

Never say never

FOR LARA DAMIANI IT WAS A CASE OF NEVER GIVING UP ON HER WAY TO MAKING **THE TIBET PROJECT**, A DOCUMENTARY ABOUT THE PLIGHT OF THE TIBETAN PEOPLE AND THEIR STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM FROM CHINESE OPPRESSION.

WORDS ROBERT WILSON PHOTOGRAPHY ELIZABETH HAWKES

Lara Damiani may be small in stature, but she is big on causes. She has just completed her first documentary *The Tibet Project*, personally delivering the newly completed DVD to the Dalai Lama when he was visiting Sydney last month.

Ordinarily a documentary of this scope and size would mean a large production team with oodles of financing behind the project. Not so for Lara, who, at the beginning of her project, had little documentary making experience and only her meager savings and a small personal bank loan with which to start. "Because I had no documentary making experience, none of the funding bodies would consider me, so I had to use my own money."

Lara started her documentary with a trip to India to film the 2007 Tibet Uprising celebrations. Her second trip took her to Tibet where she met and filmed the Dalai Lama for the first time.

On her return to Australia she had completely exhausted her funds and had no way of completing her documentary. "I was so broke, I thought I would have to move back in with my parents."

It was when Lara was at her lowest point that she received a phone call. "There was a man on the phone who said I didn't know him but he had heard of *The Tibet Project* and knew I needed money and that he wanted to help. The next time I looked in my post box there was cheque for \$100,000 waiting for me!"

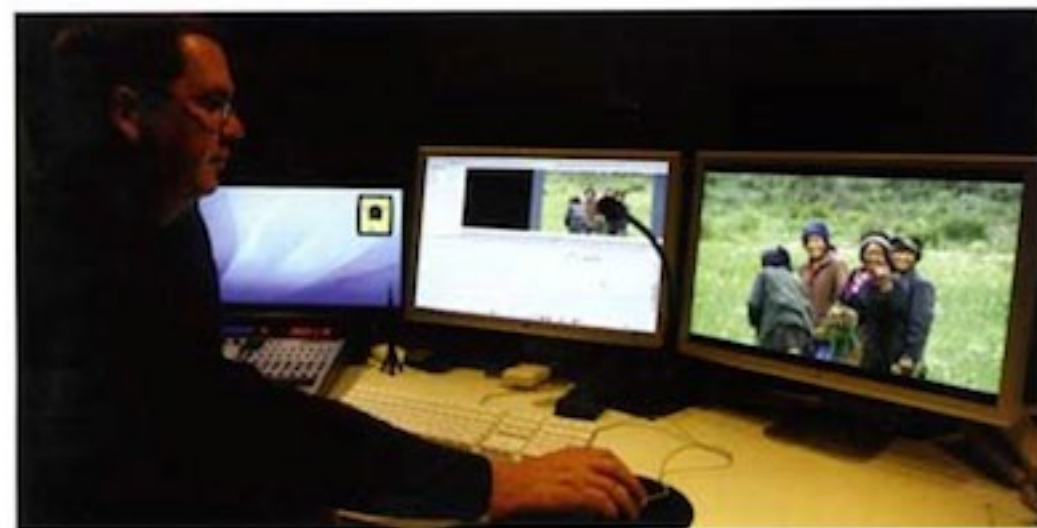
Lara believes it is the plight of Tibetans and their struggle for freedom that makes people want to help in whatever way they can. "As soon as people found out what I was doing, they volunteered to help. SilverSun Pictures here in Canberra have helped with the post production at no cost and Kerry Armstrong donated her time to do the voice over. There is no way I could have completed this documentary without their help, and the help of many, many other people like them. I thank them all from the bottom of my heart."

Kerry Armstrong is first to admit that she doesn't normally do voice overs. "I don't do things that I don't absolutely love to do, and I don't love doing voice overs, but in Lara's case I made an exception."

Kerry said that when she first saw a clip of *The Tibet Project*, she was incredibly moved by it and knew then that she wanted to help Lara with the documentary; this and the fact that Kerry is a practising Buddhist. "Whenever I have had a loss of faith, I have had a loss of happiness. It is really empowering to know that people care



Kerry Armstrong and documentary maker Lara Damiani in production at SilverSun Pictures studio in Dickson.



It was only with the generous help of people like those at SilverSun Pictures that *The Tibet Project* documentary could be made

about things greater than themselves."

Kerry says it is her heart-felt desire to shed some light on the plight of the Tibetans through this documentary. "I don't think people understand how long the struggle for freedom in Tibet has been going on and it's time for the world to put its hand up and say we do care."

Essentially, *The Tibet Project* documentary asks the question; what if what is happening in Tibet was happening to you, how would you feel? What would you do to change it?

You can find out more about *The Tibet Project* by visiting www.thetibetproject.com



Lara Damiani hand-delivered the very first copy of the *The Tibet Project* documentary to the Dalai Lama on his recent visit to Sydney

A brief time line

In 1950 the People's Liberation Army entered Tibet defeating the Tibetan army. In 1951 representatives of Tibet negotiated the Seventeen Point Agreement which affirmed China's sovereignty over Tibet.

In 1959 the Dalai Lama fled Tibet to India where land was designated for the refugees in the mountainous region of Dharamsala and where the Tibetan government in exile is now based.

The Dalai Lama, who is the spiritual and religious leader of the Tibetan government in exile, won the Nobel

Peace Prize in 1989 for his unwavering commitment to peaceful protest against the Chinese occupation of Tibet.

The Dalai Lama, who is highly respected by world leaders, was given the Congressional Gold Medal by President Bush in 2007, and in 2006 he was one of only two people to ever receive an honorary Canadian citizenship.

The Dalai Lama has said that "Tibet wants autonomy, not independence."

Talks between representatives of the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government began again in May this year.