

"If we could only remember that we are but travellers here. With this thought ever in our minds how easy would the daily trials of life become to us...Great burdens would become great blessings. Grace would be found through times of adversity."

Mary MacKillop



R.B. Films
Presents

Mary

DIRECTED BY KAY PAVLOU
PRODUCED BY ROSEMARY BLIGHT

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Mary

SYNOPSIS

Spanning sixty years, the breadth of Australia and the grandeur of Rome in the late 19th Century, MARY tells the story of one of Australia's greatest battlers.

This is the life of Mary MacKillop.

By the time Mary reached her early 20s, she was deeply troubled by the plight facing the impoverished lower classes in colonial Australia.

Her love of humanity, a belief that everybody deserved a fair go and an early calling to religious life saw her, with guidance from Father Julian Woods, (a relationship which caused her much grief later in life), establish the order of the Sisters of St Joseph.

Dedicated to the education of all people regardless of race, social status or religious belief, Mary's unfailing dedication to her work and disregard for social barriers brought her into conflict with the Catholic hierarchy and resulted in her excommunication from the Church she loved.

Facing the might of a powerful congregation of Bishops, she stood alone, rock solid, in her quest for equality for all and the right for her order to answer only to Rome.

After the excommunication was lifted by the dying Bishop who originally invoked it, Mary travelled to Rome to put a case for an independent order to the Holy Father.

She returned to Australia to find her battles were far from over.

One hundred years later, the Sisters of St Joseph, the order founded by Mary continue to bring enlightenment and knowledge to hundreds of thousands of people around the world.

In January 1995, Pope John Paul II will visit Sydney to officially beatify Mary as Australia's first saint and the eyes of the world will turn to Australia and this remarkable woman.

Mary

WRITER/DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

KAY PAVLOU

The story of Mary MacKillop is a wonderful tale of epic proportions, but there were times when I was daunted by the scale of it all. During those moments, I'd take out the photographs of Mary and stare at them. There's an intensity in her eyes that had me completely mesmerised. I could see peace and love, as well as strength and determination. They're the eyes of a 'wise' person.

I was brought up Greek Orthodox, so the concept of saints is not completely new to me. However I haven't been a practising Christian for a long time, and though my spirituality is very important to me, it's very eclectic in nature. I therefore found the Catholic content of Mary's story very alienating at first, it stopped me from getting close to her and to her life.

I have a history of taking on difficult political subjects, so the challenge for me was to switch into the spiritual world in order to understand Mary's motivation and drive. During the writing process, I was often caught in the here-and-now of Mary's political struggle with the bishops and trying to expand the canvas to include Mary's notion of Eternal Love. It was an arduous journey, but I'm a much better person for it!

Meeting the Sisters of St Joseph, particularly Clare and Margaret at North Sydney was a turning point for me. I could see how they embodied Mary's spirit with their determination and independent way of thinking. They would often say things that would shock Rosemary and me, given our preconceived idea of nuns. I refer to them as the 'radical/ratbag element of the Church'. We often went to them for advice and guidance on Mary's life, but there was never any sense that they were overseeing our project. They wanted us to find our own position on Mary MacKillop. We would talk for hours with cups of tea and a fresh batch of pumpkin scones.

Apart from the spiritual focus that the nun's habit gave Mary, she also spoke about it freeing her from the normal responsibilities of the family. Mary didn't allow anyone's notion of her as a woman to stop her achieving her ends. She believed that we are all equal and she went to any lengths across this country and Europe to bring education to the poor. After all, we're talking of a period when 'good' women didn't catch the night train, let alone travel through Europe for two years.

Ultimately it came down to a personal connection, did I want to spend several years in Mary's company? Yes. She gives me great inspiration - her fighting spirit, her 'never say die' attitude to life. Nothing was too hard for her. I often ask her advice when I come to an impasse in my own life.

Mary

WRITER/DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

NOTES ON VISUAL STYLE

The narrative style developed over many months. Although Mary was born in 1842, her beatification into a saint doesn't occur until 1995. So the story spans across 150 years of Australia's history. I needed to find a storytelling device that would eloquently deal with both the past and the present. The 'docu-drama' was the solution. The drama allows Mary's character to come to life, the documentary interviews bring her story into its contemporary relevance.

Visually I wanted the film to be beautiful in its simplicity. I became obsessed with the textures of the past - the sandstone, the natural fibres. I searched Sydney for locations that would at a glance speak volumes about the period. Stylistically I didn't want the change from documentary to drama to be tricky or reliant on technical effects. I wanted the mood to remain in the period of Mary's life, so the documentary scenes were designed and lit to match the drama. The interviewees were filmed in the same locations, so that the weave between the past and the present would appear seamless.

Mary

THE LIFE OF MARY MACKILLOP

- 1842 Born January 15 in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, Melbourne.
- 1860-1 Governess to cousins at Penola Station in South Australia; Mary meets Father Julian Woods.
- 1863 Appointed to denominational school in Portland.
- 1866 19th March, St Joseph's Day. Mary begins wearing a plain black dress to signify her dedication to religious life. She begins teaching lessons in a converted stable.
- 1867 In Adelaide, Mary opens her first school. During this year, an orphanage, refuge and providence are also established. Mary takes her first religious vows on August 15th.
- 1868 Bishop Sheil approves the rule of the Institute of St Joseph.
- 1869 Mary takes her final vows and leaves for Queensland with the first Josephites.
- 1870 Opposition to the Sisters grows, both from the Church hierarchy over the issue of independence, and from the Government over the order's refusal to accept education grants.
- 1871 Mary returns to Adelaide; she is excommunicated on September 22 by Bishop Sheil.
- 1872 The excommunication order is lifted on February 23, and an Episcopal Commission is established to investigate the circumstances surrounding the events. Mary's original mentor, Father Julian Woods, departs from Adelaide.
- 1873 Visits Rome for a personal audience with Pope Pius IX; visits Europe, England and Scotland.
- 1874 Mary returns to Melbourne.
- 1875 Mary returns to Adelaide. The constitution of the order of the Institute of St Joseph is accepted and Mary is elected Mother General. Free, compulsory education becomes law in South Australia.
- 1876 The Institute of the Sisters of St Joseph withdraws from Bathurst due to conflict.
- 1879 Mary meets with Father Julian Woods in Penola.
- 1880 Eight foundations of the order set up in Sydney and Josephite Sisters invited to Armidale. The Institute is withdrawn from Queensland.
- 1881 Mary is re-elected as Mother General.
- 1882 Mary in Sydney.
- 1883 First New Zealand foundation set up. Mother Mary is expelled from Adelaide by Bishop Reynolds.
- 1884 Novitiate opens in Mount Street, North Sydney. Cardinal Moran deposes Mary and establishes Mother Bernard as Mother General indefinitely.
- 1887 Rome refuses to approve decrees asserting diocesan control over the Josephites. Sisters arrive in Northampton, Western Australia.
- 1886 Mary's mother dies.
- 1888 Decree from Rome constitutes the Sisters of Saint Joseph as an approved Regular Congregation with its Mother House in North Sydney; central government is confirmed.
- 1889 Father Julian Woods dies in Sydney; Mother Mary elected Assistant Mother General.
- 1891 Mary suffers from the first of many bouts of serious illness.
- 1894 Mary visits New Zealand.
- 1895 Mary returns to Australia.
- 1898 Mother Bernard dies.
- 1899 Mary re-elected as Mother General.
- 1902 Mary travels again to New Zealand and has medical treatment at Rotorua Springs. While there she suffers a stroke. She returns to Australia later in the year as an invalid.
- 1904 Mary travels from Adelaide to Sydney.
- 1909 Mary dies in Sydney.

Mary

THE CREW

KAY PAVLOU - Writer/Director

Kay Pavlou is a multi-award winning director of both documentaries and drama. She is a storyteller who is not afraid to take risks - her films are at once personal and political.

Kay has the unique ability to make 'difficult' subjects accessible to a wide audience. Pavlou can easily move from 'gritty' social realism in her documentaries to highly stylised studio drama. Her light touch renders the most serious subject engrossing and entertaining.

In March 1993 two of her most recent programs were screened by SBS-TV: NOT A BEDROOM WAR, a highly acclaimed documentary about women in power and the development of feminism, and CONVICTED a chilling journey into women's prisons.

Kay's other credits include THE KILLING OF ANGELO TSAKOS, winner of the Special Jury Prize at the San Francisco Film Festival, an A.T.O.M. Award, and nominated for Human Rights Award and 2 AFI Awards; LOULLA, nominated for AFI Award for Best Actor; THE LACKING, winner of Frames Film Festival, Adelaide; and CYPRUS-A PEOPLE DIVIDED, for SBS - TV.

Pavlou says, "As I read the story of Mary MacKillop, I became increasingly enthralled by her courage and the mythology that surrounded her. She was like a magnet. I felt an intimacy towards her because her heart was always so open."

ROSEMARY BLIGHT - Producer

Early in her career Rosemary worked as a producer's assistant with John Maynard (producer of THE NAVIGATOR and SWEETIE). She has made over 40 music videos including videos for Jason Donovan and Crowded House. Her production credits include THE KILLING OF ANGELO TSAKOS, which won many awards including the Special Jury Prize at the San Francisco Film Festival. Rosemary has recently completed MAKING TRAPS, a documentary shot in Vietnam, broadcast on SBS - TV in August 1994.

Blight says, "What attracted me to Mary MacKillop's story was that despite the fact that this person wore a habit and was restricted by the limitations of her times - she had an amazing story that had to be told. And it's great to be able to make a film about a woman, especially an Australian woman. I was faced with tremendous obstacles in making this film, but I felt so strongly that it had to be made. Now, like Mary MacKillop, I have the belief that if you have the passion and the dedication, you can do whatever you like."

BRIDGET IKIN - Consultant Producer

Bridget Ikin produced the award winning film *AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE*, directed by Jane Campion. Bridget was producer on Alison Maclean's first feature *CRUSH*. She has worked as a producer of short drama since 1984, including the landmark series 'About Face'. Bridget has just completed production on *BLOODY WEEKEND* directed by Anna Campion.

"Bridget is a fantastic creative producer who understands the importance of the director/producer relationship," says Blight. Pavlou comments that "Bridget Ikin was a great support for both Rosemary and me during the development and production of the film. She encouraged me to see the big picture in Mary's story when I'd get bogged down in the minute details. She'd help me find the simple human drama in all the complexity of such an immense story."

ANGUS STRATHIE - Production Designer

Angus Strathie came to the public eye with the release of *STRICTLY BALLROOM*. Angus was responsible for the design of the ballroom costumes for that incredibly successful film. His background before *STRICTLY BALLROOM* was as production designer for the Australian Opera. He has won awards world wide for his work, including a 1993 BAFTA Award for best achievement in costume design. Strathie was responsible for the overall "look" of *MARY*, on which he and director Pavlou worked very closely for at least 12 months before filming began.

"Angus has a perfect understanding of the texture of the period. We worked closely to contrast the simplicity of Mary's life with the opulence of the church hierarchy. Ironically, in order to approximate the roughness of Mary's poverty, we had to use raw silk to get the hessian-look of the nun's habits," comments Pavlou.

JAN KENNY ACS - Director of Photography

Jan Kenny is one of Australia's best known female directors of photography and has filmed some of Australia's best drama feature films and mini-series, including *FRAN*, *THE GIRL FROM TOMORROW*, *LAND OF HOPE* and *ROUND THE TWIST*. Jan was also a director of photography on the successful television series "Michael Willesee's *Australians*". She has won three Australian Screen Cinematographers awards.

Pavlou loved working with Jan Kenny on *MARY*. She says "Jan has a natural affinity for the period of this film. She loves working with the subtlety of light given from oil lamps and candles. We immediately found we had the same vision of the film - we wanted its simplicity to be beautiful, so that Mary's life of poverty would still somehow appear rich in its warmth. Then, on the day, Jan would orchestrate her team of gaffers and grips to create works of art. I love the way the film looks."

DOUGLAS STEPHEN RAE - Composer

Douglas Stephen Rae was chosen to compose the music for MARY after producer Rosemary Blight heard his score for Pauline Chan's feature TRAPS. Well known as a composer for theatre, MARY is Stephen Rae's second film score. His work is fresh, he is eccentric and he is not afraid to take risks. Director Kay Pavlou wanted a simple yet beautiful atmosphere created through the soundtrack of the film, to match the simplicity in the visual style of MARY.

She says, "Stephen Rae already had a serious fetish with religious music, so he had an enormous vocabulary we could refer to when trying to find the right mood for MARY. He was also able to incorporate choral singing which lifted the human drama into the ethereal. The music manages to complement the images in the film in its beautiful simplicity."

MARGARET SIXEL - Editor

From a background as a school teacher, Margaret Sixel worked for many years as an assistant before attending the Australian Film Television and Radio School. There she worked with Pavlou as the sound editor on THE KILLING OF ANGELO TSAKOS. Her film credits include, amongst others, the end credit sequence of LORENZO'S OIL, associate editor on ROMERO and the documentary YOU MUST REMEMBER THIS. She has a style of editing that Blight and Pavlou wanted for MARY.

Of working with Sixel, director Pavlou says "Margaret and I actually had a great time whilst editing MARY! The mixture of documentary and drama was often a very precarious balance, but we seemed to make decisions in a similar way, we sort of synchronised our thinking. And we would always congratulate ourselves, whenever we achieved anything particularly difficult, with lots of loud clapping and cheering!"

Mary

CAST BIOGRAPHIES

LUCY BELL - Mary

Lucy Bell graduated from N.I.D.A. in 1991 and has been busy on both stage and screen. On stage Lucy has featured in productions such as 'Two Gentlemen of Verona', 'Tales From The Decameron', 'Scenes From An Execution', 'Blue Murder' and most recently, 'Darling Oscar'. Her television credits include 'A Country Practice', 'Snowy' and 'G.P.' and she has appeared in the films THE NOSTRADAMUS KID and CRIME TIME.

When Bell walked into the room for a screen test for the film MARY, producer Blight and director Pavlou were struck by Lucy's incredible presence. Pavlou says, "Lucy Bell was perfect for the role. There is enormous power in Mary MacKillop's character but, because of the time she lived, there is also a lot of restraint. During Lucy's audition, she instinctively found Mary's power, but with a kind of stillness. Assertiveness is often seen as a sort of in-your-face aggression, but Mary's force came from her incredible inner life. Lucy understood that. The fact that she has an uncanny resemblance to the young Mary MacKillop was purely an accident, though a little eerie at times.

"Lucy and I developed an intimate understanding of Mary MacKillop. I was always open to Lucy's suggestions on character. As an actor, she often had a subjective connection that I may have overlooked whilst getting the overview as writer/director. She once came to me with the script in hand and said, 'There's a couple of scenes where Mary says "I'm sorry." to the Bishop. I don't think Mary ever said "I'm sorry." to anyone.' I had to laugh - she was right."

Lucy herself comments: "When I heard a film was to be made about the life of Mary MacKillop I wasn't expecting to be considered for it. I'd seen various articles about her in the newspapers and while her story was inspiring I didn't feel any striking affinity with her. Initially I couldn't see past her habit. I was confronted by my own preconceptions of nuns.

"The more I found out about Mary, the less easily definable she became. There seemed to be such a directness and purity about her and yet her situation - a woman and a nun in the nineteenth century - meant that she was often compelled to internalise her opinions.

"Mary courageously refused to compromise her convictions. This struggle took its toll physically but spiritually she was amazingly resilient. Kay and I worked together on the many facets of her personality. Kay, as both writer and director of MARY, had a very strong vision of how Mary should be portrayed but she was always open to input from me in my thoughts on Mary."

LINDEN WILKINSON - Older Mary

Linden Wilkinson graduated from N.I.D.A. in 1976.

Linden is a well established actress and has performed extensively throughout Australia with the Sydney Theatre Company, the Melbourne Theatre Company, the State Theatre of South Australia, the Playbox Theatre Company, the Marian Street Theatre and Q Theatre.

