

A TRUE STORY OF LOVE, LOSS AND RECONNECTION



the last daughter

Healing is hidden in the past

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Logline

After being raised by a white family, a young girl is taken away and returned to the Aboriginal family she didn't know. Decades later, she's on a journey to discover where she truly belongs.

Synopsis

Brenda's first memories were of growing up in a loving white foster family, before she was suddenly taken away and returned to her Aboriginal family.

Decades later, she feels disconnected from both halves of her life. But the traumas of her past do not lie quietly buried. So, she goes searching for the foster family with whom she had lost all contact.

Along the way she uncovers long-buried secrets, government lies, and the possibility for deeper connections to family and culture. The Last Daughter is a powerful and inspiring documentary about Brenda's journey to unearth the truth in her past, and reconcile the two sides of her family.

Hurt people, hurt people.
Healed people, heal people
- Brenda Matthews





Long Synopsis

At Campbelltown train station in 1973, a young Aboriginal girl was handed over to her hopeful new white foster parents, Mac and Connie. There was no paperwork. There were no questions. Brenda settled into her new family, her new life. She became inseparable from her white foster sister, and for five years, she grew up happy. Until, one day, her parents were forced to give her back – to the family she was originally taken from.

Now, as an adult, Brenda has fragmented memories of a little white sister, but she can't put the pieces together. She feels torn between two worlds: "I felt like I was acting white. I didn't know what it meant to be Aboriginal."

When Brenda started going to cultural camps on the Gold Coast (designed to help people experience a deeper connection with the land and with Aboriginal culture) she met and eventually married Mark (a white man).

For the first time, she speaks about her experience as a child of the Stolen Generation. From that moment, everything changes. Brenda has always had unspoken questions about her past, but now she starts looking for answers.

A politician on camp tells her about their new Stolen Generation compensation scheme... but is stunned to hear that Brenda was removed years after the Child Welfare Board was disbanded in 1969. If she's not classified as Stolen Generation, then who is she?

So, in order to put her identity back together, she embarks on a journey to track down her white foster family, whom she hasn't seen for 40 years. In doing so, she uncovers long-buried secrets, government lies, and opens old wounds. Particularly for her biological mother, Nana Brenda. Decades on, she (Nana Brenda) still feels the pain of the day her seven children were taken away from her, and the lies told to justify it.

The Last Daughter follows Brenda on her journey to uncover the truth about her past, and to reconcile the two halves of her family. We discover the intersecting worlds of Aboriginal and White Australia through the eyes of someone trying to heal from their past, by uncovering their story.

The Making

The Last Daughter was shot all over Australia, primarily in Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia. Brenda lives with her husband Mark, near the Gold Coast, in Bundjalung Country. They are closely connected with the Aboriginal community in Fingal Head, New South Wales.

In 2017, long-time friends Kyle Slabb and Mark Matthews brought Brenda's story to the attention of Australians Together (AT) a not-profit-organisation. AT were on the lookout for stories that would help people recognise where we've come from, where we are today and where we go from here.

On hearing Brenda's story, Nathaniel Schmidt (who was working for Australians Together at the time) began filming with Brenda, and documenting her journey. Having worked with Gravity Films on ICE BALL (2019), a short documentary, Nathaniel introduced Brenda to Simon Williams and Brendon Skinner, and they began consulting on film production.

A few years into documenting Brenda's journey, Nathaniel saw Brenda's extraordinary ability to see a bigger story, and asked Brenda to direct with him. Around the same time, Brenda requested that Brendon and Simon be the producers of the film.

Australians Together partnered with Gravity Films and became a principal funder and impact partner for the project.

Gravity Films then went on to gain additional finance and support from Screen Australia, Adelaide Film Festival, South Australian Film Corporation and Bonsai Films.

In early 2022, principal photography began. A small crew travelled the eastern coast of Australia, filming the hero interviews that underpin the film with Brenda, Mark, Brenda's White foster parents (Mac and Connie), and Brenda's Aboriginal mother (Nana Brenda).

Then, following a period of interview editing, a cast and crew was assembled in July 2022 to shoot the reconstructed scenes from Brenda's past.

Brenda and Nathaniel worked through post production with editor David Scarborough, and composer James Henry (along with a host of other post production crew) to bring the story together.

The Last Daughter premiered to sold-out audiences at the Adelaide Film Festival on 29th October 2022, and subsequently won the Audience Award.

Each person and partner joining the circle has embraced the Banaam framework (more info below) as the Aboriginal Cultural Framework to work within, allowing for healthy cross-cultural collaboration.

Along the way, Brenda has been assisted in bringing her story to life in film by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal practitioners; a reflection of Brenda's own story.

"We can't
change the
Nation or the
world without
first changing
ourselves."

- Brenda Matthews

Adelaide
Film
Festival
Winner 2022
Audience
Documentary

[VIEW PHOTOS
FROM THE ADELAIDE
FILM FESTIVAL PREMIERE
SCREENING](#)

[VIEW BEHIND THE
SCENES PHOTOS FROM
THE PRODUCTION](#)

The Banaam Framework



The Last Daughter is brought to screen through collaboration between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cast and crew.

At the heart of our collaboration is the Aboriginal cultural framework: the Banaam Framework.

All members of the team have been educated in and agree to operate within the framework. It's a relational-based role and function framework, not a hierarchical one. The knowledge of this framework is held by Kyle Slabb (Executive Producer/Cultural Advisor).

A basic understanding of this framework recognises two key roles in any task.

Gogaun' (literal meaning is 'older brother')

the person designated as the knowledge holder for that task.

Banaam' (literal meaning is 'strong brother')

the person(s) who support a Gogaun to be able to achieve the task. This is also the default position when there may be doubt over who takes a Gogaun role in a situation

The framework also recognises that the person who brings someone into the project is ultimately responsible for them.

Brenda is Gogaun for her story (author and owner of her story) and our team has a responsibility to be Banaam to her, doing everything in our strength to support her in telling it.

Directors' Statement

Brenda Matthews and Nathaniel Schmidt

The Last Daughter is the healing journey of an Aboriginal woman navigating her way through two worlds, two families and two cultures. It's a story about going back and searching for answers on both sides to discover how she can truly find healing and belonging. It is through sharing this story that we endeavour to bring about a change through walking in the footsteps of those who have paved the way for us.

Brenda

"Since the beginning of time, our Ancestors would share story and pass them down through the generations. In our Culture, it was passed down orally, so it's humbling to continue that responsibility through the lens of a film."

We first began this filmmaking journey in 2017, when we were connected through Gudjingburra/Bundjalung descendant Kyle Slabb and non-profit organisation, Australians Together.

Brenda

"Nathaniel started following me around with a camera, and over the course of time our relationship grew. He was the same age as my daughter, so I adopted him as a son, no paperwork needed..."

Nathaniel

"Brenda was carrying a deeply personal story. Everything was crossed over and mixed up. After many cups of tea, she invited me into her life to help share it."

As two storytellers from different worlds, we wanted to co-direct this film together - side by side. At the heart of our co-directorship is the Aboriginal cultural framework: the Banaam Framework.

Brenda

"When we acknowledged each other's value and what our roles were in our relationship, we were able to walk together in respect and contribution for each other."

Nathaniel

"Brenda had the knowledge for her story, I had knowledge for filmmaking. We were responsible for one another and supported each other. It was a truly reciprocal relationship."



We embarked on a 5 year journey to capture two stories, one into the past, in search of answers and one towards the future, for reconciliation. Our journey was largely informed by years of raw and intimate observational filming of the relationships across the two families.

Brenda

"There were pieces missing, like a puzzle and if I didn't go back and find answers on both sides of my families, Black and White, I still wouldn't know who I am. I still wouldn't know where I belong."

Nathaniel

"We were filming intimate conversations that Brenda and her family had never had before... you're inside this deeply personal circle as these families try to make sense of what happened to them 40 years ago."

We had pieces of a compelling story that needed to be brought together and unravelled through each of the main characters' lived experiences. We identified significant past memories we wanted to bring into the film through cinematic reconstructions. The film is driven by captivating interviews with our main characters looking straight into the lens.

Brenda

"Knowing the truth, I wanted to clear my parents and siblings names. They never neglected us. I learnt along the way that it was a double sided injustice for everyone."

Nathaniel

"There were so many layers of complexity wrapped up together in a human story that raised questions about the system. We really wanted to emphasise the collective love and loss felt by everyone on all sides."

At the centre of the film is Brenda's personal lived experience, taking the form of an inner abstract house of concealed objects and memory, that connects the past and present storyline. We wanted to convey Brenda's inner journey through the eyes of a little girl, stuck in her hurt identity, trying to navigate her way through the hallways and doorways of a house.

Brenda

"As far as I can remember, I've always had dreams of houses and doorways... inside this house was a hurt little girl that needed to go back and search for answers on both sides to find out her true identity."

Nathaniel

"Brenda always communicated her story in the context of a house... it became a powerful mode of storytelling for us to convey the complexity of living between two worlds"

The Last Daughter is a deeply layered personal story that opens a door to Australia's history that we have struggled to confront. It takes us on a journey of hope, self-interrogation and reflection. A journey into the past to find truth and freedom for the future.

Brenda

"We all hurt, we can all be healed, if we choose to go on a journey to find healing."

We made this film together hoping to bring about a change. Not a change in plans but a change in heart. Through individual healing it gives the opportunity for collective healing. An understanding that we are all part of a bigger story which was here before any of us and will be here after us.

Brenda and Nathaniel were mentored as directors by Professor Larissa Behrendt (After the Apology - 2017) throughout the filmmaking process. They also participated in the 2022 DOC NYC x VIDEO CONSORTIUM Storytelling Incubator program.

Producer Statement

Kyle Slabb - Goguan for Banaam Framework
(Executive Producer/Cultural Advisor)

Brenda's story is a big story.

What she's been through, who she is and where she is in her life, is a microcosm of what's been happening in Australia for a long time.

You've got one Black daughter and you've got one White daughter.

The one from the Aboriginal community got taken away from that and put into a White world, but then found a place. Then being taken away from that White family and put back, is like saying "now it's alright to be Aboriginal" but, she never learned what it is to be an Aboriginal person because she was taken out of that. A lot of Aboriginal People struggle with this everyday.

A lot of the issues come from separation from country and separation from land and culture. Aboriginal communities know that story. It's a lived reality.

But listening to Brenda's story, it's not about Black and White anymore.

It's not the traditional story of outside pressure; White policy against Aboriginal community and land and culture. It's all crossed over. It's all mixed up.

All of a sudden, it's about belonging and connection, and 'how do we heal from those things'? It's about the duality of who we are, and how we live together.

There's not many people that can find a balance between the two worlds.

This process of uncovering her story has helped Brenda feel like 'I belong here'.

Then connecting with her White parents, and them being there with open arms and filling in gaps for her, she got taken away from them, but she still feels like she belongs there.

As Brenda uncovers who she is, what has been healing along the way?

She says "it's all of it". I think we can learn from that.

That's why I think Brenda's story is such a powerful story for us as a nation.

We don't want everything to be an argument or a conflict between Black and White.

What happens when we are together?

Let's consider your relationship to Country, together.

Let's reconsider things together.

Let's come to terms with the duality of Australia's identity.

I think Brenda embodies that, and her story embodies that.

Lead Cast



BRENDA



MARK



NANA BRENDA



CONNIE



MAC



Biographies

BRENDA MATTHEWS
GOGUAN FOR DIRECTING (DIRECTOR)



Brenda Matthews is a proud Wiradjuri woman living with her husband Mark, in Bundjalung Country, Queensland.

Since 2012 they've been hosting cultural camps together, taking teenagers on Country.

Brenda is a mother, a grandmother, a poet, a writer, a speaker and an emerging film director, making her feature film debut with *THE LAST DAUGHTER*, a documentary about Brenda's life.

As part of her journey, Brenda penned her first book, also titled 'The Last Daughter', which she's currently editing with Text Publishing. Having trained with Karen Thomas, a renowned speaking coach, Brenda shares her story through public speaking, booking engagements across the education and corporate sectors.

NATHANIEL SCHMIDT
GOGUAN FOR DIRECTING (DIRECTOR)

Nathaniel is an Australian/American director based in Adelaide, South Australia.

He spent six years in Minneapolis, Minnesota filming a series of stories about midwestern life in a six month winter climate. From there, he directed the award-winning short documentary *ICE BALL* (2021) with renowned Polar Explorer, Will Steger, which won Best Documentary Short at Minneapolis St Paul International Film Festival 2021, before premiering on Short of the Week, and being selected as a Vimeo Staff Pick.

Since returning to Australia in 2017, Nathaniel has been co-directing his first feature documentary, *THE LAST DAUGHTER*, with Wiradjuri storyteller, Brenda Matthews.



KYLE SLABB
*GOGUAN FOR BANAAM FRAMEWORK
(EXECUTIVE PRODUCER/CULTURAL ADVISOR)*



Kyle Slabb is a Gudjingburra Bundjalung descendant from the far north Coast of NSW. He has been involved in cultural consultancy and education for more than 20 years.

Working on developing young Indigenous leaders for the last 10 years has taken him and his team all over the country, from urban Aboriginal communities to some of the most remote.

Kyle believes that every Aboriginal person has a right to a cultural education, and the value of that education is a huge asset to their communities, also their employees, and our society at large. This belief has been at the heart of developing many initiatives and businesses over the years.



SIMON WILLIAMS

GOGUAN FOR FILM PRODUCING (PRODUCER)

Recipient of the 2020 SASA Independent Art Foundation Emerging Producer Award, Simon's recent credits include winner of Best Documentary Short at the Portland Film Festival and Vimeo Staff Pick ICE BALL (2020), XP (2019) a pilot episode for a series helping teens explore life and faith and co-producing and co-directing the ABC iview web series GOOBER (2016) which won Best Australian Comedy at Melbourne Webfest 2017.

He recently completed short narratives FINDING SERGEANT dir. Luke Wissell and BALACLAVA dir. Tom Phillips, and is currently working on feature documentary, THE LAST DAUGHTER (2023).

BRENDON SKINNER

GOGUAN FOR FILM PRODUCING (PRODUCER)

In 2020, Brendon was awarded the Independent Art Foundation Emerging Producer Award, at the South Australian Screen Awards.

Recent credits include co-producing the ABC iview webseries GOOBER (2016), winner of Best Australian Comedy at Melbourne Webfest 2017, and the winner of Portland Film Festival's Best Documentary Short, ICE BALL (2020).

His focus is on creative/story producing, having recently completed short narrative, FINDING SERGEANT (2022 Adelaide Film Festival, Official Selection) and feature documentary, THE LAST DAUGHTER (2023).



MICHAEL TEAR

GOGUAN FOR PRODUCING OVERSIGHT (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER)

Michael is a co-founder and CEO of WildBear. As Producer and Executive Producer, Michael's career spans award-winning feature films, television documentaries and series, government and commercial productions.

Michael is a Producer and Executive Producer with over 250 hours of film and television credits. His recent productions include commissions for Netflix, ABC, History Channel, Nine Network, Discovery, Arte, ZDF and National Geographic. Michael was also an Executive Producer on the feature film The Babadook

TARYN BRUMFITT
GOGUAN FOR IMPACT (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER)



Taryn Brumfitt is the fiercely passionate thought leader behind the Body Image Movement, the Director of the inspiring documentary *Embrace* (Netflix 2016) and *Embrace Kids* (2022) and a three-times bestselling author. Taryn was named the 2023 South Australian of the Year.

Taryn's fire in the belly has seen her bump *Baby Shark* off the iTunes number 1 song, direct a film that has been viewed by millions across the globe and her work has been recognised by United Nations Women, Amy Poehler's *Smart Girls*, the Geena David Institute and Ashton Kutcher who famously praised her activism as "good for the world".

Voted as General Electric's highest rated speaker, Taryn is a sought-after Impact Producer for creative organisations and individuals, she is known for her ridiculous amounts of energy and making the impossible - possible.

MARK MATTHEWS
BANAAM TO BRENDA MATTHEWS

Mark Matthews is Founder of the charity Joy For All Minds and Co-Founder of Balunjali, working in the Aboriginal Community for over 20 years. Providing water and land-based activities for every sector of the community. 2005 - Winning the Prime minister Encouragement Award, for Small Business. 2009 – Winning Travelling Australia top 20 experiences in the Country.

Mark has a passion for life, story and a heart for people. As Brenda's husband, Mark is excited to support her in sharing her story and helping it get to wherever we need to take it.



LARISSA BEHRENDT
GOGUAN FOR DIRECTING OVERSIGHT (DIRECTOR MENTOR)



Larissa is an award-winning filmmaker and author of fiction and non-fiction with a passion for telling the stories of Indigenous Australia. She won the AACTA for Best Direction in Non-Fiction Television in 2021 for *MARALINGA TJARUTJA* and the ADG Award for Best Direction in a Feature Documentary for *AFTER THE APOLOGY* in 2018.

She has a legal background, is an experienced researcher and is involved with several arts organisations and educational programs. She is currently Distinguished Professor at the University of Technology, Sydney and the host of *Speaking Out* on ABC Radio.

Gogaun for Directing

(Directors)

BRENDA MATTHEWS

NATHANIEL SCHMIDT

Gogaun for Film Producing

(Producers)

SIMON WILLIAMS

BRENDON SKINNER

Gogaun for Banaam Framework

(Executive Producer / Cultural Advisor)

KYLE SLABB

Gogaun for Producing Oversight

(Executive Producer)

MICHAEL TEAR

Gogaun for Impact Oversight

(Executive Producer)

TARYN BRUMFITT

Banaam to Brenda Matthews

MARK MATTHEWS

Gogaun for Directing Oversight

(Director Mentor)

LARISSA BEHRENDT

Gogaun for Cinematography

(Cinematographers)

MILES ROWLAND

NATHANIEL SCHMIDT

Gogaun for Editing

(Editor)

DAVID SCARBOROUGH

Gogaun for Music

(Composer)

JAMES HENRY

Tech Specs

Runtime: 87 mins

Colour: Colour

Aspect Ratio: 2.39.1

Shooting Format: 4K

Cameras: Sony FS7, Sony FX6, Arri Alexa mini LF

Sound: Stereo & 5.1

Exhibition Format + Frame Rate: DCP (25)

Language: English

Production Company

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