

ARTS ENGINE Presents A Big Mouth Film



Pushing The Elephant

“One person alone cannot push the elephant, but many people together can.” – Rose Mapendo

Directed by
Beth Davenport and Elizabeth Mandel

84 min., USA 2010—In Banyamulenge and English, with English subtitles

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Pushing The Elephant chronicles the story of Rose Mapendo and how she escaped from the ethnic violence of the Democratic Republic of Congo to become a vital voice to help mend her divided country. She has assisted dozens of survivors to recover and rebuild their lives. But there is still one person Rose must teach to forgive – her daughter Nangabire.

LONG SYNOPSIS

In the late 1990s, Rose Mapendo lost her family and home to the violence that engulfed the Democratic Republic of Congo. She emerged advocating forgiveness and reconciliation. In a country where ethnic violence has created seemingly irreparable rifts among Tutsis, Hutus and other Congolese, this remarkable woman is a vital voice in her beleaguered nation's search for peace. Now, Rose is confronted with teaching one of her most recalcitrant students how to forgive—Nangabire, the daughter who remained behind.

When war came to Rose's village, she was separated from her five-year-old daughter, Nangabire. Rose managed to escape with nine of her ten children and was eventually resettled in Phoenix, Arizona. Over a decade later, mother and daughter are reunited in the US where they must face the past and build a new future.

We follow Rose and Nangabire over the course of a year as they make up for lost time. Rose struggles to find balance in her life as a mother of ten and a full-time advocate for refugees. She serves as the Ambassador for Mapendo International, a humanitarian organization named in Rose's honor that protects and cares for forgotten refugees. Her speaking engagements have her traveling around the world from the White House to the UNHCR in Geneva to peace talks in Congo.

Meanwhile Nangabire, now seventeen, must adapt to America and discover how she fits into the sprawling Mapendo family. As mother and daughter get to know one another, they must come to terms with a painful past, and define what it means to be a survivor, a woman, a refugee and an American.

Through this intimate family portrait unfolding against the wider drama of war, we will explore the long-term and often hidden effects of war on women and families, particularly those in traditional societies—financial despair, increased susceptibility to rape, and social ostracism. *Pushing The Elephant* captures one of the most important stories of our age, a time when genocidal violence is challenged by the moral fortitude and grace of one woman's mission for peace.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The story is told from the POV of the main characters themselves, who have given us their full commitment and cooperation, along with the rest of the Mapendo family here and in Africa. We believe that it is critical to provide a platform for those who have been marginalized to speak in their own voices. Our very small film crew allows us to be as unobtrusive as possible, which encourages the subjects to interact naturally in our presence. Our scaled-down equipment includes the Panasonic HVX200, set in filmic 24p mode, using natural light, with a small light kit at our disposal. Africa footage is shot in PAL, emphasizing the contrast between the subjects' present lives and the ones left behind.

Both mother and daughter's pasts are a critical part of our story, as well as being a piece of the narrative that informs their daily lives. Rose and Nangabire are continually referencing the events that brought them to the present, and therefore the past naturally lends itself to being interwoven into the fabric of unfolding events. Using interviews, family photos and archival footage, as well as stylized footage shot on Super 8 and HD footage using 35mm lenses, we weave the past throughout the present day story. Finally, imagery of Africa, Phoenix and the many places Rose travels will infuse the film with beauty and sense of place.

Arts Engine, Inc. is a female-founded and operated company. Big Mouth Films, a project of Arts Engine, is committed to telling multifaceted and universal stories through an intimate lens about the complexities of life as a woman in this new millennium. Rose and Nangabire's story is a perfect example of this commitment. For all the unique circumstances of the story, it contains universal truths about the mother-daughter bond and the importance of family, connection and forgiveness, themes to which women everywhere can relate. Furthermore, as a strong African woman and a refugee who is a leader and an activist, Rose represents a model of woman we rarely get to see on film or other media sources. At the heart of the film is a powerful story of how families persevere through extreme circumstances.

The filmmakers are not from Congo, and are viewing the specifics of the story through an outsider lens. However, the story also has personal resonance for all of the principal personnel involved. Among us, we have: a descendant of Eastern European Jews who were forced to flee their homes, many of whom, like those in the Congo, were murdered with the cooperation of their neighbors; an African-American woman who has traveled extensively in Africa, including Rwanda, where she was moved by the harrowing stories of individuals who survived Genocide there; and four women who have complicated legacies with their

mothers. At the end of the day, Rose is a mother, and Nangabire a daughter and their stories of forgiveness, though extraordinary, are universal.

Rose Mapendo and her family have given us complete access to their lives over the past three years, enabling us to capture both the intimate and public moments that make this story.



BIOGRAPHY OF ROSE MAPENDO

Rose Mapendo was born in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. In Swahili, Mapendo means “great love.” Rose was the mother of eight children when the Rwandan army invaded the Congo in August 1998. In response to Rwanda’s invasion, Congo President Kabila announced that specific ethnic groups inside Congo were the enemy; unfortunately, one of these ethnic groups included Rose and her family. The events that followed played like a broken record: misplaced anger, fear, and confusion generated the purging of another ethnic group. Yet despite all the atrocities experienced in the Congo, Rose never lost her ability to love.

Under orders, soldiers arrested a pregnant Rose, her husband, and all of her children except one daughter. Thereafter Rose witnessed the execution of her husband and the slow deaths of her friends and relatives from malnutrition and disease. In her eighth month of captivity, despite being extremely malnourished, she bore premature twin boys on the concrete prison floor. This was all done in silence. She even had to beg the guards for a piece of bamboo in order to cut the umbilical cord. She fed her twins with rags soaked in tea.

In order to ensure her family’s survival, Rose was forced to make a series of compromising choices. She began by naming her newborns after two of the prison guards. After currying favor with the guards, Rose and her children were delivered to an International Committee for the Red Cross protection center in Kinshasa, the capital of Congo. The US government at the time recognized the situation in the Congo and funded emergency evacuations from this center to nearby African countries, from where the refugees would resettle to the US. The Mapendos arrived in Kinshasa a week before the final evacuation after 16 months in prison; however, they were not on the evacuation list. Eventually the rescue team recognized that Rose’s twins would die if left in the Congo as they were malnourished and weighed only eight pounds each. They were finally included on the list.

In February 2000 Rose and her children were flown to a refugee camp in northern Cameroon. In August 2000 the family resettled to Phoenix, Arizona. The one separated daughter eventually joined the rest of the family in Phoenix after a decade apart. Rose’s children are now all in school, healthy, and finally together. For the younger children, the traumas of their past life have already faded. But Rose doesn’t forget. She continues to tell her story and inspire people around the world through her humanitarian efforts.

Rose's efforts have not gone unnoticed. Mapendo International, a non-profit organization that "works to fill the critical and unmet needs of people affected by war and conflict who have fallen through the net of humanitarian assistance," was founded in 2003. She still serves as the chief spokesperson.

- In March 2007, Rose was named America's greatest hometown hero at the Volvo for Life Hero Awards.
- In January 2008, Rose was invited to represent her tribe in the Goma Peace Talks in the Democratic Republic of Congo. She was one of only a handful of women invited to the talks.
- In June 2008, the White House invited Rose Mapendo to speak in commemoration of World Refugee Day.
- In July 2008, Rose became the first refugee to address the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Geneva.
- In June 2009, Rose was honored with the Humanitarian of the Year Award by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees.



STATEMENT FROM ROSE MAPENDO

February 29, 2008

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Rose Mapendo, and I am a member of the Banyamulenge Tutsi of the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. I am the primary subject of *Pushing The Elephant*, a documentary film being produced by Arts Engine, Inc.,

The minority Banyamulenge have suffered persecution in the form of massacre and exile. Our voices have been silenced in our own country as we are murdered or flee; our story is little known outside our own community. The most recent massacre, the Gatumba Massacre, has led to an influx of Banyamulenge refugees into the United States. We are grateful to be here, but we also know that as we integrate into American society, our history and culture will recede further and further into the past.

Pushing The Elephant will create a portrait of the manner in which war has impacted my family over the last two decades. While every family's story is unique, our story well represents my community. The film will serve a two-fold role, in introducing the American public to our history and culture, and in calling attention to the plight of the Banyamulenge in Congo and our struggles and successes in forming a new community here in the United States.

My family and I have designated the Arts Engine team to help us tell our story. As filmmakers with a considerable talent for telling stories that would otherwise go unheard in an intimate, sensitive and compelling manner, we believe that these women are particularly well suited to give us voice on the screen. We are proud to be working with them on this project.

Thank you for your kind attention and for your consideration of this important project.

Sincerely,

Rose Mapendo

FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Beth Davenport, Director/Producer



Having worked in various capacities at Big Mouth since 2003, Beth brings over eight years of production and outreach experience in television, commercials and award-winning documentaries for P.O.V., Sundance Channel, BBC and Arte France as well as directing advocacy videos and short films. Film credits include: the Emmy-nominated film *Deadline*, Thomas Balmes' *Wrongful Death* and *Election Day*. Beth is currently a producer at Arts Engine, Inc./Big Mouth Films and is producing

Asexuality: The Making of a Movement, directed by Angela Tucker and directing *Pushing The Elephant*, a feature-length documentary work-in-progress. Davenport was a mentor for the IFP Documentary Rough Cut Lab for three years and is a NYFA Fellow. She graduated with a degree in Sociology and Peace and Conflict Resolution from Wayne State University.

Elizabeth Mandel, Director/Producer



Mandel produced the film *Arctic Son* (premiered at Full Frame, 2006, broadcast on POV in 2007) with Dallas Brennan Rexer. She was a co-producer on Jennifer Fox's film and six part series, *Flying: Confessions of a Free Woman*, served as an associate producer for Jasmine Dellal's *When the Road Bends...Tales of a Gypsy Caravan*, and was the producer of the *Deadline* DVD. She directs and

produces educational videos for non-profit organizations such as Johns Hopkins Medical Center's Project Restore, in addition to producing spots for Nickelodeon and Sundance Channel. She recently created a series of five educational and organizational videos for Jewish Women International, designed to heighten awareness around the issue of gender-based violence in the Jewish community. She is a 2008 NYFA Fellow.

Prior to joining Big Mouth in 2001, Mandel worked for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in Bombay, India, and for the United Nations and the Asia Foundation. She has also worked in Cambodia, Nepal and Japan on a variety of women's security and empowerment projects, as well as micro

enterprise, community development, leadership training and citizen participation projects. She holds a Master's Degree from Columbia University in International Affairs, with a focus on Women's Economic and Political Development and graduated magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa from Columbia University with a B.A. in Religion and East Asian Languages and Cultures.

Katy Chevigny, Producer



Chevigny is the Executive Director of Arts Engine, home of Big Mouth Films, MediaRights.org and the Media That Matters Film Festival. Chevigny brings over ten years experience as a documentary filmmaker, social entrepreneur, and manager to Arts Engine. In 2004, she produced and co-directed *Deadline*, an Emmy-nominated film that won the Thurgood Marshall Journalism Award, a CINE Golden Eagle Grand Jury Award, premiered at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival, was broadcast on NBC's *Dateline* in July 2004, and is currently available on home video at all major outlets. Chevigny also directed *Journey to the West: Chinese Medicine Today*, a feature-length documentary about traditional Chinese medicine and its influence in the West. Chevigny has produced four award-winning documentaries, including *Innocent Until Proven Guilty*, *Nuyorican Dream*, *Brother Born Again* and *Outside Looking In: Transracial Adoption in America*. These films were screened at festivals around the world, including Berlin and Sundance, and were broadcast on public television and HBO/Cinemax. Chevigny is currently directing *The Dishes*, and most recently finished directing *Election Day*, which premiered at South by Southwest in 2007.

Angela Tucker, Producer



Angela Tucker has worked at Big Mouth Films for the past seven years and is currently the Director of Production. She is directing the film *Asexuality: The Making of a Movement* and producing the films, *Rose and Nangabire* and *Dreaming Nicaragua*. She was the Associate Producer, Sound Recordist and Outreach Director for the Emmy nominated film, *Deadline (NBC, Dateline)*. She was a Consulting Producer and Field Producer for *Election Day* (POV, PBS) and a Line Producer for *Beyond the Steps: The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater* (PBS' Great Performances). She directs and produces educational videos for non-profit organizations such as ACORN

Housing and GLSEN in addition to producing spots for broadcasters such as Nickelodeon. She directed two shorts for The National Black Programming Consortium and ITVS' Initiative, *The Masculinity Project*, entitled "Invisible Men". She received an MFA in Film from Columbia University where she was awarded a grant from The Academy of Arts and Sciences, a Dean's Fellowship and a Milos Forman Finishing Fund Award.

Executive Producers, Chicken & Egg Pictures

Chicken & Egg Pictures (Wendy Ettinger, Julie Parker Benello, Judith Helfand) provides "development/we-believe-in-you" grants and executive producer support to emerging and veteran women filmmakers with non-profit and fiction film projects they consider to be important.

Camera

Beth Davenport (Director, *Pushing The Elephant*), Phoenix, New York; William Rexer (*The Devil Came on Horseback, The Trials of Darryl Hunt*), New York; Camilla Turner, Kenya, Rwanda, Congo; Leigh Iacobucci (*Pressure Cooker*), Phoenix, New York, Geneva; Ari Palos (*The Spirituals, Beyond the Border*), Phoenix.

Editor, Mona Davis

Mona Davis, winner of Best Editor Emmy for *The Farm*, multiple award winning documentary on the notorious prison in Angola, Louisiana, has been editing documentaries since the early 1980s, when she doubled as Editor and Associate Producer of her first film, *In Our Water*, a study of the pollution problem in New Jersey's water supply. *In Our Water*, produced and directed by Meg Switzgale, won a Columbia DuPont Award and was nominated for both an Academy Award and an Emmy.

The Farm, distributed theatrically and also seen on the A & E Network, was nominated for an Academy Award and was a Sundance Film Festival Grand Jury Prize winner in addition to being voted Best Documentary of the Year by the New York Film Critics' Circle, the L. A. Film Critics' Circle and the National Society of Film Critics. Ms. Davis, a native New Yorker, is a graduate of the NYU film school and has edited many highly honored documentaries. Some of the most distinguished are: *Love and Diane* which premiered at the New York Film Festival, and won the Golden Leopard Award at the Locarno Film Festival and was released theatrically in spring 2003 and aired on PBS's P.O.V series, co-presented with ITVS. *A Perfect Candidate*, a revealing portrait of Oliver North using footage from his senatorial campaign against Robb. (Nominated for an Emmy. Producer/Directors, R.J. Cutler and David Van Taylor. Associate Director, Mona Davis. Aired on P.O.V.). Mona also edited *Age 7 In America*, the

American version of the British documentary series, *Seven Up*, which interviews a group of subjects at seven year intervals, starting at age seven (Winner: Peabody Award. Producers: Michael Apted & Vicky Bippart. Director: Phil Joanou).

Translator and Cultural Consultant, Marie-Claudine Mukamabano

International Entrepreneur Awards Winner Mukamabano is a dancer/singer, activist and the founder of Kuki Ndiho Rwanda Orphans Support Project, a charitable organization dedicated to finding safe place for street kids who were orphaned by the horrendous Rwandan Genocide of 1994 and HIV/AIDS. Claudine is also a survivor of that Genocide. Orphaned at the age of 14 as her family and fellow tribe members were violently killed around her, Mukamabano today talks about the simple joy of being alive. She has traveled throughout Africa and other areas of the world, enjoining people of differing cultures to embrace their potential for survival and growth. Mukamabano is determined to educate people about HIV/AIDS, extreme poverty, and the current genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan.

CREDITS

Directors/Producers Beth Davenport
Elizabeth Mandel

Producers Katy Chevigny
Angela Tucker

Editor Mona Davis

Story Producer Geeta Gandbhir

Camera Beth Davenport
Leigh Iacobucci
Camilla Turner
Ari Palos

Executive Producers Chicken & Egg Pictures
Wendy Ettinger
Judith Helfand
Julie Parker Benello

Co-Producer Enrico Cullen

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