

The Gift

a documentary by Louise Hogarth



THE GIFT Documents the phenomenon of deliberate HIV infection.

Twenty years after the initial panic there is a dangerous new complacency fueled by the mistaken belief that AIDS is now a manageable disease.

Gift Giver: HIV positive man who gives **The Gift** of HIV infection.

Bug Chaser: HIV negative man who deliberately becomes infected with HIV.

Barebacking: Deliberate high-risk sex with disregard for HIV infection.

From the condom weary to the conscious desire for deliberate HIV infection, disturbing new trends of risky behavior have pushed the rate of new infections back into a rapid rise, all to the mantra of '**Don't Ask - Don't Tell.**' Using internet sites for promotion and connection this barebacking community (sex without a condom) is flourishing. This includes **bug chasers** and **conversion parties** where men actively seek **The Gift** of HIV infection.

Doug, a central character of the film is a bright, articulate young man who moved from the Midwest to San Francisco in search of a gay community. He became a **bug chaser** and actively sought **The Gift** of HIV infection. When Doug became infected with the HIV virus, he had a community. He is now dealing with the unexpected severity of his illness. Dr. Walt Odets, the author of **In the Shadow of the Epidemic** where he writes about the loss, grief and anxiety experienced by negative men living with the AIDS epidemic, is featured in this documentary. A noted psychoanalyst, he is very involved with the gay community and speaks at length about prevention – why it has failed and what needs to be done.

It is my hope that this film will raise the issue of isolation and division creating a dialogue within the community, thereby leading to greater awareness and a renewed prevention effort.

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Directors Intent

Denial = Death

Director **Louise Hogarth** wanted HIV/AIDS back in the headlines, and she didn't want *The Gift* to go unnoticed. As she embarked on the project, she remembered a remarkable documentary she had seen at a festival a few years earlier, and she lamented that she was only one of a handful of people in the audience.

"The film was called *Undetectable*. The film followed five people with 'undetectable' viral loads for three years, in which time three of them died. The filmmaker spent many years making the film, and people were dying, but nobody was seeing it," said Hogarth.

Hogarth wanted to make sure her film did not meet the same fate. She wanted to peg her documentary on something sensational - something that would get people talking about the increasing rates of infection of HIV and the need for new prevention strategies. In her research, she ran across the phenomenon of "bug chasing" and "gift giving" – the deliberate infection of HIV. It was an extreme example of AIDS/HIV messages gone wrong. This would be her vehicle.

She found many men who were eager to talk about the phenomenon. She found articles, Web sites, clubs, and a wealth of information and resources on the topic dating back to the mid to late 1990s. It seemed this was a reality that the community wanted to deny, just as they were denying the reality of AIDS/HIV and the failure of safe sex education.

Statistics show that 60 percent of cases of new infections are among gay men – despite the fact they make up only 5 percent of the population. These numbers made it clear to Hogarth that safe sex messages were not getting through to this at-risk group. In her research, Hogarth found a prevalence of the attitude that the answer to HIV/AIDS is simple – take a pill. It seemed that many gay men, particularly younger gay men, were unaware that the drug cocktails can cause serious side effects, including death. Many also did not know that they could be infected or re-infected by a drug-resistant strain of the virus and that drugs might not be an option. Many thought that once they had the virus, they could have unprotected sex without worry that they could get any sicker.

"AIDS was viewed as a short-term health crisis in the beginning, and the early strategies worked. Everyone was terrified of getting it. The prevention efforts were successful and the infection rate was reduced significantly, but then people stopped talking about AIDS. They viewed it as a treatable, management disease. The pharmaceutical ads and the safe sex campaigns inadvertently glamorized and eroticized HIV/AIDS

Hogarth felt an imperative to act as she witnessed the international implications of American prevention messages being exported to other countries. During a recent trip to Africa, Hogarth discovered that the same safe sex campaigns used in America were being used in Africa resulting in women there deliberately seeing infection from HIV positive men. Also during her

visit, she was shocked to find that barebacking “gift-giving” parties were taking place just miles from her hotel in Capetown. The glamorization of HIV was spreading globally.

“Without shame and blame, I wanted to explore the story of what went wrong with our prevention efforts and how we arrived at this place where people didn’t care if they got infected. I wanted to delve into the isolation of HIV negative men and the guilt of AIDS survivors that leads them to want to be HIV positive. The issues are complex, and the solutions are not easy, but we cannot begin to address them until we stop denying them,” said Hogarth.

With a dedicated crew of hard-working professionals and volunteers, Hogarth set out to present *The Gift*. With a grant from the AIDS Healthcare Foundation and donated office space, Hogarth self-financed the project which took two and a half years to complete. The film was finished in 2003 and premiered at the prestigious Berlin Film Festival where it made international headlines for its cutting-edge content and challenging message. The film is currently showing to standing-room-only theatre houses at film festivals across the US and around the world.

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Director / Producer



Louise Hogarth co-produced [The Panama Deception](#), which won an Academy Award for Best Feature Length Documentary. She was the Director, Producer and Writer of [Ollie Mae Johnson's Petition for Clemency](#). Additional credits include producer, writer, director and editor of a number of projects across the genres including documentaries, feature films and PSA's. Her work includes projects for such major studios as Universal, Paramount and Disney.

Louise Hogarth is the founder and director of the independent documentary company *Dream Out Loud Productions*. Her documentaries have dealt with such issues as AIDS, human rights and poverty.

The company specializing in true stories about people and events, Louise Hogarth passionately believes in the power of films that touch hearts, change attitudes and foster positive change.

She is a member of the International Documentary Association, the Independent Feature Project, the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers, and Women in Film.

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Editor

Mario Del Bello's credits include the documentary *Women in the Extreme* (2000); an independent feature, *It Is* (2001), directed by Billy Frolic; a weekly television program, *Revolt TV*, which he describes as a "bad-ass extreme music video show;" a promo piece for Fashion Week LA for Smashbox Cosmetics; and the pilot *Fast Max*, directed by Larry Rodriguez. In the certificate program for film and television production at UCLA, Del Bello has honed his skills on Final Cut Pro to develop an innovative style of combining motion and graphics with impacting effects to enhance the telling of a story.

Composer



Tom Batoy and Franco Tortora are two award-winning composers who dedicated their lives to music. With their company "Mona Davis Music," they created music for numerous art house films & projects worldwide. The "MDM" recording studios, located in Los Angeles and Munich/Germany, have been the place of many wild sessions with nationally and internationally known recording artists within the electronic music field.

Camera



May Rigler attended the College of Art in Berlin to study camera work in documentary film. In 1995, she graduated with a BFA/MFA in film. She has worked as a director of photography on several documentary projects including *Coleoptera* (1999), a 16 mm film by Gustav Zimmermann; Eloy Casado's *Character Driven* (2000); and Alexandra Sell's *AVON Ladies* (2001); and the making of *Goff in the Desert* (2002), a 35 mm film by Heinz Emigholz, for which she served as camera assistant.

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**FILMOGRAPHY OF
LOUISE HOGARTH**
Editor/Producer/Director/Writer

The Gift

USA, 2001-2002

(Feature Length Documentary)

Producer/Writer/Director

Does Anyone Die of AIDS Anymore?

USA, 2000

(Documentary)

Producer/Writer/Director

Women

USA, 1999

(Feature Film)

Producer/Editor

Director Mia Akiva

Mark Twain's Forgotten Journey

NICARAGUA, 1996

(Feature Length Documentary)

Producer/Editor

Ollie Mae Johnson's Petition for Clemency

USA, 1995

(Short Documentary)

Producer/Writer/Director

WINNER OF WILEY W. MANUEL AWARD, 1995

The Panama Deception

USA/PANAMA, 1993

The Empowerment Project

(Feature Length Documentary)

Co-Producer

Director Barbara Trent

WINNER OF ACADEMY AWARD BEST

FEATURE LENGTH DOCUMENTARY, 1993

Youth Talkline
USA, 1992
(PSA Commercial)
Producer/Writer/Director

EDITOR
Senior Year
PBS 13 Hour Series

No Laughing Matter
UTE Production – Two Hour MOW

Players
Dick Wolf Productions
Universal Studio – TV Pilot

Feds
Dick Wolf Production
Universal Studios – One Hour Series

The Lottery
NBC Productions – Two Hour MOW

Zero Tolerance
Savoy Pictures – Two Hour MOW

Gathering Evidence
Mfd Limited – Feature Film

The Watcher
Paramount – One Hour Series

Simon & Simon
CBS Productions – Two Hour MOW

White Fang II
Walt Disney Production – Feature Film

Dinosaurs
Walt Disney Productions – TV Series

Beauty and the Beast
Witt Thomas Productions – TV Series

Little Shop of Horrors

Warner Brothers – Feature Film

Twilight Zone

CBS / MTM Studios – TV Series

THE GIFT --- PRODUCTION CREDIT LIST

Produced and Directed by

Louise Hogarth

Editor

Mario Del Bello

Cinematographer

May Rigler

Music by

Tom Batoy & Franco Tortora

Music Supervision and Additional Music by

Alex Menck

Additional Camera

Gina DeGirolamo
Gustavo Dias

Additional Editing

Robbi Robb
Bob Lattanzio

Assistant Editor (NEED A SPACE HERE)

Nicole Thomson

Production Consultant

Robert Hawk

Sound Design

David Streefkerk

Sound Mix

Eric Ryan
Ravenswork

Still Photographer

Julia Brandreth

Special Graphics

Gun-Cock Photograph: James Higginson ©2001
3D Title Sequence by Jeff Stevens
Posters by Ed Freeman
Postcard by Terry Marcellino

Production Assistants

Ariel Fox
Vicky Hsu
Israel Cruz
Paul Nankivell

Interns

Kristin Ito
Denise Feathers-Dukoff
Elon Rutberg
Aaron Arendt
Laura Andina
Mary Lee
Thomas Rohark
Melissa Corns
Hillel Arron

Thank you to all interviewees

Jim Bloor / Writer Frontiers Magazine
Christopher Harms
Arthur Shafer
John Pinnell
Deej Jones
Dr. Greg Cason
James Ladra
Sunny Rose
Christopher Apt
Rick Corry
Fedor Rogo
Jake Dunno

Bill Gardner
John Singelton
Kenny R. Tison
Joseph Olney
Ashley Michaels
Rafael Rivera
Scott Tickler/Victoria London
Darrian Jackson
Kieren Chavez
Mario Lemos
Davis Berry
Justin Bala-Hampton
Tom Achatz
Enrique Andrade

Special Mention

David Zeiger
Susan Crutcher
David Speight
Micki Dickoff
Clinton Fein

Special Thanks

AIDS Healthcare Foundation

www.aidshealth.org

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Michael Weinstein, AHF President

Terri Ford, AHF Director of Advocacy

Ged Kenslea, AHF Communications Director

Beth and Ron Stone
Catherine and Chuck Miller
Lindsay Mofford
Carol Underhill
Sharon Melnick
Aynee Osborn
John Bates

Carol Boyce
Lakshmi Aysola
Lauren Levine
Sherry Moore
Gay and Lesbian Medical Association
SF Aids Foundation
California's Anti-Tobacco Media Campaign

Modern Video Films

Frank Bluestein

Laser Pacific

Sheryle Goodhead

Legal Services Provided by

Anne – Catharina Kedenburg

Advisor

Roslyn Hammer

Dedicated to Cecilia Hogarth my Mother and my hero.

Fade out ---- 1 sec fade out and fades up LOGO pops on

DENIAL = DEATH
STOP AIDS

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END OF THE MOVIE STATISTICS

1. At least two teenagers are infected with the HIV virus, every hour, of every day, in the US.

National AIDS Policy reported to the White House --- March 1996

2. A recent study of gay men ages 16 to 22 found 91% of blacks, 75% of Hispanics, and 74% of whites did not know they were infected with the HIV virus.

The rates of unawareness among minority gay men ages 16 to 22 in the study were staggeringly high. Among those found to have H.I.V., the AIDS virus, 91 percent of blacks, 75 percent of Hispanics, and 74 percent of whites said they did not know they were infected.

***AIDS Study Finds Many Unaware They Have Virus by Lawrence K. Altman
The New York Times Monday, July 8, 2002.***

3. By 2005, nearly half of all HIV positive people in SF are expected to exhibit resistance to HIV medications.

A report by researchers at the University of California's San Francisco and Los Angeles campuses released Thursday predicts a gloomy future for the prevalence of drug-resistant HIV--by 2005 nearly half of all HIV-positive people in San Francisco are expected to exhibit resistance to HIV medications.

Drug-resistant HIV exploding in San Francisco, September 1, 2001