



CLOSURE

Inspired by the true story
of one family's search for the truth.



Sometimes closure is not enough...

Feature screenplay by D. P. SWANSON

 **LITTLE STUDIO FILMS**

ROGAN BROWN
Films

Heather and George Johnson fear they may never see their son Peter (below, right) again.

missing persons



HAVE YOU SEEN our son?

The Johnsons ask for help in finding their eldest child

Underground miner Peter Johnson vanished without trace on April 17 last year, after his green Ford utility was found abandoned on a road on the outskirts of Nebo, near Mackay, Qld.

Among his possessions found in the car were his clothes, TV, food and bike – but his wallet and mobile phone were missing.

An intensive three-day air-and-ground search involving police, SES, musterers and volunteers failed to find any trace of him. His dad George, 65, from country Victoria, is mystified and saddened by the disappearance of Peter, who was 36 at the time, and fears he met with foul play.

To all parents, especially the men, can I offer this simple piece of advice? At every opportunity you have, tell your kids – no matter how young or old they may be – how much you love them. I didn't tell my son Peter how I truly felt about him,

and now it's tearing me apart. Peter used to telephone my wife Heather and I every fortnight from Queensland, where he had been working for the past five years.

At the end of every conversation, he would say, "I love you." I always replied with something like, "Me too, son" ... but I never repeated those magical three words.

Heather and I last saw our son on Mother's Day three years ago, when he made a surprise visit to country Victoria to see us.

We had a wonderful time. We didn't get to see much of Peter because he lived so far away. He was a good son, and a tireless worker who loved the outdoors. Building stockyards and mending fences was what he liked best.

It's just terrible, not knowing what has happened to him. There's just nothing you can do. It's not like you can go across the road and just pick something up... we feel so helpless. Maybe he has met with foul play, but I just don't know.

I just got over two major operations for bowel cancer, and I know Peter wouldn't

do anything to worry me. So I don't believe he's just fled off somewhere and started a new life – that would be totally out of character.

He was a big, strong bloke, but also a sensitive and emotional person who put his family first.

I'll never ever forget one day about 10 years ago. We were having a quiet beer in a pub when he said to me, "You know, Dad... you have never given me a cuddle." I said to him, "Come here and I'll give you one now."

I'm glad I did. If I hadn't, how bad would I feel now? We need and want answers.

■ If you have any information about Peter, please call Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000.

■ Sadly, the body of Miriam Pike (Missing Persons, May 10) has since been found.

Tell the Day

Is a loved one missing? Maybe our readers can help. Write to Missing Persons, Woman's Day, GPO Box 5245, Sydney, NSW 2001, or email womansday@acp.com.au Pictures cannot be returned. See contents page for location of privacy notice.

AS TOLD TO WARREN GIBBS. PICTURE: DAVE MASON.

Article published in *Woman's Day* following Peter Johnson's disappearance.

BACKGROUND

In 2003 a good friend of mine, Peter Johnson, went missing near the outback town of Nebo, Australia. His car was found abandoned on the Peak Downs Highway, facing the wrong way. His bank account has never been touched. His disappearance is out of character. There is a witness who has made written statements that Peter was murdered, even naming the people involved. However, to this day, his case is still listed as a missing persons case, and the police and branches of the Queensland government refuse to consider the possibility that he was murdered. *Closure* is my screenplay based on this true story.

I have known the Johnson family for over thirty years and have helped them as much as I can with the investigation into Peter's disappearance. I moved back to Australia from the USA in 2007 and shortly afterwards received a call from Peter's sister, Evelyn, with the news that they had found out who had murdered Peter. A woman who knew Peter confessed to the Johnson family that her boyfriend and a couple of his mates bashed Peter to death and hid his body in the bush somewhere, possibly down a mine shaft. The police have dismissed this witness as being a substance abuser and unreliable.

By pure coincidence, we also found out that a former investigating officer in charge of Peter's case is a close family friend of the ring-leader of this group.

Without the full cooperation of the police and with no other way to solve Peter's case and recover his remains, Evelyn came up with the desperate and courageous plan to confront one of the killers to make a deal - she promised to drop her investigation in exchange for the whereabouts of Peter's body. Luckily, I was able to talk her out of this, but I have always wondered what would have happened if I had failed?

Closure is told from Evelyn's perspective, as Peter's sister and family spokeswoman for the case. More than half of the screenplay has been based on factual experiences, confrontations and evidence. The other half of the story is a dramatization of what might have happened if Evelyn had decided to go through with her plan - to confront the killers and place her own life at risk but which would, in the end, bring her brother home.

- D. P. Swanson



LOGLINE

When a man goes missing in the Australian outback, his tenacious sister takes matters into her own hands and must fight for her life to uncover his brutal murder.

SYNOPSIS

On an idyllic island in Australia, two young siblings struggle against an abusive father. Emily is tenacious and strong while her brother James takes the brunt of the abuse. With seemingly no way of escaping the island or the abuse, Emily vows to protect her brother. But time passes. Children grow up. And childhood promises fade.

Fast-forward twenty years. Emily has been living in the US. The distance she has placed between herself and her past has not healed her wounds, and she struggles with her relationships, including the one with her troubled boyfriend, Dean. She insists on protecting the people she loves by controlling every aspect of their lives, and for Dean, this is becoming unbearable. Instead of helping him with his problems, she is unwittingly pushing him away.

Back in Australia, James finds an excuse to beg Emily to come home - a surprise 60th birthday party for their mother, Agatha, and James wants Emily to be the surprise. Emily agrees, bringing Dean with her. She looks forward to seeing James and her mother again, but dreads the reunion with Gus, her father.

Emily and Dean arrive in Australia, but what should be a joyous occasion turns sour, when James and Gus come to blows. Nothing has changed after all these years. This realisation forces James to leave the island forever, escaping as far away as possible to a small outback town. Once there, he realises that he is not welcome. The local, tyrannical cop, Kurt, and his thug mates have it in for him. His only friend is Tanya, the abused girlfriend of one of the thugs.

Later on, Emily receives the news that James has gone missing and she sets out to find answers. Despite overwhelming evidence of foul play, Kurt seems to go out of his way to make things hard for Emily.

Emily's search for the truth leads her to Tanya, and the two strike up an alliance. Emily is driven to return James home and bring closure to her family, whatever the cost, and Tanya is motivated by revenge for the abuse she has suffered. Emily's darkest fears come true as she learns from Tanya that James was murdered by Kurt and two of his mates. She confronts Lance, one of Kurt's accomplices, and makes a deal - she will keep what she knows a secret in exchange for the whereabouts of her brother's remains.

James' body is located and he is put to rest. But this is no comfort to Emily. She feels overwhelming guilt because *she* was supposed to protect James and she failed. Dean tries to take some of the burden but Emily won't allow it. He finally comes to terms that their relationship is doomed to fail, and he decides to go back to California. Unknown to Emily, he has a change of heart on his way to the airport and decides to take charge for once. He confronts Kurt and demands answers.

In the meantime, the police tell Emily and her family that they have found James' killers and Emily is shocked to learn that the suspects are Tanya and Lance. She's told that Tanya sought revenge for her unreturned love for James. But before Emily has time to process this, she discovers that Dean is now missing. Without hesitation, she takes off to find him.

Emily finds Dean injured but alive. Tanya is here also, but is she friend or foe? Tanya pleads her innocence and insists that they leave immediately as Kurt is on his way. As they try to escape, Kurt arrives, and any doubts that he is a killer are laid to rest, as he starts shooting.

In a climactic showdown, Tanya and Dean escape within an inch of their lives, leaving Emily and Kurt to face off.





The Johnson family:
Peter, Evelyn, Malcolm, Heather and George

FILMING IN TASMANIA

Although the true story that inspired *Closure* occurred in Queensland, Tasmania (Australia's island state) provides a unique range of locations, actors and opportunities for production of the film.

Tasmania is "under the radar" at present, and as *The Kettering Incident* (8 x 1 hr TV drama for Foxtel and BBC Worldwide) is currently due for release, Australian and international producers are discovering that Tasmania has a huge variety of locations in a small geographical area. The state also has talented crew and cast and an ever-increasing pool of equipment and resources. International production companies have scouted in the state and Dreamworks recently shot part of *The Light Between Oceans* in Tasmania's north-west.

Screen Tasmania

Screen Tasmania is the Tasmanian Government agency responsible for supporting and developing the state's film, television and digital media industries. Screen Tasmania provides bespoke support along with equity investments in the development, production and marketing of Tasmanian screen projects.

Climate and hours of daylight

Unlike much of the rest of Australia, Tasmania has four distinct seasons. Tasmania has a maritime temperate climate with no place more than 115 kms from the sea. Summer (December to March) is mild to warm (averaging 23° C/73° F) and is characterised by 16 hours of daylight. In winter (May to August), the shortest day is about 9 hours. The sun's elevation in Tasmania, together with the general lack of pollution, means that the light has a different quality. Hobart is Australia's second driest capital, but the west coast averages 2400 mm (96 inches) of rain per year.



Coastal beach, Southern Tasmania

KYLE PORTBURY Director

Kyle is an award-winning writer and director. In 2015 his first feature screenplay, *Sailfish*, advanced to the quarter finals of the Bluecat Screenplay competition in Los Angeles and was nominated for Best Thriller screenplay in the New Hope Film Festival competition. Kyle completed his debut feature, *Tell the World*, in 2015.

After graduating from the Drama Centre London, Central Saint Martins College in 2007, Kyle shot his first short film, *Swan Song*. Several commissions followed swiftly including *The Mountain Within*, a feature-length documentary, which gained theatrical release in the UK and won various awards including Best Documentary at Mountain Film Festival in California.

In 2010-11, Kyle directed *Beyond the Search*, shot on location in fourteen countries, which has won fourteen international awards including the prestigious CINE Golden Eagle. Kyle also produced for BAFTA award-winning director, Bob Blagden, on his film *My Brother Marvin*, and has collaborated on numerous projects with BAFTA-nominated and EMMY award-winning composer Michael Price (BBC's *Sherlock*).



D. P. SWANSON Writer

Darren Swanson is an experienced screenwriter and an emerging director with a slate of around 20 screenplays, both shorts and features. In 2011, Darren was the recipient of a grant from Screen Tasmania's New Writer's Fund for his feature thriller *Closure*.

In 2013, he was accepted into the Raw Nerve program, funded by Screen Australia, with his short comedy screenplay *Blue Shirt Green Tie*. The resulting film has aired on ABC (Australia) multiple times and earning Darren both a film and TV credit as a writer/director. In 2014, Darren wrote and directed *Toy Boy*, a short dark comedy, for the Stranger With My Face Horror Film Festival. Darren received an Honourable Mention at the same festival for his short horror screenplay *Rat Trap*.



ALEXIA MELOCCHI Co-Producer

Alexia Melocchi of Little Studio Films has a successful career in the international marketplace, as both a sales agent and buyer's representative for eleven territories. She is a representative of international media companies and talent which gives her diverse exposure to all types of films and functions in the entertainment industry.

As a consultant, she works on packaging film and television properties, securing co-productions and arranging for US and international distribution, using her expertise in international sales, pre-sales, international acquisitions, development and a global film marketing approach. She has recently produced three features, two documentaries and two shorts and is in preproduction with several high profile film and television projects in partnership with other established producers.



ROGAN BROWN Co-Producer

Rogan is an experienced producer and production manager. Having had extensive experience in producing and managing a variety of theatre productions over 30 years, he began producing films in 2009. The ten short films he has produced since have together been seen at over 80 festivals from Belgium to Serbia, India to Sweden and continue to receive invitations to festivals in USA, Canada, Europe, Asia and Australia.

Rogan has also appeared in a number of short films, marketing campaigns, feature films and documentaries, and acted in several plays and musicals. He is Chairman of Mainstage Theatre Company, and has managed many of their productions.

In 2011, Rogan was awarded a grant by Screen Tasmania through their new *silverScreen* program, and has since received funding from them to develop a feature film, a television series and a web series.



DIRECTOR'S VISION

Passion

Closure at its heart is a story about trust. How do we gain it, lose it and, if we're lucky, get it back? I'm passionate about telling this story as it goes far beyond a true crime drama and resonates with me on a philosophical level by asking me to consider if what I want is really what I need? That's what good stories do - they force us to reflect on our own capacity to make choices that ultimately either make or break us.

Emily's inability to trust no one but herself drives her to rely on herself to her own detriment. This is a lonely road which leads her to isolation. We see this through her actions as she struggles to find her brother, relying only on herself for strength. Ultimately what she wants is not found in the discovery of her brother's body. In releasing her singular trust in herself to Dean and Gus she ultimately finds the closure she is looking for through the opening of new relationships with both men. In this way James's ultimate sacrifice saves his sister from herself.

Feel of the film

As the audience watches the film, I want them to feel conflicted by their gravitation towards the characters. No one is ever all good or all bad and I want them to feel unsettled as they see themselves in these characters - "I could make that choice in that situation". That can be truly disturbing and makes for great cinema. After it's over I want them to feel that the future is unwritten, that their life, from the moment the film experience ends, is completely in their hands. I want to inspire them to engage with their choice of who to trust and how to trust them, to take risks and rely on someone else for a change. Trust more, and have a little faith outside themselves.

Inspiration

For me, *Closure* is a little Terrence Malick's *Badlands* mixed into some *No Country for Old Men* with a dollop of Jane Campion's *Top of the Lake*, served up into a tasty true crime drama.

Style

The style is realistic, wandering into a surreal, often distorted view of reality to keep the audience guessing about what really happened to James and why. It will also deal realistically with love, families, drugs, and other aspects of the human condition, warts and all.

Editing and camera style

Quick cuts will be used in the edit to build tension. These are contrasted with long takes to encourage introspection. We will revel in Tasmania as a character we are not sure we can trust - sometimes welcoming, at other times outright hostile. The camera will be predominantly handheld, rarely settled. Only in the flashbacks will we employ a fluidity of movement that will jar with the rest of the visual style of the film and create uncertainty in what we just saw. Can it be trusted? Was it real or surreal?

Special effects

Special effects will be minimal. I want to focus on practical effects as much as possible to heighten the stakes and give the film an authenticity grounded in reality.

Soundtrack

I want to juxtapose the earthy, grounded visuals of Tasmania with unearthly, metallic, electronic sounds - the sounds of industry, machines that crush and grind and break. This fight between what we hear and see will amplify the struggle raging within Emily which ultimately resolves when she releases control and trusts Dean and Gus. Emmy award-winning composer of BBC's *Sherlock* and longtime collaborator Michael Price is well placed to deliver a soundscape of unequalled dramatic intensity.

BUDGET

Estimated Production Budget = \$US 2.5 M If filmed primarily in Australia, the film will be
(\$AU 3.46 M) eligible for the Producer Offset/Rebate (40%).

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Feature screenplay by D. P. SWANSON



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