

UNIT 5: EMPOWERING WOMEN GLOBALLY

SEPTEMBER 11th

personal stories
of transformation

SUSAN RETIK lost her husband David on American Airlines Flight 11, which was flown into the North Tower of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. At the time, they had two children, and Susan was pregnant with their third. After September 11th, Susan and her friend Patti Quigley, another September 11th widow, started the organization *Beyond the 11th* to aid widows in Afghanistan who have been affected by war, terrorism and oppression. *Beyond the 11th* awards grants to programs that help Afghan widows gain the skills necessary to earn their own income.

“The terrorists who wreaked havoc on us here on September 11th clearly had a mission of spreading hate, and I just didn’t want to be a part of that.”



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TOPICS THIS STORY CONNECTS TO:

- Promoting cross-cultural understanding
- How September 11th inspired individuals to come together with a sense of purpose and global responsibility
- Empathizing with women in need

DEFINITIONS

Afghanistan is a country in South Central Asia, bordered by Pakistan, Iran, Uzbekistan and China. Traditionally and to this day, the country has been largely governed by tribal leaders who resist foreign interference. Since the late 1970s Afghanistan has been in a continuous state of war involving frequent foreign occupation.

Al Qaeda is a global, trans-national, yet stateless, network. It is made up of Islamic extremists. Dedicated to techniques of **terrorism**, its goal is to attack perceived enemies of Islam.

The **Taliban** is a violent, extremist Muslim militia that enforces a fundamentalist code of behavior that violates many human rights such as basic education and women's rights. The **Taliban** originated in Afghanistan and has moved to other countries.

Terrorism is the use of violence against civilians with the intent to cause fear or panic. **Terrorists** commit violent acts to bring attention to their cause.

Family Member refers to a person who lost a family member on September 11th.

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BACK STORY BIOGRAPHY

Susan Retik was living in a suburb of Boston with her husband and two children, ages 2 and almost 4 on September 11th. She was pregnant with their third child. Her husband traveled quite often for business, so it was not unusual for him to be heading to Los Angeles on the morning of September 11th. After taking her children to school, she turned on the car radio and learned of the attacks. When she returned home, she was able to confirm that her husband was on American Airlines Flight 11, the first plane that crashed into the North Tower. People immediately came over to give her support and continued to help her for many months afterwards. Neighbors, family and friends helped her take care of her children and her household; church groups sent quilts; anonymous people sent money in the mail.

One day, Susan was watching a television show, *Oprah*, and there was a story about the roles of women in Afghanistan. She was shocked when she heard about the Taliban terrorizing so many lives in Afghanistan and learned about the difficult life of women, unable to go to school or work. She reflected upon the agony of being a widow in Afghanistan and compared her own situation as a widow. Susan realized that the terrorists who carried out the attacks on 9/11 wanted to spread hate, and she wanted to counter that. She felt that if she could reach out to one woman and help her with food and shelter, she could make a difference. Susan contacted her new friend Patricia Quigley, who had also been widowed on September 11th. Together they formed an organization called *Beyond the 11th* whose mission is to help widows affected by war and terrorism in Afghanistan to gain the skills necessary to earn their own income.



I. WATCH PART 1.

II. WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?

Susan chose to help widows in Afghanistan. How will Susan counter the goals of terrorism through her work with these widows?

III. WATCH PART 2 TO SEE HOW SUSAN'S WORK AFFECTED OTHERS.

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IV. CONNECT AND REFLECT ACTIVITY

1. Fact: Through television, radio and internet broadcasts, it is estimated that about one-third of the world's 6.1 billion people followed the attacks of September 11, 2001, as they were happening.

Personal Experience Question: How does Susan first hear of the attacks? Does your family retain a memory of when they first learned of the attack? What were their thoughts and feelings at the time? How did the media first portray the attacks and how did the accounts change as more information became available?

2. Fact: On the morning of September 11th American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175 both departed from Boston. Both flights were headed to California and were hijacked by Al Qaeda terrorists who flew planes into the Twin Towers at the World Trade Center, (17 minutes apart at 8:46 A.M. and 9:03 A.M.). Two other planes were hijacked that morning to be used as weapons. As a result, over 3,000 children lost a parent that day, and over 1,600 people lost a spouse.

Personal Experience Question: Susan says that she thinks the terrorists had a mission to spread hate. Why does she feel that anger is not the emotion that she wants to sustain? How will her mission counteract spreading hate? In what ways can you counter aggression through positive actions?

3. Fact: Several September 11th widows became activists and lobbied Congress to demand a full investigation and independent commission on the attacks. The commission created and published *The 9/11 Commission Report*, which was released in July 2004.

Personal Experience Question: Susan chose a different path for her activism. Why did she empathize with the plight of women in Afghanistan? How was her life as a widow in the United States different from that of widows in Afghanistan? Why do some people who are affected by tragedy commit themselves to political action?



4. Fact: Between 1979 and 1988, a war raged in Afghanistan between the Soviet Union and the local *mujahideen*, (a group of opposition parties that rebelled against the Soviet occupation). The United States armed and trained the *mujahideen* to defeat the Soviets. When the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan, internal fighting between factions of the *mujahideen* continued. Some of the *mujahideen* developed into the Taliban militia and gained political power. After decades of war, the people of Afghanistan remain impoverished. There are many widows and little opportunity for women under Taliban rule.

Personal Experience Question: Why is it important to Susan that the programs supported by *Beyond the 11th* give the widows in Afghanistan the opportunity to learn a skill? Before the attacks of September 11th, did you know anything about the Afghan people? Think about your future dreams and the role your education plays in attaining them.

5. Fact: After September 11th, hundreds of family members of the victims created foundations, scholarships, and organizations to conduct charitable acts in memory of their loved ones.

Personal Experience Question: Susan co-founded an organization to support widows in Afghanistan. What can you do in your own community to commemorate September 11th in a positive way?

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V. SPECIFIC RESEARCH RESOURCES

■ **Beyond the 11th**

Beyond the 11th is a non-profit organization that provides support to widows in Afghanistan who have been affected by war, terrorism, and oppression. Started by two September 11th widows, Patti Quigley and Susan Retik, **Beyond the 11th** places a special emphasis on working with women and children, since socio-economic, cultural and legal conditions often favor men and exclude women and minors. <http://beyondthe11th.org/>

■ ***Beyond Belief, Principle Pictures, 2008, DVD.***

Beyond Belief is a documentary by Beth Murphy that follows two September 11th widows, Patti Quigley and Susan Retik over the course of two years, as they struggle to cope with their loss, raise their children alone, and devote themselves to helping widows in Afghanistan. <http://www.principlepictures.com/beyondbelief/>

■ ***Three Cups of Tea, Greg Mortenson, 2006.***

In 1993 a mountaineer named Greg Mortenson drifted into an impoverished Pakistan village in the Karakoram Mountains after a failed attempt to climb K2. Moved by the inhabitants' kindness, he promised to return and build a school. *Three Cups of Tea* is the story of that promise and its extraordinary outcome. <http://www.threecupsoftea.com/>

■ **Agent for Change**

Agent for Change is an initiative of the Tenement Museum that highlights stories of ordinary individuals taking action to make a difference in their communities. These stories encourage people to find their own ways to engage in positive social change. <http://www.tenement.org/agents-for-change/>

VI. CLASSROOM & SERVICE PROJECTS

Share your projects with the Tribute Center, and we will put them online for other teachers and students to learn about. Send your project descriptions to education@tributewtc.org

1. CONDUCT YOUR OWN ORAL HISTORY

Many other people have used the shock and sadness of traumatic events to motivate them to accomplish an act of public service. Interview someone in your own community who experienced a tragedy or a hard challenge and as a result transformed their life to serve or help others. Link here http://www.tributewtc.org/programs/pdfs/oral_history.pdf for instructions on how to conduct an oral history.

2. STUDENTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

To learn about young people who have taken steps to make a difference in their communities and the world at large visit www.facinghistory.org/bethechange. The site www.DoSomething.org offers many project ideas for how students can get active in their communities. The site www.DonorsChoose.org provides educational projects that individuals and groups can support including how to help other classrooms that are in need.

3. BREAKING STEREOTYPES AND BUILDING BRIDGES THROUGH GLOBAL COLLABORATION

Tribute WTC Visitor Center has joined with iEARN (**International Education and Resource Network**) to support interaction and global collaborative project work with students around the world, including those in conflict situations like Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq. **Your class can participate in a web-based project that can help build global understanding.** Find out more about the project on the next page. If you register through the Tribute Center, there is no fee for participation in this program this year (March 2010–February 2011). All iEARN projects build bridges, improve education, and make a difference through direct student-to-student interaction in a safe and secure online “Collaboration Centre.”

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DEBUNKING STEREOTYPES AND BUILDING BRIDGES THROUGH GLOBAL COLLABORATION

Two kinds of interaction and collaboration are possible in this project:

1. GENERAL ONLINE FORUM

iEARN can enable you and your students to interact directly with teachers and students throughout its 130-country network, including those in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This can be done by identifying schools from these countries that are active in iEARN's online discussion forums. In addition, there is an interactive database through which teachers can search for colleagues in these countries. Once you make the connection, you can introduce yourself and your class via the forums to explore possible areas of discussion that might be possible between your classes.

2. DEBUNKING STEREOTYPES

Participate with classes in multiple countries to examine the images and stereotypes that students have about other countries and to learn how their own country is perceived by students around the world. Through student interaction these stereotypes may be challenged. Classes from different countries join the project throughout the year. Currently students are participating from Algeria, Oman, the USA, Turkey, Kenya, Macedonia, Morocco, Brazil, Taiwan, Portugal, Azerbaijan, Yemen and other countries.

Project's Purpose: To build critical thinking skills, strengthen cross-cultural awareness, create ties of friendship, and increase understanding through a discussion among students of images and stereotypes about countries and cultures—both their own and others around the world.

Steps in the Breaking Stereotypes Project include:

1. Students in your class identify three stereotypes that they think students in other countries have about their own country.
2. Students discuss these possible stereotypes to see if they think that they are true. If they are not true, how would students share information about their country to create a more accurate image (break the stereotype) of their country.
3. Teachers ask students to think about and write down images of stereotypes that they have about the other participating countries.
4. Students share these stereotypes in the project's forum under the topic that has been created for posting stereotypes about various countries, using text, video, sound, or graphics/photos.
5. Students read the stereotypes that others have about their country and respond with thoughtful comments about them.
6. Students discuss in their classroom what they have learned about other countries and how they have shared information about their own culture that breaks stereotypes they have encountered among other students online.

Email education@tributewtc.org if you would like to register for this program.

