

ABRAHAM'S CHILDREN SYNOPSIS

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Contact

Nina Froriep
Clock Wise Productions, Inc.
212-343-3099
nina@clockwiseproductions.com
clockwiseproductions.com

abrahamschildrendoc.com

Synopsis:

Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world and in America. Every 10th child in the New York School system is Muslim. *Abraham's Children* tells the stories of some of these children through their own voices.

As we explore their daily routines and experiences and see them challenging stereotypes of race and religion, we learn there has been a paradigm shift in how Muslim religion and culture are viewed from the outside and that there is perceived lack of Muslim role models in America.

Character Background:

Abraham's Children profiles 10 children. All but one are first generation Muslim Americans. The exception is a so-called 'quarter generation' boy from Yemen who came to America four years ago. In addition to this boy, there are five children in three Pakistani families for whom cultural integration plays as much a role as Islam and fitting in with their American peers; two daughters of an American convert to Islam whose focus is a pure Islamic lifestyle for her and her daughters and two daughters of an African American father who found order and a direction through Islam.

Abraham's Children follows six families:

Yasmine, 12, and Dareen, 11, attend a private Muslim School in Yonkers called Andalusia, where their mother Susan is the principal. Susan was raised in a conservative Episcopal household in Connecticut and converted to Islam before meeting the girl's father, a Palestinian. The father left shortly after Dareen was born and the girls have not seen him since. Susan and the girls commute a 3.5 hour roundtrip to Andalusia from their upstate home so the kids have a chance to grow up in nature.

Kasem immigrated to the States four years ago from Yemen as a US citizen with little knowledge of English and American culture to join two of his older brothers in the Bronx. He is graduating from an ESL High School the next spring and is hoping to attend Columbia University in the fall. He wants to become an engineer and tutors peers in math after hours to give back to the community and to help support himself and his brothers.

Anam & Ahmad, Saleem & Haleema, and Imran: these are the children in three Pakistani families in Long Island who are a part of a close-knit community of family and friends. They are first-generation Americans who thrive as young leaders and role models and hold dreams for the future like any other American teen with the sky being the limit. Their parents are all working doctors. Behind the scenes these young Pakistani-Muslim-Americans are very rooted in their religion and their parent's culture. All five kids, ages 10 to 18, are quite successful in maintaining a balance between the 'old and new' world while embodying a very "American" lifestyle.

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Naeemah 17, and Saeedah 16, are sisters from the Bronx. Both girls are home schooled. Their father, Tariq, a Sheik, preaches Juma every Friday in Mosques around the Tri-State area and in Philadelphia. Tariq works as security guard at night and converted to Islam in SingSing Prison in upstate New York. He talks about his past and why he keeps the girls 'close'. Naeemah has been engaged to Mohammed since she was 14 and eagerly anticipates their marriage in the summer of 2010. Both girls are home schooled. Their younger brother Siraj goes to private school.

Director's Notes:

I believe in the power of storytelling to change minds and pre-conceived notions and to grow an understanding of the world around us.

The topic of Islam and Muslims in America is fraught with emotions, fueled by the post 9/11 media frenzy and the negative stereotyping of Muslims, both in the news and in entertainment in general. In contrast, *Abraham's Children* gives a non judgmental, apolitical presentation of real stories of Muslim children in America.

When I set out in the fall of 2007 to learn about the lives of Muslim children in America, I knew almost nothing about Islam, whether in America, in the world over, or my own backyard in Central Harlem. I also had little idea of what it meant to grow up in America. I was born and raised in Switzerland and didn't come to this country until I was in college.

What I did understand was the feeling of displacement, which I felt very much myself, even as a Western-European-Christian with a reasonable command of English transplanted to New York. How much more intense must it be for an adolescent coming to America, like Kasem, with an Eastern-Yemeni-Islamic upbringing.

I also knew that Muslims got the short end of the stick in the media, especially after 9/11. I was curious to find out why Muslims were not speaking up. Where were the leaders and the Muslims that fought the injustice and ignorance about their religion, culture and way of life?

Many of these questions are still unanswered. I had to learn that one documentary can harbor only so many angles and stories, but in the end *Abraham's Children* became a study on Islam in America from a youth's point of view.

I feel very passionate and protective of the kids in *Abraham's Children* and I think it comes through in the film. All the families were incredibly courageous to let us into their lives. We are extremely appreciative of the way they spoke to use, gave us access to their homes, schools, and workplaces and also graciously hosted us during the shoot days. This film represents a true collaborative effort from production, to crew and talent.

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I discovered that this generation of Muslim-Americans growing up in a post 9/11 era are the future leaders and spokespersons of Islam in America. I very much look forward to seeing what they will be up to in years to come.

Production Notes:

The sensitive nature of the film required an eye for a balanced assembly of cast and crew. The leg work of getting into the Muslim communities and gaining their trust was labor-intensive, but Teresa Pereira, our Associate Producer, had not only the patience, grace and the instincts but also an understanding for the cultural subtleties. Our timing was great, with a Muslim community waking up to realize that they needed to explain themselves and partake in the American community and embracing our film as an opportunity to do so.

Claudia Raschke-Robinson's, experience with children and first-time directors was invaluable. As D.P. and as a mother, Claudia's instincts were always dead on and she caught many great moments that otherwise would have undoubtedly be missed.

Editor Terry Katz and I have a long-time working relationship. Our political views are not always on the same page, but that seemed to be an advantage and I knew I could trust him instinctively to "do right by the families" while still delivering an interesting, thought-provoking film.

I am also excited to have Salman Ahmad's music in the film. Salman is the head of the legendary Rock Band Junoon with an unprecedented fan base and 30 million records sold in South Asia. Salman is also a medical doctor and UN Ambassador for HIV/Aids. His music is a wonderful mix of American Rock with a hint of Islamic Sufi otherworldliness.

Key Crew Biographies:

Swiss-born Director and Producer, **Nina Froriep**, has worked in documentary production for over a decade. Nina has worked on several award winning documentaries, two of which were about children: *The Dignity of Children*, an Emmy-nominated two-hour ABC primetime special that was nominated for an Emmy; as well as the Emmy Award winner, *Voices of Children*, about the Terezin Camp in World War II in the Czech Republic. In addition, Nina has worked as Producer in the film and event-production circuit for over twenty years, the past 12 years of which with her company, Clock Wise Productions, Inc.; a boutique corporate video and multi-media production company.

Director of Photography, **Claudia Raschke-Robinson**, is an award-winning cinematographer who has photographed independent feature films and documentaries for over 15 years, most recently the very successful feature documentary "Mad Hot Ballroom", about children in New York City. A selection of her documentary credits are: *Sister Rose's Passion* (Oscar Nomination 2005), *My Architect* (Oscar Nomination 2004), *Small Wonders* (Oscar Nomination 1995) and *Windows to the Universe* (Emmy Nomination).

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Terry Katz's editing credits include the Palm d'Or award winning film *COFFEE AND CIGARETTES*, by Jim Jarmusch;; the documentaries *Life With Big Cats*, winner of the Ark Trust Genesis Award and *Straight Dope: MTV NewsSpecial*, finalist for Best Editor at the International Monitor Awards. Terry worked on award-winning commercials for over 25 years. He was editor and Creative Director on the campaign "Respect Yourself, Protect Yourself" winning the CIPRA Award for Excellence, and received a Telly for The Ad Council's President's Initiative on Racism. Terry is Assistant Professor for editing at St. John's University, and has an MA in Media Communications from NYU.

DVD Segments and Chapters

Segment 1 – approximately 27 minutes

- Chapter 1: "Why am I a Muslim"
Chapter 2: Yasmine and Dareen
Chapter 3: The Mosque & the 5 Pillars
Chapter 4: Kasem

Segment 2 – approximately 25 minutes

- Chapter 5: Saleem & Haleema
Chapter 6: Imran
Chapter 7: Anam & Ahmad

Segment 3 – approximately 24 minutes

- Chapter 8: Naeemah & Saeedah
Chapter 9: Hijab & Ramadan
Chapter 10: Interfaith & US Teens
Chapter 11: Credit Roll

Technical Specs:

Director's Cut: 77 min.
Available on DVD (NTSC and Pal) and Digi Master (Pal and NTSC)
Native 16:9, color, stereo mix
Shot on HD, 24P (Sony EX1), cut on Final Cut Pro 6.0.

Where to find us:

Twitter <http://twitter.com/ninafroriep>
FB <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Abrahams-Children/90609674023>
IMDB <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1533971/>
IndieGoGo <http://www.indiegogo.com/Abraham's-Children>
Websites <http://www.clockwiseproductions.com>
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