

New DVD: November 2006
Includes extra scenes!

HUNGRY FOR MONSTERS

A Tale from a New Age Witch Hunt

A documentary film by **GEORGE PAUL CSICSERY**

A mysterious medieval quality haunts the lives of the people in this New Age *danse macabre* that emanates from a decade of news stories about repressed memories and Satanic ritual abuse.



Nicole Althaus, center of the storm

When 15-year-old Nicole Althaus told a teacher that her father was molesting her, the quiet affluent Pittsburgh suburb of Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania, was turned inside out. Nicole's father, Rick, was arrested and charged with sexually abusing Nicole amidst bizarre satanic rituals. With the support of her favorite teacher, police, therapists, social workers, and officers of the court, all of whom believed her stories, Nicole began to embellish on her initial

accusations. As she recovered more memories of wild orgies, sacrificed babies, and murder, more people were arrested, including her mother and a pair of strangers.

Hungry for Monsters is a step-by-step account of one family's ordeal with memory-focused psychotherapy, the cultivation of memories, and accusations of sexual abuse. A case study from the "memory wars," *Hungry for Monsters* shows how the lethal cocktail of sexual politics, uncritical therapeutic enthusiasm, feminist and Christian fundamentalist beliefs, well-intentioned social workers and police officers, and a sensation-starved media, produced a nightmare of persecution and injustice.

Festival screenings

Bermuda International Film Festival

(March 2004)



57th Locarno International Film Festival,

Human Rights Section

(August 2004)



Three Rivers Film Festival/Film Kitchen,

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

(November 2004)



Length: 69 minutes

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HUNGRY FOR MONSTERS

A Tale from a New Age Witch Hunt

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What reviewers say about *Hungry for Monsters* ...

“*Hungry for Monsters*, a new wonderfully spare, almost Bressonian feature documentary by George Csicsery, is more riveting than 20 action films put together. All of its violence is imagined, and it's all true to life. It's an amazing bit of Americana as gothic as a tale by Ambrose Bierce—a sharp and unrelenting portrait of the American system of justice run amok.”

—**Milos Stehlik**, *WBEZ Chicago Public Radio's Worldview*

“Featuring compelling interviews with the Althaus, attorneys, police, and psychiatrists, this portrait of a legal and mental health system gone mad in the late 20th century is highly recommended.” —**M. Pendergrast**, *Video Librarian*

“It's difficult to imagine a more sensationalistic subject than a suburban family nearly destroyed by the daughter's false accusations of sexual abuse, or a more restrained documentary than George Csicsery's spare, riveting *Hungry for Monsters*.”—**Michael Fox**, *SF Weekly*

“At 69 minutes, Csicsery's cautionary case study is as spare as it is gripping, at its center a perfect victim who, Csicsery says, reflected whatever ideas or attitudes her would-be saviors shone her way. Despite some underlying causes older than the witch hunts the film's subtitle references, the abuse-hysteria epidemic is a decidedly contemporary brew, born of a weird ferment of sexual politics, new-age therapeutics, the training of social workers and public-safety workers, and the core beliefs of feminists as well as Christian fundamentalists.” —**Bill Driscoll**, *Pittsburgh City Paper*

Hungry for Monsters Director's statement ...

In 1985 I researched and wrote up the story of a Nigerian medical student falsely accused of molesting children at the Oakland, California apartment complex where he lived. It appeared as an *East Bay Express* cover article, “Tony Onyejekwe's Nightmare.” As the epidemic of false accusations spread with the industrialization of campaigns against child abuse, we found Rick and Renee Althaus at a conference of accused parents in Philadelphia. They agreed to have their story documented on video, and *Hungry for Monsters* started filming in 1994.

The film is a no-frills case study with a minimum of intrusive elements. My ground rules were to keep my own voice, or any narrator voice, out of the film, and to limit expert commentary to individuals who had a part to play in the case as it unfolded.

Hungry for Monsters is a testament to a bizarre and confusing period in the annals of American mental health, when zealous efforts to protect children misfired and resulted in a real witch hunt

of epic proportions. The film shows how one family suffered through it and survived. It is also a morality tale that describes how public institutions—the police, courts, social workers, and mental health professionals—can become the instruments of cruel injustice exactly when we think we are using them to correct another wrong.

The young woman at the center of the story remains an enigmatic figure throughout the film. For me, she is an eternal character, an archetypal figure who is a required ingredient for a successful persecution. By embellishing her own fantasies, she fuels the fears and fantasies of the authority figures dedicated to helping her. Their faith in the righteousness of their mission depends on her skill at reflecting what they want to find in her. I can easily imagine Nicole playing the same part in any of the great religious persecutions and witch hunts of European history, or in the Salem witch trials of 1691. She is, in a sense, the perfect victim.

—*George Csicsery, 2003*