



## **MY YEAR WITH HELEN**

### **PRODUCTION NOTES**

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## **FACT SHEET**

**TITLE:** My Year With Helen

**PRODUCTION COMPANY:** Gaylene Preston Productions

**FUNDING:** NZ Film Commission, NZ On Air and private investors

**Producer/director:** Gaylene Preston

**Co-producer:** Catherine Madigan

**Executive Producer:** Alexander Behse

**Associate Producer:** Tim Riley

**Editor:** Paul Sutorius

**Composer:** Jan Preston

**Cinematography:** Sam Russell, Colin Sonner, Gaylene Preston

**Australia & New Zealand distribution:** Transmission

**Duration:** 93 minutes

The film conveys how tough it is to break the remaining glass ceilings.  
May it motivate future generations of women to keep at it!

- Helen Clark, 2017

## **SYNOPSIS**

With unique access to high-ranking candidate Helen Clark, award-winning filmmaker Gaylene Preston casts a wry eye on proceedings as the United Nations turns itself inside-out choosing a new Secretary-General.

Her cameras explore the cracks between the diplomats, the embedded press and feminist activists as they push for change while caught up in a power process as secretive and patriarchal as the selection of the Pope.

An observational documentary, MY YEAR WITH HELEN travels alongside Clark as she works on global development issues as head of the UNDP while also campaigning for SG and staying in daily contact with her 94-year-old father back in New Zealand.

## **LOGLINE**

A behind-the-scenes human view of the inner workings of global power.

## **REVIEW QUOTE**

“Gaylene Preston’s *My Year with Helen* delivers a fascinating portrait of Helen Clark on a mission – and a laconic account of the exasperating circumstances wherein she hit the ceiling at the United Nations.”

– Bill Gosden, NZ International Film Festival

## ABOUT THE FILM

When award-winning filmmaker Gaylene Preston was feeling depressed about the state of the world in 2015, she contacted former NZ Prime Minister Helen Clark to find out what she was doing.

“I knew that Helen was into her second four-year term of a really challenging job as Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and chair of the entire Development Group and I wanted to find out the reason for her optimism about the possibilities for doing global good,” Preston says. “She’s a no-nonsense operator known for being effective, so I knew she wouldn’t still be there if she hadn’t felt she could make a difference.

“So I asked her if I could come and film the work she was doing at the UN and it was only after we had been to Botswana with her that I realised that she was likely to make a bid for Secretary-General.”

The observational documentary, *MY YEAR WITH HELEN*, is the outcome of Preston’s time shadowing Helen Clark through her campaign for the role of UN Secretary-General while also carrying out her work as Administrator of UNDP. Preston and her co-producer Catherine Madigan filmed Clark in Botswana, Britain, Spain and Ukraine as well as the UN’s New York HQ.

Since her classic features, *Mr Wrong* and *Ruby and Rata* Gaylene Preston has been an advocate of the importance of telling New Zealand stories on film. As well as her dramas based on true stories (*Hope & Wire*, *Home By Christmas* and *Bread and Roses*), she is known for acclaimed in-depth documentaries including *War Stories Our Mothers Never Told Us*, *Titless Wonders* and *Earthquake!* These films display her ability to capture the essence of ordinary people and their experiences. All of her work combines entertainment with a strong social message.

*MY YEAR WITH HELEN* differs only in the high profile and global ambitions of her subject. Although it is not a personal expose, the film shows a different side of former NZ Prime Minister Helen Clark as she navigates the power structures of the United Nations in the biggest campaign of her career.

In following the ups and downs of Clark’s journey, Preston says the film poses the hard question: what will it take for a woman to lead in a very high-profile global position?

“We watch the selection of a Secretary-General from behind the shoulders of a leading candidate, Helen Clark, and we see her deal with and absorb major setbacks, get up and carry on. It’s a portrait of resilience.”

Clark was one of the leading candidates – as a former Prime Minister and at the time holding the third-highest ranking job at the UN, she was well-qualified. Preston says the case for a female Secretary-General is self-evident, “Women are 51 percent of the world’s population and it’s important for us to have leadership roles in global power.

“I believe this film is important and timely because it chronicles the way an organisation like the UN, which, even though it has strong remits around gender equity at the highest level, turns its back on that and sticks to the status quo.”

Even though the outcome is known, the film reflects Preston’s fascination with the workings of power and draws the audience into an emotional commitment to the journey. Preston describes it as “a human-scale view of power.

“It’s related to that idea that Bob Dylan said in a song ages ago: ‘even the President of the United States must sometimes have to stand naked’. We think about power and powerful people in a particular way, but actually, no matter what structures they’re working in, they’re only people. (That sounds like an obvious thing to say – but it isn’t really how we think of them.) At the United Nations I met lots of very clever people and all of them are really motivated for doing global good, but they are forced to operate within an antiquated system.”

The film shows Clark in a process that’s semi-transparent as a result of recent changes in the United Nations General Assembly which brought the candidates into public view through the UN website and televised presentations. There seemed to be hope for the selection of a woman, alongside talk of an Eastern European being necessary for geopolitical reasons. Preston captures the speculation and excitement amongst what she describes as the “tribes of the UN” - the various interest groups, lobbyists, diplomats and the media.

This provides a solid lead-in to the abrupt revelation of the general shock when the General Assembly appointed (after recommendation by the United Nations Security Council) former Prime Minister of Portugal, António Guterres. It seemed the Security Council’s secretive 5-nation veto system threw up the glass ceiling, rejecting all of the highly-qualified female candidates. It will be another 10 years before there is another opportunity for a woman to lead the United Nations.

An intriguing part of MY YEAR WITH HELEN is commentary from the sidelines by feminist lobby group She For SG and the international media embedded at the UN, including Al Jazeera, Associated Press and Feature Story News. There’s also a visit to the William Hill betting agency in London, which placed Clark at No 1 in the race, illustrating popular interest in this unusual contest.

“Helen Clark stands out because she’s clearly effective,” Preston says. “She has re-organised the UNDP so that it actually works. The UNDG, which she has chaired is the largest part of the UN and she has made its processes work. The sad part about her not being Secretary-General is that she would have actually been bringing them into the 21st Century and plugging them into all of the new media and modernising it. You have to be SG to do that”.

Preston says, “I think I took for granted her unique position as a world leader, and perhaps we all do. I don’t think we realise how uniquely kiwi she is because she’s always been out there and one of us. But when you see her operating – she’s task oriented, she’s kind, she’s always aware of the people who make the tea, she’s egalitarian with the staff in her office; she’s also a bit blunt, and she gets things done.”

In keeping with Preston’s style of bringing out the real personality of her subjects, we see Clark, in a very “kiwi” scene, stocking up her 94-year-old father’s freezer with home-made

casseroles in plastic margarine containers – enough to keep him going until she returns. No matter where in the world she is, she calls him daily to update him on her life.

Her well-known twitter obsessions features, as does her purely Kiwi way of relating to her colleagues. “There’s a moment in the film where Helen is particularly pleased with something a colleague says, so she hits him on the arm, one of those little, kind of matey, punches.

“When you go overseas, you really notice your own national characteristics and I’m proud to say that one of them is to do with gender equity. We do have a way of women taking charge that a lot of other nationalities don’t.”

Preston not only tells New Zealand stories, she tells them in a very Kiwi way, with compassion for her subjects and her own idiosyncratic approach, whether her subject is well known or an ordinary New Zealander. MY YEAR WITH HELEN has the distinct, unique flavour of a Gaylene Preston production: a serious topic combined with disarming human moments and a healthy layer of unforced humour.

She says, “The film carries a serious message, but some of the things that happen are funny. Strangely, I no longer feel as depressed as about the world as I did. Seeing humanity at work at its worst and its best, has settled me down and renewed my optimism in humankind.”

## ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

One of the challenges for Preston in making this film was to get behind Helen Clark's years of media experience, for which she devised several strategies.

"I wasn't a friend of Helen's, but I knew her. When you meet her at a party or a book launch, she's very personable and quite different from the impression you get on TV. I knew that getting that side of her on film was what I needed to do. I didn't want to make a film about her private life - this film is about her public life - but I wanted it to be the personable part of the public life. So basically it means that I stalked her for a year and I tried every way to disrupt every interview I ever did with her to get something different."

One example of such disruption is the "interview that wasn't an interview", where Preston set up her cameras in Clark's office and asks her to just carry on with working on her phone and computer, then Preston makes a comment about it being a big day (some results were due) and Clark gives her some advice about the timing of the results and tells her she "better scurry off down there". An interaction giving insight into the relationship between filmmaker and subject, while also moving the story along in a slightly humorous way.

Preston and co-producer Catherine Madigan also had to devise strategies for working in the United Nations building in New York. They had a small crew – Preston operated a camera herself, often solo, but also alongside camera and sound operators hired for certain occasions. Preston made herself memorable to the security guards and other UN personnel by wearing the same distinctive outfit on every visit.

"For the whole year I wore a quite distinctive leather jacket with a lot of bling on the sleeves, a Fedora hat and leopardskin trousers with silver shoes. That branded me as neither a diplomat nor a member of the media nor a general visitor. It worked - after a while they would say 'Hey, it's the Kiwi crew!' and Catherine was conscientious in maintaining relationships with the key people."

Because they were a documentary crew and therefore looking for different angles from the news media, Preston says their requests were unusual. For example, she wanted to position her cameras off to the side of the official press conferences in order to see both the media and the person addressing them, but the layout and format of the press conferences was not suited to that.

Another area of sensitivity was that although Clark had given Preston total creative control and access to film her, she would not wear a radio microphone. This was not so much to conceal what she might say, but to protect what other people might say to her, thinking they were speaking in confidence.

Preston says that having to work around these technical and other obstacles led to creative solutions which have had a positive impact on the film. She decided that wherever possible, she would be a discreet presence at the edge of frame, bringing the audience closer to the action and creating a more intimate style.

"I knew I would have to be one of the camera operators because I'm cheeky, I can jump into Helen's car with my little camera, because if you hesitate you are lost."

“I also knew I would have to be seen on screen because at the outset it seemed that the film might need some kind of narration. I didn’t want it to be a “voice of God” style, so if I could be at the edge of frame I could do a more intimate commentary. As it turned out, the film speaks for itself, so I didn’t need to do that.

“So, you do see me occasionally and you know it’s me that Helen and the others are talking to. Sometimes I’m the third person included in the conversation. And, if we’re lucky, I’m the third person included in a whispered conversation.”

Gaylene Preston is the only filmmaker who could have made this film - partly due to her shared history with Clark - they've both come up in their careers at the same time and crossed paths through Preston’s interest in politics and Clark's support of the arts. Her ability to win her subjects over often results in moments of great insight and sheer charm.

Despite the disappointment of the Secretary-General selection, Preston wanted MY YEAR WITH HELEN to end on an inspiring and global note, so the film’s composer, Jan Preston, wrote a song for women’s voices focusing on the word “woman” in all of the world’s languages. Performed by Annie Crummer, Cherie Matheson and Jan Preston with the Sydney Cantillation Choir, Preston says, “it’s a nice way to leave the cinema. It fills your heart up.”

MY YEAR WITH HELEN is produced, written and directed by Gaylene Preston through her company Gaylene Preston Productions with funding from NZFC, NZ On Air and private investors. Co-produced by Catherine Madigan and executive produced by Alexander Behse. Editor is Paul Sutorius and composer Jan Preston. Australia and New Zealand distribution is by Transmission.

## **ABOUT HELEN CLARK**

Former New Zealand Prime Minister the Right Honourable Helen Clark (ONZ) is New Zealand's most prominent female leader, and was until early 2017 the most powerful woman in the United Nations, where she championed humanitarian and development initiatives around the world. Regularly ranked by Forbes magazine among the world's most powerful women, Clark is a global advocate for issues critical to women and children, and to sustainability and climate change.

Born in 1950 and raised in a farming family in the Waikato region, Clark majored in politics at the University of Auckland, where she gained an MA (Honours) in 1974 and taught in the Political Studies department. A member of the New Zealand Labour Party for most of her life, Clark became a Member of Parliament in 1981, one of only four women elected to Parliament that year, and only the second woman to represent an Auckland electorate (she held the Mt Albert electorate until her resignation in 2008).

Clark became a Cabinet Minister in the fourth Labour Government in 1987, serving as a Minister of Housing and Conservation, then Health and Labour, and eventually Deputy Prime Minister. In 1993 she successfully challenged then-leader and former Prime Minister Mike Moore for the Labour Party leadership, and led the party through nine years of Opposition until her successful election to Government in 1999. Clark was only the second female Prime Minister in New Zealand (after Rt Hon Jenny Shipley) and the first to be elected to office. She was elected twice more, leading the country for three terms until her 2008 election-night resignation.

Under Clark, Labour was notable for its stable leadership of multi-party coalition Governments, achieving significant economic growth, low levels of unemployment, increasing investment in education, health and family well-being, and the settlement of historic grievances with Māori. Clark herself promoted New Zealand's arts, culture and heritage in a Ministerial role, while maintaining her interests in foreign diplomacy and international peacekeeping.

In 2009, Clark became the first female Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, the third highest-ranking position at the UN, where for two terms she ran an annual budget of \$6 billion and a staff of over 8,000 across 177 countries, with a focus on achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals to "end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all". Clark's UNDP tenure is noted for her pragmatism and budget-savvy leadership: she improved the financial transparency of the organisation, achieved a better gender balance among staff, and developed more diverse funding sources as traditional donor contributions declined.

In 2016, Clark was one of seven women vying to be the first female Secretary-General of United Nations. All were unsuccessful. Her term as UNDP chief ended in April 2017. Clark is a standing member of the Council of Women World Leaders, the international network of current and former women presidents and prime ministers.

A long-time lover of the outdoors, Clark is a keen trumper and cross-country skier. She is the eldest of four children, all daughters, of George and Margaret Clark, and is married to University of Auckland Professor of Sociology, Peter Davis. Clark's mother, a primary

school teacher, died in 2011. Her father George, a retired farmer, appears in MY YEAR WITH HELEN.

## **ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS**

### **GAYLENE PRESTON – Producer/Director**

Gaylene Preston is one of New Zealand's most recognised and valued filmmakers, with a screen career spanning four decades and a remarkable list of writer, director and producer credits covering feature films, documentaries and TV drama series. Many of these have become classics of New Zealand cinema, notable for the strength of Preston's human connections and her deep commitment to telling New Zealand stories.

MY YEAR WITH HELEN joins an impressive list of Preston-helmed documentaries including ALL THE WAY UP THERE (1978), LEARNING FAST (1980), MAKING UTU (1982), KERI HULME – KAI PURAKAU (1987), HONE TUWHARE – NO OTHER LIPS (1996), GETTING TO OUR PLACE (1999), PUNITIVE DAMAGE (Co-producer, 1999), TITLESS WONDERS (2001), COFFEE, TEA OR ME? (Producer, 2003), LANDS OF OUR FATHERS (Executive producer, 2004), EARTHQUAKE! (2006), TIME OF OUR LIVES (2007), LOVELY RITA (2007), STRONGMAN THE TRAGEDY (2011).

Preston's feature films include MR WRONG (1985), RUBY AND RATA (1990), WAR STORIES OUR MOTHER NEVER TOLD US (1995), PERFECT STRANGERS (2003), and HOME BY CHRISTMAS (2010). She also created television series include BREAD AND ROSES (1993) and HOPE AND WIRE (2014).

Preston's films have been in official selection for most major international film festivals including Venice, Sundance, Toronto, London, Sydney, Melbourne and New Zealand and have won awards in the USA, Canada, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Switzerland, Russia Australia and New Zealand.

Born in Greymouth, Preston attended Ilam Art School in Christchurch before working as an art therapist in both Christchurch and London. It was through this work that her interest in filmmaking began. A pioneering filmmaker, Preston was making movies when few New Zealand women were, breaking ground for those who have followed and setting up prizes in her name to support women directors. She is renowned for being generous with her time and wisdom, has served on the boards of New Zealand's main screen organisations, and her powerful mentorship and advocacy have been central to the development not only of women filmmakers, but of New Zealand's wider filmmaking community.

In 2001 she was honoured by the New Zealand Arts Foundation, becoming New Zealand's first Filmmaker Laureate. In 2002 she was appointed an Officer of the NZ Order of Merit for her services to filmmaking. Preston is the recipient of a WIFT NZ Lifetime Achievement Award, the 2016 New Zealand Women of Influence Award for Arts and Culture, the SPADA Industry Champion Award and the Services to Cinema award in the 2017 NZ Film Awards (the "Moas").

As well as making films, Preston has raised a daughter and is now helping to raise her young granddaughter.

## **CATHERINE MADIGAN – Co-Producer**

Catherine began her career over 30 years ago on the US/NZ co-production SAVAGE ISLANDS. Since then she has line produced both international features (WILLOW, VERTICAL LIMIT) and New Zealand films, (MR PIP, WHITE LIES).

Her work also spans feature documentaries and commercials, (PUNITIVE DAMAGE, BEYOND THE EDGE) and she worked with Matthew Metcalfe's General Film Corporation line producing Toa Fraser's feature thriller 6 DAYS. She is currently line producing, for GFC, CAPITAL IN THE 21ST CENTURY, an NZ/France co-production feature documentary directed by Justin Pemberton, based on the book of the same name by economist Thomas Piketty.

She has combined her extensive production experience with an abiding interest in global development issues with a focus on human rights. Alongside her work for agencies such as UNICEF (directing and producing CHILDREN ARE NOT FOR SALE, on the rise of child prostitution) and VSA (as a mentor producer at an Audio Visual company in East Timor) she also produced and directed her own documentary, TURNING THE TIDE, which screened at festivals in China and New Zealand, becoming a finalist in the DOCNZ competition, 2007. TURNING THE TIDE was acquired by PBS USA for screening in 2007.

Madigan and Gaylene Preston have worked together on the award winning commercial CHRISTMAS CROSSES and on the international shoot of the acclaimed feature documentary PUNITIVE DAMAGE, co-produced by Preston.

## **ALEXANDER BEHSE – Executive Producer**

Born and raised in Germany, Alexander Behse has carved out an impressive career in New Zealand, producing stories that explore New Zealand and the Pacific. Since forming his company Monsoon Pictures in 2000, Behse has produced over 100 hours of award-winning factual and documentary content, much of which he has sold internationally.

Beginning his career in New Zealand as an editor, Behse moved into producing with the 2009 documentary THE FLIGHT OF TE HOOKIOI, his first pairing with director Tearepa Kahi. Their second outing was the 2011 documentary ALLAN BALDWIN: IN FRAME, which won Best Documentary - Aotearoa at the Wairoa Māori Film Festival, as well as the Special Jury Award at the FIFO Film Festival. Their most recent collaboration was POI E: The Story of Our Song, the uplifting documentary about the 1980s pop song entirely in te reo Māori that became an enduring hit.

Further documentary credits include: FREEZING WORKS, about a group of mainly Māori abattoir workers who head off to Iceland for seasonal work; ROAD TO THE GLOBE, which followed a te reo Māori production of Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida to London's Globe Theatre; Sarah Grohnert's debut documentary EVER THE LAND, about a landmark architectural undertaking by one of New Zealand's most passionately independent tribes, Ngāi Tūhoe. The Behse-produced feature documentary KIM DOTCOM: CAUGHT IN THE WEB, directed by Annie Goldson, premiered at SXSW 2017.

For television, Behse has produced the series DAVEY HUGHES - UNTAMED, and two series with history-obsessed New Zealand comedian Te Radar, the first of which, RADAR ACROSS THE PACIFIC, won Best Factual TV Series at the 2012 NZ Television Awards, and a Silver Medal at the New York World TV Awards. In 2012 Behse made his directorial debut with NAZI HUNTER, a documentary for TV3's Inside New Zealand series.

### **PAUL SUTORIUS - Editor**

Paul Sutorius is a multi award-winning and much-loved film and television editor. He has been nominated for best editor 15 times for his work, which spans five decades and encompasses feature films, TV dramas and documentaries; he has had four wins. Sutorius began his editing career in 1969 at the NZ Broadcasting Corporation (which would become TVNZ), where he worked on current affairs shows, documentaries and important drama series such as PUKEMANU and THE GOVERNOR. In the 1980s, Sutorius took leave without pay from TVNZ to work on a number of independent films and dramas, eventually going solo in 1989.

That same year, Sutorius began his long and fruitful collaboration with Gaylene Preston, cutting her second feature RUBY AND RATA. This work won him his first NZ Film Award in 1990. Twenty years later, he won the award again for Preston's HOME BY CHRISTMAS. Sutorius has also picked up a best documentary editing award for GETTING TO OUR PLACE, which Preston produced and co-directed with Anna Cottrell. Other Preston titles under Sutorius' belt include BREAD & ROSES and WAR STORIES OUR MOTHERS NEVER TOLD US.

Alongside his collaborations with Preston, Sutorius' feature films include John Laing's ABSENT WITHOUT LEAVE (starring Craig McLachlan), Glenn Standring's THE IRREFUTABLE TRUTH ABOUT DEMONS, Dale Bradley's CHUNUK BAIR, Mike Walker's KINGI'S STORY, KINGPIN and MARK II, and more recently Dana Rotberg's WHITE LIES. His television credits include dramas INSIDER'S GUIDE TO HAPPINESS, DUGGAN, MORTIMER'S PATCH and docu-drama FALLOUT (about the lead-up to NZ Prime Minister David Lange's anti-nuclear stand). Sutorius also cut the tele-movies UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT, TANGIWAI - A LOVE STORY and the forthcoming CATCHING THE BLACK WIDOW.

### **JAN PRESTON - Composer**

Sydney-based Jan Preston is known as one of Australia's foremost female composers. She won a New Zealand Film & Television Award for her work on Leon Narbey's feature ILLUSTRIOUS ENERGY and her other NZ feature film work includes Narbey's THE FOOTSTEP MAN, Melanie Read's TRIAL RUN, and Gaylene Preston's HOME BY CHRISTMAS.

Preston began her career in New Zealand studying classical piano, then worked in theatre and rock bands. She was a founding member of Wellington's respected avant-garde theatre troupe

Red Mole, and subsequently created rock band Coup D'Etat with Red Mole colleague Neil Hannan. They had a No.1 hit with "Doctor, I Like Your Medicine" (NZ Music Awards Single of the Year 1981).

Since relocating to Australia in the 1980s, Preston has composed for many Australian documentaries, TV series and short films, including two Tom Zubrycki documentaries: THE HUNGRY TIDE, about the effect of climate change on Kiribati, and THE DIPLOMAT, about East Timorese politician José Ramos Horta. Preston's original piano composition was used as the theme to ABC's AUSTRALIAN STORY, and she has appeared on ABC TV's SPICKS AND SPECKS.

A piano player, songwriter and performer who has had longstanding popularity on the concert and festival circuit throughout NZ, Australia, and Europe, Preston continues to tour as the Queen of Boogie Piano.

## **MY YEAR WITH HELEN Final Credits**

The film makers would like to thank the Diplomats, members of the Press and the UN staff for their generous contribution during the making of this film.

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**Producer**  
Gaylene Preston

**Co Producer**  
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**Executive Producer**  
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**Associate Producer**  
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**Editor**  
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Sydney Cantillation Choir

**Percussion**

Chris O'Connor

**Recorded**

Guy Dickerson (Sydney)

Neil Hannan (Auckland)

‘Women’

Composed by Jan Preston

Performed by Annie Crummer, Cherie Mathieson, Jan Preston

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