



UNLOVED

HURONIA'S FORGOTTEN CHILDREN

A FILM BY BARRI COHEN

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Filmmaker Barri Cohen leads part detective story, part social history in ***UNLOVED - HURONIA'S FORGOTTEN CHILDREN*** as she uncovers the truth about Alfie and Louis, her two long-dead half-brothers. They were institutionalized at the Huronia Regional Centre in Orillia in the 1950s, with one brother unceremoniously buried in secret in an unmarked grave as a small child. Their lives were cut short, but their story stands as a microcosm of the immense tragedy of the western world's 20th century disastrous treatment of intellectually disabled children and youth. Through the interwoven narratives of a POV family story with critical institution survivors, a question preoccupies the film: how do we allow ourselves to dehumanize the most vulnerable people in our care?

UNLOVED - HURONIA'S FORGOTTEN CHILDREN is a heartbreaking yet redemptive work that moves outwards from a highly personal and painful family secret to an investigation of hidden, searing truths about an entire government-enabled system of institutional cruelty and ugliness against vulnerable children. Yet, humanity is hopefully restored by assembling community and survivor testimony, along with the filmmaker's insistence that these experiences be fully recognized and memorialized.



O. H. S. Orillia

NOTICE OF DEATH

Case Book No. 10,688

1. Name of the patient in full COHEN, Lewis (Louis)
2. Residence [REDACTED] Toronto
(Street and number, or lot and concession) (Municipality)
3. Date of admission to hospital June 6/55
4. Date of death March 26/57
5. CAUSE OF DEATH

I

LONG SYNOPSIS

Time and again in Canada, we are confronted with the revelations of brutal legacies of violence and the damage wrought on traumatized lives. Indigenous children from residential schools... boys and girls at the hands of Catholic priests... elders isolated in nursing homes... disabled, institutionalized children: What links their often-horrendous treatments, the ensuing lawsuits and class actions, and survivors' demands for apologies and reparations?

UNLOVED - HURONIA'S FORGOTTEN CHILDREN explores this central question as the filmmaker sets out to uncover the mystery and story of **ALFIE** and **LOUIS**, her two long-dead half-brothers whose lives were a microcosm of the immense tragedy of Canada's and the 20th century's disastrous treatment of intellectually disabled children.

This personal mystery story widens in focus to encompass the story of former Huronia residents, like **PAT SETH** and **MARIE SLARK** — two survivors who launched a 2010 landmark class-action lawsuit against the Province of Ontario seeking redress for the pain, suffering, abuse and neglect inflicted upon thousands of children and youth who were institutionalized at the Huronia Regional Centre from 1945 to 2009. It was the first such class action of its kind in Canadian history.

Many of the film's participants are former residents and staff at Huronia when the filmmaker's brothers were there. Through these survivors, we'll get a rare and bracing glimpse at how they — and by extension, the brothers — lived and how and why Alfie and Louis died.

WHAT IS HURONIA?

It's a haunted set of derelict buildings today and a place of nightmares in the memories of survivors who lived their childhoods there long ago. It was one of three institutions created in Ontario in the 20th century to house the intellectually disabled child. It's part of a network of institutions that made claims to care, train, and make lives better for children, youth, and adults who aged in place. But Huronia Regional Centre and its sister institutions were not unique to Ontario or even Canada. On the contrary, it was typical for institutions of its day – indeed, some still exist in Canada and across North America, even in Europe. And yet - as the film reveals, Huronia tragically breached its standards of care, again and again.

Initially called in 1876 THE ORILLIA ASYLUM FOR IDIOTS AND THE FEEBLE MINDED, its ethos was to remove the “stain”, shame and burden of “retardation” and “otherness” from families by housing the intellectually disabled far away – perhaps educate them if possible – but more likely keep them fed and locked up, often forever. Countless such places sprung up across North America since the 1900s, but Huronia was the most overcrowded - with more than 2,500 residents in its heyday and staff in the hundreds. Its doors were locked for good in 2009.

Canadians know virtually nothing of what went on inside in places like Huronia: the neglect and abuse, the daily humiliations, and vast breaches of standards of “care”. In 1960 Ontarians were first alerted to neglect in an expose – but its author – the celebrated late journalist, Pierre Berton, never knew how very much worse it was for the children locked up there.

“Remember this: They said [of the Concentration Camps] they did not know what went on behind those walls. No one had told them. Well, you have been told about Orillia. Prisoners have better facilities.”

*Pierre Berton, 1960, Toronto Star
(from his exposé on Orillia's Ontario Hospital School)*

The class action settled in 2013 out of court and included reparations for survivors from 15 similar institutions across Ontario. But without their day in court, survivor testimonies remain largely hidden. **UNLOVED - HURONIA'S FORGOTTEN CHILDREN** brings them out of the shadows and follows survivors, former workers, activists, and supporters as they embark on a final mission of redemption: to create a proper monument acknowledging the vast number of unmarked graves in the Huronia Cemetery. It's an act echoed by the filmmaker's family – who come to terms with the mystery and shame of a disappeared dead brother.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Family secrets – especially 65-year-old ones – are difficult to pry open. *Unloved* began with a phone call that led me to this conclusion.

News headlines landed in December 2013 about a historic class-action lawsuit settlement in Ontario. The Action was against the province for grave harms and abuse suffered by children institutionalized at Orillia's Ontario Hospital School – first opened in 1876 – one of the oldest of its kind in North America. It was later called Huronia Regional Centre.

The class action represented survivors from 1945 to 2009, though the class action revealed that dehumanization had been ongoing throughout the 20th century.

The lawsuit was brought by Huronia survivors, many of whom were sent away as children in the '50s through to the '70 – either because they had an intellectual disability or labelled as such by authorities. Often these kids were poor, came from broken families and were dumped at Ontario Hospital Schools by the Children's Aid.

My dad had two sons from a first marriage who were sent to Orillia in the 1950s under cover of secrecy. I barely noticed the news headlines until I got a phone call from my half-sibling Adele: Did I know that Alfe had been there? I didn't, not exactly; I knew he had lived and died in a Hospital in Orillia, but I never connected that fact up with this terrible place in the news! Adele connected those dots for me.





Alfie died in 1973 at the Huronia Regional Centre. I never knew him. I'd later discover that his younger brother Louis was also sent away to live there, but that fact was a secret Dad took to his death. Little Louis died at 4 in the institution in 1957. Until I undertook to make *Unloved*, we didn't realize his grave was a mystery. Its place is unknown and unmarked. The quest to figure out what happened and where he was, forms one of the driving narratives of a larger story that connects our family's questions with the stories and memories of the institution's survivors.

I tried to make a visually arresting film based on these intertwining threads. The personal family story and the mystery at its heart; the chorus of survivors' memories and stories; I interrogate the larger narrative of 20th century dehumanization, which unfortunately has a history that knows few national boundaries. With the emergence of neoliberal Western societies, we consistently create spaces and policies that dehumanize the most vulnerable. That's a fact I learned in making this film. Most of the children, the disabled, elderly, and racialized members in these populations.

My intention with *Unloved* resides there: to portray a reality that will hopefully resonate with audiences so that they may recognize how much dehumanization, "othering", and warehousing of people continues to this very day. In Long Term Care spaces. In Group Homes and in places where people have little choice or agency.

I have had the great privilege of spending time with incredible survivors since I undertook the research and filming in 2014. *Unloved* is the product of trust and conversations built over these many years. The survivors and the survivors they speak for are resilient and brave, and I'm grateful they chose to share their stories. In addition, the film features brilliant and dogged activists, advocates, historians, and academics of critical disability studies who guided my thinking – and the film's trajectory of thought – about how vulnerable we all still are living in conditions structured by failures of love, compassion, and decency.

- Barri Cohen (she/her)



Barri Cohen

Director, Writer, Executive Producer

Barri Cohen is an award-winning writer, director, and producer whose career spans over 20 years of making independent documentaries and television series across a range of genres from lifestyle to comedy for general and specialty audiences in Canada and around the world. Her work has involved partners such as the National Film Board of Canada, the CBC, Discovery Channel USA and Canada, CTV/Bell Media, the Corus Group of Channels, and OTT's like Hulu, GEM Super Channel and Starz. Many of Cohen's independently produced and directed works involve health, mental health, and environmental, social justice stories. Among her awards and nominations include those for her feature documentary *Toxic Trespass: Children's Health & The Environment* (TVO/NFB) and the recently co-produced *Toxic Beauty* (2019) – Phyllis Ellis's multiple Canadian Screen Award-winning and internationally nominated feature documentary for White Pine Pictures and documentary Channel which had its premiere at the 2019 Hot Docs International Documentary Film Festival. Cohen also produced Ellis's Canadian Screen Award-nominated documentary for CBC, *Girls Night Out* (2016)

Cohen is the past National Executive Chair of the Documentary Organization of Canada, past editor and publisher and current columnist of *Point of View Magazine* and was the co-chair and co-founding member (1994 - 1996) of the Hot Docs International Documentary Film Festival. She is currently developing a family drama/comedy series, writing a memoir collection with essays, and studying psychoanalysis.

PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHIES

HURONIA SURVIVORS

Patricia (Pat) Seth

Hurononia Survivor / Class Action Co-Litigant

Sent away at age 7 to live at the then-named Ontario Hospital School in Orillia, Patricia Seth suffered an unthinkable range of abuses during her 10 years as a resident at the Huronia Regional Centre. Pat recalls: “When mom and dad let go of my hand, I remember I was so scared. I cried my eyes out.”

In 2010, Pat and her friend Marie Slark, also a former resident and survivor, became co-litigants of a landmark class action lawsuit against the Government of Ontario for the abuses and harms suffered by them and fellow residents while at Huronia. The lawsuit was quickly followed by similar suits brought by survivors of Southwestern Regional Centre in London, Ontario and Rideau Regional Centre in London, Ontario (along with twelve other Huronia-like institutions). Settlements totaled near \$75 million in compensation.

Today, Pat is a disability advocate who has spoken out about disability rights and the history of Huronia to universities and organizations across Canada. She lives on her own in supportive housing in downtown Toronto and is active in her church community. Before retirement, Patricia led a life of work and marriage (now divorced).



Marie Slark

Huronion Survivor / Class Action Co-Litigant

Marie Slark was sent to live at Huronia in 1961 at the age of 7. “I was a ward of Children’s Aid Society and in the institution or group homes for thirteen years before I got discharged,” she says. “They wanted total control over our lives.”

Like Patricia, Marie could have chosen a path to try and forget the harms of Huronia. Instead, she decided to compel those in power to confront an ugly legacy of abuse and institutional failure. Retired now from her job in retail, Marie lives with fellow survivor and half-sister Antoinette Charlebois, their two cats and a beloved Jack Russell terrier in downtown Toronto. Pre-pandemic, Marie travelled across Canada with a group of survivors, each of them telling their stories of being institutionalized and speaking out against the re-institutionalization and warehousing of disabled youth and adults in Long Term Care.

Marie and Antoinette are gifted knitters and crafts persons and have been creating outerwear for women and children in shelters. The knitted forget-me-knots that surround Huronia’s cemetery were made by Marie and installed by survivors in 2018.



Cindy Scott & Harold Dougall

Hurononia Survivors / Co-Founders, *Remember Every Name*

Cindy Scott and Harold Dougall are good buddies who still live in Orillia. They met after the class action was settled, while touring Huronia's empty halls and cemetery. It is especially hard for both to see those buildings still standing. "Just blow 'em up, tear it all down," they say. Cindy was admitted to Huronia in 1971 at age 8 lived there for two brief periods in the 1970s. Deaf at birth from a bout of maternal Rubella, Cindy says life was troublesome. In 1960, Harold was sent to Huronia at the direction of Children's Aid Society's due to his learning disabilities when he was 12. Both Cindy and Harold suffered physical, emotional and sexual abuse while at Huronia.

Both excelled in their adult lives thanks in part to their association with Special Olympics. Harold went on to study public speaking. Cindy spends her time on social media staying connected with other survivors while taking care of her retired mother.

In 2014, Harold and Cindy formed the **Remember Every Name** survivor group, to steer the construction of a monument within Huronia's cemetery to honour the dead — many lying in unmarked graves. The monument is to serve as a testament to those who lived and died at Huronia and, symbolically, for all children who have suffered and continue to suffer in institutional settings. In 2018, Harold ran for Orillia City Council's Ward 2 as a disability advocate. He may yet run again in 2022.

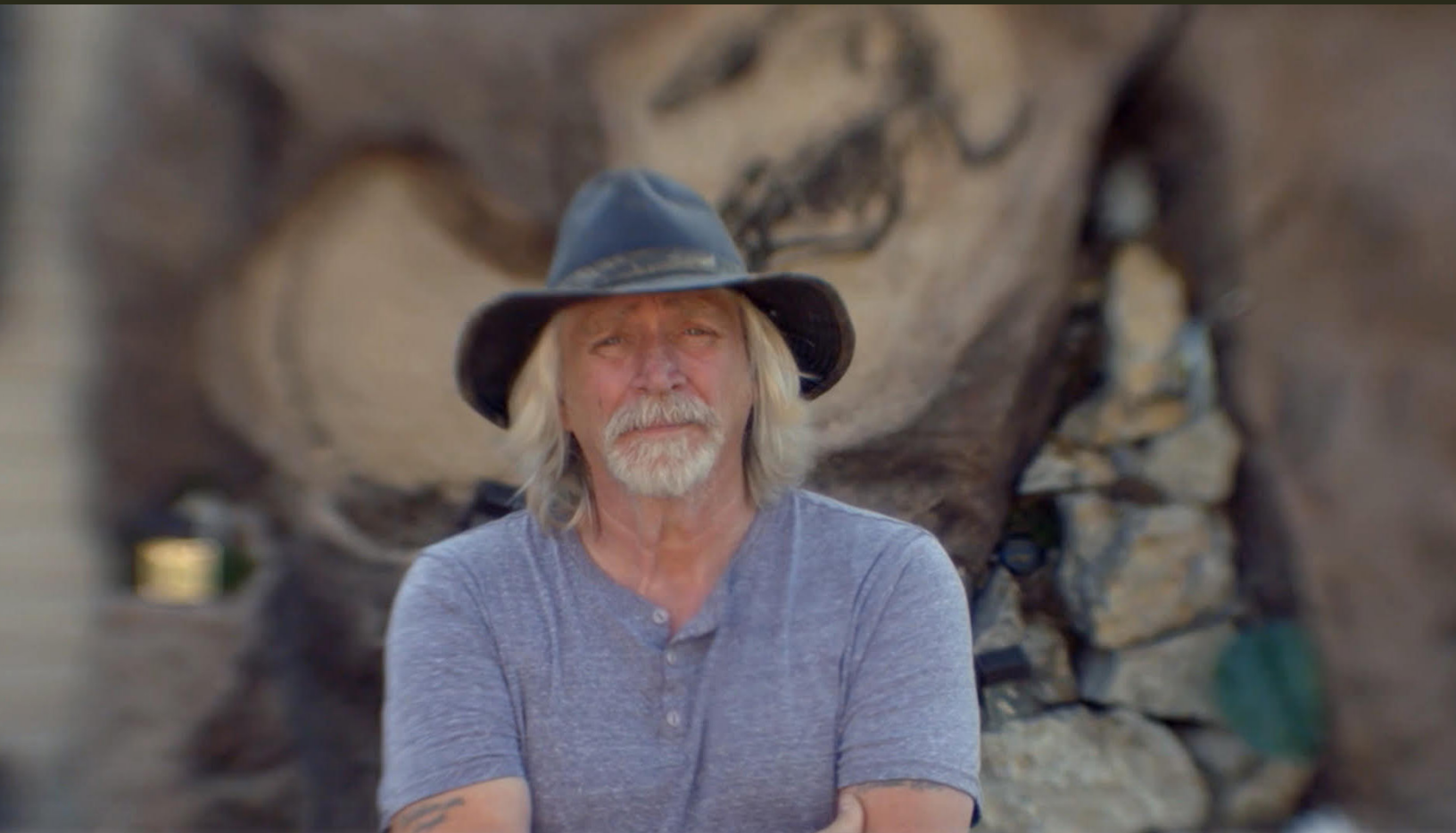


Brian Logie

Hurononia Survivor, *Remember Every Name* Member

Survivor Brian Logie first tried to sue the Ontario government in 1993 for the abuse and neglect he suffered at Huronia. He got nowhere and realized it would be a costly and monumental task, so he was grateful when the class action finally emerged so that he could tell his story.

Brian was sent to the institution at the age of 10 in 1962 when his family fell apart. His story represents what happened to many kids who had the misfortune of being born into poor and dysfunctional homes. Brian's memories of abuse and sexual assault are painfully vivid, and he has spent many years telling his story to support groups and agencies as well as advocating for justice. When Brian was discharged from Huronia as a teenager, he trained to become a master plumber. Brian is also an artist, sculpting with metal and wood. Brian is married to an insurance executive, has grown children and grandchildren, and enjoys his retirement on a farm in rural Ontario. Each Mother's Day, Brian makes an annual pilgrimage to Orillia to honour the dead at the Huronia's cemetery, along with other members and supporters of *Remember Every Name*.



Carrieanne (Ford) Tompkins

Huronian Survivor, *Remember Every Name* Member

Like Brian Logie, Carrieanne was sent to Huronia in the 1960s because of family dysfunction and poverty. Carrieanne spent nearly ten years in the institution. She has been active since 2014, speaking about her experiences and advocating for justice around the unmarked graves at the cemetery. Along with Harold, Cindy, Pat and Marie and other survivors, Carrieanne participated in a cabaret about Huronia in 2016. She also joined the Recounting Huronia Speakers Bureau to travel across the province and Canada – including trips to universities and the Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg – to tell her story of abuse and survival. She is a widow, a mother, and a grandmother.

Carrieanne lives in Brampton, Ontario, and can't wait to get safely back on the road again to raise awareness about the dehumanization and suffering of institutional life.





HURONIA SURVIVOR SUPPORTERS / ADVOCATES

Marilyn Dolmage & Jim Dolmage

Class Action Litigation Guardians, Disability Activists

Debbie Vernon

Survivor Supporter / Remember Every Name Co-ordinator

Mitchell Wilson

Disability Advocate / Remember Every Name Member and Researcher

Hilary Clark Cole

Sculptor, Huronia Cemetery Memorial Monument

EXPERTS

Madeline Burghardt, PhD

Author, *Broken: Institutions, Families, and the Construction of Intellectual Disability* (McGill-Queens University Press, 2018)

Kate Rossiter, PhD

Chair, Department of Community Health, Wilfrid Laurier University, Ontario / Co-Author, *Punishing Conditions: Institutional Violence and Disability* (Routledge, 2019)

Katharine Viscardis, PhD

Former Lecturer at Trent University/ Instructor, Northern Lakes College/ Dissertation Author, *The History and Legacy of the "Orillia Asylum for Idiots": Children's Experiences of Institutional Violence*

THE FILMMAKER'S FAMILY

Marshall Cohen

Filmmaker's Older Brother and "Sleuth"

Adele Perrin (Née Cohen)

Alfie's and Louis's Sister / Filmmaker's Half-Sister / Mother of Samuel

Eric Cohen

Filmmaker's Younger Brother

DOCUMENTARY TEAM

Craig Baines

Producer

Craig Baines is an award-winning content producer, showrunner, writer, story editor and media financing consultant. Craig's production expertise covers a broad range of factual genres – including documentary, true crime, lifestyle, children's/youth, and structured reality programs. Throughout a 27-year career, Baines has collaborated with many of Canada's top executive producers. *Unloved – Huronia's Forgotten Children* is his second project working with Toronto's White Pine Pictures.

Baines recently won the 2020 Canadian Screen Award for Best Biography or Arts Documentary Program for producing the arts documentary *Finding the Secret Path* (2019), which documents the final year of Gord Downie's life and tracks the celebrated singer/songwriter's efforts to raise awareness of the dark legacy of Canada's residential school system. Baines also won the Canadian Screen Award for Best Variety or Entertainment Special and a Golden Sheaf Award for the Performing Arts Special, *Gord Downie's Secret Path in Concert* (2018).

Other accolades for Baines' work include a Canadian Screen Award nomination for the original lifestyle series *Food Network Canada's Great Canadian Cookbook* (2017) and two Gemini Awards nominations for *Survive This* (2010) and *Pretty Dangerous* (2008).

Baines currently divides his time between producing award-winning factual content and writing fiction and creative non-fiction.



Peter Raymont

Executive Producer

Award-winning filmmaker, journalist, writer, Peter Raymont has produced and directed over 100 films and TV series during his 50-year career. Raymont's films are often provocative investigations of "hidden worlds" in politics, media, the arts, and big business. His films are informed with a passion for human rights and social justice.

Raymont's documentary feature, *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Journey of Roméo Dallaire* was honoured with the 2007 Emmy for Best Documentary and the Audience Award for World Cinema Documentaries at the Sundance Film Festival. His films on poet and author Ariel Dorfman and pianist Glenn Gould were shortlisted for the Academy Award for Best Documentary. *Guantanamo's Child: Omar Khadr* and *All Governments Lie* were nominated for an Emmy. *Once Were Brothers: Robbie Robertson and The Band*, *Toxic Beauty* and *Margaret Atwood: A Word after a Word after a Word is Power* have screened to sold out audiences worldwide.

In 2019, Peter was honoured with the Don Haig Award at The Hot Docs Film Festival which recognizes a Canadian filmmaker with a significant body of work and a history of mentoring Canadian filmmakers.

Steve Ord

Executive Producer

Steve Ord is an independent media consultant with 30 years of experience in the field and currently provides services to White Pine Pictures, a leading documentary production company. At White Pine Pictures he was an Executive Producer on the Emmy nominated *All Governments Lie* feature documentary and the more recent *Once Were Brothers: Robbie Robertson and The Band* which opened TIFF in 2019. Until 2008, Ord held the position of Executive Vice President, Alliance Atlantis Communications, where he was responsible for business and operational aspects of AAC's content business and international television distribution division, including the *Crime Scene Investigation*, one of the most successful television franchises of all time. Ord was also an Executive Producer on the long running *Cold Squad* scripted series (98 episodes). Prior to joining Alliance Atlantis, Ord was Manager of Business Affairs at Telefilm Canada.

Ord previously worked in policy consulting with Paul Audley & Associates. For 14 years, he was also a part-time graduate level instructor at the Schulich School of Business (York University) where he led a course, *The Business of Creativity*.

James Kinistino

Director of Photography

Jimi (James) Kinistino is a Toronto based Indigenous cinematographer, director, filmmaker, and owner of Ravensun Media. He's the 2021 Canadian Screen Award recipient for best picture editing on Insight Productions' *Every Child Matters*. The multi-talented Kinistino has directed and lensed several feature films, over 25 episodes of dramatic series television, MOW's, numerous music videos, short films and documentary projects across Canada, Europe, and the USA and been featured on CBC, Global Al-Jazeera, APTN and Showcase. His first Telefilm-funded feature DOP work was for *Firesong* (directed by Adam Garnet-Jones) which premiered at TIFF in 2016.

Kinistino's notable documentary projects include the Antica Production's *The Secret Path in the Classroom* and the acclaimed CBC arts documentary series *In the Making*, hosted by fine art impresario Sean O'Neil. In addition to *Unloved*, Kinistino has completed DOP work on CBC Gem's *Stories from the Land* and he is slated to direct its second season. He will also be directing the **2022 Inspire Awards**, which celebrates cutting edge Indigenous, Inuit and Métis achievers from across Canada.

Sarah Peddie

Editor

Sarah Peddie is a 20-year veteran film and television editor whose work ranges from dramatic features to documentaries and series television. Peddie's work has been launched at such international venues as the Sundance Film Festival, the Toronto International Film Festival, and the Rotterdam Film Festival. Peddie's television work includes the award-winning series *Pitchin' In* and *Til Debt Do Us Part*. Her most recent work includes the CSA award-winning dramatic feature *Brotherhood* (streaming now on CBC Gem and Amazon Prime) and Trevor Cameron's feature documentary, *Shadow of Dumont*. She is currently a senior editor for Alibi Entertainment series *Crossroads* (2022) for TVOntario.

Michelle Osis

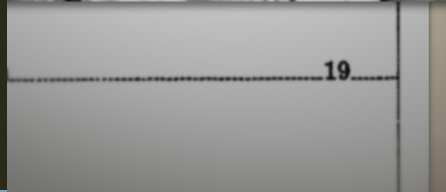
Composer

Michelle Osis is an Ontario-based composer for Film and TV. Osis emigrated from Sydney, Australia, where she had also worked as a freelance screen composer. Osis's past work includes such award-winning films as *A Little Bit Behind* (directed by Paul Slater), *Let It Rain, Bamboozled* (directed by Matt Hardie), and the documentaries *Fake Blood* (directed by Rob Grant) and *The Skin We're In* (directed by Charles Officer). Most recently, you can hear Osis's music on the David Suzuki narrated documentary series *The Nature of Things: Inside The Great Vaccine Race*.

Osis has been nominated twice for a Canadian Screen Award — once for the ground-breaking documentary *Corporate Coup d'Etat* for White Pine Pictures and again for the 2020's horror film *Bloodthirsty* (directed by Amelia Moses).



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Written and Directed by **Barri Cohen**

White Pine Pictures Presents In Association with **documentary Channel**

UNLOVED: HURONIA'S FORGOTTEN CHILDREN

Producer **Craig Baines** Executive Producers **Barri Cohen, Peter Raymont, Steve Ord**

Director of Photography **James Kinistino** Editor **Sarah Peddie**

Composer **Michelle Osis**

Produced with the participation of the **Canada Media Fund,**

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