



**FORBIDDEN LIE\$**  
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**Roxie Releasing presents  
the 2008 US theatrical release of**

# FORBIDDEN LIE\$

A film by Anna Broinowski



## WHO DO YOU BELIEVE?

The journalist? The Chicago mobster? The murdered friend? The FBI?  
The violent husband? The extorted granny? The spurned lover?  
The outraged publisher? The embittered fan? The detective?  
The Muslim activist? The estranged father?  
The psychiatrist? The media?  
*Yourself?*

**A REAL LIFE THRILLER ABOUT NORMA KHOURI,  
THE PEOPLE SHE'S CONNED,  
AND HOW NOONE'S SAFE IN THE AGE OF SPIN.**



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## S Y N O P S I S

How often do you get inside the mind of a con woman – “one of the best ever”, according to the Chicago cop desperate to track her down? **Norma Khouri** is a thief, a saint, a seductress and a sociopath – depending on who’s talking. Men want to marry her, Islamic extremists want to kill her and the global publishing industry wishes she’d just disappear. Those she duped with her best-selling ‘true story’ about the honour killing of her best friend **Dalia** in Jordan, *Forbidden Love*, number 500,000 readers, publishers and journalists in 15 countries. But her victims don’t end there.

When Norma’s book was exposed as a fake by Australian journalist **Malcolm Knox** in July 2004, the world learned that Norma was not, as she’d claimed on Western chatshows, a Jordanian Catholic virgin on-the-run from bloodthirsty Muslim patriarchs who’d placed a *fatwah* on her head for her outspoken campaign against honour crimes in the Middle East, but 34 year old **Norma Bagain a.k.a. Touliopoulos**, a married Chicago real-estate agent and mother of two, under investigation since 1999 by the FBI for one million dollars’ of fraud.

**Knox**’s scoop rocked the literary world and prompted the FBI to reopen their files on Norma. Norma took a lie detector test in self defence, sued Knox for defamation, dumped her kids with ex-heroin addict and ‘tart-with-a-heart of gold’ **Rachel Richardson** in Bribie Island Queensland, and fled to the U.S.A with \$350,000 in advances still owing to her outraged Publishers. She’s been in hiding ever since. And now she wants to talk.

Weaving between the literary salons of London, the mosque-lined vistas of Jordan, the beachside suburbs of Queensland and the seamy Chicago backstreets of Norma’s dubious past, FORBIDDEN LIE\$ pits Norma’s tale against the stories of those she conned. There’s **Mary Baravikas**, who died in an underfunded Chicago hospital after Norma allegedly cashed in her life savings and stole her house. There’s **Rachel Richardson**, \$15,000 poorer thanks to Norma, who still swears her friend is a “sweet person who’d bake pies for everyone in the street – she’s just got dark secrets only she can answer”. And there’s Norma’s estranged husband with alleged ties to the Chicago mob, **John Toliopoulos**, whom Norma claims forced her to commit her crimes at gunpoint.

Meanwhile, *Forbidden Love* has just been released in the Arab world as fiction, Middle Eastern women continue to be murdered by male relatives in ‘crimes of honour’ with apparent impunity, and Human Rights Groups have yet to receive a cent of the royalties



# FORBIDDEN LIE\$

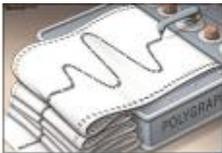
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Norma Khouri promised them. Jordanian honour crimes activist **Rana Hussein**, furious at the damage that Norma's "fake book" has done to her cause, is demanding to know why the 73 factual errors in *Forbidden Love* slipped past publishing giants Simon & Schuster, Random House and Transworld just before the Iraq invasion, when racist potboilers about evil Muslim men with mysteriously veiled women on the covers were selling like hotcakes. So who was really cashing in? Who is to blame? And does it matter that Norma lied?

FORBIDDEN LIE\$ lets you be the judge. As we follow Norma to Jordan to meet with people she says will "prove that Dalia existed, that she was murdered, and that the media has lied", we also investigate Norma's criminal past. Will the FBI arrest her? Is her passion to stop honour crimes genuine, or just a new con? Who do you believe, as you watch Norma's web of stories spinning ever faster, ensnaring everyone, including the filmmaker? Is she a calculating sociopath, a damaged soul craving the limelight, a genuine martyr, or simply a monster of our age, who states that "if Bush and Blair can spin the truth about WMDs to justify bombing innocent people then why can't I spin Dalia's story to save women from being murdered on a daily basis?"

In a spin-driven era, as the lines between truth and fiction grow increasingly blurred, FORBIDDEN LIE\$ is a real-life thriller for our time. Weaving murder, deceit, greed, the East/West clash and an international literary scandal into a web that entangles us all, Norma Khouri's real-life drama is even stranger than her fiction. We all love watching a successful con story – the more dangerous the better.

But this time, it's for real.



***Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities. Truth isn't.***

MARK TWAIN

## PRODUCTION NOTES

**"The marriage between con-artist and filmmaker is a match made in heaven: both use a million tiny deceits to manipulate the way we think and feel; both are in the business of making illusions real."**

ANNA BROINOWSKI

When director Anna Broinowski read Malcolm Knox's Sydney Morning Herald article exposing Norma Khouri as a hoax in July 2004, she knew she'd found the subject for her next documentary. "I wanted to know what kind of woman could be so brilliant that while on the run from the FBI she could reinvent herself as a Jordanian virgin with a *Fatwah* on her head, write a best-seller, and convince the best publishing and media minds in the world that she was telling the truth."

**PRODUCERS [sallyregan@libertyproductions.com.au](mailto:sallyregan@libertyproductions.com.au) & [annabroinowski@ihug.com.au](mailto:annabroinowski@ihug.com.au)**



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Teaming up with producer Sally Regan in early 2005, Anna invited Norma (then lying low in Chicago) to fly to San Francisco to attend the premiere of her last documentary, HELEN'S WAR (about anti-nuclear activist Dr. Helen Caldicott), at the Castro Theatre. Norma liked what she saw, and agreed to tell Anna her side of the story on the condition that Anna make a film putting Honour Crimes back in the spotlight.

Anna, smitten by Norma, agreed: "on the first day of the shoot I was telling the crew to hide their credit cards, that Norma was a notorious con-woman; by the third day, Norma had convinced me that her book was not a hoax, that she was utterly genuine, and that everything the media had written about her criminal past in Chicago was a lie. She promised to take us back to Jordan to prove her friend really was murdered: how could I not believe her?"

Anna's journey from Norma convert to con-victim is just one of several betrayals captured in the labyrinth of Truth and Spin that is FORBIDDEN LIE\$. By the time Anna and DOP Kathryn Milliss got to Jordan with Norma (and her American 'body guard', Jeremey Lackowski), it was obvious that Norma was taking them for a ride. Key witnesses disappeared, locations evaporated, and the actual hair salon, in which Norma had promised to introduce Dalia's friends to the camera, fell apart when Norma's mysterious 'cousin' failed to arrive with the key.

"I realized I could no longer make a film vindicating Norma; that this had become a portrait of a con woman whether I liked it or not", says Anna. Yet through it all, Anna and Norma have remained friends: "there is a sense with Norma that everything is a game for her, that she relishes the challenge of having to improvise when confronted, of having to convince you to believe her all over again. I can't help admiring her audacity".

The film's style was designed to directly reflect the mental sleights of hand Norma plays out on her victims. Armed with a 1.5 million dollar budget, the filmmakers worked hard with visual effects company Resin and DOPs Kathryn Milliss and Toby Oliver to create CGI and in-camera illusions; the expense of the round-the-world shoot was offset by filming several of the Jordanian scenes in Adelaide with the imaginative help of designer Robert Webb and his team.

Above all, the filmmakers were keen to create a 'real-life thriller' rather than a conventional documentary: FORBIDDEN LIE\$ owes more to the narrative structures of con movies like CATCH ME IF YOU CAN and HOUSE OF GAMES than it does to non-fiction genres. *"What excites me about FORBIDDEN LIE\$ is that people walk out with more questions than answers. I don't know if we got to the bottom of who Norma is, I don't think even Norma knows who she is", says Sally Regan. "There can be no absolute conclusion with someone like Norma", agrees Anna. "Should we judge Norma, or the spin-driven climate that allowed her to thrive? If the audience walks out less inclined to trust what they are told, by anyone, especially the filmmaker, then that's a good thing!"*

With a successful Australian release through Palace in 2007, 2 AFI wins, Top Ten audience votes at Hotdocs, Melbourne and Adelaide Film Festivals, international prizes

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including the San Francisco Golden Gate Special jury Prize and the Rome Film Fest 'Cult' Award, and distribution deals in the US, Japan and the Middle East, FORBIDDEN LIE\$ is satisfying people's desires to be entertainingly deceived.

Even Norma, now selling car insurance and studying human rights law at night-school in Chicago, has seen the film and enjoyed it. Of course she had an outrageous new comeback to every allegation made against her... but all of that is revealed in the DVD, released by Madman in April 2008!



***The public will believe anything, so long as it is not based on the truth.***

Edith Sitwell

## TEAM

**ANNA BROINOWSKI** (Director/Writer/Producer) is a NIDA acting graduate who has been making award winning films for international audiences for the past ten years. Her 2004 film **Helen's War – portrait of a dissident** (CBC/ZDF/FFC/SBS) won an Australian Film Institute award for Best Director (Documentary) and Best Documentary at the Sydney Film Festival Dendy Awards. It was nominated for a Canadian Gemini, an Independent Film Award and an Australian Film Critics Circle award. It sold to Sundance Channel, screened theatrically in Australia and the US and toured the UK as part of the 2005 British/Australian Film Festival. Two of Anna's other documentaries, **Hell Bento!!** (SBS/AFC) and **Sexing the Label** (SBS/FFC), both had theatrical releases, screened at several international film festivals, sold widely overseas, and can still be found in the cult section of Australian video stores. Anna's other films are **Romancing the Chakra** (ABC/FFC) and the shorts **Tsunami** (part of the Slamdance DVD *12 angry Women*) and **Burqa** (part of the 2004 Oz feature *Time to Go John.*) Anna's past awards include Best Australian Documentary (Sydney Film Festival), 1 Bronze and 1 Silver Plaque (Columbus Film Festival), Best Documentary (Film West) and Best Documentary Director (Films des Femmes, France).

**SALLY REGAN** (Producer) was awarded the Kenneth Myer Fellowship upon graduation from the Australian Film Television and Radio School and has produced film and television in Australia, Europe, Asia and America for the past 15 years. Her documentary, **First Look**, won the Fuji award, and her short film, **Swerve**, opened the Berlin Film Festival. In 1997 Sally won the AFC Distinctly Australian Script Editing award. From 1999 to 2003 Sally was Business Affairs Manager of Documentary Production at Film Australia, Australia's leading documentary agency. Since then, she has co-produced the international Russell Crowe-narrated series **The Colour of War**, and produced **National Treasures**, **Korean Anzac**, **Peter Berner's Loaded Brush** and **Road to Tokyo**. Sally is currently developing a number of projects, including the feature film **Axe Fall**, a recent participant in the competitive NSWFTO Aurora script workshop (the development

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stomping ground of acclaimed Australian dramas SOMERSAULT and LITTLE FISH).

***We are never deceived: we deceive ourselves.***

GOETHE



## MAIN CAST

The Artist  
The Press

Norma Khouri  
Malcolm Knox  
Rana Hussein  
Caroline Overington  
Jon Yates

The Law

Det. Ed Torian, NYPD

Frank Bochte FBI

Dawn Lawkowski

The Friends

Rachel Richardson

Kara Elliott

Maree Elliott

The Clan

John Toliopoulos

Majid Bagain

Cousin Faris

Asma Bagain

The Literati

Patrick Walsh

Larry Finlay

David Leser

The Activists

Dr. Amal al Sabbagh

Nadia Shamroukh

The Muscle

Jeremy Lackowski

John Akdikman

Anna Hermann

The Medics

Charles v. Ford MD

Dr. Mu'men Hadidi

Dr. Hani Jahshan

Dr. Nasri Khoury

The Actors

*Dalia:* Linda Mutawi

*Mohammed:* Shahin Azimi

*Mahmood:* Fariborz Zareei

*Michael:* Farhad Noori

*Norma:* Sara Azadegan



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## MAIN CREW

Director/writer	Anna Broinowski
Producers	Sally Regan and Anna Broinowski
Cinematographers	Kathryn Milliss and Toby Oliver ACS
Editors	Alison Croft and Vanessa Milton
Titles/CGI	Resin
35 mm Blow-up/additional CGI	Tim Trumble
Sound design and Mix	Craig Carter and Peter Smith
Drama designer	Robert Webb
Covers composer	Max Sharam

## FINANCE

**Budget** 1.5 million (Aus)  
**Completed** July 2007  
**Format** 35 mm  
**Sound** 6 track Dolby  
**Duration** 108 minutes

FORBIDDEN LIE\$ was produced by the Film Finance Corporation Australia, produced and developed in association with the New South Wales Film and Television Office, and produced in association with the South Australian Film Corporation, the Adelaide Film Festival and Palace Films.

It was developed and produced with the financial assistance of the Australian Film Commission and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and developed with the financial assistance of the South Australian Film Corporation.

Distributed in Australia and NZ by Palace Films. International Sales by Jonathan Page of Icon.

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US Theatrical release through Roxie Releasing, contact Bill Banning at [billbanning2@gmail.com](mailto:billbanning2@gmail.com)  
phone (415) 431 3611



***A half truth is a whole lie.***  
YIDDISH PROVER

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