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## **Newark's JFK High School Is No Secret to the Autistic Students Who Thrive in Its Dynamic Learning Environment, As Seen in POV's 'Best Kept Secret,' Monday, Sept. 23, 2013 on PBS**

Passionate Teacher Janet Mino Struggles to Find Her Graduating Students a Place in the Adult World, Before They "Age Out" of the System

"In and out of the classroom, Mino fights for her kids, first to teach them life skills, then to help ensure they don't spend that life neglected . . ."—*The Washington Post Express*

### ***MEDIA ALERT – FACT SHEET***

National Dates: Samantha Buck's **Best Kept Secret** has its national broadcast premiere on **Monday, Sept. 23, 2013** at 10 p.m. (check local listings) during the 26th season of the award-winning PBS documentary series **POV (Point of View)**. The film will stream on POV's website, [www.pbs.org/pov/](http://www.pbs.org/pov/), from **Sept. 24-Oct. 7, 2013**.

The Film: At a public school in Newark, N.J., the staff answers the phone by saying, "You've reached John F. Kennedy High School, Newark's best-kept secret." JFK provides an exceptional environment for students with special-education needs. In **Best Kept Secret**, Janet Mino, who has taught a class of young men for four years, is on an urgent mission. She races against the clock as graduation approaches for her severely autistic minority students. Once they graduate and leave the security of this nurturing place, their options for living independently will be few. Mino must help them find the means to support themselves before they "age out" of the system.

Sen. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.), who helped introduce Buck to John F. Kennedy High School, said, "I was proud to be part of this terrific documentary, which inspires me to continue fighting on behalf of children and adults living with autism."<sup>1</sup> In July 2013, Menendez introduced the Assistance in Gaining Experience, Independence and Navigation (AGE-IN) Act, that would provide federal funding to research and evaluate services currently available for young people "aging out" of existing education and support systems, develop a national strategic action plan and provide training grants to put the plan into action.<sup>2</sup>

**Best Kept Secret** is a production of BKS Film in association with Occasional Giant Beard.

Embed a trailer, download press materials and learn more at [www.pbs.org/pressroom](http://www.pbs.org/pressroom).

Online: POV's website for **Best Kept Secret** – [www.pbs.org/pov/bestkeptsecret/](http://www.pbs.org/pov/bestkeptsecret/) – offers a broad range of exclusive online content to enhance the PBS broadcast. Watch the full film online

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/senatormenendez/posts/255521794557872>

<sup>2</sup> Robert Menendez Newsroom, July 15, 2013. <http://1.usa.gov/1519pQ0>; "Menendez announces bill that would provide resources for adults with special needs," by S.P. Sullivan, NJ.com, <http://bit.ly/1dAnJux>

for free for a limited time following the broadcast (Sept. 24-Oct. 7, 2013), learn from the filmmaker in a video interview, download a discussion guide and other viewing resources, find out more about autism and the state of special education programs, and get an update on what's happened to the subjects of the film since the cameras stopped rolling.

**Outreach:** POV works with educators, public television stations and national and community groups across the country to foster dialogue around the issues presented in our films. For a list of upcoming screening events, go to [www.pbs.org/pov/outreach](http://www.pbs.org/pov/outreach). POV and nationally recognized media educator Dr. Faith Rogow develop discussion guides with background information to help event organizers facilitate conversations. The **Best Kept Secret** guide includes background information on the autism spectrum and "aging out," as well as prompts for dialogue and a list of services and programs for adults with autism. Rogow has also developed a lesson plan that involves older students in a project to create an activity or piece of media that helps younger students learn about autism. Event organizers may email POV at [events@pov.org](mailto:events@pov.org) to request a free loaned DVD to screen at their event.

**Filmmakers' Statements:**

"This wasn't meant to be a film about the causes or possible cures of autism," says director Samantha Buck. "This is a personal story about some young men who live with it and their very dedicated teacher in one remarkable school. It's about the struggles they face beyond the confines of that school."

"I saw so much quiet strength in the spirit of Janet Mino, her fellow teachers and the parents of these incredible young men," says producer Danielle DiGiacomo. "Samantha and I chose to tell a story about under-resourced people of color—arguably the most ignored population in the country—with dignity and without sensationalism. I believe we accomplished something more than a straightforward vérité film—a subtle and layered story that manages to touch upon the delicate issues of race, class and disability simply by telling the stories of these characters."

**Filmmaker Bios:** Samantha Buck (Director/Co-producer)

Samantha Buck's directorial debut, the feature documentary *21 Below*, aired on Channel 4 in the U.K. and YES in Israel, as well as at festivals worldwide, including Hot Docs, Sheffield Doc/Fest and AFI-Discovery Channel Silverdocs. As an actress, she was a regular on *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*, opposite Vincent D'Onofrio, and *Stella*, opposite David Wain. Her other acting credits include *Third Watch*, *Big Apple*, *Golden Boy*, *Blue Bloods*, *Six Degrees*, *Z Rock* and *Sex and the City*. Buck's film credits include *Searching for Paradise*, *Wirey Spindell*, *The 24 Hour Woman* and *Woman in Burka* (which won a Spirit of Slamdance Award in 2008). She can also be seen in the recent films *Gayby*, *What Maisie Knew* and *Hellbenders*.

Buck was born in Dallas, grew up in Washington, D.C. and now lives in Brooklyn. She is a graduate of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts and is currently a student at Columbia University School of the Arts' master of fine arts film program.

Danielle DiGiacomo (Producer)

Danielle DiGiacomo was born in Brooklyn, N.Y., and grew up in Cumberland, Md. and Princeton, N.J. She is the manager of video distribution at The Orchard, a 15-year-old independent music and video distribution company operating in more than 20 global markets. She is also an independent film producer and consultant. Previously, she worked as community manager at the Independent Filmmaker Project (IFP), the nation's oldest and largest membership organization for independent filmmakers, and as head of documentary acquisitions for IndiePix Films.

DiGiacomo developed and produced the first two annual Cinema Eye Honors for Nonfiction Films and associate produced two documentary features, Jennifer Venditti's *Billy the Kid* and Samantha Buck's *21 Below*. In 2010, she produced three short films, two of which premiered at Cannes' Short Film Corner, and was associate producer for Andrew Semans' *Nancy, Please*, which premiered at the 2012 Tribeca Film Festival. DiGiacomo consults as a panel programmer for several international film festivals, and was one of six producers selected to attend the 2011 Sundance Institute's Creative Producing Lab, where she was the Mark Silverman honoree. She has a bachelor's degree in film studies from Wesleyan University and a master's degree in media studies from the New School.

Related Stories: "Governors push to help disabled find jobs," *San Francisco Chronicle*, Aug. 9, 2013. <http://bit.ly/13up8hU>

"Menendez touts legislation to aid adults on autism spectrum," by Bryan Wassel, *Town News*, July 22, 2013. <http://bit.ly/13u0s9h>

"Minority children with autism lack access to specialists," by Dr. Arshya Vahabzadeh, *The Chart*, CNN Health, June 17, 2013. <http://bit.ly/ZXsxai>

"No longer a secret: Janet Mino's work with autistic children," by Gwen Orel, *The Montclair Times*, May 4, 2013. <http://bit.ly/18bgdEQ>

"Children With Autism 'Fall Off the Cliff' After Graduation," by Susan Donaldson James, ABC News, April 30, 2013. <http://abcn.ws/141Ary8>

"Autism: Coming of Age," by Nancy Redd, HuffPost Live, March 19, 2013. <http://huff.lv/13u07mQ>

"When Autistic Children Are Children No More," by Cassie Walker Burke, *Chicago Magazine*, March 2013. <http://chi.mg/14mSEWa>

"Bill Could Help Find New Homes for Autistic Adults in New Jersey," by Andrew Kitchenman, *NJ Spotlight*, Feb. 5, 2013. <http://bit.ly/167Fbru>

"Jobs and College Pose Big Challenges For Young People With Autism," by Scott Hensley, *Shots: Health News from NPR*, May 14, 2012. <http://n.pr/1cFW6nW>

"Experts brace for wave of autistic adults," by Erin Allday, *San Francisco Chronicle*, Oct. 4, 2012. <http://bit.ly/1cruJP6>

Credits:	Director:	Samantha Buck
	Producer:	Danielle DiGiacomo
	Executive Producers:	Paul Bernon, Sean Curran, Daniella Kahane, Scott Mosier
	Co-Producers:	Samantha Buck, Zeke Farrow
	Cinematographer:	Nara Garber
	Editor:	Francisco Bello
	Associate Editor:	Matt Posorske
	Original Music:	Brian Satz
	Running Time:	86:46

**POV Series Credits:**

Executive Producer: Simon Kilmurry  
Co-Executive Producer: Cynthia López  
VP, Programming & Production: Chris White  
Coordinating Producer: Andrew Catauro

Festivals: Winner, Audience Award, Best Documentary, Independent Film Festival Boston, 2013  
Best of the Fest, AFI Docs Film Festival Presented by Audi, 2013  
Official Selection, Montclair Film Festival, 2013  
Special Screening, Rooftop Films, 2013  
Sundance Documentary Fund Grantee, 2012

Visit <http://bestkeptsecretfilm.com/> for a complete list of screenings and events.

Pressroom: Visit POV's pressroom, [www.pbs.org/pov/pressroom](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pressroom), for press releases, downloadable art, filmmaker biographies, transcripts and special features.

POV: Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and now in its 26th season on PBS, the award-winning POV is the longest-running showcase on American television to feature the work of today's best independent documentary filmmakers. POV has brought more than 365 acclaimed documentaries to millions nationwide. POV films have won every major film and broadcasting award, including 32 Emmys, 15 George Foster Peabody Awards, 10 Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards, three Academy Awards® and the Prix Italia. In 2012, POV achieved a new milestone, winning five News & Documentary Emmy® Awards. 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. Visit [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov).

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