

FANTOME ISLAND

PRESS KIT

FANTOME ISLAND

A FILM BY SEAN GILLIGAN & ADRIAN STRONG



IN 1945 SEVEN YEAR-OLD JOE EGGMOLESSE WAS DIAGNOSED WITH LEPROSY. HE WAS TAKEN FROM HIS FAMILY UNDER POLICE ESCORT, TRANSPORTED BY RAIL AND SEA OVER A THOUSAND KILOMETRES TO FANTOME ISLAND WHERE HE WAS TO BE INCARCERATED FOR THE NEXT TEN YEARS.

JOE'S POIGNANT JOURNEY OFFERS A PROFOUND AND PERSONAL INSIGHT INTO ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S HIDDEN HISTORIES.

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FANTOME ISLAND

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FANTOME ISLAND

Synopsis

One Line Synopsis:

The fascinating and moving tale of Joe Eggmoulesse, who in 1945 was removed from his family and confined to an Indigenous leper colony off the north east coast of Australia - he was 7 years of age.

Short Synopsis (125 words):

In 1945 at the age of seven a young Joe Eggmoulesse was diagnosed with Leprosy. He was immediately removed from his family and home and transported under police escort over a thousand kilometres to be confined on an island for the treatment of the disease. For the next ten years, a leprosarium for Indigenous Australians became his home.

An isolated tropical island off the north east coast of Australia became home to a close knit community of Indigenous 'lepers' who made the most of their existence as people living on the fringes of the marginalised.

Now as a 73 year old Joe reflects on his indelible Fantome years. His incredible, poignant story offers a profound insight into one of Australia's hidden histories.

Short Synopsis (247 words):

In 1945 seven year-old Joe Eggmoulesse was diagnosed with Leprosy. He was taken from his family under police escort, transported by rail and sea over a thousand kilometres to Fantome Island where he was to be incarcerated for the next ten years.

The isolated tropical island off the North Queensland coast became home to a close-knit community of Aboriginal and Islander 'lepers' whose marginalized existence was conveniently hidden from white society and has hitherto remained absent from the mainstream historical record. Cared for by nuns from the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary their isolation was the consequence of apartheid-like policies developed by the Queensland government and medical establishment which espoused a eugenicist philosophy and regarded racial segregation as standard practice.

As one of the few surviving former patients Joe returns to the island in 2010 for a long awaited event, the Fantome Island Remembrance Day. His train journey north is haunted by memories of his passage as a young boy. As a 73 year old Elder Joe reflects thoughtfully on his indelible Fantome years shedding light on what it was like to be both indigenous and a 'leper' during a period of racism and paranoia. From the pre-cure years as one of 'the walking dead' to the acceptance of a life lived under unique and trying circumstances Joe shares his story as he questions the context surrounding it. Fusing pathos with ironic humour Joe's poignant journey offers a profound and personal insight into a dark side of Australian history.

FANTOME ISLAND

Synopsis

One Page Synopsis (604 words):

In 1945 seven year-old Joe Eggmolese was diagnosed with Leprosy. He was taken from his family under police escort, transported by rail and sea over a thousand kilometres to Fantome Island where he was to be incarcerated for the next ten years. The isolated tropical island off the North Queensland coast became home to a close-knit community of Aboriginal and Islander 'lepers' whose marginalized existence was conveniently hidden from white society and has hitherto remained absent from the mainstream historical record.

The documentary follows Joe Eggmolese's remarkable personal story. As one of the few surviving former patients Joe returns to the island in 2010 for a long awaited event, the Fantome Island Remembrance Day. His train journey north is haunted by memories of his passage as a young boy and recollections of his aunt, another leprosy patient who was originally incarcerated on Peel Island before it became a "whites only" leprosarium. Her forced removal on the 'death train' to Fantome Island resulted as with many other indigenous patients in her death soon after her arrival.

As a 73 year old Elder Joe reflects thoughtfully on his indelible Fantome years shedding light on what it was like to be both Indigenous and a 'leper' during a period of racism and paranoia. From the pre-cure years as one of 'the walking dead' to the acceptance of a life lived under unique and trying circumstances Joe recalls many aspects of life on Fantome Island such as how his education was eclipsed by child labor as he took on the role as 'hygiene officer' emptying latrines. His darker memories of widespread sexual abuse are balanced by memories of deep friendships, a sense of finding a new family and his relationship with Molly the great love of his life.

Joe also questions the wider context surrounding his experience and recalls with great fondness the nuns from the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary who cared for the leprosy patients on Fantome Island with such selfless dedication. Fusing pathos with ironic humour Joe's poignant journey offers a profound and personal insight into one of the darker chapters of Australian history.

The Fantome Island reunion day brings together all those with some connection to the island with Joe weaving together their various story strands into the wider narrative of Fantome Island's history. The unveiling of a commemoration plaque and the scattering of the ashes of a former Fantome Islander who had expressed a wish to be buried on the island bring to a climax the long awaited event. These rituals bring some sense of closure to those whose painful memories of the past needed more than a statement of apology from Kevin Rudd's administration for the attitudes and policies of past Australian governments toward indigenous people.

Throughout the documentary, the personal odyssey of Joe Eggmolese is complemented by an exploration of the context of Indigenous incarceration through interviews with historians and incorporation of archival footage. Consequently, the documentary sheds light not only on the medical condition of leprosy in the mid twentieth century, but also on *apartheid*-like policies developed by the Queensland government and medical establishment which reveal the institutional adoption of a eugenicist philosophy which accepted racial segregation as standard practice. Through the compassionate portrayal of one man's story against the background of a wider historical context, this documentary helps to close another chapter of Queensland's past, with honor and respect for those who suffered under its erstwhile racist policies. In particular this documentary was made for the community of Palm Island whose people have the closest connection to Fantome Island, and whose voices finds utterance in their own history.

FANTOME ISLAND

Key Crew Biographies

SEAN GILLIGAN - Director/Producer/Co-Editor

Sean Gilligan is a Brisbane based filmmaker whose work spans documentaries, music videos, tvcs and short films. He has directed and produced over 40 music videos for bands including Birds of Tokyo, Gin Wigmore, Silverchair, Missy Higgins, The Living End, The Sleepy Jackson, Kasey Chambers and Tim Finn. Sean was also a co-founder of Squaredyed Films, a highly sought after music video production company.

Sean's keen interest in Indigenous history and education has taken him to many Indigenous communities around Australia and has recently seen him conducting media making workshops on Palm Island teaching and facilitating the production of short films, music videos and documentaries with the island's student community. The Palm Island community invited Sean and his colleague Adrian Strong to produce a film about the little known history of the neighbouring Fantome Island leprosarium. This culminated in 'Fantome Island', Sean's first feature documentary which premiered at The Brisbane International Film Festival in 2011.

Currently Sean is a director at Blacklab International where he directs TVC's while still occasionally dabbling in the dark art of music videos.

ADRIAN STRONG - Producer/Co-Editor

Adrian Strong is an anthropologist and ethnographic filmmaker with experience in Africa and Australia. He is currently completing his PhD at Griffith University on representation of indigenous people in documentary. In Africa he worked with the Kalahari San (in Namibia) and his doctoral studies focus on the 50 years of ethnographic documentary by American filmmaker John Marshall with whom he worked in the late 1980s. Adrian also studied documentary with Australian filmmaker Mike Rubbo at QUT.

In 2007 together with fellow filmmaker Sean Gilligan, Adrian conducted media-making workshops in schools on Palm Island under the auspices of Strong & Smart Inc. The Palm Island community invited Strong and Gilligan to make a film about the history of neighbouring Fantome Island, a former leprosarium. The making of the feature length documentary took place over the next few years, during which time Adrian also completed *Bitter Roots* his thesis film about the Kalahari San (<http://www.der.org/films/bitter-roots.html>) which screened at a number of international film festivals.

Adrian has also made films for the Australian National University about an Arnhem Land Elder and several documentaries for Griffith University about perspectives on 'Contact period' Rock Art featuring Australian archeologists and Aboriginal Traditional Owners. Adrian holds Masters degrees in Physics, Mythology & Depth Psychology and has worked in international aid, international business and academia. He is currently based in the UK and France.

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Key Crew Biographies

MARK NEWMAN – Executive Producer

Mark studied arts and social sciences in South Africa in the 1970's and graduated from the French National Film Academy in the 1980's. He has been involved in the film and television industries in South Africa, France, the United Kingdom and now Australia for many years, working as a writer, producer and director of a wide variety of fiction and documentary films, television shows and community-based media. He was one of the co-founders of Strong and Smart Inc. His current main focus is producing educational media with Indigenous communities.

JOE EGGMOLESSE – Associate Producer

Born in 1938 to Pacific Islander parents, Joe Eggmolese was removed from his family in Nambour as a 7 year-old and spent the next 10 years on Fantome Island, a Leprosarium for Indigenous people in Australia's Far North Queensland. After 5 years of rudimentary schooling by the Franciscan Mission of Mary on the island, Joe entered the world of work as a 12 year-old, taking on various roles as a woodcutter, cook and hygiene worker. In view of his lack of formal schooling, after his release from the leprosarium Joe ended up taking numerous short courses as an adult and obtained a Diploma in Community Education in 2006.

Joe's efforts in self-education and his natural emotional intelligence enabled him to move on from various labouring jobs in the 1950s and 60s toward community work in Victoria in the early 1970s. During the 1980s he worked in the Department of Community Services, and Health Department of the New South Wales government, where he developed and ran various community development programs. In the mid 1990s he worked for Queensland Health as a Coordinator in Brisbane and Wide Bay implementing the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander Health Policy (1994), whilst also managing the Cherbourg Community Health Service.

Joe subsequently worked in the field of Indigenous Mental Health in the Fraser Coast district and Cherbourg in Queensland until his retirement in 2006. Since then he has continued providing voluntary community development and support services to Indigenous Australians in the Maryborough District. During the course of his retirement, in order to pass his story on to his grandchildren, Joe began researching his early years on Fantome Island, making use of the archives at the Franciscan Mission of Mary in Sydney. Through a handwritten note he had left at the archive, filmmakers Adrian Strong and Sean Gilligan made contact with him in January 2009 and asked him if he would agree to participate in the documentary, *Fantome Island*.

FANTOME ISLAND

Key Credits

Director/Producer/Co-Editor

SEAN GILLIGAN

Producer/Co-Editor

ADRIAN STRONG

Executive Producer

MARK NEWMAN

Associate Producer

SELWYN 'JOE' EGGMOLESSE

Music

DAVID LAZAR

Sound Design

TFER NEWSOME

Interviewees

SELWYN 'JOE' EGGMOLESSE

JOANNE WATSON

DR. HUGO REE

DR. GORDON BRISCOE

SISTER MADONNA PURCELL

WINNIE OBAH

BERYL GORRINGE

PETER LUDLOW

Camera

SEAN GILLIGAN

ADRIAN STRONG

RICHARD BELL

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FANTOME ISLAND

Key Credits

Colourist

NUALA SHERIDAN

Post Production Assistance Provided by:



Produced with the Financial Assistance Of:



&



Australian Government
**Department of the Environment,
Water, Heritage and the Arts**

Indigenous Heritage Program

FANTOME ISLAND

Technical Notes

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| Production Format: | HDV / Canon 7D |
| Release Formats: | Digital Betacam 16:9 Anamorphic HD Cam 16:9 Anamorphic |
| Sound Configuration: | Tracks 1 & 2 Stereo Mix |
| Date of Production: | 2007 – 2011 |
| Release Date: | 2011 |
| Duration: | 82min |

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Stills Information

A number of still are available on request. Please contact Sean Gilligan or Adrian Strong.

e: seanieg@gmail.com

e: adrian.strong@gmail.com

