

Feature documentary - 1 x 90 min

Directed by Mariel Thomas and Akhim Dev

Produced by Simon Nasht

Gabrielle



WE are JENi



***We Are Jeni* is the incredible story of over 2500 personalities inhabiting one young girl and saving her life.**

"Multiple personality disorder - the ability to develop different alters - saved my life and it saved my soul. It took those things that I felt were the most precious about me and it kept them safe. ...MPD is the greatest act of self-love"

Dr Jeni Haynes

From infancy Jeni Haynes was subjected to extreme abuse at the hands of her father. With no one protecting her, Jeni created a vast network of alternate personalities to survive her ordeal. It took her 40 years for her father to be brought to justice when, in a world first, her 'alters' stood as witnesses in court.



SYNOPSIS

From courtrooms to Hollywood, dissociative identity disorder (previously known as multiple personality disorder, or MPD) is the domain of 'the craziest of the crazy', a defence of the 'criminally insane' who have committed the very worst crimes. To be used by the prosecution is unheard of. Until now.

We open from the point of view of a woman in a court room - 49 year old Dr Jeni Haynes. She speaks in the voice of someone much younger, and places a child's hand puppet on her hand. In the witness box, a man visibly recoils in his chair.

In interview setting, Jeni begins her story - Finally she is facing her abuser, her father Richard Haynes, in court decades after the abuse took place. She encountered roadblocks at every turn, facing successive challenges of scepticism, injustice and official indifference. In Jeni's own words, hers was a truth too big to be believed. Will she finally get justice?

We Are Jeni reveals this long road to justice through the eyes of Jeni and her key 'alters', the six alternate personalities who have been significant figures through Jeni's life and who were there in the courtroom, ready to testify. The alters are credited for the superior memory Jeni possesses, a memory that enabled her to write a 900,000 word witness statement that formed the backbone of the prosecution.

With interviews from Jeni and her alters driving the narrative, the film will step between different periods of Jeni's life. The film will not follow a linear chronology, moving between the 2019 trial, her childhood in 70's suburbia and the "new" life Jeni and her alters are creating today. Jeni will recount multiple failed attempts to seek justice in the 90's, and meeting her 'shining knights', the psychiatrist and police officer who validated her through their support and belief.

WHAT IS DISSOCIATIVE IDENTITY DISORDER?

DID is almost exclusively a reaction to violent crime trauma experienced by very young children, typically by a primary care giver or care givers. It begins when the child's mind is plastic enough to employ high-level dissociative strategies to protect the psyche. In essence, memories and experiences are cordoned off and hidden so they are difficult to access, in what Dr George Blair-West describes as a genius coping strategy.

The film will also step into Jeni's internal landscape, 'the system'. Through the eyes of Jeni and her alters, we will learn how the condition not only gave young Jeni the means to survive her horrific ordeal, but also enabled the adult Jeni to fight for justice and eventually face her abuser in court.

Stories of childhood abuse are difficult to tell. Victim/survivors are often understandably reluctant to tell their stories. Audiences can find the subject too confronting to watch. Jeni is a survivor enthusiastic to tell her story, and her incredible survival mechanism is a unique device. Telling Jeni's story through the experience of the alters allows us to approach the difficult subject matter in a creative / sensitive way. Working closely with Jeni to understand the look and character of different alters, innovative VFX will be used to bring these distinct

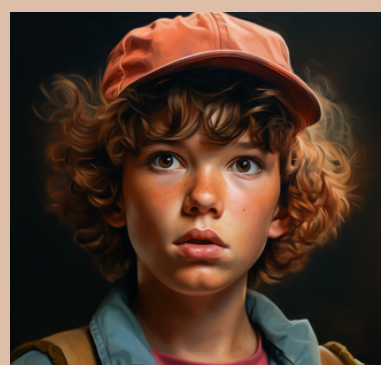
personalities to the screen. The audience will be brought into Jeni's internal landscape, where alters protected one another from the extremes of the abuse Jeni's father inflicted. Rather than retell the horrors, which could be re-traumatising for Jeni and a portion of the audience, the film will nod to the abuse through retelling of events around the abuse, and the measures the alters put in place to protect one another.

This is a tale of the unimaginable - the severity of the crime and the depravity of Jeni's perpetrator; the extremes of the mental condition she conjured in self-protection, and how crazy it sounds; the decade of roadblocks hampering the legal case, and the utterly unique outcome of trial. While not a feel-good film by any measure, *We Are Jeni* is ultimately an uplifting story of triumph against extreme odds.

THE KEY ALTERS:

SYMPHONY – The creator of alters, Symphony was 4 years old during the period of abuse and is now 18. Jeni credits Symphony with saving her life, dedicating her book to my dear Symphony..... You were my mother, my saviour and my friend through the worst.

ERIK – The 'Internal Architect' who built the tunnels in Jeni's mind where the alters live.



GABRIELLE – Hyper-feminine older teenage girl who holds and protects Jeni's femininity.



MUSCLES – A 17 year old 'alpha male' protector, seemingly fuelled by teen testosterone.



DR JENI HAYNES

To meet Jeni is one of the most extraordinary experiences imaginable. Jeni's courage, intelligence (she has a PhD in Criminology) and astounding resilience is truly remarkable. Through all the pain and injustice, Jeni has retained a hope and optimism. Since the trial, Jeni and her alters are taking tentative steps to a more joyful, liberated life. And now, despite her debilitating life-long injuries, Jeni is embarking on a new crusade, to speak up for the millions of survivor/victims around the world who have not been believed.

OTHER INTERVIEWEES / PARTICIPANTS

We will hear from key figures in Jeni's story, medical and legal who "believed the unbelievable". Like our audience, most started from a position of doubt and were slowly drawn into Jeni's case, eventually arriving at the truth.

Dr George Blair-West, Jeni's psychiatrist for over 20 years, describes her DID as the brain's most brilliant defence mechanism. As well as being a key player in her story, diagnosing her DID and 'mapping the system' through 100's of hours of therapy, Dr Blair-West also brings an expert perspective on Jeni's condition.



We will also speak with **Detective-Sergeant Paul Stamoulis**. Stamoulis is lead investigator at one of the country's busiest police area commands, Bankstown in Sydney's western suburbs. Managing a huge workload including violent robberies and murders, a file on an historic sexual abuse case could have easily been swept aside. Stamoulis chose to take on this case, spending 10 years "running through brick walls" to bring Jeni's father to trial. He faced hurdles, and disbelief, every step of the way.



Plus:

- The doctor who conducted an external examination, uncovering physical evidence of abuse decades after the injuries were inflicted.
- The prosecutor who agreed on the risky and unprecedented move to put Jeni's 'alters' in the witness box.
- The compassionate judge who agreed to allow the alters to testify.

CREATIVE VISION

Jeni's story spans genres - crime investigation, courtroom drama, family thriller, scientific exploration - but at its heart it is a love story, Jeni describing her dissociative identity disorder as 'the greatest act of self-love'.

Jeni & the alters story will take us between their internal landscape and the outside world, spanning half a century to the present day where, in Jeni's words, her 'story is still unfolding.'

A child of the 70's & 80's, Jeni and her alters regularly reference music, TV shows and games from this era. These pop culture references, from Enid Blyton to Dungeons and Dragons to The Osmonds, give us an engaging palette for highly art designed reconstructions and VFX treatments.



THE ALTERS

One physical body. Over 2500 'alter' personalities. How do we introduce the audience to a cast of distinct characters who all inhabit the one body? This is a huge creative opportunity for us as filmmakers. Jeni and six key alters recollections, primarily told through master interview, will provide the back bone to the film. As Jeni speaks, there is a distinct shift in both voice and mannerisms as different alters come forward to tell distinct parts of the story.

We are working with Jeni to create characters that have only existed in her mind. Jeni can describe the different looks, personalities and styles of the 'frontrunners' who are central to her story - Hyper-feminine Gabrielle; Erik wearing a dapper 3-piece suit; 80's rock teen Muscles. With Jeni's blessing, guidance and great enthusiasm, we are working with animators (and Monash University's AiLEC Lab) to trial manipulating Jeni's image to that of the alter speaking, to truly bring these distinct characters to life. It is crucial we approach this in a way that feel like a natural extension of Jeni's complex mind and the topography of her many personalities, and is not gimmicky or exploitative.

THE INTERNAL LANDSCAPE

Jeni speaks of 'the system' that the alters inhabit - a vast network of corridors, rooms (open and locked) and 'The Vault'. Within this system, alters will wait in line to speak, and have 'all-in' meetings, where all get to raise hands in a vote, in a room the size of a basketball court.



Jeni and her psychiatrist George Blair-West have 'mapped' this system, providing detail to graphically realise this internal landscape using CGI.

This world will feel distinct from the 'outside world' and our creative treatment of this internal landscape is inspired by Jeni's love of fantasy realms - Dungeons and Dragons, Magic The Gathering and children's classic The Faraway Tree. An avid fantasy role player in her spare time, Jeni sees similarities in a Dungeons and Dragons adventure with her quest for justice.

THE WORLD THROUGH JENI'S EYES

We know that Jeni's story is not an easy one to tell, yet it is crucial that people do not look away from stories like hers. We will not seek to explicitly retell Jeni's childhood abuse, but will allude to the horrors she endured and focus on the strategies she and her alters employed to manage them.

We know from Jeni's testimony, and from our work with agencies tackling childhood sexual abuse, that what a child victim recounts may not be the horrors of the physical act, but events surrounding it.

We are exploring shooting from Jeni's point of view, stylistically shooting scenes from her viewpoint, both as a child and in adulthood.

Jeni has incredible memory, and recounts features of spaces where the abuse took place in detail - The type of trees, and movement of the leaves; her Sweep puppet on floor; soft blue towels laid on the sofa. Jeni speaks of her father removing her glasses as a form of punishment, leaving her struggling to see. At these points, the POV camera shot could be blurred, reflecting her experience. Shooting low, as from the viewpoint of a small child, we capture such images to 'set the scene', before returning to master interview, or stepping into the internal landscape that was so innovatively employed to protect her.

This directorial approach will also be used to recount events in adulthood, such as Jeni's first meeting with her psychiatrist George, where she was unable to look him in the eye so instead absorbed features around the room. As we hear elements of Jeni's story from others, such as George and police inspector Paul, we may shift the viewpoint or broaden out to more conventional reconstruction.

THE PRESENT DAY

There will be elements of Jeni's story playing out in real time, which we will follow in an observational fashion, unobtrusively, with 2 cameras shooting longer lens following the action. This may include interactions between Jeni and George, as Jeni reveals steps she wants to take to reconcile with her sister.

ARCHIVE TREATMENT

Jeni has given us access to the small number of family photos that she has. We will add subtle animation effects to these, with emphasis on the emotion that Jeni remembers feeling when the photo was taken. Eg. 5-year old Jeni's expression may shift from smiling to sombre, with eyes downcast.

JENI'S MASTER INTERVIEW

Jeni's physical limitations will partly determine the style of her interview. We are exploring shooting her in a reclined position, reminiscent of a psychiatrist couch, so the audience feels drawn in to the intimacy of a psychiatrist's room. We propose shooting on 2 cameras, with a head & shoulder framing, shot down the barrel and a looser mid-shot.

THE OTHER INTERVIEWEES

There are additional characters who are crucial to Jeni's story, and all have a long standing and close relationship with her. *This is obviously not definitive – just a suggestion to have a vision on paper. We are exploring shooting their interviews in the environment most appropriate to their role and profession – Police inspector Paul Stamoulis at his desk, surrounded by files; psychiatrist George Blair-West in his armchair in his treatment room and surgeon Dr Carina Chow in her office. We may cut directly from Jeni in interview to the relevant response, 'passing the baton' in the narrative. Eg:

Jeni (in IV setting): "I walked in to George's office and said "What do you think is wrong with me?" and he said.."

George (in IV setting): ""I think you know what's wrong with you" and then she turned and walked to the door and, as she went to pull the handle I said "I can help you if you want".

