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LEFT BY THE SHIP TO PREMIERE ON INDEPENDENT LENS ON THURSDAY, MAY 24, 2012

Film Explores the Lives of Three of the Approximately 50,000 Filipino Children Fathered by American Servicemen

(San Francisco, CA) — JR, Charlene, and Robert are half American; they are among the close to 50,000 children of Filipina sex workers fathered by American servicemen who were stationed in military bases in the Philippines until 1992. Their poignant stories, recounted in *Left by the Ship*, illuminate the limbo in which this generation of Filipino Amerasians find themselves. Filmed over the course of two years, filmmakers Emma Rossi-Landi and Alberto Vendemmiati followed the lives of these three young people as they struggle with discrimination, troubled families, and identity-related issues, trying to overcome a past they are in no way responsible for. *Left by the Ship* will premiere on the Emmy® Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Mary-Louise Parker, on Thursday, May 24, 2012 at 10 PM (check local listings).

The Subic Bay Naval Base in the Philippines was the largest naval base outside the United States mainland. The town of Olongapo sprung up outside the base to cater to the “R&R” needs of soldiers; more than 15,000 women worked in its red light district. Many of the women entered into long-term relationships with American servicemen and close to 50,000 Amerasian children were born out of wedlock. When the Marcos regime fell twenty years ago, in 1992, the Filipino Senate voted to force the U.S. bases to close and these children were left with their mothers to fend for themselves, many in poverty. Often, these men had other families back home and found it easier to deny these children. Other times, the children had no idea who their true father was or even how to go about finding him. Although some Amerasians were recognized by their fathers and live happily in the U.S., they are a small minority.



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Ten years before the Philippine bases were closed, in 1982, the United States Congress voted to grant U.S. citizenship to Amerasians from Vietnam, Korea, Thailand, and other Asian countries, in what was known as the Amerasian Homecoming Act. Although the Philippines has been a United States ally for more than a century, Filipino (and Japanese) children of American soldiers are not included in the Act: these children can only claim U.S. citizenship if they are claimed by their American fathers. Even then, the process is arduous.

In the Philippines, Amerasians are often the victims of cruelty and prejudice; children of African-American fathers are particularly discriminated against. Abandoned in early life, living with the stigma of being illegitimate, they are labeled “Iniwang Barko,” which means “left by the ship.”

For some of them, it’s about redemption. For others, it’s about connection. *Left by the Ship* asks: What does the future hold for these forgotten children of the post-war world?

To learn more about the film, and the issues involved, visit the companion website for *Left by the Ship* at www.pbs.org/independentlens/left-by-the-ship. Get detailed information on the film, watch preview clips, read an interview with the filmmakers, and explore the subject in depth with links and resources. The site also features a Talkback section where viewers can share their ideas and opinions.

ABOUT THE PROTAGONISTS

Robert Ianne Gonzaga was born in 1978. It is his letter to his unknown father that leads us through the film. Thanks to the Pearl S. Buck Foundation, and his mother’s support, Robert had a chance to study. He now has a degree in English, a talent for writing and is a journalist for one of the country’s leading newspapers. For years, Robert had felt anger about his situation but, when he became a father himself, he felt obliged to better understand his own origins. He had never tried to contact his father, but now things have changed. Robert is still working as a journalist and living with his family in Olongapo.

JR Nielson Dyas, born in 1987, was constantly mocked as a kid and started getting into trouble at an early age. His father acknowledged him, but then discontinued contact and disappeared when JR was 5 years old. JR’s mother married another man who never accepted him. He dropped out of school at age 12 and was in and out of jobs and his mother’s house, violently in conflict with his stepfather, until he and his half brother Richard joined a local gang, called the Original Young Gangsters. For a while the gang was JR’s family, but he grew disillusioned with them as well. For years, JR was sure that reconnecting with his biological father would solve his problems. He currently lives in Olongapo and has a child of his own.

Charlene Elizabeth Rose was born in 1990 and her mother, Beth, brought her up to be confident and successful. Charlene was luckier than other Amerasians — when she was 13 years old, she lived with her father for a while on the island of Guam. But their relationship was troubled and Charlene decided to return to the Philippines. Back at home, Charlene did everything she could to be accepted by local Filipino society. She went back to school and graduated for college, as a medical transcriptionist. She currently lives in the United States.

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ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Emma Rossi-Landi (Co-director/Co-producer) is an Italian-American dual citizen. She was born in Italy in 1971, studied history of cinema at the University of Rome, and obtained a diploma in film making at the London Film School in 1998. She worked as an editor and directed eight short fiction films. Her documentary films as a director include *Giuseppe's Journey* (2001), about an Italian man who looks for a mail order bride in Russia; *Forty Days* (2004), which tells the story of four orphans from Chernobyl; *Veronica's Thread* (2005), the story of a woman from Romania who does everything she can to make the best of her time in an Italian jail; *Looking for Eden* (2006), about an African American woman from Texas and her journey to Africa; and *La Canzone di Vaccarizzo* (2007), about the Arbëresh multilingual community in southern Italy.

Alberto Vendemmiati (Co-Director/Co-Producer) was born in Italy and graduated from the University of Bologna and the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia. He directed the fiction feature film *Cadabra* and a few short fiction films before moving on to documentaries. After directing two films about Italian psychiatric wards, he and co-director Fabrizio Lazzaretti spent ten months in Afghanistan before and after 9/11, following Italian surgeon Gino Strada and his mission to build hospitals for war victims in Afghanistan. The experience resulted in two films: *Jung, War in the Land of the Mujaheddin* (2000) and *Afghanistan Collateral Damages* (2002). His next project, *The Person De Leo N* (2005), followed the emotional struggles of Venetian woman undergoing a sex change.

Left By The Ship is the first documentary film that Emma and Alberto co-directed and co-produced. After four years of discussions in the editing room, they were married in 2010.

ABOUT INDEPENDENT LENS

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about unique individuals, communities, and moments in history. Presented by the Independent Television Service (ITVS), the series is supported by interactive companion websites and national publicity and community engagement campaigns. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen.

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