



THINKING ABOUT THE MAKING OF *JUDGEMENT RIDGE*

By Jay Craven

“*Judgment Ridge* marks something of a departure for me. It’s a contemporary story that’s drawn from a wrenching real-life drama. My 1997 film, *A Stranger in the Kingdom* was also based on a true incident but it was fictionalized in Howard Mosher’s novel and transplanted to a time 16 years earlier than the actual events—in that case, a racially motivated shooting. Despite this, some Vermont audiences resisted the film, preferring “not to re-visit that story.”

“Still, I’m glad I made *Stranger*—and I’ve seen how it serves as a resource, reminder, and imaginative re-telling of an indelible true story that remains in our collective culture and consciousness. The film also provides a resource and touchstone for young people that they would otherwise lack—it’s actually teenagers’ favorite of my films.”

“There are surely some similar public reservations about *Judgment Ridge*. I nevertheless feel that this is a compelling and cautionary tale, not because it can scare us into recognizing darkness within our midst—but because there are roots to this crime that go beyond its specific and complex circumstances and persist in rural communities everywhere. We can learn something important from this—and act in simple but direct ways to help alleviate some of these conditions.”

“I knew the boys who committed the killings that animate this story. I actually shot *A Stranger in the Kingdom* in their small town and I led a playwriting residency in their school. Robert was quite bright, a wise-ass playing the bad ass. His sidekick, Jim, was the class clown, always needing an audience. I’ll peel away their façades to explore the complex relationship and psychology that had them fantasizing escape to Australia when what Robert was really anticipating was murder.”

“I’m not interested in pointing fingers of blame at a specific town or family. I will re-locate and fictionalize the specifics. I also intend to work extensively with Vermont teens to develop and produce this film and to find in it the human elements that will allow us to engage this story and hopefully find ways to shape a future that will alleviate some of the conditions that may have triggered and fed the momentum that led to this terrible act.”