

1 X 53 MINUTE **DOCUMENTARY**

SECRET KEY FILMS PTY LTD

35 Price Ave

Lower Mitcham

SA 5007

A FILM BY SHALOM ALMOND

MY LONG NECK

**"I WANT TO SHOW PEOPLE THE TRUTH
ABOUT WHAT IT'S LIKE TO HAVE A
LONG NECK." MAJA**

Financed with the assistance of:



**South Australian
Film Corporation**



**Screen
Australia**

ABOUT THE FILM

ONE LINER

After a chance meeting with an Australian filmmaker, Maja decides to make a film about her life in a Long Neck village, but soon begins to see it as a 'human zoo' and must take a stand to reclaim her culture.



SHORT SYNOPSIS

Maja is proud of the 16 coils of brass around her neck that distinguish her as a Long Neck Kayan woman from Burma. But after 20 years of living on display and constantly being photographed in a tourist village in Thailand, the rings are becoming more a trap than a source of pride. When a chance meeting with an Australian filmmaker puts a video camera in her hands, Maja decides to turn the lens around and make a film about what it means to live in a “human zoo”. The process turns her life on its head and forces her to choose between tradition and rebellion.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

SHALOM ALMOND

2009 I visited a so-called Long Neck village in Mae Hong Son, Northern Thailand, with mixed feelings. I had heard about the exotic Long Neck women of Burma, but my travel guidebook described these villages as “human zoos”, where tourists pay big money to gawk at the women and take photographs. I was even more intrigued by recent stories on the internet about an uprising amongst the young Kayan women against wearing the rings.

For centuries, the Kayan or Long Neck Karen as they are called, have worn multiple rings that elongate their necks by deforming their collarbones and pushing their shoulders down. Nobody knows how the tradition started, but whatever the origin, I soon realised Thailand's tourism industry has been instrumental in keeping it alive.

The sign at the entrance to the Long Neck village told me the women had traveled here from Burma as refugees, but visitors should refrain from asking them any personal questions. The women were quiet, withdrawn and made limited eye contact. They seemed ashamed to be there, and I felt guilty looking at them. I made an instant decision to put away my camera and not to take any photographs. Instead, I walked up to the first Long Neck stall in the village to look at some scarves, and it was here I met Maja.

Maja was 26-years-old and wore sixteen brass rings around her neck weighing four kilos. Her hair was twisted up in brightly coloured scarves and she was wearing hot pink lipstick. She looked more like an exotic Japanese pop princess than a poor Burmese refugee. Maja told me she was proud of her tradition and wanted her two young daughters to wear the rings too. Maja seemed smart, savvy and told me she was content with life in the village. It wasn't what I was expecting to hear and just as I was about to ask more, she invited me to come and stay at her house. This spontaneous invitation marked the beginning of a special friendship.

When I decided to make this film about Maja and her family, I had no idea that over the next four years I would experience so many twists and turns – including eight trips to Thailand, having a baby in the middle of production, falling off a motorbike into a river (not once but three times!) eight bouts of gastro, barely escaping two malaria outbreaks, overcoming a fear of flying in very small planes, spending six months in the edit suite and having to translate four languages (Kayan, Kayah, Thai, Burmese) – all for this one-hour film. It's been a massive journey, but I've loved every second of it.

One of the most exciting aspects of filming My Long Neck was giving Maja her own video camera and helping her tell her own story, which ended up becoming the



narrative framework for telling my story too. It was amazing to see how Maja turned the camera – which until this point had been a symbol of her imprisonment – into a tool for her empowerment.

The experience of Maja making her own film was a truly transformative experience for her, and for me too. Every filmmaker hopes that their film will make a positive impact – no matter how small – on the people and community they're working with.

I'm proud that the film will make a lasting and meaningful impact on the lives of future Kayan women. Maja's film is available to view online for a small fee (<http://vimeo.com/ondemand/majasfilm/75073670>) and all of the profits will be deposited into an education fund for Maja's two daughters Yoko and Yuki. If a documentary has the power to do that, it was definitely worth all my effort tenfold.

Shalom Almond
25th September 2013

HISTORY OF THE RINGS

The Kayan are a subgroup of the Karenni people, an ethnic minority of Burma (also known as Myanmar) in South-East Asia. The Kayan are made up of various tribes who identify themselves by their forms of dress. The women of the Kayan Lahwi tribe are well known for wearing neck rings: brass coils that are worn around the neck, appearing to lengthen it. The women who wear these coils are known as "Long Necks" or "Giraffe Women" to tourists.



Kayan girls first start to wear rings when they are around five or six years old. Over the years, the coil is replaced by a longer one and more turns are added. The rings weigh an average of 4 to 6 kilos, which push the collarbones down and compresses the rib cage. Contrary to popular belief, the neck itself is not lengthened; rather, the appearance of a stretched neck is created by the deformation of the clavicle.

Anthropologists have suggested many conflicting reasons for the rings, including that they made the women more sexually attractive, or alternatively protected them from becoming slaves by making them less attractive to other tribes. Some have suggested that the coils give the women the appearance of a dragon – an important figure in Kayan folklore – or that they protect them from tiger bites.

Kayan women acknowledge these ideas, but say they wear the rings for cultural identity as well as to enhance their beauty.

Coiling and uncoiling the ring is a lengthy process. It is usually only removed to be replaced by a new or longer coil. Eventually, the neck muscles may become weakened but are still able to support the head if the coil is removed. Although many women have removed the rings for medical examinations, most prefer to continue to wear them as the area can become bruised and discoloured.



In Thailand, the practice of wearing the rings amongst Kayan refugees has gained popularity because it draws tourists who bring revenue to the tribe and to the local businessmen who run the villages and collect an entry fee of 250 baht per person.

In January 2008, the UNHCR expressed reservations about tourists visiting the Kayan villages in Northern Thailand due to the provincial government's refusal to allow registered Kayan refugees to take up offers of resettlement in other countries. It is believed this policy was linked to their economic importance to the area.

Around this time, some of the younger women in Mae Hong Son started to remove their rings, either to give them the opportunity to continue their education or in protest against the exploitation of their culture and the restrictions that came with it.

ABOUT THE CREW

Shalom Almond **Writer/Director/Co-Producer**

Shalom (www.shalomalmond.com.au) is an award-winning South Australian documentary filmmaker who is passionate about making character driven social issue films in Australia and overseas.

Shalom spent four years making her first film 'The Love Market' (2009) which follows the journey of four hill tribe girls struggling to grow up in the face of Vietnam's growing tourism industry. The film was nominated for Best



Documentary and Best Director at the 2009 AFI Awards and won the Best Documentary and IF Audience Awards at the 2009 St Kilda Film Festival, to name a few.

Shalom's other recent directing highlights include 'Chasing Shadows' (2010) which screened on ABC, about the journey of a young Aboriginal man trying to carve out a career in the Hip Hop music industry, and 'Love-Heart Baby' (2012) exploring her own

Katrina Lucas **Producer**

Katrina has been making documentaries since 2005. She has produced a number of award winning films that have been broadcast on SBS, ABC, Al Jazeera, Australia Network and screened at festivals around the world. In 2009 Katrina was the recipient of the South Australian Screen Awards (SASA) Emerging Producer Award. She went on to produce Sally's Story about transgender Jewish activist Sally Goldner, which premiered at the 2011



Melbourne Queer Film Festival and screened at major LGBTI film festivals across the United States. In 2011 Katrina directed an educational documentary about street art, which was nominated for an ATOM award, and she recently produced Shalom Almond's documentary 'Love Heart Baby' (2012) for ABC2.

Lauren Drewery
Executive Producer/Story Editor

Lauren works as a writer, producer, director and story editor in partnership with filmmakers in Australia, Canada, the US and Italy. She has collaborated with Shalom Almond on three other projects - 'Chasing Shadows', 'The Love Market' and 'Love Heart Baby'. Some of Lauren's credits include director of 'The Graduate from Sudan' for SBS (2009), writer/producer on 'The Lost Ship of Venice' for Discovery/France 5 (2007) and 'Born to Fly' for National Geographic International (2006), and writer on the PBS series 'Secret Files of the Inquisition' (2005).



CONTACT

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CREDIT LIST



Writer / Director / Producer
Shalom Almond

Producer
Katrina Lucas

Executive Producer / Story Editor
Lauren Drewery

Consulting Producer / Story Editor
Alan Erson

Cinematographers
Shalom Almond
Helen Carter
Maja Duboya

Editor
David Banbury

Grade & Online Editor
Erfan Khadem

Sound Edit & Mix
John Bridges, Wombat Studios

Cinema Sound Mix
Tom Heuzenrouder

Original Music
Ashley Klose

Production Assistant
Danny Hales

Translations
Elnee Jehn
Khun Dee
Jack Anantabum

Title Design
Amy Milhinch

Screen Australia Investment Managers

Mary-Ellen Mulane

Julia Overton

South Australian Film Corporation Project Managers

Melissa Juhanson

Sandy Lapore

Music

'Ocean' by John Butler

(2012 Family Music Pty Ltd)

Courtesy of Jarrah Records

**Recorded Live in 2012 at The Compound, Fremantle,
Western Australia**

'Nothing to Lose' by Michael Learns to Rock

(1997 Sony/ATV Music Publishing)

Courtesy of Universal Music

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Maja Duboya

Manang Duboya

Madam Khan

and their families

Osker Linde

Brenda King

Susan McKinnon, Documentary Australia Foundation

Department of Screen and Media, Flinders University

Fiona Gilroy

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