



From left - a still from the movie, with Kerry Mack and Ralph Schicha; Christine and Amanda in the film's closing credits; the movie's poster. Screen shot from Hostage by Frontier Films.

Christine to write her book.

Back to real life

In later years Christine had gone back to using her parents' name, O'Neill, and it is this recorded on her death certificate.

She had married again at age 37, to a man named Frank Ellerbrock, but the pair later divorced.

Legal trouble was to follow in 2008 when a magistrate in Wollongong Local Court found she had assaulted a woman with a glass at the Beaches Hotel in Thirroul.

The court heard it happened during an argument that started when Maresch verbally abused Paul Comelli, brother of Anita's Theatre founder John Comelli, after the opening celebration for Anita's. The magistrate found the offence proved but adjourned the case for mental health advice.

Ms O'Neill had multiple NDIS service providers. Her Local Area Co-ordinator was from Uniting. She briefly had a "recovery coach" but this ended more than a year ago. A complaint about her declining care had been made to one of the groups some weeks before her death.

Uniting said it could not comment specifically but said it "does not provide support co-ordination or personal support services in the Illawarra".

Amanda Maresch is in the process of digitising her mother's book for re-release. She doesn't know if her father is alive. He was deported to Germany in 1986.

The end of Christine's life leaves serious questions to be answered. Her family hopes the investigation will lead to better care.

She was a courageous survivor of violence, sexual abuse, shootings and a criminal husband who kept her captive for years - yet somehow she died in circumstances where she should have been, at last, safe.

A memorial service will be held for Christine O'Neill on June 24 in Perth.

water. Older people and those with poor circulation are more at risk.

The Hostage story

Christine O'Neill was 16 when she met Walter, a German she got to know while working at a travelling carnival. Christine got a job there and they had an affair - the start of a violent decade across three continents, in the grip of a monster.

Her autobiography *Hostage: My Own Story* is a harrowing tale, a devastating insight into the mind of a horribly abused woman. An optimistic teenager seeking

adventure and something better than the violent home she grew up in, came out of it as a hardened survivor of major traumas.

In the early 1980s it was turned into a movie directed by Frank Shields, called *Hostage: The Christine Maresch Story*, billed as "a true story". It was part of a wave of low-budget Australian films branded "Ozploitation" for their heavy doses of sex, violence and/or horror.

In the book Christine writes about how she was coerced into marrying Walter - when he threatened to shoot himself if she didn't.

He pulled the trigger, then refused medical treatment unless she said yes.

They lived in humble accommodation near Port Kembla and before she turned 17 Christine was pregnant with Amanda. Scenes from the movie showed the couple speeding around Cringila and Port Kembla in a red Mercedes; the reality became darker as Walter became more controlling.

After Walter lost his job they moved from town to town around Australia with his treatment of her growing more violent. Eventually they moved to Germany,

where Walter took to robbing banks to help fund his attempt to revive the Nazi Party. Christine was forced to participate after Walter kidnapped Amanda.

They eventually left Germany, heading east, and survived an attack by bandits in Turkey in which Walter slit one man's throat, spilling blood across his wife and daughter in the process. He would remind her often how he saved her life.

Christine returned to Australia with Amanda, but Walter arrived and they again moved from town to town, the violence worsen-

ing to the point Christine and Amanda were at one stage locked in a cellar.

A survivor, Christine told her story so unflinchingly that being tied to a bed and raped, or shot with a rifle or a crossbow, are described in no more lurid detail than time spent renovating a houseboat. The horror needed no embellishment.

Both were eventually arrested, Christine as an accessory. Walter was jailed for 14 years; Christine got a bond.

The *Mercury* has tried several times to contact Shields, who was said to have been instrumental in encouraging



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