various permutations of the story have changed over the years, there has always been the central character of Karen as the strong protagonist. Beck’s previous two short dramas (*Flat* and *Plains Empty*) have also featured strong female characters in isolation. Without dipping into amateur psychology, it’s not hard to see her fascination with the place of women in the world and I’m sure this is a theme she will continue to pursue.

WE SHARE A great friendship as well as a working relationship, both of which have developed over the past seven or so years we have been a team – along with our third wheel Warwick Thornton (cinematographer, husband, collaborator, drinking partner). Together we have a terrible sense of humour, which often gets us into trouble. Laughing has got us through many trying times and I hope that audiences can appreciate the humour and joy in the film.

TO MY KNOWLEDGE, this is the first feature film that has concentrated on urban Aboriginal women in a contemporary setting. Most films that have come before have been about blokes, set in the past or set in the regions. *Here I Am* is a rare insight into a world of women most people know little about, but which has a universality about it by the fact that they are all just getting on with their lives in the best way that they know how, hoping for a better future. And in some cases getting it.

LOCATION SAILORS AND INMATES



THE FILM WAS written specifically for a Port Adelaide setting. It was shot entirely on location in Port Adelaide and the surrounding areas for six weeks during May/June 2010. Beck grew up spending half her time between Adelaide and Alice Springs and has many family members, including her mother, who reside in Adelaide, so she knows it well. Filming in Adelaide was a pleasure and meant we were able to work with most of our usual favourite crew, who reside in Adelaide and have in the past come up to Coober Pedy or Alice Springs or wherever we are filming for Beck or Warwick's projects. This time they were able to stay at home and we came to them.

TEMPLE HOUSE

THE MAIN LOCATION of the women's shelter was an old vacant building we discovered by walking around the streets of Port Adelaide. We took over the premises for the entire duration of pre-production and the shoot and used the old house as our production office as well as the location. This worked well most of the time, but some shoot days it got a bit much when we had a full house of eight women actors, a crew of approximately 24, stray kids of cast/crew whose childcare had fallen through (some in tears), a few attachments, curious family members and sometimes Marcia Langton's large, energetic dog.

WE'RE NOT ENTIRELY sure of the history of the 1868 building, but passers-by told us it was anything from the rectory for the nearby church or a house for sailors. This century it has been a drop-in women's health centre and offices for a financial institution. It had been vacant for several years before we dusted away the cobwebs, but it was in such good condition that our scenic artist worked overtime to grubby it up for the screen. It has since been sold to a group of filmmakers who are making it a home as well as studios and offices.

THE PRISON

WE SHOT THE opening scenes of the film inside the Adelaide Women's Prison on our first shoot day, which was a great reality check for the cast and crew. We are very grateful to the Prison for allowing us to film there. The inmates also painted the mural that appears on the wall in the counselling session scene at Temple House. Based on a design by production designer Sam Wilde, on completion of filming it was donated to the Prison.

CASTING FRESH FACES

BECK I wanted to cast women who I believed had qualities that the characters actually had or owned. So I was generally looking for women who hadn't acted before because I wanted there to be a real edge and rawness to the performances. I wanted fresh faces. I wanted to give women the opportunity to act. I had a number of people in mind that I auditioned. We spent a lot of time in Port Adelaide and through the Aboriginal community there we put out a big call and had hundreds of women come and meet us. Everyone was really keen and very supportive. And so from there we just began to compile a shortlist to get people back to re-test. We cast a number of people out of the Port Adelaide community and then of course Shai Pittman (Karen) is from Sydney and other actors from all around Australia.

SHAI PITTMAN KAREN

SHAI STARTED HER acting career at the age of seven as a featured extra on a run-away bus in an episode of *Police Rescue*. She's still got an on-set photo of her with Gary Sweet. More recently she is the proud mother of her son – two year-old Braith. In between she has featured as Cathy Freeman's body double in an Earth Hour commercial, posed as an athlete on the billboards and postage stamps celebrating the Athens Olympics and played a supporting role in an episode of *All Saints*. Her most significant work is playing opposite Chris Haywood in an AFTRS short film, the celebrated two-hander *Fuse* in 2005. Shai, a Blacktown girl, is a water baby and loves diving for abalone with her Yuin family and friends on the South Coast of NSW. *Here I Am* is her first feature film.

PROF MARCIA LANGTON, AM LOIS

MARCIA HAS PREVIOUSLY acted for the screen in Tracey Moffatt's short film *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy*, which screened In Competition at the Cannes Film Festival in 1990. We convinced her to come out of her acting retirement by promising to babysit her (rather large) Chow-Chow dog Finn while she was on set. In her day job, Marcia is an anthropologist and geographer. Since February 2000, she has been the Foundation Chair of Australian Indigenous Studies at the University of Melbourne. Marcia has made a significant contribution to Indigenous studies at three universities and to government and non-government policy and administration throughout her career. Her work in anthropology and the advocacy of Aboriginal rights was recognised in 1993 when she was made a member of the Order of Australia. She became a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia in 2001 and was awarded the inaugural Neville Bonner Award for Indigenous Teacher of the Year in 2002.



QUINAIHA SCOTT ROSIE

QUINAIHA MAKES HER acting debut in *Here I Am* after her mother Lena taught her ‘gammin’ acting by watching TV and encouraging her to copy the actors. Lena also taught her to listen and do what she’s told – perfect mothering for an aspiring actor! Quinaiha was four when we shot the film and this year she has just started school.

BRUCE CARTER JEFF

BRUCE IS FROM Murray Bridge near Adelaide. Apart from being a great actor he is also a talented singer, musician and footballer. Bruce has acted before in supporting roles in several films including *The Life of Harry Dare* by Aleksis Vellis.

THE WOMEN OF TEMPLE HOUSE

THE WOMEN OF Temple House range from an award-winning actress to a psychologist who has never acted before.

PAULINE WHYMAN SKINNY

PAULINE IS A two-time Victorian Indigenous Performing Arts Award winning actor. Career highlights include *Stolen* (Ilbjerri/Malthouse Theatre), *Windmill Baby* (Yirra Yaarkin), *Fever & Up The Ladder* (Melbourne Workers Theatre), *The Birthday Party* (Melbourne Theatre Company), *The Cherry Pickers*, *Stolen & Blacked Up* (Sydney Theatre Company). She lives in Melbourne and wrote and directed an SBS-TV short film (which Kath produced) based on an event from her childhood called *Back Seat*.

TANITH GLYNN- MALONEY JODY

NEPOTISM GETS YOU to the audition, but then you’re on your own. Tanith is Beck’s niece and, we suspect, has always harboured a secret desire to act. Lucky she’s good at it. She lives in Alice Springs, has two children and has worked in different jobs including as a runner on several film-sets and as a librarian at Alice Springs library.

VANESSA WORRALL BIG RED

VANESSA IS A psychologist in central Sydney, mainly working with Aboriginal youth in Glebe and Redfern. We met her through a mutual friend and Beck spent many hours picking her brains as a sounding board for the script. Then before you knew it, the character of Big Red became Vanessa and Vanessa became Big Red. Prior to being in the film, she hated having her photo taken.

BETTY SUMNER ANITA

BETTY IS A prominent actress, singer, and songwriter and has appeared in many films and theatre productions around Australia. Betty is a walking history book of Aboriginal culture and society, a compelling storyteller and an expert in the Ngarrindjeri weaving technique, which you can see her performing in the film. Betty lives in Adelaide next door to Beck’s Aunty Helen.

YANJA THOMPSON VANESSA

BECK FIRST SPIED Yanja on the street when we were hanging around outside the Tandanya Centre in Adelaide waiting to go in to see a show. Originally from Ramangining in Arnhem Land, Yanja was in Adelaide attending university and looking after her young daughter. She now lives in Wagga Wagga with her partner and has a newborn baby – a second little girl.

MISTY SPARROW GENNA

IN ADDITION TO having the best name of all the cast and crew, Misty is also the best dancer. *Here I Am* is her second feature film, after having appeared in Kriv Stenders’ *Boxing Day* in 2007. She is currently finishing year 12 and would like to pursue a career in acting. She lives in Adelaide.

RHIANNON SPARROW GECKO

RHIANNON IS ADELAIDE born and bred and older sister to Misty. We came across her when we were trying to track down Misty and asked if she would like to audition. Despite very little acting experience she decided to give it a go – and we loved her. She is in her mid-twenties and has a young son.

CAROL COLLINS COOKIE

ANOTHER CASE OF nepotism and art imitating life – Carol is Beck’s aunty. We went to a women’s hostel on the outskirts of Adelaide to audition some potential actors and to get some reference photos for the design department of a real life hostel. And there was Beck’s aunty – working at the hostel and practicing her method acting complete with apron.

BECK COLE WRITER/ DIRECTOR

BECK COLE IS A writer and director and she lives in Alice Springs. *Here I Am* is her first feature film. Beck shares a love for both drama and documentary and is currently working on a new script and trying her hand as a novelist. Documentaries written and directed by Beck include *Making Samson & Delilah*, the cheeky little sister of the feature film, award-winning *Wirriya: small boy*, *The Lore of Love* and the acclaimed SBS history series *First Australians: The untold story of Australia*.

HER DRAMA PLAINS EMPTY, set in the remote South Australian township of Coober Pedy, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2005, the previous year her first short film *Flat* also screened at Sundance and the Edinburgh Film Festivals.

BECK WAS FEATURED as one of seven filmmakers (including Jackie Chan and Apichatpong Weerasethakul) in the 5th Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art at the Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA), Queensland.

LITTLE KNOWN FACT about Beck: She was a teenage weather girl on the Central Australian television station – Imparja.

MAKING SAMSON & DELILAH (2009)

Directed and shot by Beck Cole
Produced by Kath Shelper and Beck Cole

One hour documentary about the making of the feature film *Samson & Delilah*.

"Beck Cole's *Making Samson & Delilah* is a rare gem; a gorgeous documentary. But it's also a short feature film in its own right, often touching and very funny. Cole captures the random and fleeting intimacies of moviemaking reality in this country in a way few other filmmakers have done." Graeme Blundell *The Australian Telluride Film Festival 2009* | Melbourne International Film Festival | New Zealand Film Festival

PLAINS EMPTY (2005)

Written and directed by Beck Cole
Produced by Kath Shelper

A half-hour short drama set in Coober Pedy about a woman with an unwanted visitor.

"I loved the atmosphere of this film... Cole's film tells its story with great confidence and understatement. It leaves us to see things, and work them out rather than telling us what to see. This is very accomplished filmmaking..." Julie Rigg Radio National Sundance Film Festival 2005 | Hawaii International Film Festival | Uppsala International Short Film Festival, Sweden
WIRRIYA: SMALL BOY (2004)

Shot and directed by Beck Cole
Produced by Beck Cole, Citty Williams

A half-hour documentary about seven year old Ricco and his life in Hidden Valley and Alice Springs.

Best Australian Film, WOW Film Festival, Sydney 2004 | Nominated, Best Documentary, IF Awards

FLAT (2002)

Written and directed by Beck Cole
Produced by Rachel Perkins & Darren Dale

A lyrical ten-minute short film set over a day in Alice Springs through the eyes of a teenage girl with a video camera.

Sundance Film Festival 2004 | Edinburgh Film Festival 2003

KATH SHELPER PRODUCER

KATH SHELPER IS the producer of many award-winning films, most noticeably *Samson & Delilah* which won the prestigious Camera d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 2009. The film is hailed as one of the country's finest and took out many other awards including the IF and AFI Awards for Best Feature Film.

KATH PRODUCED THE documentary *Making Samson & Delilah*, which premiered at Melbourne Film Festival and screened at Telluride Film Festival alongside the feature film. She also collaborated with director Beck Cole on the half-hour short *Plains Empty*, which premiered at Sundance in 2005. The same year she received recognition for her work when she took home the IF award for Rising Talent.

KATH HAS MADE many short films including *Green Bush* (dir: Warwick Thornton, Best Panorama Short Film, Berlin Film Fest), *Confessions Of A Headhunter* (dir: Sally Riley, Best Short, Australian Film Institute Awards), *Above The Dust Level* (dir: Carla Drago, Best Comedy, Melbourne Film Festival), and *House Taken Over* (dir: Liz Hughes, nominated, Australian Film Institute Awards).

SHE ALSO PRODUCED the TV series *Bit Of Black Business*, which included short films *Nana* (dir: Warwick Thornton, Crystal Bear, Berlin Film Fest) and *Hush* (dir: Dena Curtis, Audience Prize, Creteil Women's Film Fest).

KATH LIVES IN Sydney where she runs her own production company Scarlet Pictures and has a number of projects in development. She wore baby's breath in her hair to her high school debutante ball in the eighties and Beck has a photograph to prove it.



TECHNICAL INFO

RUNNING TIME 91 MINUTES LENGTH 2671
METRES / 8150 FEET RATIO 1:1.85 35MM
COLOUR SOUND DOLBY DIGITAL LANGUAGE
ENGLISH FILMED ON LOCATION IN ADELAIDE,
SOUTH AUSTRALIA

HERE I AM

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KEY CAST & CREW

KAREN SHAI PITTMAN LOIS MARCIA LANGTON
ROSIE QUINAIHA SCOTT JEFF BRUCE CARTER
SKINNY PAULINE WHYMAN BIG RED VANESSA
WORRALL JODY TANITH GLYNN-MALONEY
WRITER/DIRECTOR BECK COLE PRODUCER
KATH SHELPER ASSOCIATE PRODUCER
FIONA PAKES DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY
WARWICK THORNTON EDITOR ROLAND GALLOIS
PRODUCTION DESIGN SAM WILDE COSTUMER
HEATHER WALLACE MAKE-UP CAROL CAMERON
SOUND RECORDIST DAVID TRANTER SOUND
DESIGN LIAM EGAN ORIGINAL MUSIC CLIFF
BRADLEY

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