



## **Press Kit**

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## **SYNOPSIS**

Through the eyes of three families, *All God's Children* tells the personal story of the first boarding school for children of missionaries to be investigated for abuse at the hands of the parents' missionary colleagues. The survivors and parents share their journey of seeking justice, redemption and healing.

The Beardslee, Shellrude and Darr families left North America for West Africa during the 1950s. They followed what they believed to be "God's Calling" – to spread Christianity throughout the world. Their children however - starting at the age of 6 – were required to attend the boarding school in Mamou, Guinea, run by the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Cut off from their families for 9 months out of the year and without any reliable means of communication, the children quietly suffered emotional, spiritual, physical and/or sexual abuse at the hands of the all-missionary staff.

It took the children decades to acknowledge the effects the abuses had on their lives. When they finally dared to break the silence and speak out, the Church denied all allegations and refused to help. But through years of persistent activism the survivors and their parents finally compelled the Christian and Missionary Alliance to conduct an investigation and acknowledge the abuses. The healing could begin.

The investigation of the Mamou Alliance Academy was the first of its kind but has since inspired investigations at other schools of many different denominations.

## **QUOTES ABOUT THE FILM**

"All God's Children is a chilling snapshot of what can happen when an institution like the church ignores the signs of abuse: isolated and vulnerable children are harmed and their trauma remains for years. This is the story of courageous survivors who ask their church for justice and healing. They got less than they deserve. But they stood up for themselves and each other. Thanks be to God."

Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune, FaithTrust Institute

"There's much we can learn from this film - about predators and about "good people" whose silence enables predators. At the same time, we can learn about how courage and unified action can shed a light on horrific crimes and help deeply wounded victims recover."

David Clohessy, national director of SNAP,  
the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests: [SNAPnetwork.org](http://SNAPnetwork.org)

"All God's Children struggles to find meaning amid grief compounded by decades of disregard and a willful lack of justice. It also serves as a clarion call to organizations that would ignore and suppress the truth rather than drag it kicking and screaming into the light. [...] The tragic implications are clear: All God's Children forces us to ask ourselves, What does it gain a man if he saves the whole world but loses his own children?"

Brandon Fibbs, Christianity Today

"I believe that this story is a valuable addition to the growing awareness of how children have been long sacrificed on the altar of God's work, and that alone will be healing for many of us, so thank you for that."

William Paul Young, author of NY Times #1 Bestseller [The Shack](#)  
[www.windrumors.com](http://www.windrumors.com)

"All God's Children is both a disturbing reminder that the Christian community is not immune to abuse and also a deeply moving case study on the complex dynamics of healing from spiritual, emotional, sexual and physical wounds. The redemptive possibilities that emerge when survivors find the courage to tell the truth and support each other in the process of healing are powerfully illustrated.

I recommend it highly."

Dr. Dale S. Ryan, Associate Professor of Recovery Ministry  
Fuller Theological Seminary  
[www.recoveryfromabuse.com](http://www.recoveryfromabuse.com)

"Deeply moving, the film tells of children who were cast onto the rocks of horrific abuse by the siren call of God's will. Yet years later, the wounded adults manage to shine a little light for all of us. Their stories stand as testimony to the transformative power of truth-telling."

Christa Brown, author [This Little Light](#)  
and founder, [StopBaptistPredators.org](http://StopBaptistPredators.org)

"Exposing a horrific scandal that's virtually never been highlighted anywhere, this deeply moving film is about far more than childhood betrayal. It's also about the heroic work of wounded adults to hold callous and deceitful church officials accountable for stunning crimes. It's both jaw-dropping and awe-inspiring."

David Clohessy, national director of SNAP,  
the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests: [SNAPnetwork.org](http://SNAPnetwork.org)

"All God's Children tells a tragic story—one that no one really wants to hear, but one that responsible adults need to hear. It reminds us that all souls need saving, starting with the ones God has seen fit to put in our care."

Cliff Vaughn, [EthicsDaily.com](http://EthicsDaily.com)

"I felt all that has been described here, It's hard to put into words how it affected me. I didn't attend Mamou but the boarding school I went to mirrored the experiences I saw on this film. I grieve for each of you, and for all of us with wounded children still hurting within us. [...] The word needs to be spread. I felt deeply saddened by it, but also validated, that I'm "not the only one", and am not alone."

Suzie Baer - MK and former boarding school student

"[...] brilliantly woven together, picking up the threads of the individual stories and unique personalities, to give us the powerful, collective drama. [I hope] that many more will have the desire and the courage to see this story [...] The message is as multi-faceted as the story, in fact. [These] lives stand as a testimony to the transformation of horrific suffering, a transformation that is contagious enough to bring about change in all who are willing to awaken."

Dee Ann Miller, advocacy writer, [www.takecourage.org](http://www.takecourage.org)  
author of [How Little We Knew](#) and [The Truth about Malarkey](#)

"I've watched the [DVD]... it is powerful. [...] we both could hardly sleep last night. I kept remembering things when I wakened during the night hours. I was reminded of the impotency of our lives there, our helplessness. [...] I know why I struggle with being an over achiever more clearly now, why I can't seem to rest, or be at peace."

Vivian Harvey - author, MK and former Mamou Academy student

"For Canadian Beverly Shellrude Thompson, participating in the project was both difficult and helpful. 'One of the things that has been my mantra is that the story needs to be told, that there's healing in telling the story,' she said from her home in Burlington, Ont. 'I've always carried in my head a deep shroud of secrecy that allowed both the pain and the system to go on.'"

Debra Fieguth, Faith Today

"... Solary and Westphal's film is sad yet unflinching, and demonstrates what can happen when unsuspecting parents put too much faith in an institution. The tone of the film may be more than just cautionary, however: It could be humanitarian."

Joel Rozen, Sarasota Herald Tribune

## DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

*All God's Children* began as a very personal project. Among the children abused at Mamou Alliance Academy were director Scott Solary's cousins Keith and Howie Beardslee. When their parents first told us about what happened to the children in Africa and the years of denial by the Christian and Missionary Alliance that anything had gone wrong, we were surprised there hadn't been more coverage in the media. As we began our research it became clear that the incidents at the missionary kids' boarding school in Mamou were not that unusual; mistreatment of children by missionaries appeared to be a widespread problem among various denominations. Why was nobody talking about it?



Scott Solary and Luci Westphal, filmmakers  
Photo Credit: Jamie Penkethman

We realized we needed to do our part in breaking the silence by spreading the word about some dark secrets of the missionary community. The investigation of the Mamou Alliance Academy was the first of its kind. A few have followed, some of them still ongoing. But even more have not happened yet because the responsible Churches and mission-sending organizations are still trying to keep the silence. We hope that with the help of *All God's Children*, organizations will find it more difficult to deny the victims' request for compassion and justice. And while individuals and organizations contemplate the events of the past, hopefully they will also look into improving their current systems and practices to better protect the children in their care.

Just as important, we also believe that viewing and discussing the documentary may enable other survivors of abuse to speak up and thus begin the healing process for themselves and their families.

With the help of the New York City Media Arts Grant from the Jerome Foundation we began production in 2004.

We made a conscious choice not to focus on the abusers but on the abuse survivors and their families. This is not so much a film about "why" but about "how to go on from here". We did however include a spokesperson from the Christian and Missionary Alliance to tell their side since they were involved in the events after the abuse.

While listening to the victims' accounts was often painful and very humbling, it was gratifying to learn that the process of talking to a camera and recording the unheard stories became part of the healing for some of the former students. As children they didn't have a voice, as adults they were silenced for many years, now their voices were heard, recorded and soon to be amplified when audiences would finally watch *All God's Children*.

It took several more years of filming and editing until in 2008 the film was finally finished and premiered at the Sarasota Film Festival.

In early 2009, we began traveling around the country with the film and some of the survivors and parents. Through moving conversations with audience members and organizers, we all soon realized we were telling a wider story than anticipated: the story of children, parents and siblings who learn to deal with abuse trauma first experienced by a child and later felt in after-shocks, not only by the survivor, but often by the entire family. The parallels between survivors of various forms of abuse in very different circumstance was striking.

Encouraged by our experience on the road with audiences, we hope that the film and the courageous survivors of the Mamou Alliance Academy will inspire you to talk, to listen and to take action.

Making *All God's Children* has been at times a challenging experience – but as we see the effect it has on the people in the film, audiences and on our own lives, we are grateful for having had the opportunity to do so and know we couldn't have spent this time in a better way.

### **BIOGRAPHIES OF DIRECTORS**

**Scott Solary** graduated from Florida State University with degrees in Creative Writing and Film Theory. He has held a myriad of positions in the independent film world: from the grip department on feature films to development at Good Machine. He lives in Brooklyn where he runs the production company Good Hard Working People with his filmmaking partner, Luci Westphal.

Scott currently works at CBS Interactive as a Senior Producer.

He has received a Jerome Foundation Grant for the production of *All God's Children*.

**Luci Westphal**, a Brooklyn resident, originally from Germany, holds a degree from the Film School at Florida State University. Her narrative thesis film and first feature screenplay won several awards. As a partner at Good Hard Working People she has produced and directed various short films, music videos and online shows.

Luci received a 2007 New York City Film and Video Grant from the Jerome Foundation for her feature documentary *All's Well and Fair*, currently in post-production.

**PRODUCTION CREDITS**

GOOD HARD WORKING PEOPLE presents  
ALL GOD'S CHILDREN  
(70 minutes)

Producer, Director, Editor	Scott Solary
Producer, Director, Camera	Luci Westphal
Additional Grip, Electric	Peter Verchick
Assistant Off-Line Editor	Benedict Kasulis
Sound Design and Sound Mix	Tom Lino
Assistant Sound FX Editor	Ruth Hernandez
Transcription Services	Ellie Snapp
Legal Counsel	Innés Smolansky

**INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS**

Ann N. Beardslee  
Rev. Dr. Howard M. Beardslee  
Howie Beardslee  
Keith Beardslee

Anne Darr  
David Darr  
Dianne Darr Coutts  
Dr. John Darr  
Rev. Richard Darr, Th.D.

Beverly Shellrude Thompson  
Marilyn Christman  
Ralph Shellrude

Dr. Bob Fetherlin

**PICTURES**

(all images are available in high-resolution on  
<http://www.allgodschildrenthefilm.com/Photos.htm>)



Rich, David, Dianne and John Darr in "All God's Children" by Scott Solary and Luci Westphal  
Photo Credit: Dick Darr



Ann Beardslee and Howard Beardslee in "All God's Children" by Scott Solary and Luci Westphal  
Photo Credit: Good Hard Working People, LLC





Baptism in "All God's Children" by Scott Solary and Luci Westphal  
Photo Credit: Shellrude Family



Keith and Howie Beardslee in "All God's Children" by Scott Solary and Luci Westphal  
Photo Credit: Howard Beardslee