

## CROPSEY

"Intelligent, profound and unsettling...auds will walk out of their theaters, get in their cars and check on their kids, not necessarily in that order."

-John Anderson/Daily Variety <http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117940125.html?categoryid=31&cs=1&nid=4157>

**NY Mag Tribeca FF Pick** - "In this fascinating documentary, we get the nightmarish story behind an urban myth—a series of child murders in the eighties that traumatized the borough, leaving some residents so obsessed that, more than twenty years later, they're still digging for missing kids."

-Logan Hill/New York Magazine <http://nymag.com/movies/filmfestivals/tribeca/55984/>

"A hard-hitting crime documentary that unfolds like a creepy episode of 'CSI: Staten Island.'"

-Robert Dominguez/NY Daily News

[http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/movies/2009/04/29/2009-04-29\\_cropsey\\_recounts\\_horrorifying\\_staten\\_island\\_murders.html](http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/movies/2009/04/29/2009-04-29_cropsey_recounts_horrorifying_staten_island_murders.html)

"The movie has twists and turns and enough chills that its showing at (Tribeca's) horror night."

-Andrew Siff/WNBC NY news at 11

[http://www.nbcnewyork.com/station/as\\_seen\\_on/Tribeca\\_The\\_Urban\\_Legend\\_of\\_Cropsey\\_New\\_York.html](http://www.nbcnewyork.com/station/as_seen_on/Tribeca_The_Urban_Legend_of_Cropsey_New_York.html)

**Hammer to Nail's pick for Grand Jury Prize (DOCUMENTARY)**- "Zeman and Brancaccio get to cross off the checklist in one fell swoop—boogeyman, Satanism, deranged madman... *Cropsey* stokes our imaginations' spookiest fires."

-Michael Tully/Hammer to Nail <http://www.hammeronail.com/genre/documentary/tully-2009-tribeca-film-festival/>

"One of the most involving tales of murder, madness, and mystery that I've seen in a long, long time...one of those rare docs that doesn't just educate you, it actually makes you look at the world differently."

-Peter Gutierrez/Firefox Reviews <http://firefox.org/news/articles/2735/1/Tribeca-Movie-ReviewCropsey/Page1.html>

**Paper Magazine Tribeca FF Pick** - "An intriguing, creepy documentary."

-Denis Dermody/Paper Magazine <http://www.papermag.com/?section=article&parid=3232&page=2>

**NewYorkology Tribeca Weekend Pick** - "Eerie... with undeniable emotional power."

-Tim McGonagle/NewYorkology [http://www.newyorkology.com/archives/2009/04/tribeca\\_reviews.php](http://www.newyorkology.com/archives/2009/04/tribeca_reviews.php)

"Cropsey is an absorbing and terrifying piece of filmmaking. Part personal history remembrance, part time capsule of a place, part true crime thriller."

-Brandon Harris/Hammer to Nail <http://www.hammeronail.com/genre/documentary/cropsey-entre-nos/>

"CROPSEY can be seen as THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT by way of ZODIAC and CAPTURING THE FRIEDMANS."

-Samuel Zimmerman/Fangoria <http://www.fangoriaonline.com/features/21-fearful-features/2180-the-awful-truths-of-cropsey.html>

"Certain to be creepiest of all is CROPSEY ....made all the more frightening because it is true."

-The Tribeca Tribune

[http://www.tribecatrib.com/news/2009/march/127\\_the-tribs-guide-to-the-tribeca-film-festival-april-22---may-3.htm](http://www.tribecatrib.com/news/2009/march/127_the-tribs-guide-to-the-tribeca-film-festival-april-22---may-3.htm)

"One of the best films of the festival."

-Mina Hochberg/ AM NY

"A Fascinating documentary."

-This Week in New York <http://www.twi-ny.com/>

"Simply blew my mind."

-Retroslashers <http://retroslashers.net/blog/cropseyhes-real/>

## TRAILER

[http://www.tribecafilm.com/videos/Cropsey\\_-\\_Trailer.html?page\\_type=small](http://www.tribecafilm.com/videos/Cropsey_-_Trailer.html?page_type=small)

# Hammer to Nail

Ambitious Film

Sign-Up for Newsletter

- [Monologues](#)
- [Dialogues](#)
- [People We Love](#)
- [Collaborators](#)
- [Accomplices](#)
- [Contact](#)

## Tully's 2009 Tribeca Film Festival Wrap-Up

Posted by [Michael Tully](#)

05 / 04 / 09

[Coming of Age](#) | [Documentary](#) | [Drama](#) | [Foreign](#) | [Horror](#) | [On the Festival Circuit](#) | [Short Film](#)

I have always been skeptical of the Tribeca Film Festival's... how should we call it... *agenda*? With such a humongous lineup of proudly advertised "world premieres," it has always felt like the festival's priority was more relentlessly focused on premiere status over actual quality (a problem with just about every high profile festival, I realize). While I understand that the TFF has some serious fiscal backing and some powerful supporters, this still poses a problem. When you're just three months past Sundance and one month before Cannes, that approach seems like an incredibly dangerous one, no matter who you are. From the films I've managed to see at past festivals, calling this approach dangerous is being kind. But this year, with the news that the lineup had been trimmed and there were (to my ignorant eyes) many more New York premieres, lessening that "world premiere" burden, I felt a surge of hope for the festival that I hadn't previously felt. Having seen twelve features and a few shorts at the 2009 edition, I am happy to report that things appear to be heading in the right direction.

That said, the opening American Express commercial that played before every film seemed head-scratchingly inappropriate. This was supposed to make us swirl and swell with pride for the TFF, as it was rejuvenating the energy of downtown Manhattan—specifically the neighborhood for which the festival is named. But aside from a few one-off drive-in screenings and the closing weekend's screenings at Tribeca Cinemas, the festival *didn't* take place in Tribeca. This year, for all intents and purposes, it was the Union Square/East Village Film Festival. While I actually didn't think I cared about that issue, being reminded of it *every single time I sat down to watch a movie* made me care. Note to TFF: if next year plays itself out in a similar location pattern, you might wanna hold off on the grandstanding. But enough about that. Let's talk about the movies themselves, which is the point, after all.

(A reminder: let it be known that I only saw 12 features, so this is in no way a comprehensive reading of the festival's program!)

### GRAND JURY PRIZE (NARRATIVE)

[The House of the Devil](#) (Ti West) — This is one of those cases where a film spoke to me so directly that it's hard to be objective about it. That said, I watched this with some folks who weren't watching movies like *Let's Scare Jessica to Death* when they were eight years old, and it seriously worked for them as well. West avoids any lame smatterings of irony to deliver a film that, sans familiar faces (Ms. Gerwig, Mr. Noonan, Ms. Wallace, Ms. Woronov), I would have believed was a lost horror classic from 1983. As the film unfolds at its slowly foreboding pace, West shows his mastery over every element within the genre, especially with regards to cinematography (by Eliot Rockett). He dollies when he needs to. He zooms at the right moments. He employs close-up sweep pans to add a subconscious layer of tension in the exact right places. Sonically, West and sound designer Graham Reznick also create an unbearable level of dread. By the time the shit hits the fan, man-oh-man, West has earned it and we are about to be *drenched* in blood. For aspiring filmmakers worried about taking the period piece plunge, *The House of the Devil* provides proof that with ingenuity and a whole lot of talent, it can very well become 1983 all over again. I *love* this movie.

### GRAND JURY PRIZE (DOCUMENTARY)

[Cropsey](#) — While I also connected deeply to this film's subject matter on a purely superficial level, Joshua Zeman and Barbara Brancaccio have produced a work that thoughtfully and expansively explores the urban legend phenomenon. At the same time, *Cropsey* is a chilling investigation of one particular community's missing children phenomenon. That it happens in Staten Island adds

immeasurably seedy flavor to the proceedings. With this particular case, Zeman and Brancaccio get to cross off the checklist in one fell swoop—boogeyman, Satanism, deranged madman. But the best part—the part that makes these urban legends so fascinating and this film so exceptional—is that they aren't able to provide a cut-and-dry answer to put these myths to bed. As a result, *Cropsey* only stokes our imaginations' spookiest fires.

### THE REST OF THE REST (in no particular order, necessarily)

*Still Walking* — I finally got to catch up with Hirokazu Kore-eda's latest effort after hearing about it since Toronto, and it didn't disappoint. In his introduction, Kore-eda said he was worried showing this deeply personal film to a Western audience, who might not be able to relate to the film's themes and story. Let's see here... a professionally drifting adult returns home to spend an uncomfortable day with his domineering mother and stubborn father who still treat him like a child... gee, that doesn't sound like something anyone in America could possibly relate to. With the utmost grace, Kore-eda tells his simple tale, which is profoundly moving every step of the way.

*Fish Eyes* — First time feature filmmaker Zheng Wei takes an experimental approach to telling the quiet story of a father and son who live in extreme isolation in rural Mongolia. A young woman enters their life, and, in keeping with these characters' sense of solitude, they don't explore what could have driven her here. They simply appreciate her presence. *Fish Eyes* might take a while to cast its spell, but when it does, its hooks sink comfortably into one's skin. Picked up for distribution by Benten/Watchmaker Films, this first theatrical acquisition establishes that this distribution partnership certainly isn't in it for the money. *Fish Eyes* is a deceptively minor film that reverberates; it also marks the arrival of a fresh new voice on the world cinema scene.

*The Exploding Girl* — Less than 24 hours removed from having seen Bradley Rust Gray's film, my appreciation for it is still growing. Like *Fish Eyes*, the story that this film tells is a minor one, but that isn't to belittle it in any way. Gray is clearly in full command of his vision, employing a detached and formal visual approach that keeps viewers on the observational side of the emotional fence. But in the film's third act, things turn and we begin to truly *feel* for this young woman. Winner of the Best Actress award at this year's festival, Zoe Kazan delivers a refreshingly understated and natural performance. And this *is* a performance.

*Blank City* — I haven't done my homework, but to my eyes, Celine Danhier's *Blank City* is the definitive document of New York City's DIY underground film movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Yet to call this movement underground is overstating things. The spontaneous off-the-cuff super-8 cinema that these artists were churning out makes mumblecore look like big-budget Hollywood. Danhier presents an onslaught of incredible archival footage that really gets at the core of what these individuals were doing. New York City was a different place back then, and it's clear that the dangerous atmosphere fueled the anarchic, punk rock content of these films. To be honest, *Blank City* didn't make me feel like this was an even somewhat important cinematic movement. But as a time capsule and a glimpse into New York City at such a volatile and bustling and unique moment in time, it more than delivers.

*In the Loop* — Another film that I finally got to catch up with at Tribeca, Armando Iannucci's *In the Loop* is indeed smart and funny, but I can't deny the fact that the *Office*-esque presentation didn't make it feel as fresh and alive as I had been expecting. That said, there are some laugh out loud moments and I found myself playing catch-up throughout to figure out exactly what was going on (a good thing). Another strange point: I'm the last person in the world to complain about foul language, but in this case, it bordered on the gratuitous to me. More specifically, it felt like it was being used to enhance situations that otherwise might not have been as funny otherwise. Some of it felt more juvenile than I was expecting, especially when compared to the more intelligent satire that was occurring at such a breakneck pace.

*Racing Dreams* — Or, as I like to call it, *The Highest Grossing Documentary of 2009*. Just kidding. Or not. Marshall Curry follows three adolescent go-karters who dream of becoming Nascar drivers when they grow up, and the result is an automatic crowd-pleaser. For me, the best moments are the non-racing ones, in which we get lovely little glimpses and reminders that kids are pretty much still the same. Curry gets to scratch the happy surface a bit further with one boy's difficult relationship with his father. Of course, the film does take place over the course of one year and is leading up to the climactic national championship, so there is that undeniable element as well. Whoever buys this movie has a hit on their hands.

*P-Star Rising* — Not a perfect documentary by any stretch of the imagination, Gabriel Noble's portrait of an aspiring child rapper, Priscilla Diaz, nonetheless has a lot to say about our fascination with stardom as well as a parent's sometimes inappropriate controlling of his or her children. For me, what elevates *P-Star Rising* is not Priscilla, who is clearly overflowing with talent and maturity. It's the frank and at times unsettling portrait of her father, who is unable to leave the past behind. Clearly he loves his daughter, but even more clearly, he is dragging her into his own unresolved feelings of dissatisfaction and regret. Ultimately, it's up to Priscilla to put him in his place, which she does.

*Vegas: Based On A True Story* — I was completely sucked into this movie for the first 30 minutes, but as the family began to unravel, so too did my connection to it. This is a genuinely great concept, in which a Las Vegas family who is already wrestling with gambling demons, learns that there might be a stash of loot hidden in their hard. After deliberations, the excavation begins. Director Amir Naderi is to be commended for trying to actually *say something* with his film. The problem is when he says it too loudly. It's a murky line, and I found myself teetering back-and-forth throughout. To be honest, I don't know exactly where I land with regards to *Vegas: Based On A True Story*. When it was a movie, it worked for me. When it became a morality play, it worked less so.

# FILM

Posted: Sat., Apr. 25, 2009, 10:00pm PT

Digg [submit](#)

TALK BACK!

EMAIL

PRINT

CONTACT

Tribeca

## Cropsey

(Documentary)

By JOHN ANDERSON

An Antidote Films, Afterhours Prods. presentation of a Ghost Root production. (International sales: Submarine, New York.) Produced by Joshua Zeman, Barbara Brancaccio, Zachary Mortenson. Executive producer, Jeffrey Levy-Hinte. Directed by Joshua Zeman, Barbara Brancaccio. Written by, Zeman.

With: Donna Cutugno, Karen Schweiger, David Navarro, Ralph Aquino.

A real-life multiple-murder tale that could have been called "A Guide to Recognizing Your Boogeyman," "Cropsey" has all the trappings of a true-crime TV special, but with an undercurrent of cultural exposition that is **intelligent, profound and unsettling**. Not content to tell a story of suburban murder and urban myth, helmers Joshua Zeman and Barbara Brancaccio heap enough doubt on what people consider a long-closed case that auds will walk out of their theaters, get in their cars and check on their kids, not necessarily in that order.

Zeman and Brancaccio establish the name "Cropsey" as a generic term for the monster/demented nightmare figure that lives under children's beds and is the stuff of campfire stories. In the abandoned Willowbrook State School for the mentally handicapped, in Staten Island, a former school worker named Andre Rand became the local Cropsey -- accused of the kidnapping and murder of a 13-year-old with Down syndrome, Jennifer Schweiger, and suspected of perpetrating the disappearance of little Holly Ann Hughes.

There were other missing children, too. But there was never any physical evidence to link Rand to the crimes, and no bodies were ever found, except in the Schweiger case. So what Zeman and Brancaccio do throughout their interviews with detectives, families of the missing, and local activists -- some of whom have made the case their life's work -- is to ask questions that make it obvious what a perfect scapegoat Rand would be if of course, he weren't also guilty.

But is he? He's certainly a bad guy out of central casting: "I've never seen a perp walk like that," recalls TV broadcaster David Navarro as the shaven-headed, hulking, drooling, handcuffed Rand is seen being led out of a Staten Island police station after his initial arrest. That "Cropsey" is about an urban legend come to life is true enough. But so is the gnawing idea that we need, and create, Cropseys to assuage our primal fears and inability to explain the inexplicably criminal. **Zeman and Brancaccio manage to make a thriller and a doctoral dissertation in one fell swoop.**

Production values are adequate; much of what is assembled comes out of decades-old news footage -- including [Geraldo Rivera's](#) career-making expose on Willowbrook -- and there are a couple of "Blair Witch Project"-style sequences in which the native Staten Islanders/filmmakers stumble around the old school grounds that troubled their childhood sleep. They make revisiting the location seem quite courageous indeed.

Camera (color, HD), [Chad Davidson](#); editors, [Tom Patterson](#), Anita Gabrosek; music, Alexander Laserenko; associate producers, [Corbin Day](#), [Todd Tiberi](#). Reviewed at Tribeca Film Center, New York, April 14, 2009. (In Tribeca Film Festival -- Midnight.) Running time: 84 MIN.

Variety is striving to present the most thorough review database. To report inaccuracies in review credits, please [click here](#). We do not currently list below-the-line credits, although we hope to include them in the future. Please note we may not respond to every suggestion. Your assistance is appreciated.

Web Exclusive

TALK BACK!

EMAIL

PRINT

CONTACT

RSS

Links posted in this story: Antidote Films, Army Archerd, Bashirah Mutalib, Chad Davidson, City of, Corbin Day, Donna Cutugno, Eu, Geraldo Rivera, Harry Gregson-Williams, Jeffrey Levy-Hinte, Joshua Zeman, Peter Bart, Todd Tiberi, Tom Hanks, Tom Patterson, Tribeca Film Center, Zachary Mortenson

### VARIETY TO GO

Widget

Edition

iPhone

Mobile Delivery

RSS Feed

Home Delivery

Get Variety in your inbox

Enter your email address

SIGN UP

-- Advertisement --

VARIETY Sign up for Daily Newsletter Updates

NEW! [GREAT! GREAT! GREAT!](#)

...and comes up for 'Air'!

THE VARIETY WIDGET

YOUR NEWS WHERE YOU WANT IT

FOR MORE LOG ON TO [VARIETY.COM/WIDGET](#)

-- Advertisement --

World map graphic



# A Leaner, Meaner Tribeca

**Fewer films, more spunk.**

By [Bilge Ebiri](#) , [Logan Hill](#) , [Boris Kachka](#) , [Emma Pearse](#) & [Miranda Siegel](#) Published Apr 12, 2009

This year's Tribeca Film Festival slashes its lineup from last year's 120 films to just 86. Instead of booking publicity blitzes for blockbusters like *Mission: Impossible III* or *Spider-Man 3*, as in years past, it opens on April 22 with Woody Allen's more modest *Whatever Works*. Allen's first New York film in five years stars Larry David as an aging, Woodyish "genius" who beds an impressionable young girl (Evan Rachel Wood)—partly by impressing her with great movies. After watching 51 of the festival's films, we came up with sixteen sure ways to impress *your* date.

## Cropsey

By [Barbara Brancaccio](#) and [Joshua Zeman](#)

In Staten Island, kids fear the bogeyman Cropsey because he kills kids with his hook. Or ax. Or hands.

In this fascinating documentary, we get the nightmarish story behind an urban myth—a series of child murders in the eighties that traumatized the borough, leaving some residents so obsessed that, more than twenty years later, they're still digging for missing kids. —*L.H.*

## Racing Dreams

By [Marshall Curry](#)

We've been waiting for Curry's follow-up to his stunning 2005 political documentary *Street Fight*. Now he trains his lens on three young kids competing in the national go-kart circuit and dreaming of nascar stardom. The result is an exciting, poignant tale of growing up fast with adult ambitions. —*B.E.*

## About Elly

By [Asghar Farhadi](#)

In this sharp, panic-riddled examination of pretense, a group of young Iranians are weekendending in a beach house when Elly, a relative outsider, suddenly disappears into the sea. The camaraderie sours; the squabbling intensifies; and the friends' guilty discomfort fills the space like a stench. —*M.S.*



(Photo: Giles Keyte)

## Easy Virtue

By [Stephan Elliott](#)

How do you update Noël Coward's fizzy 1924 masterpiece of class conflict for the 21st century? You don't. Elliott's lovely take on Coward's female American race-car driver marrying into an upper-crust British family is terrifically acted by Colin Firth, Kristin Scott Thomas, and (surprise!) Jessica Biel. —*B.E.*

## Garapa

By [José Padilha](#)

Stark in the extreme, this documentary about starving Brazilian families could have felt manipulative, even exploitive (at one point the filmmaker shoots as children devour rock-hard beans). Instead, it's profoundly moving, thanks to Padilha's even tone and stunning camera work. —*M.S.*



# 3 Days

FRIDAY ■ SATURDAY ■ SUNDAY



# Best of the fest

BY MINA HOCHBERG

Special to amNewYork

Once boasting what critics called an unwieldy number of films, the Tribeca Film Festival, now in its eighth year, has trimmed its lineup to a slender 84 selections — compared to 150-plus films in past years.

The 12-day event, which starts Wednesday, offers an even balance of documentaries and narrative films, including work from Spike Lee, Steven Soderbergh and Barry Levinson.

Here's a selection of films that hold promise.

#### DOCUMENTARIES

##### Love the Beast

Aussie actor Eric Bana directs this documentary about the love of his life: a Ford XB Falcon Coupe, his "beast." In this ode to cars, Bana narrates the story of his lifelong affair with the beast, which he's owned since he was 15.

##### Cropsey

If you're from Staten Island, you may have heard of Cropsey, the eerily named bogeyman who nabs children off the streets if they're out too late at night. Two native Staten Islanders investigate the urban legend after five children actually do disappear.

##### Lost Son of Havana

Cuban pitcher Luis Tiant had a prosperous career in the major leagues, playing for the Red Sox, Yankees and Indians, but it came with a price: exile from his native country. "Lost Son" follows Tiant as he returns to Cuba for the first time in decades. Produced by the Farrelly brothers.

##### Racing Dreams

Marshall Curry, who scored an Oscar nom for his 2005 documentary "Street Fight," follows three boys as they compete in the World Karting Association's national championship — a huge step on the path to NASCAR.

##### Playground

"Playground" delves into the ugly, illegal world of child sex trafficking. The U.S. is no innocent in this vile business, director Libby Spears learns. Produced by George Clooney, Grant Heslov and Steven Soderbergh.

##### Kobe Doin' Work

Celebrities love their L.A. Lakers, and Spike Lee gets intimate with one of the Lakers' star players, Kobe Bryant, in this day-in-the-life-of documentary. Lee captures everything from team meetings to Bryant family time.

##### Fixer: The Taking of Ajmal Naqshbandi

Naqshbandi used to be one of Afghanistan's top fixers. In 2007, though, he was kidnapped and killed by the Taliban. This documentary explores his harrowing and underappreciated life.

##### Burning Down the House: The Story of CBGB

This posthumous tribute to CBGB gathers testimony from a multitude of musicians who helped make the Bowery club what it was.

##### Pollwood

People may roll their eyes at the Sean Penns of Hollywood, but veteran director Barry Levinson is intent on examining that intersection between politics and Tinseltown.



Clockwise: "Love the Beast" documents the love Eric Bana has for his car; "Kobe Doin' Work" follows a day in the life of the famous basketballer; "Black Dynamite" sends up the blaxploitation genre; "Lost Son of Havana" tells the story of Cuban pitcher Luis Tiant.



#### TICKETS

Get tickets and a full schedule at [tribecafilm.com](http://tribecafilm.com) or by calling 646-502-5296.



# FIREFOX NEWS

ABOUT US | CONTACT | JOIN FIREFOX NEWS! WRITERS WANTED!

[Home](#) | [Movies](#) | [Tribeca](#) [Movie](#) Review—Cropsey

[Home](#) | [Horror Films and Thrillers](#) | [Tribeca](#) Movie Review—Cropsey

[Home](#) | [Horror Films and Thrillers](#) | [Festivals and Filmmakers](#) | [Tribeca](#) Movie Review—Cropsey

## Tribeca Movie Review—Cropsey

By [Peter Gutiérrez](#) | Published Today | [Movies](#) | Unrated

World Premiere: April 25, 2009, at the Tribeca [International Film Festival](#)

"If you have a bad idea in your head, you can go there and do it..."

This line of dialogue about Staten Island, the least populated of New York City's five boroughs, seems like a bit of hyperbole when it's delivered, but then *Cropsey* goes about proving it so in stunning fashion. The doc's tag line, "What if your urban legends were real?" is equally ambitious in its ominousness, but there *Cropsey* only partly keeps the promise it makes: the movie quickly leaves the somewhat generic legend behind for a more compelling true-crime emphasis, with only the thinnest of connective tissue between the two. Still, that connection, more thematic than actual, is a sufficiently strong springboard to launch **one of the most involving tales of murder, madness, and mystery that I've seen in a long, long time.**

Taking its title from a child-killer whispered about 'round campfires up and down the length of the Hudson Valley, *Cropsey* is one of those rare docs that doesn't just educate you, it **actually makes you look at the world differently**—which in this case might not be such a good idea. That's because its core sociological (anthropological?) conceit seems more the stuff of the Victorian era, not America in the latter half of the twentieth century: a specific region where a major metropolis exiles and isolates (represses?) elements that it doesn't want to see the light of day. And since the metropolis in question is New York, by implication we're dealing with the "unwanted" of the modern world itself. One example is the Fresh Kills landfill, rumored to be visible from outer space, and evidence that the rest of the city literally "dumps" on Staten Island. Another example is the Willowbrook State School, the notorious institution for the developmentally challenged whose depraved conditions a young Gerald Rivera became famous for exposing.

But who later returned to the forested grounds of Willowbrook after it closed down? Former patients? Former employees? The answer is, *both*... and that's the premise that co-directors Barbara Brancaccio and Josh Zeman start from in their engrossing [film](#). Think of it as investigating reporting with the creepiness factor dialed way up. *Indeed*, a lot of horror movies try for the look that *Cropsey* actually achieves: period photos of law enforcement searching for bodies, vintage newspaper headlines about disappearances, and, in the most frightening moments I've spent in a [theater](#) in years, a first-person shot of mysterious figures approaching silently out of the dark, nighttime woods.

Of course enjoying *Cropsey* for all its eerie wonder is problematic in the same way that enjoying based-on-true-events horror flicks is: at a certain point the comfort of the imaginary is no longer a refuge for the audience's conscience. So yes, we enjoy breathing in the air of the truly sinister, but then it's interrupted by the painful realization that real kids went missing, that real families grieved and continue to suffer to this day. Fortunately, *Cropsey* is a good enough movie that it transcends any exploitative feelings that might arise—by evoking true horror, true heartbreak, not the kind that you can hide a faint smile behind, it does the important job that only very artful truth-telling is capable of doing.

### Peter Gutiérrez

Peter's non-fiction, short fiction, [poetry](#), and comics have appeared in numerous publications. Recently these have included Rue Morgue, Screen Education, BookShelf, Graphic Novel Reporter, School Library Journal, Shantytown Anomaly, and ForeWord Magazine, where he is the graphic novels columnist. His book on scriptwriting will be published by Scholastic in 2010, and his 2009 speaking gigs include New York Comic Con, Fordham University's Graphica Conference, the Science Fiction Society of Northern New Jersey, Kids' [Comic Con](#), and the Massachusetts Library and School Library Annual Conference. MySpace = [peter\\_gutierrez](#); LinkedIn = [/in/petergutierrez](#)

[View all articles by Peter Gutiérrez](#)

After several children go missing over a fifteen-year span beginning in the early '70s, a suspect is brought into custody, Andre Rand, whose literally drooling appearance seems to signal "case closed." In addition, the body of Jennifer Schweiger, a thirteen-year-old with Down syndrome, is found near his *al fresco* sleeping quarters in the woods. On the other hand, it's discovered *after* the area had already been combed once and, moreover, *after* Rand had been identified as a suspect... so is this an instance of a simple frame-up? And what of all the rumors of Satanic cults operating on Staten Island that require human sacrifices—was Rand possibly doing their dirty work for them? (Oddly, although it raises many questions about Rand, including whether he had accomplices, the film does not directly address the fact that after Rand's imprisonment, the disappearances stopped.)

In the end, *Cropsey* suggests more than it reveals conclusively, which may make it frustrating for whodunit fans who need the closure of a TV cop drama. But Zeman, who wrote as well narrates the script, is careful to position the film as an exploration of the phenomena of urban legends more broadly... so that all the questions we're left with merely serve to heighten the grander sense of mystery that the film is all about.

(Watch a clip from *Cropsey* [here](#).)

<b>Horror Short Movie</b>	<b>Full Length Movies Online</b>
Watch and Share your passion for Films. Play on Babelgum!	Watch Classic Full Length Movies for Free at Fancast.

### Spread The Word

- [del.icio.us](#) It
- [Digg](#) this
- [Furl](#)
- [Reddit](#)
- [Yahoo!](#) this!
- [StumbleUpon](#)
- [Google Bookmarks](#)
- [Live Favorites](#)
- [Technorati](#)

### Related Articles

- [Movie Review: Hannah Montana - The Movie \(2009\)](#)
- [Tribeca Movie Review—The Lost Son of Havana](#)
- [Tribeca Movie Review—Here and There](#)
- [Movie Review: State of Play \(2009\)](#)
- [Firefox Exclusive: The Kindertrauma Interview](#)

### Related Links

<http://www.tribecafilmm.com/filmguide/cropsey.html>





# FANGORIA

"FANGORIA IS THE PREMIER HORROR MOVIE MAGAZINE. IF YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT HORROR MOVIES AND WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE FIELD TODAY... FANGORIA IS THE BIBLE-ETTE."

—SAM RAIMI, DIRECTOR  
THE EVIL DEAD SPIDER-MAN DRAG ME TO HELL

Home » FEATURES » Fearful Features » The Awful Truths of CROPSEY

## The Awful Truths of CROPSEY

Wednesday, April 22, 2009 04:20 PM Samuel Zimmerman Fearful

Features - Fearful Features



"Everybody has their guy," says Barbara Brancaccio, one half of the team behind CROPSEY, a standout film at this year's Tribeca Film Festival. And she's absolutely right. Horror, no matter what artistic form it takes, didn't create the boogeyman; he created horror, and we've been telling stories about him since the beginning. In every neighborhood across the country, he comes in a different form, with a different past, but he exists in the darkest reaches of our minds and communities, starring in cautionary tales that warn us of places we shouldn't go and things we shouldn't do.

In upstate New York, he was called Cropsey (or Cropsy), a burned judge, or camp counselor (depending on who you speak with) who took vengeance on the foolish children that accidentally killed his wife and daughter (supposedly). By the time this urban legend floated down the Hudson River and onto Staten Island, it attached itself to a very real, very terrifying string of crimes that were steeped in superstition and legend, blurring the lines between cold, hard facts and haunting myth.



CROPSEY investigates the tale of Andre Rand, a now-convicted child kidnapper who worked as a janitor in the Willowbrook State School. Once it closed down, he returned there to live on the grounds. That's all that is known for sure, as every other story regarding all of the children he is alleged to have kidnapped and buried around the institution varies depending on who's telling it. Jump-started by an exploration into the case of Jennifer Schweiger (a young girl with Down syndrome who went missing on the island in 1987, and the most famous of his victims), Brancaccio and her filmmaking partner and boyfriend Josh Zeman trace Rand's history through those who searched for the girl, both police and citizens alike, and others involved in subsequent cases associated with Rand, following them until his present-day trials, trying to figure out just what exactly is the truth.



### FEARFUL FEATURES

- [The Awful Truths of CROPSEY](#)
- [The CHAOS EXPERIMENT Theory](#)
- [Tracking THE BURROWERS: Part Two](#)
- [Tracking THE BURROWERS: Part One](#)
- [THE ART OF HORROR](#) spotlight on Lydia Burris
- [TOXIC AVENGER: The Monster MUSICAL](#)
- [FANGO FACE-OFF: THE FACULTY Vs. DREAMCATCHER](#)
- [VINYAN: Matters of Life and Death](#)
- [Larry Fessenden: So Much to SEE](#)
- [Exclusive Interview & Pics: Leslie Simpson on STRAW MAN](#)
- [From SLAYER to THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE: The Art of Wes Bencoter](#)
- [The SCARS OF DRACULA \(and SVENGOOLIE\) run deep](#)
- [POSTAL ZONE: Never too young to be a FANGORIA Fiend!](#)
- [FRAGMENT of Fear: Exclusive trailer and more!](#)
- [ZOMBIE: From Page to Stage](#)



Staten Island is very much a part of New York City, but like the North Bronx and the farthest reaches of Brooklyn and Queens, it has an aura of isolation and suburban aesthetics that disconnect it from the concrete jungle. What seems to be the most distant of New York's counties, it was looked upon as a haven for those wanting to get away from the filth of Manhattan and settle into a quieter, smaller-town-minded life. Forests and suburban paradises house their own demons, however, and Staten Island contains one of the most honest-to-God terrifying locales for a local legend, the abandoned Willowbrook mental institution. It has been steeped in controversy since an eye-opening 1972 exposé by Geraldo Rivera (one of his earliest journalistic pieces), which detailed how this immense site of supposed health care was actually a place of extreme disorganization and mistreatment, where child patients lived in overcrowded and poor conditions, without any proper care or a sterile environment.

This and other scandals led to the school being shut down in 1975, and like any good spooky spot, it became a notorious hangout for the local kids, Brancaccio and Zeman included. "Willowbrook was behind my house," Brancaccio says. "It was not even a mile away, and I could literally walk to it, so people would throw parties back there. That's where you went with your boyfriend, your friends; you played manhunt in Willowbrook Park. We were in there and exploring the buildings and everything, and I guess at that time I didn't have any fear around it; you're fearless when you're a teenager. Boys take girls there to scare them so they can make out or get in their pants, whatever the case may be."

For the film, the couple spent a large amount of time returning to the decrepit buildings, walking through and searching for any new evidence of past crimes and revisiting their own time spent within its walls. "Now we realize the gravitas of the situation," Zeman notes, and Brancaccio adds, "Josh and I went back and we were literally acting exactly as we had when we were kids, but because we were old enough to understand what was going on, we were legend-tripping again."

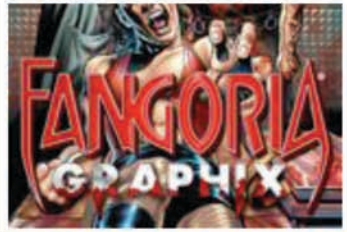
Zeman explains, "Legend-tripping is the idea that, as teenagers, typically, you return to the haunted house in your neighborhood and basically hang out, drink and try to scare the shit out of your girlfriend and have sex with her. Everybody does it."

"And now we understood the implications of when Jennifer went missing," Brancaccio continues. "We thought, 'Oh my God, here we are. This child was buried around this place where we had been playing.' I can remember even my mother saying, when we started making the movie, 'I can't believe I let you play there, I let you hang out there.' We didn't really know—I don't think anybody really knew—what was actually going on."

"We didn't know each other growing up," Zeman notes. "We met later on in life, and one of the first conversations was, 'Oh you're from Staten Island, I'm from Staten Island. Did you go to school here? Hey, do you remember the Jennifer Schweiger story?' So we started talking about it and began dating. One of our early dates was to take a walk through the Staten Island trails, and maybe going back a little bit and joking, going legend-tripping. And we were talking about how it was so interesting because now, as adults, we contextualize all the stuff we were going through as teenagers. Just as we started doing research, the Staten Island DA announced that they were going to pursue or indict Andre Rand for a kidnapping that happened 20 years prior. We were already on the road to making the movie, and coincidentally, we were pursuing one of the children they were looking into. It gave us a reason to say, 'Why now?'"

Delving into Rand's story was no easy task, however, as his history was actually a series of events, each proclaiming something horrific about the man, but none accompanied by concrete evidence. "There's a lot of that small-town mentality, so everybody went out to go search for these kids, and now they were going out into the woods and legend-tripping too," Brancaccio says. "The whole community; during the summer of 1987, it's like you couldn't go anywhere and not see all of your neighbors out, at least for a couple hours a day, looking for that kid. When we started interviewing all the people associated with the hunt for Jennifer Schweiger, we were making a movie about an urban legend, a sort of campfire story. They were telling us stories about the search, and we could see that it had transformed itself to be a part of this urban legend. They all had their own way of telling the story, so it became a movie about storytelling. What they started doing was giving us the facts they knew, and then adding the urban-legend stuff."

"You'd have a case where they'd say, 'What happened with Willowbrook, back when all the patients escaped, or they lost track of them, they went to live in the basements, in the steam tunnels,'" says Zeman. "That's every urban legend about a mental institution. 'We searched for weeks.' They did, that part is fact. 'We think the devil worshippers took her.' That part is urban legend. The other thing was, with Staten Island, yes, you had your hometown, but there off in the distance was Manhattan, and bad shit went down there, so people would say, 'Where do devil worshippers come from? The city, and then they go into the outlying areas and do their thing.' The most interesting thing for Barb and I was the devil-worshipping part of it, so we went to investigate that."



## LATEST FILM REVIEWS

[RISE: BLOOD HUNTER \(Tribeca Flashback Review\)](#)

[THE OBJECTIVE and KILLER MOVIE \(Tribeca Flashback Review\)](#)

[THE WILD MAN OF THE NAVIDAD and KIRKSDALE \(Tribeca Flashback Review\)](#)

[BAGHEAD \(Tribeca Flashback Review\)](#)

[THE POUGHKEEPSIE TAPES \(Tribeca Flashback Review\)](#)

[LUNACY and SHEITAN \(Tribeca Flashback Review\)](#)

[ALONE WITH HER and SAM'S LAKE \(Tribeca Flashback Review\)](#)

[MONSTER MOVIES- Ten of the Best](#)

[ALIEN TRESPASS \(Film Review\)](#)

[NIGHTMARE \(Film Review\)](#)



## DVD & BLU-RAY REVIEWS

[THE SHE-BEAST \(DVD Review\)](#)

[LAID TO REST \(DVD Review\)](#)

[TOKYO ZOMBIE \(DVD Review\)](#)

[SUMMER SCHOOL \(DVD Review\)](#)

[SPLINTER \(DVD Review\)](#)

[BLED \(DVD Review\)](#)

[THE BURROWERS \(DVD Review\)](#)

[SLAUGHTER HIGH \(DVD Review\)](#)

[CTHULHU \(DVD Review\)](#)

These rumors only cast Rand as an errand boy, however, supposedly snatching kids for and answering to these cuts. The opposite tale involved him as a pied piper, a leader of homeless Willowbrook patients, living underneath the institution and sharing the young victims, passing them through the infamous tunnels. "Andre Rand worked at Willowbrook," Zeman notes. "Then it closed down, he went and lived in the forest surrounding it and suddenly all these mentally disabled were returning to the woods. Was he leading them in some weird ship-of-fools thing, where he was saying, 'I'm sexually perverted; let's go grab some kids and bring them back'? In the movie, one guy says, 'I don't know if you heard the story about Andre Rand having sex with dead people.' We interviewed mentally disabled guys who are not in the film, who were saying, 'Andre Rand would take me to go have sex with dead bodies.'"

"It was like throwing the baby in with the bathwater," adds Brancaccio. "Stories mounted and mounted and mounted before we knew it, and I would say to the people we were interviewing, 'So, which is it? Is he a serial killer or a necrophiliac?', etc. You know, not everybody is everything; he's one thing or another. But as time progressed, the legend of Andre Rand had become so big that everybody accused him of being everything there was. So what if, in fact, maybe he was simply just a kidnapper? That's just as horrible, but because nobody knew, because he wasn't caught for so long and so many other kids were associated with him, there was opportunity for the bogeyman to grow."

But what if the bogeyman isn't real? **CROPSEY can be seen as THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT by way of ZODIAC and CAPTURING THE FRIEDMANS.** There isn't exactly closure, as is sometimes the case in real life, and despite the mounting stories and intensely odd correspondence that Zeman and Brancaccio engaged in with Andre Rand while he was in prison, there needed to be room in CROPSEY for doubt as well. "In fairness," Brancaccio says, "that doubt really comes from the fact that this guy was an outcast. He was a little bit different, he was homeless and we were trying to tell an objective story; it is a documentary. The other part of the equation is, maybe they just pinned all of these abductions on him because he was a homeless guy and didn't fit in with what the '70s and '80s, which was this sort of sleepy suburban community where nothing bad happens. And here was a guy who was living in the woods and a little bit off, so let's just pin all the bad stuff on him. I was willing to buy that story also, particularly because there was so little evidence."

CROPSEY is a complex piece of film. It looks into both sides of evil: the Cropseys that span our counties and campfires—bogeymen, murdering and kidnapping—and the mob mentality of those whose minds will not be changed, and who easily believe the legends and myths that come to our doorsteps. It may just blur the lines between real life and our worst nightmares a little too much, leaving viewers without a stable side to lean on. "Certainly, the story is what it is," says Brancaccio, "and it really is for the audience to decide." You can find out more at the movie's [official website](#) and see an exclusive clip [here](#).



# FANGORIA



## Tribeca Fest set for next step

Hopes high with slimmer slate, international features

By Steven Zeitchik

April 20, 2009, 09:30 PM ET



"Whatever Works"

### Related

**Special Report: Tribeca Film Festival**

"Tribeca has always been a bit of a problem with respect to exciting product, because of its timing (right before the Festival de Cannes)," said Mark Urman, president of Senator Distribution. "But I think two things are happening that augur well for the festival. One is the arrival of Geoff Gilmore, and the other is that we're going to start seeing a genuine eclipsing of the relevance of Cannes for North American distribution. That means that, in the coming years, you're going to see a class of film at Tribeca that will take this to the next level."

In the meantime, there is the matter of showcasing films.

More than most years, Tribeca, run by fest chief Schafer, will try to keep the tone buoyant -- it's a rarity that the fest is both opening and closing with a comedy (Woody Allen's "Whatever Works" and Donald Petrie's romantic comedy "My Life In Ruins") -- a conscious decision by organizers in these recessionary days.

"We have deliberately tried lighter fare," fest co-founder Rosenthal said, comparing the fest's place on the calendar this go-round to its first iteration shortly after 9/11. "We sat down with programmers and said we need lighter pictures, because people need to laugh right now."

Perhaps best embodying this spirit of lightness is the Johnny Knoxville exec-produced "The Wild and Wonderful Whites of West Virginia," a docu about a rural family prone to outrageous antics, which premieres this weekend.

While a number of the more prominent titles made a first stop at Sundance -- the James Gandolfini-topped political satire "In the Loop" and Steven Soderbergh's "The Girlfriend Experience" top that list -- there are a number of movies from big names using the fest as a world-premiere venue.

Spike Lee's "Kobe Doin' Work," his day-in-the-life examination of Los Angeles Lakers star Kobe Bryant, which was made by and will air on ESPN, unspools Saturday, while Allen's return-to-New York movie "Works" will, fittingly, open the Gotham fest Wednesday.

Sales at the fest tend to be both infrequent and modest. Arguably the biggest, the Oscar nominee "Transamerica," took place a long four years ago. Last year saw just a smattering of distributor interest, with the William H. Macy coming-of-age comedy "Bart Got a Room," notching one of the few sales when it sold to Anchor Bay.

But a number of available titles have begun to stir interest, none more so than "Serious Moonlight," Cheryl Hines' directorial debut and a project based on a script by the late Adrienne Shelly. The last time a movie based on a Shelly script went to a festival -- "Waitress" at Sundance '07 -- it became a \$4 million acquisition for Fox Searchlight and a \$20 million hit.

Like Hines, other prominent actors will be bringing their directorial efforts to the fest and looking for a deal. They include Andy Garcia's prison-set dramedy "City Island" and Eric Bana's directorial debut "Love the Beast," a doc centering on Bana's love for automobiles and his vintage Ford GT Falcon coupe.

As it does for other pics, Tribeca offers a platform for passion projects that were financed and made with a minimum of commercial interference.

"Movies that have cars in them are considered car films, but they don't connect with me in an way," Bana said of "Beast." "What I realized is that what's missing from a lot of films was sitting in front of me."

Among the other acquisition targets are "Cropsey," a doc about urban legends from Barbara Brancaccio and Joshua Zeman; "Wonderful World," a Matthew Broderick dramedy from Miranda Bailey's Ambush Entertainment; and "Accidents Happen," a dysfunctional-family tale starring Geena Davis.

And there's growing chatter about the world premiere of "Outrage," a provocative look at closeted gay politicians from "This Film Is Not Yet Rated" helmer Kirby Dick.

Despite the buzz, filmmakers and execs continue to be realistic, looking at Tribeca and the indie world with a sober eye and a realigned set of expectations.

"We're in different times from a distribution point of view," Garcia acknowledged. "The important part is we've done the difficult thing: We've made the movie."

When Robert De Niro, Jane Rosenthal and Nancy Schafer kick off the Tribeca Film Festival at Tuesday's news conference in downtown Manhattan, they will do so amidst a lot of indie angst. Distributors are shrinking, finance sources are drying up and film fests around the country are facing economic hardship.

And yet, paradoxically, the prospects for Tribeca are fairly bright.

Now in its eighth year, the fest is going with a slimmed-down slate of 85 films across its traditional area of documentary film as well as expanding its focus on international features. With a more manageable number of titles and changes both within (the hiring of Sundance vet Geoff Gilmore to run Tribeca Enterprises) and out of its control (the shifting fest landscape), Tribeca may finally take the leap it's been attempting for years.

Advertisement



- » Cannes Festival Unveils Lineup: Inglorious Bastards Included
- » BREAKING: Jay Leno In The Hospital
- » PBS launches online video channel
- » Sin City 2 For Sale?
- » Drama at GE shareholders meeting

- » Drama at GE shareholders meeting
- » Reports: Jay Leno hospitalized
- » ABC announces several renewals
- » Two sign on for 'Iron Man 2' roles
- » PBS launches online video channel
- » Film Review: Star Trek
- » Festival de Cannes unveils lineup
- » Will Smith in 'Business' with Sci Fi
- » James Marsden is 'Straw' man
- » Joseph Gordon-Levitt joins 'Inception'



NOW

Filmmakers  
Brancaccio and  
Zeman walking  
near the ruins of  
Willowbrook. Photo  
by Chad Davidson.

# UNEARTHING HIS CRIMES

'Crospey' tells of real-life S.I. bogeyman

BY ROBERT DOMINGUEZ

When a group of friends and neighbors from Staten Island ventured into Manhattan last weekend to watch a hard-hitting crime documentary at the Tribeca Film Festival, most had no idea just how gut-wrenching the experience would be.

It's been 22 years since a creepy drifter who lived in the woods behind the abandoned ruins of a mental institution was arrested for the kidnapping and murder of a 12-year-old girl with Down syndrome. The horrific crime soon took on an even more ominous tone when the man, 43-year-old Andre Rand, became a suspect in the disappearances of several other Staten Island children over the years.

The strange case of Rand and the still-missing kid remains one of the biggest mysteries in the annals of New York crime, and is now the subject of "Crospey," a gripping documentary that debuted at this year's Tribeca fest.

But for the friends and neighbors of the victims who attended Sunday's screening, sitting through a rehashing of Rand's crimes — both real and imagined — was almost unbearably painful despite the passage of time. "It was very emotional, and very sad," says Donna Cutugno, a neighbor of Jennifer Schweiger, the disabled girl who was abducted and killed in the only one of 1987 and whose body is still the single one that was ever found.

"You tend to put things in the back of your mind over the years, but seeing the film brought a lot of bad things back," adds Cutugno, who spearheaded the neighborhood search for Jennifer's body when the little girl went missing.

"It's still very painful because there has been no closure for my family," says Rita DiMartino, the aunt of Alice Pereira, a 5-year-old girl whose disappearance in 1972 has been linked to Rand, though never proven.

"Alice's mother passed away without even knowing what happened to her. But even though they focused more on [Jennifer], on the whole [the filmmakers] did a great job, because this is something that should be shown everywhere to build awareness that you can't trust people like [Rand]."

The case didn't only deeply affect those who lived in the close-knit, working-class neighborhoods of Richmond and New Dorp where at least three other children besides Jennifer and Alice were presumably abducted since the early 1970s. It touched the film makers, too.

Like most every kid growing up on Staten Island at the time, "Crospey" co-directors Joshua Zeman and Barbara Brancaccio were well-versed in the details of the crimes. But what spurred them to make the film was how Rand's arrest in 1988 turned folklore into fact.

Rand, who had already served time for sexually abusing a Bronx girl in 1969, put a sinister face to one of New York's most enduring urban legends: the twisted tale of Crospey, an ax-wielding maniac who lived in the woods and whose gory exploits were th-

## Body of girl found

APRIL 21, 2001

### A shallow grave at Willowbrook

SEARCHER DISCOVERS REMAINS OF 12-YEAR-OLD GIRL

A body girl's body, believed to be that of Jennifer Schweiger, was found in a shallow grave at Willowbrook on Sunday. The body was found in a shallow grave at Willowbrook on Sunday. The body was found in a shallow grave at Willowbrook on Sunday.



## DAILY NEWS

New York's Bestselling Newspaper



Wells punched out at diner

## MIND OF A SEX FIEND

Suspected serial killer to stand trial in '81 child kidnapping



How the Daily News covered the Rand case in 1987 (top clipping) and 2002 (front page). At left, Rand's mug shot in 2001.



88T1289  
RAND, ANDRE  
5'10" 156lbs  
DATE 01/25/2001





A drooling Andre Rand is taken into custody by police, including Detective Robert Jensen (second from left).



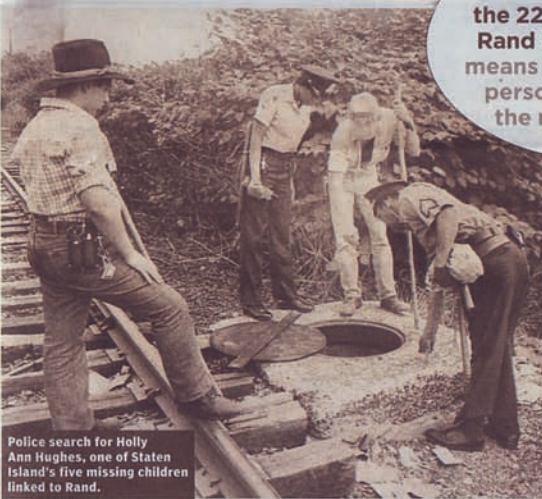
Andre Rand is escorted during his arraignment in 2001.



Home locations of the five missing Staten Island children

The fact that no one's been missing for the 22 years since Andre Rand has been in prison means he is definitely the person responsible for the missing children.

— Donna Cutugno



Police search for Holly Ann Hughes, one of Staten Island's five missing children linked to Rand.



Makeshift campsite where Rand slept near Willowbrook

subject of many a scary campfire tale. Except that the Staten Island version had Crosey being a mental patient who had escaped from Willowbrook, the massive state facility that was shuttered in the 1970s.

For Zeman and Brancaccio, Rand was the embodiment of their childhood bogeyman. He had worked at Willowbrook for two years in the late 1960s, and after the facility was shut, he had lived in makeshift campsites in the thick forest of the surrounding grounds.

"We didn't know each other as kids, but we both knew about Rand and we both grew up with the cautionary tales of not going into the buildings and the woods around Willowbrook because of Crosey," says Zeman, 37.

"When Rand was being re-indicted in 2001 for the disappearance of one of the children, we took this as a sign," adds Zeman. "So we picked up a camera and

started shooting. We couldn't believe this story had never been told before."

"Crosey," which has a final screening on Saturday at 8:30 p.m. at AMC Village 7, unfolds like an eerie episode of "CSI: Staten Island." Zeman and Brancaccio went to great lengths to interview victims' relatives, neighbors, witnesses and the cops who worked the missing children cases. They even brought their camera into the deserted buildings, underground tunnel networks and wooded areas around Willowbrook, where most people believe Rand's alleged victims are buried.

"It's unsettling to be there by day," says Brancaccio, 38. "But it's even scarier at night. Walking through the rooms, it still has that mental institution feel. You can still see the hospital beds and tables, and part of the horror is knowing something bad happened there."

The co-directors didn't merely retell the story and revisit the crime scenes, how-

ever. They also played amateur sleuths — though Rand was twice convicted for the kidnapping of two of the children (but not the murders) there are still those who think he may not have had a hand in all of the other disappearances.

The film recounts how there are still whispers that a satanic cult may have been responsible for at least some of the abductions, though most people familiar with the case strongly discount that theory.

"There are all sorts of rumors about devil worship, but we never found anything to substantiate that," says Robert Jensen, a retired detective who worked the case.

During the making of the film, Zeman and Brancaccio managed to start corre-

sponding with Rand, hoping to get the truth; he sent them vast numbers of letters from Sing Sing professing his innocence.

"When you're receiving that many letters and so many details, you want to find the clues," says Brancaccio.

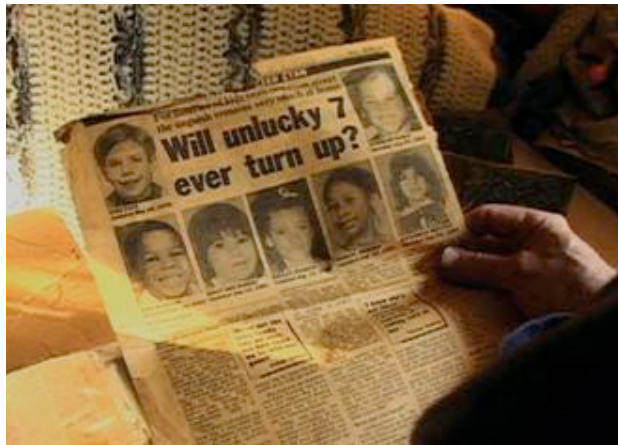
Yet the biggest mystery isn't who did it, but what he did with the bodies.

"The fact that no one's been missing for the 22 years since Andre Rand has been in prison means he is definitely the person responsible for the missing children," says Cutugno, who helped found Friends of Jennifer for Missing Children. Among the organization's goals is getting Rand, now 65, to reveal where the bodies are buried.

"The one regret about the case is that we didn't find that out," says Jensen. "It would give a closure to all the families."

CLARENCE DAVIS/DAILY NEWS; TONY CARANNANTE/COURTESY STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE

TURN THE PAGE FOR MORE TRIBECA FILM FEST NEWS



### **Cropsey (2009) – World Premiere**

As a kid I remember hearing about a guy driving around my neighborhood in a black van and offering kids candy. He may have dressed up like a clown or something to that effect. Sound familiar? Every neighborhood has a local boogeyman. In filmmakers Joshua Zeman and Barbara Brancaccio's documentary [Cropsey](#), their native Staten Island boogeyman "Cropsey" may have been the real deal.

In 1987 the disappearance of Jennifer Schweiger, a 13-year-old girl with Down syndrome, touched off a frantic search on Staten Island. The likely predator responsible for her disappearance was linked to four other missing children, all from the same area of Staten Island. An arrest was eventually made of a creepy homeless man named Andre Rand. While Rand fit the profile and certainly looked the part, none of the children's bodies were ever found. Though convicted, Rand professes his innocence to this day.

Rand was a drifter who used to work in the Willowbrook State School on Staten Island (where apparently the base used by Boogeyman "Cropsey" to snatch up children.) Willowbrook was the subject of a 1972 expose by a young reporter named Gerald Rivera who exposed the institution (for severely retarded children) as a horribly abusive, overcrowded and neglectful environment. The filmmakers explore the metaphor of Staten Island as a dumping ground for all sorts of things: the mentally retarded, the sick in a TB ward built there, a landfill, bodies the mob wanted to disappear and perhaps these missing children. It's an unnerving point that perhaps this killer was somehow contributing to the aggregate.

The film becomes especially eerie as Rand begins to correspond with the filmmakers from jail. At first it may seem like a jackpot for their documentary. Later it appears Rand is actually playing Zeman and Brancaccio for attention and the thrill of manipulation.

Zeman and Brancaccio nicely move back and forth in the film from present day to old footage and other aids to convey the metamorphosis from myth to perhaps reality. Though the likely killer, Rand's conviction certainly wasn't a prosecutorial slam dunk. With literally no physical evidence and very shaky witness testimony there was nothing close to a Perry Mason moment in Rand's two trials.

There is undeniable emotional power in the film's interviews with people connected to the case in one form or another. From



detectives and police who worked the case in the '80s, to people who initially volunteered to look for Jennifer Schweiger when she was first reported missing. Some still search for the bodies of the five children in the woods by Willowbrook to this day. They hope finding their remains will somehow ease the suffering their families endure. What these people all have in common is their anxiety of the unknown surrounding the cases. They are haunted by these murders.

But one thing we certainly do as humans is create our own monsters. It's our coping mechanism for things we don't understand or fear too greatly. Toward the end of the film, one of Rand's old acquaintances is interviewed and holds Rand's picture up to the camera. He says that if you showed it to a person who had never seen him and said, "This guy's a child murderer" they would agree and say he looks like a killer. But if you held up the same picture and said "This guy just risked his life saving five people from a burning building" people would gush about how nice a guy and brave he looked. He has a point. We are more susceptible and subjective than we'd care to admit when it comes to most of our perceptions.

What is real and truthful in the words of Zeman, "is a range of possibilities." The filmmakers adroitly present the viewer with all the "range of possibilities," (which is what a well crafted documentary should do,) about the Staten Island child murders with, and without, Rand's likely involvement. **What makes *Cropsey* so special, is the directors compellingly convey the knowledge that all these real "possibilities" are perhaps more frightening than any Boogeyman our minds could possibly conjure up.**

*Final festival screening: Saturday at 8:30 p.m.*

Picture credits: (All provided by Tribeca Film Festival)

*Entre Nos*; photos courtesy of the film

*About Elly*; photo courtesy of the film

*Cropsey*; Will the unlucky 7 ever turn up? Freeze frame from film

April 30, 2009 12:28 PM in [Cheap Stuff](#), [Downtown](#), [Sightsology](#)

[Comments \(0\)](#)

©Copyright 2004 - 2009, All Rights Reserved