For Immediate Release

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Emotionally Traumatized Children Get a Second Chance in Unique English School in POV’s “Hold Me Tight, Let Me Go,” Tuesday, July 28, 2009, on PBS

At the Mulberry Bush School in Oxford, Loving Discipline Counters Anger and Violence In Troubled Kids

“Mixing ferocity with tenderness, delicacy with tenacity . . . a docu of uncompromised integrity and edge-of-the-seat drama.” — John Anderson, Variety

For the 40 children who call the Mulberry Bush School in Oxford, England home at any one time, the school offers possibly their last chance at a normal life. The kids boarding at Mulberry are not brain-damaged, and many are very bright. Yet their extreme behavioral problems — often caused by emotional trauma and including violent outbursts, agitation and verbal abuse — have gotten them excluded from other schools and institutions and made their families’ lives intolerable.

As compassionately documented by acclaimed British filmmaker Kim Longinotto in classic vérité style in Hold Me Tight, Let Me Go, the staff at Mulberry eschews instruments of restraint, punitive measures or drugs as a means of helping these kids. Instead, staff members offer patience, determination and a human embrace. It is a program that requires immense fortitude and steadiness in the face of incipient chaos, and one where success seems always to hang in the balance — nonetheless, it achieves some remarkable turnarounds.

Hold Me Tight, Let Me Go has its American broadcast premiere on Tuesday, July 28, 2009, at 10 p.m. on PBS during the 22nd season of POV (Point of View). American television’s longest-running independent documentary series, POV is the recipient of a Special Emmy for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking. The series continues on Tuesdays at 10 p.m. through Sept. 22 and returns with two specials in November and December. (Check local listings.)

The Mulberry Bush School has a staff-to-student ratio of 108 to 40. To watch a staff member restrain a hysterical child in his or her arms for as long as it takes the child to calm down is to watch a wrestling match between human reason and human self-destruction, as heart-wrenchingly expressed in the lives of troubled pre-adolescents. Throughout Hold Me Tight, Let Me Go, this firm but loving embrace emerges as Mulberry’s signature approach to severely disturbed kids. It expresses not only a commitment to non-violence but a determination to get the child to focus on what is happening and why — and how to change self-destructive behavior.

The kids ages five through 12 who attend Mulberry (most of them boys) can broadly be described as having attachment disorders, with some having Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD). Hold Me Tight, Let Me Go introduces five of Mulberry’s students over the course of a year. Eight-year-old Alex is given to mania and kicking. Ben, also eight, is a violent biter and hitter. Twelve-year-old Michael appears the least sympathetic, perhaps because he is older (about to complete Mulberry’s three-year program),
and certainly because, in addition to hitting and spitting, he shouts racist curses at Mulberry’s black staff members. And Robert, age nine, is constantly relieving himself in his room.

Longinotto’s camera is also there to capture these children feeling hurt, troubled, anxious for human touch and desperate to change. When Alex’s mania doesn’t get the best of him, he is charming and smart as a whip. At one point, with his attention directed to artwork after an outburst, he makes a remarkable comment for an eight-year-old: “With a few words, I could change the world.” Before film’s end, he does make a change in his life — he earns advancement to a higher class.

Ben, meanwhile, unable to control his temper, twice attacks Alex. Ben is then lost in guilt and shame. Helped by the staff to see that his behavior mimics the violence in his own family, he must finally admit to having the feelings of a frightened and confused little boy.

In the course of the year, Robert discovers that good things can come from not urinating everywhere. And Michael, his time at Mulberry nearing an end, seems suddenly more mature, showing focus and determination in learning to play the recorder and new self-confidence when visiting his family. His final week at Mulberry is a moving expression of the bonds that form among the school’s staff and students. It is also testament to a new Michael, who was, at the film’s beginning, an ink-eating, spitting, racist hellion — a seemingly irredeemable child.

But it is Mulberry’s quiet determination that no child is beyond saving. Hold Me Tight, Let Me Go presents a heartbreaking, engrossing tableau of the consequences that family and social dysfunction can have on small children and of the tremendous transformations possible in young lives when a community of determined adults envelops them in love rather than force.

“When I first went to see the Mulberry Bush School, within 20 minutes of arriving, I knew I wanted to make a film there,” says director Longinotto. “I remembered that during my own school days, the driving force behind everything was punishment and discipline. The aim of the school was to break down your self-esteem.

“By contrast, at Mulberry, the goal is to help the kids feel happier and more confident. When they misbehave, the teachers don’t punish them, but try to find out why they are acting like that. The Mulberry Bush School tries to mend the hurt of the outside world.”

Says John Diamond, CEO of the Mulberry Bush School, “The film captures the minute-by-minute issue of staff grappling with ‘what is in the best interests of this child in the here and now?’ In this way it is a ‘warts and all’ view of the work of the school.”

Hold Me Tight, Let Me Go is a production of Films of Record in association with the BBC. The film is distributed by Women Make Movies (WMM), the world’s leading distributor of independent films by and about women, including 14 films from Kim Longinotto.

About the Mulberry Bush School:
As part of Britain’s post-war reconstruction, renowned psychologist Barbara Dockar-Drysdale founded the Mulberry Bush School in 1948 with her husband, Stephen, to help children traumatized by World War II. The couple had looked after children who had been evacuated from London during the wartime blitz. A pioneer of therapeutic childcare, Dockar-Drysdale published a 1958 paper, “The Residential Treatment of Frozen Children,” which offered clinical stories about working closely with the most “cold” and “hardened” of children. She described them as emotionally “frozen” at the “point of failure” of their original attachment relationships at home.

Dockar-Drysdale and her staff built on the concepts of various experts, including psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim, whose 1950 book, Love is Not Enough, described the treatment of severely emotionally disturbed young people at the Orthogenic School in Chicago. His work was informed by his own experience of the institutionalization of hatred in the Nazi concentration camps. Sue
Gerhardt’s 2004 book *Why Love Matters* validated Dockar-Drysdale’s theories and described how the brain of the human baby physically enlarges as a result of being in a loving relationship. By contrast, if the baby experiences ongoing neglect and abuse, the evolving brain is flooded and overwhelmed by stress, releasing the hormone cortisol, which can “freeze” the growth of the brain.

More information about the Mulberry Bush School can be found at [www.mulberrybush.oxon.sch.uk/](http://www.mulberrybush.oxon.sch.uk/).

**About the Filmmaker:**

**Kim Longinotto, Director/Producer/Cinematographer**

Kim Longinotto studied camera and directing at England’s National Film School, where she made “Pride of Place,” a critical look at her boarding school, and “Theatre Girls,” documenting a hostel for homeless women.

Her first film in Japan was “Eat the Kimono,” about the controversial feminist performer Hanayagi Genshu. “Hidden Faces,” an internationally acclaimed documentary about Egyptian women, and “The Good Wife of Tokyo,” exploring women, love and marriage in Japanese society, followed. During this time period (1985-1988), she also made a series of 10 broadcast and non-broadcast videos on special-needs issues, including “Tragic but Brave” for the United Kingdom’s Channel 4.

With Jano Williams, Longinotto directed the audience pleaser “Dream Girls,” a BBC-produced documentary about the spectacular Japanese musical theatre company the Tararazuka Revue, and “Shinjuku Boys,” concerning three Tokyo women who live as men. Next, she made “Rock Wives” about the wives and girlfriends of rock stars for Channel 4, followed by “Divorce Iranian Style” with Ziba Mir-Hosseini, a film examining women and divorce in Iran, set in a family law court in Tehran. She then made two short films for Channel 4’s *Best Friends* series: “Steve & Dave,” about two friends who work as a drag act, and “Rob & Chris,” about two homeless young men, followed by “Gaea Girls,” which looked at a young girl’s struggle to become a professional wrestler.


Her latest film, “Rough Aunties,” which won the World Cinema Jury Prize in Documentary at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival and will be broadcast on HBO in 2010, is about a brave group of women protecting neglected and forgotten children in Durban, South Africa. Longinotto was recently honored with a two-week retrospective of her work spanning 30 years at The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. ([http://www.wmm.com/longinotto/](http://www.wmm.com/longinotto/))

**Credits:**

Director/ Producer/ Cinematographer: Kim Longinotto  
Executive Producer for the BBC: Richard Klein  
Executive Producer: Roger Graef  
Editor: Ollie Huddleston  
Running Time: 86:46

**Awards & Festivals:**

- International Documentary Film Festival, Amsterdam (IDFA), 2008, *Special Jury Prize*  
- Britdoc, 2008, *Best British Feature Documentary*  
- Britspotting, Berlin, 2008, *Best Documentary*  
- Birds Eye View, 2008, *Best Documentary*  
- London Film Festival, 2007  
- Hot Docs Canadian International Film Festival, 2008
• Seattle International Film Festival, 2008
• Los Angeles Film Festival, 2008
• Margaret Mead Film Festival, New York, 2008
• Film Retrospective, The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, 2009

For a complete list of festivals and screenings go to http://www.wmm.com/longinotto/films.htm

Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and beginning its 22nd season on PBS in 2009, the award-winning POV series is the longest-running showcase on American television to feature the work of today's best independent documentary filmmakers. Airing June through September, with primetime specials during the year, POV has brought more than 275 acclaimed films to millions nationwide and has a Webby Award-winning online series, POV's Borders. Since 1988, POV has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information is available at www.pbs.org/pov.

POV Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)
POV's award-winning Web department produces special features for every POV presentation, extending the life of our films through filmmaker interviews, story updates, podcasts, streaming video and community-based and educational content that involves viewers in activities and feedback. POV Interactive also produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, POV's Borders. In addition, the POV Blog is a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss and debate their favorite films, get the latest news and link to further resources. The POV website, blog and film archives form a unique and extensive online resource for documentary storytelling.

POV Community Engagement and Education
POV works with local PBS stations, educators and community organizations to present free screenings and discussion events to inspire and engage communities in vital conversations about our world. As a leading provider of quality nonfiction programming for use in public life, POV offers an extensive menu of resources, including free discussion guides and curriculum-based lesson plans. In addition, POV's Youth Views works with youth organizers and students to provide them with resources and training so they may use independent documentaries as a catalyst for social change.

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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 | POV

DVD REQUESTS: Please note that a broadcast version of this film is available upon request, as the film may be edited to comply with new FCC regulations.