

A lost father  
A thirty year old conspiracy  
A daughter's journey to uncover the truth

# THE SNOWMAN

A film by Juliet Lamont



New South Wales Film and Television Office

The logo for pony films, featuring the word "pony" in a lowercase, monospace-style font inside a black rounded rectangle, followed by the word "films" in a lowercase, sans-serif font.

pony films

A Pony Films Production

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## **Synopsis** (Short)

In 1978 Jimmy Graham went to Antarctica with Operation Deepfreeze to train scientists in survival skills on the ice. He left in December of that year. Three months later he arrived back agitated and paranoid. He said that he had stumbled onto an illegal nuclear site and that the CIA had given him a chemical lobotomy. He descended into madness. Unable to cope with his frightening behaviour, his wife fled with their two children. Now, thirty years later, his daughter Juliet will try to uncover the truth and reconnect with what's left of the man she called her father.



## Synopsis (Long)

In 1978 Jimmy Graham, a thirty four year old happily married father of two, scored his dream job with Operation Deepfreeze - training American scientists in survival skills in Antarctica. He left in December of that year. Three months later he arrived back agitated and paranoid. He said that while out on the ice he had stumbled onto a secret American nuclear site and the CIA had given him a chemical lobotomy to keep him quiet. Jimmy rapidly descended into schizophrenia. His behaviour became so frightening that his wife Frances fled to safety, taking their two children Sean and Juliet with her. For thirty years the family lived with this story, but no one ever dug deeper. The man they loved went away sane and came back permanently fractured – his mind was a blizzard.

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Now Juliet wants to know what exactly did happen on that frozen continent.

First she must locate Jimmy, who she finds now living a marginal, alcoholic life in a country town from where he has had little contact with his family for the past three decades. Juliet is now in her mid 30s and lives five hours from him in the city with her husband and two children of her own. She wants her father back. She wants a grandfather for her daughters, but will she be able to reach this fragmented man who longs to reconnect with his family?

The starting point is to ask 'what if Jimmy's version of events is true?' Operation deep freeze not only existed, it still operates today as the support operation for US Bases in Antarctica. The CIA has been exposed over and over again as having conducted illegal drug experiments, illegal interrogations and covert operations for the last 50 years. To find the truth Juliet takes us to Australia, New Zealand, Antarctica, Scotland, Ireland and the United States to put together the pieces of that summer in Antarctica. Meeting New Zealand Antarctic program co-workers, his climbing friends, members of the 70s communes the family lived in, the people behind operation Deepfreeze, and others who were down on the ice in the summer of 1978. Juliet's quest takes her across the world revealing along the way an Antarctica much scarier than anyone thought as she unturns stones some would prefer left alone. Like explorers Scott and Mawson she too ventures into an unknown continent as she travels into the uncharted frozen centre of her father's mind and her family's memory to bring some sort of closure and get back what of her father she can.





## **Juliet Lamont** (Writer/Director)

Juliet studied theatre and creative writing at the Victorian College of the Arts and is a graduate of the Playwright Studio at the National Institute of Dramatic Art.

She won the Bruce Dawe National Poetry Prize in 1999 and was awarded the Mick Young Play Award for an emerging Australian playwright in 2002 for her play “Strange Fruit”, which later premiered at Wharf2Loud at the Sydney Theatre Company in 2007.

Her first short film “Burst” screened in the 2006 Telluride Film Festival ‘Filmmaker’s of Tomorrow’ program, won Best Film at the Hope Awards and came second in Australia’s most prestigious short film festival, Tropfest. She has just finished her next short drama “Fall” and is currently developing her feature drama “Wasteland”. She has also completed a commissioned play for Urban Theatre Projects to be produced in 2009. *The Snowman* is Juliet’s debut feature film.





**Rachel Landers**  
(Producer/Cinematographer)

Rachel completed a PhD in history at the University of Sydney and a post-graduate directing course at the National Institute of Dramatic Art. Working in theatre after graduation she then moved into film as a writer, director and producer of both drama and documentary. Her films have screened all over the world and have won and been nominated for a number of awards that include: the Gold Hugo from the Chicago Film Festival, Best Cinematography from the ACS, Nominations for 2 AFI's (writing and direction) for the film *Revisionism*; won a United Nations Media award as well as Best Documentary at the Melbourne Film Festival for the documentary *Whitey's Like Us*, and a Logie Nomination for the series *Drama School*.

Rachel produced and directed the successful documentaries *A Girl, A Horse, A Dream*, *The Lost Tribe* and the 4 part series *Missing*. She also directed the documentary *A Debt of Honour*. She has recently completed the feature documentary *A Northern Town* that screened at a number of international film festivals was a finalist in the Dendy awards and the Film Critics Circle awards, was shortlisted for a Grierson Sheffield Innovation Award, received a United Nations Media award and won an AFI award for Best Cinematography in a Documentary.



## **Dylan Blowen** (Producer)

Dylan studied at the University of Massachusetts - Amherst, Harvard, and the International Film and Television Workshops before taking up production work at Paramount and Universal for four years. He then moved to New York to produce live television before moving to Sydney in 2002 when Dylan formed Pony Films with Rachel Landers to produce a large slate of successful, award-winning cutting-edge documentaries.





## Director's Statement

There are films you want to make and films you have to make. Hell would have to have frozen over before *The Snowman* fitted into the former. That's not to say that as a filmmaker I didn't sense the inherent drama of the story - the dark fairytale, the conspiracy, the domestic soap opera set against the epic frozen landscape of Antarctica - but as a human being and a daughter I was scared. The prospect of finding my lost father, of unceremoniously picking at the bones of my family's past and sorting through my own emotional baggage on camera was terrifying. I usually need two quick glasses of red wine to form a confident sentence at a dinner party, so this film was going to be a baptism by fire.

The galvanising force that was pulling me up onto my feet to declare 'I'm going to make this film' was the fear that if I didn't find a way to reach my father soon, he'd die alone in a bed-sit surrounded by sherry bottles and climbing books. I'd get a call to arrange a funeral and collect the traces of him. And that would be the end of it. That image alone plagued me with enough heartache and panic to overcome any self-consciousness about the process of making a personal documentary. And the more I thought about the possibility that a great injustice was perpetrated against him on the Ice during that fateful 1978 Antarctic summer, the more I was fuelled with the quest of finding the truth. The idea that, finally, after almost thirty years of separation, I had an excuse to spend time with him outweighed everything.

The camera would be my olive branch. And the filmmaking process would become the bridge that facilitated our first tentative steps back towards each other.

The film shows us a very real family with the courage to share their mistakes, their human frailty in the face of the challenges of dealing with the mental illness of a family member and the potential for us all to reach out, before it's too late, to the people we love. My family isn't fixed, but it's less broken. And there's enough hope in that for me. So there's a lot to be said for jumping into the fire.

- Juliet Lamont

## **Credits**

### **Director**

Juliet Lamont

### **Producers**

Rachel Landers

Dylan Blowen

### **Cinematographers**

Rachel Landers

Simon Smith

### **Editors**

Melanie Sandford

Lindi Harrison

### **Composer**

Benjamin Speed

### **Animation**

Sam Challis

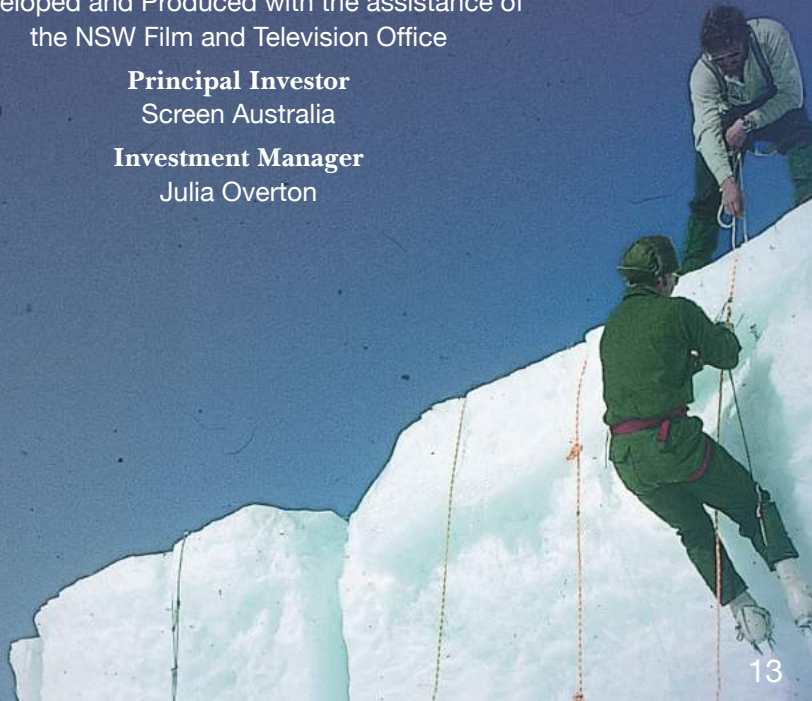
Developed and Produced with the assistance of  
the NSW Film and Television Office

### **Principal Investor**

Screen Australia

### **Investment Manager**

Julia Overton



## Technical Information

Genre: Documentary

Copyright Year: 2009

Running time: 79 minutes

Format: Available as both HDCam/Digibeta

Locations: Australia, Scotland, Ireland, NZ, USA

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SCREEN  
AUSTRALIA



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