

WORDS BY LUIZA SAUMA

Brian Woods

True Stories: Chosen Tuesday 10pm More4

Brian Woods is no stranger to difficult subjects. After all, his best-known documentary is 1995's *The Dying Rooms*, which provoked an international outcry over the state of Chinese orphanages. The director's latest project, *Chosen*, is bound to have a similar effect. Several years in the making, the film follows the stories of three men, Tom, Mark and Alastair, who were sexually abused by teachers at Caldicott prep school more than 30 years ago.

The past decade has seen the media stir itself into a paedophilia frenzy, but it's rare to hear stories from the victims, particularly ones as eloquently candid as Woods's subjects. "I never before met victims of sexual abuse who were willing to go on camera and talk so openly - not only about what happened to them, but the effect it's had on the rest of their lives," he says.

The simplicity of the film, which is built around straight-to-camera interviews and school-days stills, is central to its power.

After the project was rejected by all the major channels - "They said it was too dark" - Woods went to Britdoc, who offered him a quarter of the budget he had planned for. "We thought, 'How are we going to make those interviews as potent as they possibly can be?'" he says. "We experimented and came up with a technique using a half-silvered mirror. Tom, Mark or Alastair and I would speak to each other in a mirror, but behind the mirror was a camera, which was directly

at my eyeline. So whenever they looked at me, they looked straight

into the camera."

The result is raw, emotional and intense beyond words. Moreover, *Chosen* isn't just an exercise in misery voyeurism: everyone involved wants it to have a bigger impact. "We're hoping to get the attitudes of public schools changed," says Woods. "I think parents could afford to be a little bit paranoid. There's certainly no room for complacency." ■



