

CONTACT MEDIA KIT



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Joint Winner Best Documentary - Sydney Film Festival 2009
Winner Best Achievement in Directing for Documentary, Australian Directors Guild 2009



**In 1964 Yuwali was 17 when her first contact with whitefellas was filmed.
Now 62 she tells the story behind this extraordinary footage.**

CONTACT

**Directed and Produced by
BENTLEY DEAN & MARTIN BUTLER**

**Length: 78 minutes and 52 minutes
Format: PAL, HDCAM, Colour
Country of Production: Australia
Language: English, Martu with English subtitles**

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Screen Australia ARTE France Contact Films

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SYNOPSIS



CONTACT is constructed around one of the most extraordinary pieces of footage in Australian history: The moment when a group of Martu women and children walk in from their nomadic existence of millennia into the universe of European modernity.

The film centers on Yuwali, the beautiful 17-year old girl we see making that giant leap on the 24th of September 1964. Now 62, Yuwali's account of the 'first contact' experience is probably the fullest and most revealing ever caught on film.

Her group of twenty were the last remnant aboriginal mob still living traditionally, without any contact or knowledge of modern Australia, in the remote Great Sandy Desert.

A huge space rocket test – Blue Streak – was to be fired in May 1964 at their home in the dry Percival Lakes. The authorities sent in patrol officers to evacuate anyone living there to protect them from rocket debris.

The days counting down to blast off drive the narrative of the film. Back at the Lakes, Yuwali gives a riveting account as she and her group are chased hundreds of kilometers around the desert trying to escape the 'devilmen' in the 'rocks that move' (four wheel drives). The climax is both extraordinary and emotional.

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BACKGROUND

The contact only occurred because the 'Blue Streak' rocket was being tested at Woomera and was expected to land in the Great Sandy Desert. 'Native patrol Officers' were sent out in 4 wheel drives to check the site and warn any Aborigines there to move away lest they be hit by falling debris from the rocket. An initial search in May 1964 confirmed the presence of Aborigines, but they managed to evade the patrol officers and no contact occurred. Three months later another rocket was to be fired and a second expedition with film and still cameras set off to find the Aborigines. This time the aboriginal trackers managed to find the group in only two days and 'bring them in' to the Patrol officers. In all there were 20 people in the group 8 women and 12 children. No men had been with the group for two years. None had seen Europeans before, or even knew of their existence. The group lived as they had for millennia, without metal tools or any outside technology.

After this first contact the patrol officers and the aborigines then stayed at the Percival Lakes for about a month until the next Blue Streak was fired. The two groups got to know a little about each other and the Patrol officers had to make a decision – whether to leave the group in the desert or bring them in to a mission. Surprisingly the prevailing political view at the time was that aborigines should be left alone and not 'brought in' from the desert. Intriguingly the accounts of this decision are directly contradictory. The man charged with responsibility for making it, Terry Long from the W.A. Native Welfare department, claims that the Aborigines were desperate to leave the desert and would swamp any vehicle seen to be driving away lest they be left behind. Yuwali claims that she and the other members of the group did not want to leave their country but felt powerless

In the end all 20 were removed from the desert and within a few more years the last of the Martu were extracted from their country and placed in missions dotted around the edges of the desert. A way of life developed over tens of thousands of years had come to an end.

To place it in context, this extraordinary story played out as Beatlemania was hitting the world and humans were already orbiting in space. It has been extensively researched and written up in a book 'Cleared Out' by anthropologists Sue Davenport, Peter Johnson and Yuwali. Their research forms the basis for this documentary and they agreed to collaborate in making the film, and organising the field trip to the desert.

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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



When we first started filming with Yuwali we realised immediately that we had a truly unique storyteller with us. Her account is so detailed and so fresh that it dominates and drives the film. We can't recall from anywhere in the world such an accessible and perceptive account of the 'first contact' experience.

While filming we attempted to capture Yuwali's point of view to try and emphasise the subjective nature of her account. This is a film about her response to the planes, cars, rockets and whitemen that entered her life when she was a teenager. She took us back to the extremely remote Percival Lakes in the Great Sandy Desert where the contact occurred to tell us the stories from the exact locations – where she first saw a car, where she made contact, where she saw the rocket from, etc.

All of the movie archive used is authentic to this story. The footage in the desert was filmed by the lead patrol officer, Walter MacDougall and the vehicles, dingoes and people are all the direct participants in this story. All the footage of the rockets are the actual Blue Streak rockets that were fired. Almost all of the photographs are also directly authentic although we have used one or two general pictures from other situations. This was a deliberate decision to try and preserve the integrity of the first hand accounts.

One of the extraordinary elements of filming was the rapport and comfort we managed to achieve with the Martu mob. We were lucky that we were introduced to them by people who had already established a great amount of trust with them. This, and our very small team and willingness to roll with the flow of the

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Martu activities allowed an intimacy rarely captured. They bring this story and their unique situation in 1964 to life so vibrantly and accessibly that they came to set the pace of the narrative taking us back to that time and place without the use of dramatic devices.

Martin Butler and Bentley Dean
2009



STORIES FROM THE SHOOT

The filming on location at Percival Lakes had to be undertaken in mid winter as it's too hot and dangerous outside of those months. To set up the shoot required a 6-month lead-time and was clearly going to be a major operation. All fuel, food and water, plus the necessary transport for over 20 people have to be taken in to probably the most remote part of Australia.

As we approached the winter of 2008 it became clear that our funding from the ABC, ARTE France and Screen Australia would not be available in time, we had no guarantees that any of the funds would come through.

Not wanting to wait another year we decided to go ahead with the shoot anyway. So by borrowing some money, calling in favours and sheer foolhardiness we set off for Newman in late July to join the convoy of 7 Four Wheel drives that would take us all to the Lakes.

First stop Parrngurr, Yuwali's home. As the last of the swags and blankets were being thrown on the roof rack, one of the bush mechanics noticed a pretty serious fuel leak in our lead vehicle. No problem – the leak's in the back up tank and if we don't put much fuel in there we might be alright. Remember we were heading at least 2 days drive from any help or back-up. If you broke down out there, the vehicle was dumped. Day 2 and the same vehicle overheats and needs a double dose of Barsleaks before the precious water stops flowing from the radiator. Day 4 sees us leaving the tracks altogether – we just head off into open country. This is soft red sand, trees and shrubs everywhere and rolling 20-meter sand dunes as far as the eye could see. After failing to cross the first sand dune we return to the tracks a look for another route.

That night we arrive at Picture Hill Cave, the campsite of MacDougal and Long. Just after filming our first major interview with Yuwali, we were excited and filming inside the cave with burning torches when Bentley's trousers caught alight. A pretty serious burn in his calf resulted but we had very good first aid kits including special burns dressings that turned out to be very effective.

So the shoot had a worrying start and we hadn't even arrived at the Lakes yet. From then on the shoot went smoothly. It was hot during the day and freezing at night and the physical conditions were incredibly tough. Red dust was everywhere and cameras and computers constantly at risk. We couldn't afford water to wash with, so for the first ten days of the trip no one had a wash. We eventually found a waterhole full of camel dung that provided the first wash for the whole party. It's the first time we've experienced elation at the prospect of a wash with a bucket of camel shit.

Apart from multiple bogs, plenty of punctures and exhaustion we limped back into Newman 17 days later with 70 tapes of fabulous material. All we needed now

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was about 9 months to put it together.



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KEY CREATIVE BIOS

Bentley Dean - Director/Producer/DOP



Bentley studied Philosophy and Politics at Sydney University and Film and Television at the Victorian College of the Arts. In 1997 he participated in the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's inaugural series of *Race Around the World*. From 1998 he worked as a freelance cameraperson and director making numerous music video clips and short stories focusing on music and the arts. In 2001 he started working for SBS TV's international current affairs programme '*Dateline*' making stories around the globe including intimate portraits of Venezuela's president Hugo Chavez, the Zapatista guerrilla spokesperson Subcomandante Marcos, Colombian presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt kidnapped by the FARC guerrilla. His report on human shields in Iraq was made into the documentary *Baghdad or Bust* for the BBC. In 2002 he filmed and directed *Anatomy of a Coup*, the story of Venezuela's dramatic 48-hour coup. It won **Best Political Documentary at REAL: Life in Film**. In 2003 he filmed and co-directed *The President Versus David Hicks*. It won the **AFI Award for Best Documentary** and the **TV Week Logie for Most Outstanding Documentary**. In 2007 he made *Jon Frum He Come*, a 35 minute video installation exhibited with Ben Bohane's "The Black Islands" at the Australian Centre for Photography. His feature length film about the love story behind the Lima hostage crisis *The Siege* premiered at the Sydney film Festival in 2007 and was **nominated for AFI awards for best editing and best sound**. In 2008 he co-directed *A Well-Founded Fear*, which tells the disturbing story of what happened to asylum seekers deported by the Australian government. It won the **Australian Cinematography Society award for Best Cinematography**. In 2009 with Martin Butler he filmed, directed and produced *Contact*. It won **the Best Documentary Prize at the Sydney Film Festival and Best Achievement in Directing for Documentary, Australian Directors Guild 2009**.

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Martin Butler - Director/Producer/Sound



Martin has spent the last 25 years as a long form current affairs television producer. He spent 6 years at Four Corners directing/producing Tony Jones' 'Antarctica' film, Deb Snow's 'Maori Revival' and Mark Colvin's 'Massacre in New Caledonia'. He was a founding member of the 'Foreign Correspondent' team, serving for 10 years as Supervising or Associate Producer. Most recently he was the Supervising producer at SBS Dateline. He's produced **two Walkley winners**, most recently Olivia Rousset's Abu Ghraib trilogy. He's also produced films that have won the **New York Film and Television best documentary award**, **two UN media peace prizewinners**, two **George**

Munster awards for Independent journalism and **finalists in the Logies and Rory Peck Awards**. He has worked with Bentley Dean on several features for 'Dateline', including Big Brother in Baghdad, the story of the human shield's attempt to prevent the war in Iraq. In 2009 with Bentley Dean, he directed and produced *Contact*. It won **the Best Documentary Prize at the Sydney Film Festival** and **Best Achievement in Directing for Documentary, Australian Directors Guild 2009**.

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Tania Nehme - Editor

Tania Nehme edited numerous documentaries, commercials and short dramas before she cut her first feature, EPSILON, for Rolf de Heer in 1995. A graduate of the Australian Film Television & Radio School, Tania was **nominated for an Australian Film Institute [AFI] Award for Best Editor** in 1991 for her work on the short drama ONCE IN A TIME. Working as both picture and sound editor, THE TRACKER was the fifth feature Nehme has cut with de Heer, earning her **Best Editor nominations at both the 2002 AFI Awards and the 2002 Film Critics Circle Awards**. She also received an award from the **Sound Editors Guild for Best Dialogue**. Nehme also edited THE OLD MAN WHO READ LOVE STORIES, DANCE ME TO MY SONG, THE SOUND OF ONE HAND CLAPING and THE QUIET ROOM. After it's delayed release in 2004, Nehme received **nominations for an IF, AFI and Critics Choice Award** for The Old Man Who Read Love Stories. She won the **Best Editor Award at the Independent Filmmakers (IF) awards** in November 2004. Apart from feature films, Nehme edited the Barron Television children's series CHUCK FINN, the SBS Australia documentary KUMARANGK 5214 and the Australian Film Commission funded short feature THE 13th HOUSE. Her sixth feature collaboration with Rolf de Heer, ALEXANDRA'S PROJECT, resulted in **nominations for Best Editing for Film Critic's Circle and AFI awards** in 2003. As well as the film editing nominations, Nehme also received nominations for an IF and AFI Award as part of the sound team for THE TRACKER (2002) and ALEXANDRA'S PROJECT (2003). In 2006 Nehme **won the AFI and Critics Circle Award as Best Editor** for TEN CANOES. She also shared **best Documentary award at the Critics Circle Award** with Molly Reynolds and Rolf De Heer for THE BALANDA AND THE BARK CANOES (aka MAKING TEN CANOES). IN 2007 Tania edited the silent feature DR PLONK. Nehme also currently edited 12 x 6 minute pieces for the online platform called 12 CANOES. Nehme thinks she should shorten this page... She truly believes no one will read down to the end because it's boring...

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TO PURCHASE BROADCAST RIGHTS

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TO PURCHASE A COPY OF THE FILM

Copies of the film for private and educational use can be purchased from Contact Films

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FULL CREDIT LIST

Thanks to the Martu Community

Directed by

Bentley Dean
Martin Butler

Editor

Tania Nehme

Composer

Antony Partos

Consultants

Sue Davenport
Peter Johnson

Cinematographer

Bentley Dean

Sound Recordist

Martin Butler

Translators

Nola Taylor, Maureen Judson,
Hayley Atkins, Curtis Taylor

Production Assistance

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Sound Designer

Annie Breslin

Atmosphere Editor

Ilias Fortin

FX Editor

Jared Dwyer

Sound Editing Facility

Huzzah Sound

Re-recording Mixer

Wes Chew
Glenn Butler

Sound mixing facility

Deluxe StageOne (Australia)

MacDougall Voice

David Ritchie

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Online Editor

David Gross

Editing Facility

Definition Films

Maps

Matt Busted

Landsat TM

Visual Effects

Ben Blick-Hodge

Photoshop Artwork

Marden Dean

Production House

Definition Films

Legals

Lloyd Hart

Production Accountant

Jill Coverdale

Completion Guarantor

FACB Pty Ltd

David Noakes

Musicians

Violin

Phil Hartl

Cello

Adrian Wallis

Voice

Verushka Pestano

Music produced and mixed by

Wes Chew

Music Recorded and mixed at

Supersonic

**End credits music written
and performed by**

Elliott Gibbs

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Yikartu Peterson, Junior Rowlands
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Ezekiel Nixon, Hayley Atkins, Elliott Gibbs,
Richard Taylor, Nick Anderson,
Nicki Everson, Curtis Taylor,
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Stephen Butler

Archive Material

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Australian Broadcasting Corporation,
Western Desert Lands Aboriginal Corporation,
Ara Irititja, Terry Long, Bob Tonkinson,
Vic Surman, Arthur Lamp, Robert Macaulay,
Walter MacDougall, Associated Press,

Based on an original book 'Cleared Out' by
Sue Davenport, Peter Johnson
and Yuwali

Produced by
Martin Butler
Bentley Dean

**Developed and Produced in association with
The Australian Broadcasting Corporation**

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