

TRUE LIVES

A New Limited Series from the Producers of *P.O.V.***For Immediate Release**

Contact:

Cathy Fisher, cfisher@pov.org, 212-989-7425Neyda Martinez, neyda@pov.org, 212-989-7425**“My American Girls” Captures Bittersweet Drama of Immigrant Parents
And Native-Born Daughters as They Pursue the American Dream***A Co-presentation of Latino Public Broadcasting (LPB)*

“My American Girls,” Part of “True Lives” Series Distributed by NETA,
Available for March 2008 – December 2009 Scheduling by PBS Stations

Antonia "Sandra" and Juan "Bautista" Ortiz are hardworking immigrants who live frugally in Brooklyn and dream of retiring to their native Dominican Republic. Their American-born daughters have other ideas and dreams. Welcome to the bittersweet contradictions of contemporary immigrant life as revealed in **My American Girls: A Dominican Story**, the dramatic portrait of one year in the life of a family as it struggles to sort out the rewards — and costs — of pursuing the American dream.

Aaron Matthews' **My American Girls: A Dominican Story** airs on public television stations as part of *True Lives*, a series presented by American Documentary, Inc. and the National Educational Telecommunications Association (NETA). *True Lives* is a new programming initiative from the producers of P.O.V.

In 1975, Sandra became the first of her family to immigrate to New York from the Dominican Republic seeking better work and pay. She met her husband, Bautista, also a Dominican immigrant, and began bringing her brothers, sisters, and other family members over, until nearly the whole family — except her parents — was ensconced in Brooklyn.

As with so many immigrants, Sandra and Bautista work long hours for relatively low pay by U.S. standards. But it is enough for them to live a decent if not exactly middle-class life in Brooklyn, to give their children the advantages of American citizenship and education, and to return to the Dominican Republic for family reunions bearing big bags of coveted consumer goods. Most importantly, Sandra and Bautista earn enough to be slowly building a dream house for the time they retire and return to their beloved island.

The attachment of the immigrant parents to the homeland, their discipline and work ethic, and their clarity of purpose all contrast with the independent, searching outlooks of their three U.S.-born daughters. It is the story of the daughters that forms the dramatic spine of **My American Girls**.

There is Monica, the fast-tracking eldest, who excels in college, wants to be an actress, lives on the Upper East Side, and feels ill at ease with Dominican culture. Mayra, the youngest, is a self-described "ghetto kid" who has problems in school. Aida, the middle daughter, is mostly concerned with earning money for the things she wants and has little patience for her parents' frugal ways.

Says filmmaker Matthews: "When you look at the Ortiz family and the struggles they have and the issues they deal with — education, opportunities gained and lost, the role of the mother, the role of women in the family, balancing work and family, and the fulfillment of dreams — you realize that these are issues and struggles and themes that affect us all."

In vivid, verité detail, **My American Girls** paints an intimate portrait of the immigrant experience at the end of the 20th century. Ultimately, Sandra realizes the irony in her situation: when she and Bautista leave New York to return to the Dominican Republic, she will be leaving her family once again.

About the filmmaker:

Aaron Matthews

Producer/Director/Editor/Camera

For over 12 years, Aaron Matthews has been making award-winning documentary films that have appeared on national and international television and in numerous film festivals around the world. His current documentary, **The Paper**, goes behind the scenes at a university newspaper embroiled in controversy, following America's future journalists as they confront the pressures and problems of working in media today. It is now being broadcast on PBS's *Independent Lens* series.

Matthews explored the legacy of the 1960s through the eyes of former Black Panther and American exile Pete O'Neal in the award-winning **A Panther in Africa**. The film had its national broadcast premiere on PBS's P.O.V. series in 2004 and screened at over 35 film festivals worldwide. It won Best Documentary at the St. Louis International Film Festival and a CINE Golden Eagle Award.

He made his feature documentary debut with the highly acclaimed **My American Girls**. The film, "packed with uncommon honesty and humor," according to *The Los Angeles Times*, was nationally broadcast on P.O.V. in 2001 and selected for an encore P.O.V. broadcast in 2002. It aired throughout Europe and Latin America, and was also broadcast on the Discovery Times Channel.

Matthews began his career making short documentaries. **Taddo**, (about the oldest barber in Brooklyn) and **The Art of the Moment** (an in-depth look at three professional New York City improvisers) played at numerous festivals nationally and were broadcast on The History Channel and public television.

In addition to filmmaking, Matthews has worked as a writer and producer for A&E, The History Channel, and as an English as a Second Language teacher in New York City. Born in Venezuela, he grew up in Brooklyn and graduated from Wesleyan University with a degree in English literature.

Credits:

Producer/Director/Editor/Camera: Aaron Matthews

Running Time: 1 hour

Awards:

- San Francisco International Latino Film Festival -- *Best Documentary*

* * * * *

Latino Public Broadcasting

Created in 1998 by Edward James Olmos and Marlene Dermer, Latino Public Broadcasting (LPB) is a non-profit organization funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. LPB's mission is to support the development, production, post-production, acquisition and distribution of non-commercial educational and cultural television that is representative of or addresses issues of particular interest to U.S. Latinos. These programs are produced for dissemination to public broadcasting stations and other public telecommunications entities. Mr. Olmos is LPB's Chairman of the Board of Directors.





National Educational Telecommunications Association (www.netaonline.org)

The National Educational Telecommunications Association is a professional association based in Columbia, S.C. It serves public television licensees and educational entities in all 50 states, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico by providing quality programming content, educational resources, professional development, management support, and national representation.

American Documentary, Inc. (www.amdoc.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation. Simon Kilmurry is executive director of American Documentary | P.O.V.

* * * *