



## Q&A with Director Lynn-Maree Milburn (In Bob We Trust)

### What drives you to work in the documentary filmmaking industry?

My little Honda Civic... I actually work on both drama and documentary projects in the filmmaking industry (in the independent sector). I think I do this because I am passionate about the filmmaking process as the creative means of telling stories. It has been a lifelong passion. With documentary you have the added bonus of getting caught up in the intricacies of the lives and stories of real people who in turn become the driving force and energy behind the dedication. I think also having some autonomy over what you do and the shape it takes by being independent means you can work on things you love without the interference or dictates from broadcasters and this allows for the experience to be more creative and fulfilling and therefore keeps you drawn to it. Economically it has been very hard and over the years I have had other income from occasional commercial work but this has taken second place to the documentary and drama work, because you need to dedicate so much of you and your time, that is the commitment.

### How did you initially approach Father Bob Maguire to be the subject of this documentary?

We read in the local paper that Father Bob had been asked to retire and that he didn't want to. Because we had already made his acquaintance – and were aware of him and his work and what he stood for – via our previous association on *Safran vs. God*, we were hooked, drove immediately to his door and rang the buzzer. Father Bob was so open and generous and inviting, as if we had known him a long time. And apart from him telling us his story would be boring, he was quite innocently accepting of us.

### How did you manage to follow Bob over three years and decide which moments would be important to capture during that time?

We haunted Father Bob daily for the first few weeks, then gradually – as we captured what we could of the unfolding drama and became aware of his schedule and how to access and assess his daily work – we dropped back to less days per week. We were also working on the development of other projects at the time (one of which went into production) as well as doing some other TVC paid work, and that meant we did have some undesired time away from Father Bob. But mostly we would make sure we regularly visited him at the presbytery, and then later his Victoria Avenue office, to keep up with events and routine tasks. There were pivotal times we just knew we had to be there and at times we would be almost camping out.

### Why do you find Father Bob to be such a fascinating character?

You could have asked this question a number of times over the years and I might have given a different answer each time, as I came to understand him more – and also because he has evolved himself, like an expanding universe.

We find him fascinating because he has many apparent contradictions and yet is so authentically himself, unified in a very unusual way. He is not afraid to question, cannot help himself but speak the truth – often truths people would prefer he didn't speak of – and he speaks of without self-interest or self-protection. He is motivated by something very strong and deep, a unifying principle about which he never stops thinking and investigating. He is both wise and innocent because of his very nature.

He spends so much of his time when he possibly should be sleeping instead meditating on life – what it will take to make it more just and compassionate – and he ends up with so much to speak about and needs to be heard. And usually when he speaks there is fallout: not everyone agrees with him and not everyone enjoys his insights. Because he dares to speak out against the powers that be, whom he believes do a disservice to the autonomy of people, and because what he says also displeases the very people he wishes to alert, because they appear to believe that subjugation of the self to the church and pious devotionism is a worthy Christian act.

At 77 years of age Bob has had to virtually rebuild his life from scratch as well as build a Foundation that was formerly more comfortable as part of the church. And he has had to tackle a life-threatening disease. But he did all this with his 'noisy' grace and little thought for himself. He claims he is a dour Scott and he certainly does not have an easy temperament, but his positivity, his wry grumpiness and his incredible humour never seems to flag and are just astounding. He has an intelligent, provocative understanding and knowledge of what is going on anywhere in the world at any given time. He has a compassionate curiosity for those around him, in particular the quiet one in the room. He also appears to be more at home with the secular world and yet is such a brilliant preacher, not only in his church but also in a variety of mediums in the world at large. He seems to have "swallowed the gospels whole". For all we witnessed, for all his distress at the Archbishop, for all his mock and real rebellion, and all he shared of that, he has an even deeper and more private self. He is so curious and open about other religions, other spiritualities and what they could bring to the comfort and understanding he wishes people to have. I'm also fascinated by the fact that he can be so grumpy, feel so miserable and yet keep on giving of himself; that he had so much to go through and yet he shared that with us and that he continues to care and fight for the lost and the gloriously ordinary of the everyday...

### **Was the Catholic Church cooperative in being interviewed during this process?**

Not really. There were some people that we interviewed – a few priests and an ex-priest, a journalist, the executive secretary of the Bishop's Committee for Justice, Ecology and Development, and a member of a Social Justice Council who were generous with their time. But as far as the Archbishop Denis Hart, Cardinal George Pell and the upper hierarchy of the Catholic Church were concerned, they declined to be interviewed and were generally not helpful.

### **The film chronicles such an emotional journey for Father Bob, as he is basically evicted from his post. Did he request not to be filmed at any time because it was too personal?**

He did say, "Don't film this..." sometimes and mostly we still did; other times he expressed himself quite strongly, not so much to stop filming but almost because he was in great pain and he wondered out loud how we (Ghost) had "suddenly turned into a heartless news crew" when the Capuchin Monks visited the presbytery. We did not include this line in the film because I never wanted the viewer to be aware of our presence, but it was very hard to keep filming as he was obviously shaken to his core. I felt he has always walked on the edge, but I think history had told him it was okay, and that his 'bosses' knew and understood him and his role. So when this event happened he really took it hard and it was the loss of all hope, and with it the trust in the powers that held his fate. I think there is only one line we have kept in the film: Father Bob saying "better not put this on tape". We left this in only because it said something about Bob – he didn't want to get the person he was speaking to into any trouble. But for the most part he became very used to us and would forget about the cameras and I think he had eventually come to terms with us doing what we were doing and kind of indulged us, forgetting about himself as subject.

### **Do you think this film is specific to an Australian audience only, or do you think it will have appeal globally?**

We would naturally hope the film might have global appeal, because we feel the struggle with power is universal; the dilemma of organised religion and all that entails is universal. The conundrum of the monolithic Roman Catholic power and the pious and more conservative route it has taken over the last few decades – with social justice, trust and spirituality being the victims as well as small parishes not really having a voice in their own destinies – are subjects relevant to wherever there is Catholicism; perhaps to all religions.

Father Bob also raises a series of other issues, such as spirituality, women's role in the church as well as the other issues of the place of power and subjugation of the will in relation to sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. These are all issues we feel are universal and would hope that Father Bob might find a voice out in the world as well as in Australia.

### **What is Father Bob doing now in his retirement?**

As mentioned above, he's not really retired. He has been indefatigable in his efforts to create his foundation from scratch in a new place and create some kind of home for himself in the same place, which is a small shop-front with offices in Albert Park. He likes to live and work in the same place.

This means he never stops working and he has never had a break, ever since being forced out of his parish. He continues all his work as an advocate for justice and understanding, and speaks on panels, seminars, conferences, other charities and anything with a social cause that involves helping the poor, compassion, emotional intelligence and of course justice. Under the banner of the Father Bob Foundation, he is working with other organisations – such as Interaction, an interfaith network exploring religion without borders, and the Big Umbrella, who do various works both here and overseas. The Father Bob Foundation also does outreach work, working with people to help them obtain appropriate help and social services. There are many more plans in progress too.

Father Bob still continues to perform christenings, funerals and marriages and a small mass at six o'clock on Sundays at Saint Peter and Paul's; but this mass remains unofficial and is held at the back of the church. It is a little like going into a mass held underground for exiles, and has a very intimate and connected feel about it. He is fascinating because he has the courage to speak up.

### **The [MIFF Premiere Fund](#)-supported *In Bob We Trust* is screening on the following dates:**

- **Saturday 27 July, 4pm at Greater Union**
- **Tuesday 30 July, 6.30pm at ACMI**
- **Wednesday 7 August, 11am at the Forum Theatre.**