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April 19, 2005

## Journey of discovery'

'Searching For Angela Shelton'  
Childhood sex abuse revealed

**CHELSEA DUNCAN**, [cduncan@newsreview.info](mailto:cduncan@newsreview.info)

April 18, 2005

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When Roseburg resident Abigail Elliott first saw filmmaker Angela Shelton on CBS's "48 Hours Investigates" last year, she knew she had to talk with her.

Elliott, a microcomputer specialist at Umpqua Community College, was riveted by the woman's story and captivated as she spoke of her documentary, "Searching for Angela Shelton."

"I was glued," Elliott said. "I was just glued at what this woman had done."

On the show, Shelton was discussing her film that turned out to be a nationally renowned portrayal of the sexual abuse she had endured as a child.

Elliott contacted CBS and got in touch with Shelton and the two have conversed ever since. When the UCC Cultural Enrichment Committee -- of which Elliott is chairwoman -- later agreed to show the film at a community event, Elliott thought Shelton should be there.

The film will be shown at 2 p.m. Saturday at UCC's Jacoby Auditorium, followed by a discussion with the filmmaker herself.

The film follows Shelton through a journey of discovery about the epidemic proportions of child abuse, incest and domestic violence in the United States.

The free event coincides with Child Abuse Prevention Month and is a part of the local movement, the Child Abuse Prevention Partnership.

"This was clearly the project we wanted to do," said Jillanne Michell, a member of the UCC committee. "It was unanimous."

The event, which is expected to garner at least 1,000 people, will include a panel discussion with local abuse and law enforcement experts. Information tables about the local agencies working to prevent abuse will be on hand and copies of the film will be for sale.

"The idea was to get the community talking," Elliott said of the event, which is being financially supported by local businesses and organizations.

When the Los Angeles-based Shelton set out to create the film in the summer of 2001, she

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### Committee leaders

Cultural Enrichment Committee chairwoman Abigail Elliott, left, and committee member Jillanne Michell arranged a showing at Umpqua Community College of 'Searching for Angela Shelton,' a documentary about childhood sexual abuse.

**STEPHEN BRASHEAR / N-R staff photo**



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thought it was going to be a lighthearted look into the lives of other women who shared her name.

The actress and former model got in touch with 40 Angela Sheltons on her cross-country trip in an RV. She also found that more than half of the women shared much more than a name. While unique in other ways, 24 of them came from backgrounds of rape, physical abuse or molestation.

Listening to the other women's stories conjured memories of Shelton's own abuse at the hands of her father, stepmother and stepbrother. Since coming out with her story, she found that the crime is more widespread than she'd ever imagined.

"Everywhere I go, everyone I meet knows someone who's a victim," she said in a telephone interview from New York City. "That's an epidemic in my book."

The crime, she added, is not just against women. Men are also abused and women can be perpetrators. She came to realize through the film that her stepbrother, who was also abused, was just as much a victim as she was.

Since creating the film that has spurred a grass-roots movement of abuse survivors and prevention agencies to curb abuse, Shelton has also appeared on the "Oprah Winfrey Show." Her film has been selected for several film festivals around the country, winning the best documentary audience award at the 2004 Austin Film Festival in Texas and best documentary at the 2004 Asheville Film Festival in North Carolina.

"It's very artistic," Elliott said. "It touches you so deeply and at the same time, it's so well put together."

Elliott said the documentary is unusual in that Shelton doesn't remain behind the scenes. Instead, she's often on screen as the camera captures her raw emotional responses to the women she meets and to the opened floodgate of her own memories.

"I would call Angela Shelton the Quentin Tarantino of (documentary makers)," Elliott said.

In fact, Shelton didn't anticipate being such a large part of the film. Looking back, she's glad she was. She realizes that the brutal honesty of her past -- exemplified by the on-screen confrontation with her father on Father's Day -- has helped others come forward with their abuse and seek help.

"I love this movie," Shelton said. "It saved my life in a lot of ways and I'm happy that it's saving other lives."

Shelton has since taken her message to Washington, D.C., to advocate for harsher penalties against offenders. A version of her film will also air on Lifetime Television for Women in spring 2006 as part of the station's campaign against domestic violence.

Elliott and Michell said despite the subject matter, the film is not depressing, but inspiring.

"It does offer inspiration to victims of abuse and encouragement to get help," Michell said. "It offers them real hope."

The event is intended to be a safe and open environment in which people can feel comfortable sharing their stories. Because the powerful movie could trigger emotions and memories, local counselors will be available for people who need to talk.

"I think that most people will identify with it," Michell said.



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**Shelton**

**AT A GLANCE**

**WHAT:** Filmmaker Angela Shelton will speak following the showing of her documentary. A panel of local child abuse and law enforcement officials will also discuss abuse.

**WHEN:** 2 to 6 p.m. Saturday

**WHERE:** Jacoby Auditorium,  
Umpqua Community College

**COST:** Free. Children under the age of 16 are strongly advised not to attend.

**INFORMATION:** 957-4511

Donations for the event can be dropped off at UCC's business office or mailed to P.O. Box 967, Roseburg, OR 97470-0226. Donations are tax-deductible.

A screenwriter herself, Elliott said her feeling of connection with Shelton runs deep. Elliott has just finished a screenplay, registered with the Writers Guild of America, on which she spent the past 10 years working. It's titled "Love in Quotes," and also deals with the ordeal of child abuse. While the story is fictional, an autobiographical thread runs through it based on Elliott's past of abuse and trauma.

The women share a drive to no longer tolerate society's denial of a tragedy that occurs all too often.

"We are on a quest," Elliott said.

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