

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

In January 2008 we read a newspaper article about Sydney couple Craig and Shane, who had been holding hands when they were assaulted in the heart of gay Sydney. On the page was an enormous photograph of the bruised and battered face of Craig - it was the first time we had seen an assault victim's face, and it was shocking. The attack was so brutal that Craig had his jaw reduced to powder, when the attackers stomped on his face. The attackers were so certain that Craig was dead that an hour later, they used his stolen mobile phone to call his mother to inform her 'We killed your faggot son'.

The story became even more appalling as we read that police told the couple there was nothing they could do. They told Craig and Shane they did not have time to check CCTV footage or trace phone calls made from Craig's stolen phone, or even talk to the taxi driver who the attackers hailed down after the assault. We couldn't believe that in an area with a thriving gay community, there was such a lack of support from local police.

Craig and Shane agreed to take part in the film because they wanted to support their community and help other assault victims by sharing their experience. We initially thought that we would only film an account of their assault, but as new developments came to light, their story continued to grow and we ended up documenting Craig and Shane's recovery over an incredibly emotional and often painful 11 month period.

By standing up for their rights, Craig and Shane became heroes in their community, even being nominated to lead the 2008 Sydney Mardi Gras Parade, where a supportive crowd cried out 'Welcome back!' Craig and Shane's story was very significant because their bravery to come forward about their experience ultimately caused positive changes for all assault victims through police reviewing their procedures. Their story shows how we can all create something positive out of even the worst circumstances.

HOLDING HANDS PREMIERED ON THE 5TH SEPTEMBER, 2009 AT DENDY NEWTOWN as part of the QueerDoc Film Festival.

## **MAKING HOLDING HANDS**

Our first interview with Craig and Shane was shortly after Craig had recovered from a breakdown. He was timid and shy and Shane was very supportive of him, checking that he was ok during the filming. They just poured out their story and much of the film is based on that one powerful interview. We spent about 3 hours with them as they talked about the pain and frustration they had experienced. We all had tears in our eyes. Their willingness to go back to painful places is a gift to those who watch their story.

## **THE KIDS**

The next time we met Craig and Shane, we were introduced to their dogs, Milly and Gus. Milly looked like a miniature fox and could not keep still. Gus obviously thought he was human and had the personality of a grumpy old man. He would grudgingly allow a pat, but only had eyes for his dads. The couple spoiled their dogs just like doting parents - they were fed choice cuts of raw chicken and Gus wouldn't eat his unless it was carefully warmed in the microwave!

## **THE MULLET - A LOVE STORY**

We were interested to find out how Craig and Shane first met and it turned out to be quite an entertaining story: Craig was sitting in a bar and a guy walked past and glanced in his direction. A few minutes later, the same guy walked past again. Then a few minutes later, the guy appeared again, fixing him with a penetrating look. Craig said he thought to himself that either the guy had to keep going to the bathroom, or he was trying to flirt! Craig had never approached anyone before, but the stranger looked like he was a country boy too, as he had a typical country hairstyle - a little mullet. (For those of you wondering, a mullet is a haircut that is short on top and long at the back). Craig and Shane got talking and started meeting for dinner once a week at Shane's. After dinner, they would sit on the sofa with Gus sitting between them, very protective of his master. If Craig tried to touch Shane, Gus would growl loudly and try to bite him! Finally, Craig managed to tame Gus and as soon as he and Shane were serious, Craig told Shane the mullet was a fashion disaster. Wisely, Shane got rid of the mullet for love.

## **THE POLICE**

We felt it was very important to show the police's side of the story, but it took a long time for us to get an interview. Naturally, they were very cautious to be interviewed on film, as they had already had a lot of bad press. Also, the police we interviewed in the film were not the police who were in charge when the assault on Craig and Shane occurred. Cath Burn and Donna Adney were brought in after the negative media attention and the previous senior police officers were moved on to other stations. Cath Burn and Donna Adney have worked hard to improve procedures for assault victims and we know that Craig and Shane had a lot to do with that. By telling the media about their story, they focused attention not only on the police, but gained the support of the Lord Mayor of Sydney and ACON, who both made a complaint to the NSW Ombudsman regarding the handling of Craig and Shane's case. It is sad and depressing that homophobic violence is still so prevalent, but we are proud to have documented an important chapter in queer history that led to positive change.

### **SYDNEY MARDI GRAS - LEADING THE PARADE!**

Craig and Shane were pretty stunned when they were asked to lead Mardi Gras and we were excited! Craig was nervous about walking in the area he was assaulted in, but Shane was there to give him lots of support. On the night, we ran alongside the parade so we could see both the crowds and the parade close up. Craig and Shane just looked triumphant as they walked hand in hand up Oxford Street, and many people in the crowd were calling out messages of support.

### **CRAIG'S NOSE OPERATION**

By far the most bizarre part of the film was filming Craig's nose operation. We were hesitant to film it, but Craig thought it was a great idea - he said it would ensure the surgeon did a good job! We were gowned up and given shoe covers, and then led into the operating theatre where a nervous Craig was waiting on the operating table. It was incredibly surreal to watch. The surgeon was very relaxed, talking whilst he worked, tapping and sawing away, and at one point he made little clouds of smoke billow from Craig's nostrils! We often had to squat on the floor and take deep breaths - but we kept reminding each other that it would show people the amount of pain Craig had to go through as the result of a hate crime.

### **THE BREAK-UP**

We were stunned when Craig and Shane broke up. We had not known the couple prior to filming, so there was a lot going on that we were not aware of. It was a very intense time and even their dog Gus was so badly affected he was put on anti-depressants. We were glad when Craig and Shane decided to give it another go, but we were painfully aware that the trauma of the assault was still hanging over them. We hope the film shows an assault seeps into every part of a victim's life and affects those around them. Craig has still been unable to return to Crown Street, the place where he was assaulted.

### **CITY2SURF MARATHON**

One part of Craig's life that didn't make the final cut was Craig running the City2Surf Marathon. This is a major Sydney event that is attended by around 70,000 people, who run 14km from Hyde Park in Sydney's CBD to beautiful Bondi Beach. Craig had previously run in marathons but after his leg was broken in the assault, he was unable to run for a long time. So the run was a big milestone for him and he was nervous about doing it. We followed him preparing for the event and then the big day! Co-Director Tonnette even managed to get a shot of Craig crossing the finishing line, which was no easy task - she had no idea when he was going to turn up. She waited for hours and then amazingly, she spotted Craig and got the shot. Hopefully, we will have room to put this segment in the extras section when the DVD comes out. Craig got a little medal and also beat his personal best - a proud day.

### **OUR THOUGHTS**

Looking back, the 11 months filming Craig and Shane was a very intense and exhausting time. You can't make a documentary without stepping into the lives of your subjects, so we often felt the same emotions as those we were filming and it was a hard year for us. We had no idea what was going to happen with the film, but as the film progressed we realized once you decide to do something, the rest will fall into place.

It was an honour to make this film. When Craig was told about our idea, he said he was happy to discover he could take something positive from his experience through making a film that would help people. We hope this film will fulfill his wish.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We would like to thank ACON, New Mardi Gras, Sydney Gay and Lesbian Business Association, Metro Screen, The Aurora Grant, Maxx Black, Sydney Star Observer and Hair Health Australia. Thank you also to the generous members of the community who supported the film.

During filming, we were also contacted by a Brisbane band called Dizzygotheca, who offered to create music for the film. The fabulous Mardi Gras track was created by the wonderful Anthony and Heidi of Dizzygotheca especially for Holding Hands. Thank you Anthony and Heidi!

We would also like to thank Huzzah Sound.

Finally, we would like to give our extra special thanks to the wonderful Frameline Completion Fund. Frameline gave us a very generous grant that ensured the film was completed - thank you Frameline for your wonderful support!