“Extraordinary. Compassionate.”
-KHALED HOSSINI, NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

What Tomorrow Brings
Press Kit

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Synopsis

With unprecedented access, WHAT TOMORROW BRINGS goes inside the very first girls’ school in one small Afghan village. Never before have fathers here allowed their daughters to be educated, and they aren’t sure they even want to now. From the school’s beginnings in 2009 to its first graduation in 2015, the film traces the interconnected stories of students, teachers, village elders, parents, and school founder Razia Jan.

While the girls learn to read and write, their education goes far beyond the classroom to become lessons about tradition and time. They discover their school is the one place they can turn to understand the differences between the lives they were born into and the lives they dream of leading. And although remarkable changes happen when a community skeptical about girls’ education learns to embrace it, the threats that girls face - from forced marriage to Taliban attack – loom large.

Award-winning filmmaker Beth Murphy embeds herself in this school and community for a most intimate look at what it really means to be a girl growing up in Afghanistan today.

The film premiered at the Hot Docs International Film Festival; screened at Human Rights Watch Film Festivals in London, New York, Zurich and San Diego; won Best Film at the Woods Hole Film Festival (click here for a full list of screenings and awards); was broadcast on PBS’s POV series; and is the subject of a New York Times Op-Doc and podcast.

Click here to watch the trailer.
Director’s Statement

My recent feature films—BEYOND BELIEF and THE LIST—grappled with the human consequences of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. While filming in Afghanistan for BEYOND BELIEF (Tribeca Film Festival, Sundance Channel), I witnessed the terrible isolation, desperation and poverty that often accompany a life without education. Since then, I’ve made a personal commitment to return to Afghanistan and share with the world my conviction that education is the best way to empower women and strengthen families and communities.

Three generations of women—students Rihala and Pashtana, teacher Nazima, and school founder Razia—shared their stories with me, and they all reminded me why it’s right to have hope—not only for Afghanistan, but for humanity.

Educating girls means finding a precarious balance between hope and tradition, even at the best of times in Afghanistan. These girls, their teachers, and the school administrators face serious threats and formidable obstacles every day. I believe they earned the right to be heard. And I’m hopeful that while WHAT TOMORROW BRINGS draws attention to the precariousness of girls’ education in Afghanistan, it can also spotlight a community that is lighting the way for others.

Beth Murphy
A Conversation with Beth Murphy

What brought you to Afghanistan and the Zabuli Education Center?

I met Razia Jan, the founder of the Zabuli Education Center, a few years before she opened the school. I was making another documentary – BEYOND BELIEF – that offered a glimpse into the lives of Afghan widows, and explored the deep bonds women and widows share across geographic, ethnic, and socio-economic lines. At the time, the Taliban had recently fallen, and Razia – who was born and raised in Afghanistan but had now spent 38 years in the United States – was thinking about going back and helping rebuild her country. When she told me she was starting a school in a village that had never before allowed its daughters to be educated, I knew immediately that this was my next film.

What was your first impression of Razia and the work she is doing?

The feeling it gave me to my core was the feeling of hope – hope for girls, for women, for Afghanistan, for our world community, for the future. I know it sounds expansive – and it was. It’s a really special feeling to be reminded why hope is the most powerful human trait and why it’s right and rational to have it.

What was the biggest challenge you faced in making “What Tomorrow Brings?”

The biggest challenge I faced—and continue to face—is simply that I don’t want to stop filming. There are so many “firsts” happening, and I want to capture them all. In April 2017, the new college will open next to the K-12 school, and I’m looking forward to celebrating that day with Razia, the girls, the teachers, and the whole community. Get ready for What Tomorrow Brings 2!

How have the girls in Afghanistan’s first free private girls school changed your perception of education?

When I started filming in 2009, I questioned how far the girls could really go in this community. Patriarchy here is deeply, deeply entrenched. I knew the girls would learn to read and write, but I worried about how long they’d be able to stay in school and how much learning would go beyond the books. What the girls taught me is that education creates change that extends so far beyond the classroom. It’s breathtaking.

The film documents the challenges and safety concerns that the school faces. Do these challenges and concerns persist today?

Every day the water at the school is tested to make sure that it hasn’t been poisoned. Last year there were 213 attacks on girls’ education in Afghanistan – keeping more than 50,000 girls out of school. It’s important to remember the context in which this school exists in the country. Women’s rights and girls’ education are once again under attack as the Taliban has again been exerting more power. ISIS is also active in the country, sowing more fear and instability especially among women.

I think the courage that these girls, teachers and families have to wake up every morning and go to school speaks to the fact that you can’t live in fear. The future of Afghanistan is not a fear-based future. These girls need to be part of the country, part of the conversation. They need to be at the table and the only way to get to the table is to have an education.
Is there a lot of community support for the school? Has the amount of support changed over time?

Well, this is the story. To me this is the whole story. Day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year, the changes and the shifts in attitude have added up. And now taken as a whole, they are significant.

Ten years ago it was unimaginable a girls' school could exist here; the men in this village had never allowed their daughters to go to school. Once the school was built, it was unimaginable that a girl who got engaged—never-mind married—would be able to continue her education. Today, there are five students who are engaged. More incredible, one student was able to graduate after getting married. Girls still need permission from their fathers, brothers, uncles, fiancés and husbands to go to school and stay in school, but what’s so powerful is how the girls are making sure they get that permission. Their education has given them the confidence to stand up for themselves and the ability to advocate for themselves and get results.

What kind of impact do you want the film to have?

We realized during our filming Zabuli graduates would not be able to go on to college. It’s completely unconventional in a small village like this to send a daughter off to college, and even if it weren’t, college is too far away, and families don’t own cars or have access to other transportation. And they can’t afford it - 75% of girls going to this school live below the poverty line; in this village that means living on less than one U.S. dollar a day.

Since they can’t go to college, we asked: What if we bring college to them? And that simple idea became the basis of the initial phase of the film’s impact campaign – Build A School Today. Within six weeks, we raised $120,000 to build a college in this same village. A week after the end of the campaign, I was back in Afghanistan filming the groundbreaking.

And the men in the community are already talking about what happens beyond college, and about the careers their daughters might have. At the groundbreaking ceremony for the college, six fathers laid in the first foundation stones. One of them said: “I hope doctors and ministers come out of this college.” That’s a moment I’ll never forget... I’ve a lot of those moments filming this documentary.
BETH MURPHY, DIRECTOR/PRODUCER
Beth Murphy is Director of Films and correspondent at The GroundTruth Project and the founder of Principle Pictures. Murphy is focused on stories of human rights and social justice and tells these powerful, award-winning narratives through feature and short documentaries, news packages, digital media and targeted impact and educational campaigns. The Build A School Today Campaign she recently led succeeded in building a women's college in the Afghan village where WHAT TOMORROW BRINGS was shot.

Murphy has produced nearly 20 documentaries (for The History Channel, Discovery International, Discovery Health, Lifetime, PBS) including the features BEYOND BELIEF (Tribeca, Sundance Channel), THE LIST (Tribeca, PBS), and WHAT TOMORROW BRINGS (Hot Docs, PBS/POV). Murphy is a former Fellow at Boston University’s Institute for Iraqi Studies, and she has taught courses in covering international crises, media ethics, and documentary filmmaking at Suffolk University and American University Paris. She is a blogger for HuffPost, author of "Fighting For Our Future" (McGraw Hill), and has directed/produced two New York Times Op-Docs. She was recently recognized with Edward R. Murrow and Alfred I. duPont Awards for a short film series and podcast based on WHAT TOMORROW BRINGS.

CHARLES SENNOTT, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
Charles Sennott is the Founder and Executive Director of The GroundTruth Project. He is an award-winning foreign correspondent, author and editor with 30 years of experience in journalism. Sennott was Executive Producer on Murphy’s previous feature THE LIST (Tribeca Film Festival, PBS). He has reported on the front lines of wars and insurgencies in at least 15 countries, including the 2011 revolution in Cairo and the Arab Spring. Sennott’s deep experience reporting internationally led him to launch The GroundTruth Project and to dedicate himself to training the next generation of international journalists for the digital age. Sennott is also the co-founder of GlobalPost, an acclaimed international news website. Previously, Sennott served as the Boston Globe’s Middle East Bureau Chief based in Jerusalem from 1997 to 2001 and as Europe Bureau Chief based in London from 2001 to 2005.

DEBRA MCLEOD, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
Debra McLeod is Founder of Grant Me the Wisdom Foundation, a non-profit dedicated to empowering women and girls through education. She is on the board of Impact Partners, a pioneering equity investment company that supports the documentary film community—especially social issue films. McLeod also serves on the board of the Yale Divinity School.
About Razia Jan

Founder of Razia’s Ray of Hope Foundation and the Zabuli Education Center, Razia Jan is fiercely protective of “her” girls and is the film’s trusted narrator. Her humanitarian efforts earned her a CNN Top 10 Hero honor (2012) and recognition in First Lady Laura Bush’s book We Are Afghan Women: Voices of Hope (2016).

Jan’s efforts to forge connections between Afghans and Americans began by rallying her adopted New England community to send over 400 homemade blankets to rescue workers at Ground Zero after September 11, 2001. Her efforts expanded to include sending care packages to U.S. troops in Afghanistan. Through her involvement in the military’s Operation Shoe Fly, she coordinated the delivery of over 30,000 pairs of shoes to needy Afghan children. Her handmade quilts commemorating September 11th have been exhibited at Madison Square Garden, the chapel at the Pentagon, and at fire stations in New York and Massachusetts.

Born in Afghanistan, Razia moved to the United States in 1970. The proprietor of a small tailoring business in Duxbury, Massachusetts, for 20 years, she served as president of the town’s Rotary Club. She is a member of the Interfaith Council and No Place for Hate, and a member of the board of directors at Jordan Hospital. Razia has spoken on women and children’s issues at many venues in New York, Massachusetts, Washington, DC, and Afghanistan.

Razia has received many awards for her humanitarian work, including the 2007 Woman of Excellence award from Germaine Lawrence Inc., multiple Rotary Club International Peace Awards, and certificates of appreciation from the Army Corps of Engineers and the American Legion. In 2011 Razia was honored by the Duxbury Rotary Club with their inaugural Amazing Woman of the Year Award. In 2014 she was named Social Innovator by the Lewis Institute at Babson College and in 2015 she was awarded a Woman of Action award from Rotary International at the United Nations in New York City.
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Teachers, students, community and faith-based organizers: We've got everything you need to make your screening a success. Click here to download the Screening Toolkit.

Click here to download a zip file of stills from the film.