

NO PAST TO SPEAK OF

A Story of Infant Rape in South Africa

Directed by Jeremy Gans

Edited by DGC Member Bryan Reid

Director's Statement

“I want to show you something,” the doctor said, “so that you understand what you are dealing with.” Graeme Pitcher tunneled his way to the core of the Johannesburg General Hospital, where he is chief pediatric surgeon, fetched his laptop and set it on a coffee table. “You can’t film this,” he said. So instead Wilson Lee, my co-producer, trained his lens on me.

Dr. Pitcher opened a file labelled *My Pictures*, and scrolled through the list of subfolders. He breezed over *Family Photos* and double-clicked on *Trauma*, revealing the most horrifying images I have ever seen. I saw the back side of a young girl lying on a gurney in an operating room next to her own unfurled intestines. And I saw the subject of my documentary’s five-month-old perineum torn from vagina to anus. My eyes flickered and I lost my equilibrium. It was the same way I felt when I first heard of Claudia Ford and committed myself to telling her story.

A few weeks earlier, Wilson had given me a newspaper clipping that had already started to curl and yellow. The photo on the clipping was a close-up of an attractive woman in her forties; she was black, with freckles and long dreadlocks. The caption said her name was Claudia Ford. Blurred in the background was the image of a baby girl, whom the caption named Princess Moonbeam.

I read the article about the baby girl raised in a Johannesburg slum, who, in her fifth month, was raped by a grown man. I read about the police rescuing the little girl and rushing her to the Johannesburg hospital, where Dr. Pitcher and his staff performed emergency surgery to save her life. And I read about Claudia Ford, the American development-economics specialist living in Johannesburg, inexplicably marching down to the hospital and volunteering to become the baby’s foster mother.

“So, what do you think?” Wilson asked. To be honest, I was incapable of thinking anything. I was numb. I had never heard of this before. The thought of a man raping an infant had never crossed my mind; I assumed that it had never happened before, and that the action itself was physically impossible. After combing over old news clippings, it became clear that it was not only possible but also a recurring phenomenon in South Africa.

North American media outlets had all but ignored the story. Wilson explained that the story received almost as little attention in South Africa. He also informed me that Ms. Ford was campaigning to change this. She was working tirelessly to bring this issue out of South Africa’s collective closet and into the fore of the nation’s psyche.

As we explored this story, we uncovered countless myths surrounding this terrible crime. The most significant myth that we wanted to address was that men in South Africa were raping babies because they thought they could cure themselves of HIV/AIDS. Most everyone who has heard about babies being raped has heard about the *Myth of the Virgin Cure*. We wanted to know if men actually believed this, and we wanted to know if this belief could drive a man to commit such an atrocious and inhumane act.

What we discovered turned our beliefs upside down. We realized that the explanation was not as simple as a false belief in the power of black magic. To find the answer we were required to look back into South Africa's long, violent history, learn about the social structure of different communities, and try to imagine the impact of living with nothing in a land that has so much.

The purpose for making this film was to share what we learned learnt with as many people as possible. The enormous problem of infant and child rape can only be addressed once the underlying causes are recognized and understood, only then can the myths and rumours be put to rest.