

# ***SUBURBAN FURY***

A FILM BY ROBINSON DEVOR

118 min. | USA | 2024



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## LOGLINE

*Suburban Fury* revisits the story of Sara Jane Moore, a conservative mother from the San Francisco suburbs who, in 1975, attempted to assassinate US President Gerald Ford.

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

*Suburban Fury* revisits the 1975 assassination attempt on US President Gerald Ford through the perspective of would-be assassin Sara Jane Moore, a conservative mother from the San Francisco suburbs who became radicalized while working as an FBI informant. Freed after serving 32 years of a life sentence, Moore returns to San Francisco under watch of the Secret Service to tell the extraordinary story of her transformation from suburban housewife to government infiltrator to far-left extremist. Interweaving rarely seen archival footage with an imaginatively staged dialogue between Sara Jane Moore, the informant, and Bert Worthington, her FBI control agent, the film features exclusive access to Moore, revealing a beguiling, and often seemingly unreliable, narrator. Moore's true nature, as well as the validity of political violence, are ultimately left up to the mind and heart of the viewer.

## LONG SYNOPSIS

*Suburban Fury* explores the political, cultural and psychological influences on Sara Jane Moore, a 45-year-old divorced accountant and mother, who attempted to assassinate US President Gerald Ford with a handgun outside San Francisco's St. Francis Hotel on September 22, 1975.

Sara Jane Moore lived the good life in a wealthy, deeply conservative San Francisco suburb from 1970 -1975. She remained largely isolated while war and social upheaval burned around her. Only after the kidnapping of Patty Hearst — who was the daughter of multimillionaire newspaper publisher Randolph Hearst (and a social acquaintance of Moore) — were her blinders ripped off. Moore became “woke” in a period of great social volatility — an era that directly foreshadowed MAGA, Black Lives Matter, MeToo, and the recent attempts to overthrow the US government — but not before she became an FBI informant who infiltrated (and later converted to) far-left political groups. In the end, Moore's struggle to integrate the forces of conservatism and revolution were so intense that a bullet flew within inches of an American president.

Interweaving rarely seen archival footage with an imaginatively staged dialogue between Sara Jane Moore, the informant, and Bert Worthington, her FBI control agent, *Suburban Fury* features exclusive access to Moore, who served 32 years of a life sentence, as she recounts how she went from a conservative suburban housewife to an FBI informant to a radicalized would-be assassin. A beguiling storyteller — confrontational, surprisingly vulnerable and often seemingly unreliable — Moore's true nature, as well as the validity of political violence, are ultimately left up to the mind and heart of the viewer.

## **INTERVIEW WITH ROBINSON DEVOR**

**How did you come to meet Sara Jane Moore? And why did you choose to focus on this time in US history?**

A friend of mine in San Francisco contacted me when Sara Jane got out of prison. He suggested I do a film on Billy Sipple (the man who deflected the gun). I looked into it and agreed, but Sara Jane's story soon took center stage. Then I had to find her, which was not easy. Luckily the author Geri Spieler was kind enough to give me her email. She had just finished a very informative book on Sara Jane called "Taking Aim at the President."

**Where did the idea for the film come from? Were there specific influences or texts that inspired it?**

I have always marveled at Coppola's *The Conversation*. The period San Francisco locations, the surveillance work, the dirty politics, the existential dilemma. I wanted to be in that space as a filmmaker — but how to get there? Sara Jane's story provided an opportunity.

**What brought about the formal aspects of the film? How was this visual language created?**

I have been experimenting with interview set-ups that go beyond taking heads for some time. Putting Sara Jane in a car and placing it around the city seemed like a natural extension of these experiments.

**What was it like to work with Sarah Jane Moore? The process led to some difficult moments. How did you navigate that?**

Sara Jane is an expert storyteller. I had to just stay out of the way. We did work together on things together, though — in the spirit of director and actress. She was keen on taking direction and I remain grateful. The linearity of her stories was tricky to navigate as her history is quite dense. Sometimes we would get tangled up in what happened when.

**What brought about the narrative structure? How much original footage did you shoot and what was the process of editing?**

We made the decision to shoot her interviews on location — in a station wagon on streets she once drove through, in the hotel ballroom where she was interrogated after the assassination attempt, etc. Recreations were considered but ultimately one of my co-writers, Charles Mudede, made a good case to use only archival footage and the interviews. My other co-writer and head archivist, Bob Fink, started snagging amazing archival footage and we were off to the races. The idea was to have Sara Jane narrating her life freely and poetically against history.

**Could you talk about the archival footage that appears in the film?**

It is mostly footage from 1970-1975. Much is from accomplished filmmakers making documentaries at the time such as Sandra Hochman, Agnès Varda and Ira Eisenberg; the rest is from very talented producers and camera people who had worked in the field for network news. Some are grassroots film works; others were sanctioned by the government. Their contributions to this film cannot be overstated.

### **Can you say more about the identity of FBI control agent Bert Worthington?**

He is mentioned often by Sara Jane Moore in the film and we learned that the name “Bert Worthington” is not real, but is actually a cover identity created by the FBI to protect the true identity of the agent.

We discovered a declassified document that listed control agents and informants in the San Francisco area via their codenames and Bert (Bertram) Worthington was listed among them. Upon looking closely at the names of the agents, we fairly quickly saw that all the names were phony. They were rather upper-class riffs on names like John Williamson, Franklin Sutherland and others like that. There was a pattern of these false names and it became clear from these lists and our research that the FBI’s protocol was to have cover identities for all their control agents and that Bert Worthington was indeed a created persona designed specifically to connect with Sara Jane Moore.

### **How did you come up with a dialogue for the film that is in Bert’s voice?**

We spent close to 11 full days interviewing Sara Jane Moore, some on camera, some purely audio. It was a lot of interview time and very often, being the great storyteller that she was, she would often adopt the voice of both of them — “I said...” and “then he said...” This is how much of Bert’s voiceover was created — very simply from things that Sara Jane said that Bert said.

### **Why did you think it was important to include Bert’s voice in this documentary?**

Because there needed to be an explanation of the kind of intimacy, and human longing for connection, and some kind of balance against the politics or the rhetoric or the materialism or the violence.

Sara Jane was coming off of her fourth divorce and I can only imagine it was difficult for her. She was seeking love and support. Instead, she was used. As Sara Jane herself stated, everybody was trying to use everyone else — the left, the right, politicians, feds, etc. — to get what they wanted, to get what they thought was good for the country. It also extended to me as a director. I too was trying to get things that I needed from Sara Jane Moore, things that I would like her to do on camera, etc.

That’s why I ended up voicing the role of Bert Worthington. There are quite a few similarities between control agent and informant and a documentary filmmaker and the person that they’re working with.

**Can you talk about the use of music in the film? How did you collaborate with the composer?**

Paul Moore is a long-standing collaborator. We listened to a lot of Vangelis for this (especially the under-appreciated atonal masterpiece, *Boberg*). We have long talked of doing a synthesizer score and the '70s time period was ideal for us to do that here. Paul composed over nine hours of score. He's a savant, and also full of love. It doesn't hurt that he loves conspiracy theories

**There is an element of cosmic wonder that enters the film. Can you talk about why this was important for you to include?**

My spiritual practice is a big part of my life. I always try to ask for divine guidance before working on the film. It is ostensibly a dark story but I always tried very actively and consciously to bring love into it. After all, the essence of all revolutionary consciousness is love — love of the people and love of oneself. I should also say that the greatest thing my writing partner Charles has taught me over the years is to “go cosmic.” Look up at the stars.

**Why is it important to tell this story? Why is it important that we understand Sara Jane Moore through glimpses rather than the conventions of a detailed narrative arc?**

I don't know if this story is important. My co-writer Bob Fink and I discussed the concept of getting to someone through conversations. You don't always know what someone is talking about.

There are holes and linearity is off. That's okay. You struggle to understand and sometimes you interrupt and ask questions, other times you don't. It's okay to not know everything. Conversations are always impressionistic.

**Any other influences you had while making the film?**

Many! James Benning and his formalism and associative powers, especially in crime films like *Landscape Suicide* (1987); Sandra Hochman's *Year of the Woman* (1972), which incorporates the director's poetry against the 1972 Democratic Convention; Emile de Antonio's *In The Year of The Pig* (1968), with its hallucinatory sound design against war footage and interviews of politicians, soldiers and activists; Kazuo Hara's *The Emperor's Naked Army Marches On* (1987), in which Kenzō Okuzaki, the ex-soldier who hunts down his murderous WWII commanders, states the greatest enemies of peace are loyalty to family and country; Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* (1975), with its dual quotidian domestic horrors and her protagonist's simmering rage beneath the surface appearance; the great Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini, a self-proclaimed “gay Marxist Catholic” and a beautiful example of three disparate people living as a unified one; and Kenneth Patchen's 1941 novel “The Journal of Albion Moonlight” — the poet vs. war using spirit and creativity as a sword. And political satire of all kinds.

**How does Sara Jane Moore feel about the film coming into the world?**

She has stated that she is hopeful. She has stated that she thinks we have done too much research and that it affected our outlook. She also has stated that she feels it will probably not be accurate.

## FILM TEAM

### **ROBINSON DEVOR - Director, Producer, Writer, Editor**

Robinson Devor is a Seattle-based feature film writer and director. His 2018 feature documentary, *Pow Wow*, debuted at the Locarno Film Festival and in the US at Lincoln Center's Art of the Real series. It was hailed by New Yorker film critic Richard Brody as "one of the best films of this or any year," while Slate called the multi-character film "ambitious, surreal and intoxicating." Devor's previous documentary, *Zoo*, made its world premiere at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival and went on to play at the Cannes Film Festival in the Directors' Fortnight section. The press called the film "masterful" (Dennis Lim, The New York Times) and "a breathtakingly original nonfiction work" (Scott Foundas, Variety). It was named by Filmmaker magazine as "One of the Top 25 Indie Films of The Decade." Devor's 2005 narrative feature, *Police Beat*, premiered in Dramatic Competition at Sundance, where it was called "emotionally devastating" (Rolling Stone) and "Sundance at its best" (Los Angeles Times). The film has since been included in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art. Devor was named one of Variety's "10 Directors To Watch" for his 1999 directorial debut, the neo-noir comedy *The Woman Chaser*, which premiered at the New York Film Festival and later screened at Sundance.

### **JASON REID - Producer, Writer**

Jason Reid is an award-winning producer, editor and director. He directed and produced the Emmy® award-winning documentary feature *Man Zou: Beijing to Shanghai* and the Webby award-winning *Sonicsgate: Requiem for a Team*, which aired on both CNBC and ESPN. He also produced the documentary features *K2: Siren of the Himalayas* and *Evergreen: The Road to Legalization*, which both streamed on Netflix, and *Dirtbag: The Legend of Fred Beckey*, which won 26 awards at film festivals and is currently streaming on Amazon Prime. He is also producer of *Super Frenchie*, a documentary feature that aired on National Geographic. Reid was selected as a Film Independent Fellow for the ITVS funded documentary feature, *Sam Now*, which he produced and edited. It has screened at over 50 festivals, winning 15 awards, including 10 for Best Documentary, and was nominated for Best Editing in 2022 by the IDA. *Sam Now* premiered theatrically in 2023 and received The New York Times Critics' Pick, aired nationally on PBS's Independent Lens and is currently streaming on The Criterion Channel. It was nominated for a 2024 Peabody Award.

### **ZACHARIAH SEBASTIAN - Producer**

Zach Sebastian is founder of Santa West, a production company making its debut with *Suburban Fury*. Sebastian and Robinson Devor are also collaborating on the forthcoming feature film *You Can't Win*, based on the cult novel by hobo and criminal Jack Black (1926). Cutting his teeth in Reality TV, he has since focused on branded content working with clients such as Marc Jacobs, Vans, BBC, Adidas Originals, Fred Perry and Mello Music.

### **BOB FINK - Executive Producer, Writer, Archival Research**

Bob Fink is a filmmaker and photographer based in Everett, WA. He received a BA (psychology) from Stanford University in 1970 and his MD from the University of Minnesota in 1975 and practiced psychiatry for over 40 years. Fink made his first film, the award-winning documentary feature *Wally*, in 2006 screened at 35 film festivals around the world. He worked in various capacities on *Zoo*, *Grassroots*, *Tsuyako*, *Sweetheart Deal*, *The Immaculate Conception of Little Dizzle* and other films before deciding to retire from medicine and to attend film school in New Zealand.

### **CHARLES MUDEDE - Writer**

Charles Mudede is a Seattle-based writer, filmmaker and cultural critic. He is presently Associate Editor for the Seattle-based weekly, *The Stranger*, as well as professor at Cornish College of the Arts. Mudede is also the co-writer of Robinson Devor's *Police Beat* and *Zoo*, and the writer/director of the 2020 feature *Thin Skin*. A founder of the Seattle Research Institute, a Marxist circle inspired by the Frankfurt School and the work of Hardt and Negri, Mudede and SRI have published two books, "Politics Without The State" and "Experimental Theology." Mudede's academic work has appeared in numerous books, including "Nervous Conditions," "Critical Digital Studies: A Reader and Life In The Wires" and "Life Science." His journalism has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Village Voice*, *LA Weekly*, *The District Weekly*, *Cinema Scope*, *Nest Magazine*, *Souls Journal*, and *Radical Urban Theory*.

### **D.D. WIGLEY - Executive Producer**

D.D. Wigley is a film producer and playwright. She has produced seven documentary features, including the Peabody Award documentary nominee *Sam Now* and the Cannes Film Festival feature *Be Natural: The Untold Story of Alice Guy-Blaché*, which was released theatrically in 2019. Other documentary features to her credit include *Anbessa*, which premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival, and *There Was, There Was Not*, which premiered at True/False in 2024. She currently has numerous documentary features in post-production, as well as two documentary shorts. D.D. has also produced two narrative features and four narrative shorts with four more narrative features, one narrative series and one narrative short in various stages of production. As a playwright, D.D. has seen thirteen of her works produced. She was an artist-in-residence at the Seven Devils Playwrights Conference in June 2024.

### **PATRICK WARBURTON - Executive Producer**

Patrick Warburton is known to many for the role of Elaine's laconic boyfriend "Puddy" in the famed NBC comedy *Seinfeld*. He starred for seven seasons on the hit CBS comedy *Rules of Engagement* and is now set to star in NBC's upcoming sitcom series *Crowded*. Warburton also played "Guy" in the international blockbuster comedy *Ted* and recently completed shooting the sequel *Ted 2*, where he reprises his role. He starred on the ABC hit comedy *Less than Perfect*,



as "Jeb Denton," an opinionated network anchorman; and on the hit show *NewsRadio* as "Johnny Johnson" the unscrupulous business rival who takes over the station. Warburton starred in Disney's live action comedy *Underdog* as the archenemy "Cad." He is also one of the busiest voiceover artists in Hollywood for his many characters including the role of the overzealous cop, "Joe Swanson," on the long-running comedy *Family Guy*. In 1999, he played the lead role in Robinson Devor's feature narrative debut *The Woman Chaser*.

### **SU KIM - Executive Producer**

Su Kim is an Academy Award-nominated, Emmy® and two-time Peabody Award-winning documentary producer. Her credits include the Oscar®-nominated *Hale County This Morning This Evening*, *Free Chol Soo Lee* and *Midnight Traveler*. Kim is a former Women at Sundance fellow and is the recipient of the 2022 Sundance Amazon Studios Nonfiction Producers Award. Films in release currently include *Bitterbrush*, *Hidden Letters*, *Sansón and Me* and *The Tuba Thieves*.

### **JOSHUA ZEMAN - Executive Producer**

Joshua Zeman is the director of the acclaimed true-crime documentary *Cropsey*. In 2017, he EP'd, with Alex Gibney, and directed *The Killing Season*, an unscripted docu-series. Recent director credits include the 6-part docu-series *Murder Mountain*; the Netflix hit *The Sons of Sam*; and *The Loneliest Whale*, EP'd by Leonardo DiCaprio, which was released by Bleecker Street and nominated for 3 Critics Choice Awards. His latest film, *Checkpoint Zoo*, premiered and won an Audience Award at the 2024 Tribeca Festival.

### **SEAN KIRBY - Cinematographer**

Sean Kirby has photographed a multitude of films that have premiered at the Sundance, Tribeca, Toronto and Cannes film festivals, including the documentaries *Zoo* and *Pow Wow* (Robinson Devor), *Happy Valley* and *The Tillman Story* (Amir Bar-Lev), *Racing Extinction* (Louie Psihoyos), *We Are X* (Stephen Kijak), and the narrative films *Lovely, Still* (Nik Fackler), *Magic Valley* (Jaffe Zinn), *Against The Current* (Peter Callahan) and *Police Beat* (Robinson Devor). Kirby has also served as the director of photography on episodic documentaries, including *Five Came Back* (produced by Steven Spielberg, Scott Rudin and John Battsek).

### **ADAM SEKULER - Supervising Editor**

Adam Sekuler is a filmmaker, curator, educator and editor. Screening in forums and film festivals throughout the US and internationally, his many alternative films strike a delicate balance between stylization and naturalism, creating a poetic and lyrical form of visual storytelling. He is interested in the intersection of documentary and fiction filmmaking practices. Sekuler is known for *Cinema-19* (2020), *36 Hours* (2019) and *Open Air* (2015). He is currently Assistant Professor of Journalism and Media Production at the University of Michigan-Dearborn and has taught at Loyola University and Skidmore College. His latest documentary feature, *The Flamingo*, made its world premiere at the 2024 Camden International Film Festival.

### **JOHN W. COMERFORD - Consulting Producer**

John W. Comerford is a principal at Paradigm Studio, an independent motion picture production company based in the San Francisco area. He recently produced the acclaimed feature drama *Wallflower*, the award-winning conservation documentary *The Wild* and the race and sports documentary *Marshan Lynch: A History*. Comerford is currently assisting as a producer on the documentary *Kinsu Maru*. He previously co-wrote and co-produced the music-driven drama *Around the Fire*, which has been distributed worldwide, and the feature film and television series *Icons Among Us: jazz in the present tense*. Distributors and exhibitors of Comerford's work include Showtime, Starz/Encore, Public Television, Netflix, Hulu, Amazon, Peacock, American Film Institute, and the SXSW, Seattle and Mill Valley film festivals. In addition, his work has been exhibited and supported by institutions such as The Smithsonian, Jazz at Lincoln Center and National Endowment for the Arts.

### **PAUL MATTHEW MOORE - Original Score**

Paul Matthew Moore has scored sixteen films, including Robinson Devor's *Police Beat* and *Zoo*, which was featured in the Sundance and Cannes festivals. Since moving to Seattle in 1995, he has worked with Wayne Horvitz, Eyvind Kang, Timothy Young, Tim Hecker, Randall Dunn, Stuart Dempster and Kronos Quartet, among many others. Moore worked with Dayna Hanson on the film *Improvement Club* and toured with her live theater piece, *Gloria's Cause*. Choreographers with whom he has collaborated include Mark Dendy, Mark Haim, Rob Kitsos, Jennifer Salk and many more. He has also transcribed and performed scores for ten seasons with the Chamber Dance Company. Moore is currently a lecturer in the Music Department at the University of Washington in Seattle.

### **BRIAN BECKER - Archival Producer**

Brian Becker is a New York-based filmmaker who directed and produced *Time Bomb Y2K* (co-directed with Marley McDonald), which premiered on HBO in 2023. The film's festival run included True/False, Hot Docs, Sheffield DocFest, IDFA, Camden International Film Festival, and DOC NYC. Brian served as archival producer on *Free Chol Soo Lee*, *MLK/FBI*, *Spaceship Earth* and *The Fourth Estate*, and as co-producer on *Bobby Kennedy for President*. He began his career on the Oscar-winning *O.J.: Made in America*. He is a 2022 DOC NYC "40 Under 40" recipient, Impact Partners Producing Fellow, Points North Fellow and a FOCAL Jane Mercer Researcher of the Year award nominee.

## **CREDITS**

### **Director, Producer, Writer, Editor**

Robinson Devor

### **Producer, Writer**

Jason Reid

### **Producer**

Zachariah Sebastian

### **Executive Producer, Archival Research, Writer**

Bob Fink

### **Writer**

Charles Mudede

### **Executive Producers**

D.D. Wigley

Patrick Warburton

Su Kim

Joshua Zeman

### **Director of Photography**

Sean Kirby

### **Supervising Editor**

Adam Sekuler

### **Consulting Producer**

John W. Comerford

### **Original Score**

Paul Matthew Moore

### **Co-Producers**

Matt Levinthal

Roxanne Tarn

### **Archival Producers**

Brian Becker

Wyatt Fiske

Brittan Dunham

### **Art Director**

Michael McConville

**Production Designer**

Gerald Sullivan

**Ms. Moore's Wardrobe**

Gena Segala

**Second Unit Director of Photography**

AJ Lenzi

**Colorist**

Tim Maffia

**Co-Supervising Sound Editor / Sound Designer**

Tony Volante

**Co-Supervising Sound Editor / Re-recording Mixer**

Dan Timmons

**Sound Effects Editor / Additional Re-Recording Mixer**

Ryan Billia

Jeremy Bloom

**Sound Effects Editor & Dialogue Editor**

Alex Stuart

**Associate Art Director**

J. Baab

**Online Editor**

Dillon Brown

**Music Supervisor**

Adam Spiro Brown

**The Voice of Bert Worthington**

Robinson Devor