

ITV commissions extraordinary story - **The Thief, His Wife and the Canoe**

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ITV commissions extraordinary story - *The Thief, His Wife and the Canoe*, written by acclaimed screenwriter Chris Lang and produced by award winning producers, Story Films

The extraordinary and compelling story of how John Darwin faked his own death to claim life insurance and avoid bankruptcy will be told in a new ITV drama, *The Thief, His Wife and the Canoe* written by acclaimed screenwriter Chris Lang.

The four part drama, relates how Anne Darwin's husband, a prison officer, came up with the hare-brained scheme to defraud insurance companies, unbeknownst to their two sons.

The Thief, His Wife and the Canoe, will be produced by Story Films, the company founded by three times BAFTA-winning director, David Nath (*The Murder*

Detectives, My Name is Lizzie) and fellow award-winning director Peter Beard. Susie Liggat (Giri/Haji) also executive produces with Alison Sterling (The Windermere Children) producing.

They will be joined by the celebrated screenwriter of Unforgotten and Innocent Chris Lang (The Hookup Plan, Dark Heart, A Mother's Son) who will also executive produce the four part series. BAFTA winning director, Richard Laxton, (Honour, Mrs Wilson, Mum) will direct each of the four episodes. The Thief, His Wife and the Canoe is based upon the unpublished manuscript written by journalist David Leigh. David was the first journalist to find and interview Anne in Panama.

The drama has been commissioned for ITV by Head of Drama Polly Hill and will be produced in association with All3Media International.

Commented Polly Hill:

"This is an extraordinary story of deception within a very ordinary family. Chris has written brilliant scripts about the heart breaking cost of this elaborate lie. I am so pleased to be working with Richard Laxton again and with Dave Nath and Story Films first drama for ITV."

The drama will focus on how Anne Darwin became complicit in her husband's deception as she needed to convince the world, their family and friends, the police and insurance companies that he had gone missing in 2002 whilst canoeing off the coast of Seaton Carew in Cleveland where the couple owned two large houses with panoramic views of the sea.

Mortgaged to the hilt, Darwin had also run up debts of 64K on 13 credit cards and his excessive spending had seen their finances spiral out of control. Anne would have preferred her husband go bankrupt, but she eventually went along with his absurd scheme to fake his own death.

Darwin laid low whilst Anne was questioned by the police and began to weave a web of deceit.

The deception was to take its toll on Anne who lied to their sons, Mark and Anthony, for five years whilst her husband, in the early days of the fraud, secretly lived in a bedsit next door to the home he shared with Anne.

Devastated by the loss of their father, neither son had an inkling their parents were capable of such treachery. Anne and John Darwin eventually decided to leave Seaton Carew and move to Panama City to start a new life together before

their secret was exposed by the discovery of an infamous photo of them posing in a Panama real estate office in July 2006.

At her trial Anne Darwin pleaded not guilty, arguing that she had been coerced into the plot by her husband, but the jury didn't believe her. She and her husband were both jailed for more than 6 years.

Commented screenwriter Chris Lang:

"If I'd tried to sell this project as an original story, it would never have got further than the pitch. "It's just too far-fetched, Chris, no-one would ever believe that any of that could actually have happened". Except it did. All of it. And I loved writing every, single, word."

London based indie, Story Films, is the company created by David Nath and Peter Beard with the aim of producing creative, bold and thought-provoking programmes.

Commented Executive Producer for Story Films, David Nath:

"Chris has written a wonderfully entertaining series that brings to life one of the most extraordinary true stories of recent times while asking profound questions about marriage, love and betrayal."

Filming for The Thief, His Wife and the Canoe will commence in the spring of 2021. Casting and the appointment of further key production personnel will be advised closer to filming commencing.

All3Media International represents the show internationally.

Press Contacts

janice.troup@itv.com

Viewer enquiries

<https://www.itv.com/contact/how-to-get-in-touch>