



and the Democratic Republic of Congo for Human Rights Watch and publications including The New York Times Sunday Magazine. She wanted to write. Connors has photographed 10 conflicts for various publications including Time, Newsweek, The New York Times, The Guardian and The Observer. He wanted to make a documentary.

During the summer of 2003, they decided to focus their reporting on Baghdad's Adhamiya neighborhood, where Bingham, while on a freelance assignment that May, had met a man who told her he was in a resistance movement.

"That meeting [indicated to] us that we might have a place where we could start — if we could find that guy again," Bingham says.

The two came to the United States to organize themselves for their new projects and planned to return to Baghdad in August 2003. The photographers were hearing U.S. government officials and media refer to these resisters as hooligans, dead-enders and former members of Saddam's Baath party. Maybe that was accurate, they say, but they were skeptical and wanted to travel to Iraq and find out for themselves.

Bingham says they had no preconceptions about the identities of these people, but they did have questions: "So what is the other side? Who are these people? What do they believe in? What's going on? What do they think they are going to accomplish?"

"We felt," she adds, "that that was just a very fundamental, really basic, sort of journalistic curiosity that had to be addressed, and we didn't see anybody doing it."

**In an effort to locate the resisters**, the journalists discussed living in Adhamiya, a tempting but unrealistic option.

"As great as it would be to get closer to this community and really understand and get inside it more, it was too dangerous," Bingham says.

Connors believes the couple's constant presence in the neighborhood would have attracted the attention of the American military and possibly jeopardized their lives — they could have been perceived and treated as traitors by their sources.



**Sha'ad Mehdi:** PHOTO BY MOLLY BINGHAM/WORLDPICTURENEWS BAGHDAD, Oct. 27, 2003 — In this photo by Bingham, which Actors Theatre will display, Sha'ad Mehdi, 47, holds shrapnel from an explosion at a police station that shattered every window in his house more than a bloc

So they lived at the Hamra hotel in Baghdad's Jadriya neighborhood and visited Adhamiya daily, hanging out in teashops, drinking tea, smoking cigarettes, playing backgammon and trying to cultivate relationships with locals. In time, Bingham says, she became reacquainted with the man whom she'd met earlier that year and who had claimed to be in the resistance. Later, they say, they met and interviewed other people involved in attacks or logistics for the resistance.

Based on conversations with resisters and the other people they met there, Bingham says, they found an Iraqi resistance that had passive public support mixed with active public support — that is, people involved in attacks and moving weapons.

Rank and file resisters did not fit any particular profile, but most had one common characteristic: They found it absurd that the mainstream media described them as members of Al Qaeda or the former Baath party. Instead, Bingham and Connors say, they learned that these people, who became known as insurgents, were motivated by a mix of nationalism and interpretations of Islam

that, in the Iraqis' current situation, mandated jihad.

Ultimately, the pair interviewed 12 people, 10 of whom are in the film. Of those, interviews with three — whom the filmmakers name only as "the teacher," "the warrior" and "the traveler" — provided the narratives that Bingham says bridge the entire film. (Bingham wrote a story called "Ordinary Warriors" for Vanity Fair, published in 2004, in which "the teacher" is a major source.) During the 10-month process of shooting the film, the two say they watched these people hone their combat skills and logistics by improving coordination and how they supplied themselves. Connors says the sources spoke with the couple because they wanted their story and history to be told.

As new directors, Bingham and Connors faced a steep learning curve and several difficulties, which included working with translators in Iraq and translators who transcribed the recorded interviews — Bingham notes that "you're not sure you're getting an exact translations until you go home and do transcripts" — and using an out-of-focus camera technique to conceal their sources' identities. There were other difficulties dictated by their sources' uneasiness, which they dealt with by filming in public places and allowing interviewees to view the tape at the end of interviews.

"There wasn't that much trust," Connors says.

**When the pair digested what they'd captured on film**, their conclusions about the insurgency in Iraq differed significantly from those of other journalists. However, their story didn't raise much enthusiasm when they pitched it to network TV in 2004 and 2005.

"We were banging our heads against a wall that we couldn't really see," Connors says.

Based on their experiences and how they differed from what they were seeing in media reports, they began to question the actions and intentions of the press more than they ever had. Bingham gave a speech in April 2005 at Western Kentucky University in which she said her experience taught her that "many journalists in Iraq could not, or would not, check their nationality or their own perspective at the door"; that "(seeking) to understand and present to an American audience the reason behind the Iraqi opposition is practically treasonous"; and that gatekeepers, including editors, publishers and media company business sides, don't want "their outlet to reveal that compelling narrative of why

she managed to really listen to and bring to life in her own interviews and writing of the play and the performance of it," Bingham says. —Elizabeth Kramer



**Molly Bingham:** Photo by Marco Di Lauro

anyone would oppose the presence of American troops on their soil."

**Soon after, The Courier-Journal ran the text of the speech in its op-ed section, then received an assortment of letters both denouncing and extolling her views.**



Steve Connors

By the end of 2005, the couple decided to look for a distributor so the film could be shown as an independent documentary, and they organized themselves to enter it in festivals. By that time, the news was full of reports of protests to the war by people like Cindy Sheehan and criticisms by officials like Congressman John Murtha, a Pennsylvania Democrat and decorated Vietnam veteran. The filmmakers felt this shift in the public's perception of the war was changing their prospects of getting support to finish and distribute their film.

Last summer and early fall, they edited further and held eight small, private screenings for audiences with varied backgrounds, including the general public, Iraq war veterans, retired and active intelligence experts and professionals working at the Pentagon. It was shown in Washington, D.C., New York and London and at the University of Kentucky School of Journalism. They got positive feedback and audience members felt prompted to ask questions. Several people, Connors says, remarked, "I have different questions now, different questions from the ones I had before."

Constructive criticism said the directors needed to include more context — information about Iraq's history, Islam and some of the main actors in the conflict, such as Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

Throughout this process, they've kept the documentary focused on their main objective, which Bingham describes as informing the dialogue about who the United States is fighting in Iraq so it can determine how to most effectively create peace in Iraq. She also is quick to say the film does not aim to promote a specific point of view like "Fahrenheit 9/11."

"We've actually gone way out of our way not to make this a polemic film," she says. "This film does not discuss the political decisions that were made in Washington except as the characters themselves discuss them or raise them."

Meanwhile, the couple hopes to have a world premiere of "Meeting Resistance" at a film festival sometime this year. (They have applied to several festivals scheduled this February through May.) If the film doesn't make a festival cut, they will continue efforts to find a distributor.

"It will be released, one way or another, this year," Connors pledges. "That is for sure."

Bingham interjects. "We're looking for somebody who's willing to step forward and put out this narrative that is not one that Americans have seen," she says, adding that she really wants to have a big event for a Louisville showing. "That could be as early as this spring."

**Throughout the project, Bingham and Connors have maintained a romantic relationship that began in May 2003; soon after the two knew they also wanted to work together. This, of course, has posed its own challenges.**

Bingham explains that, "Steve and I have very different —"

"Styles," Connors interjects.

The rewards, they say, have included completing a project that allows both to use specific skills, knowledge and prior experiences. But would they take on a similar project again? They laugh for a long time at this question.

Finally, Bingham responds. "The great part is that we do really get each other's profound journalistic motivations and visions, which we share on a very deep level," she says. "This is this tremendously important time in American history. Let's put Iraqi history aside. But the impact that this is having on America as a country and both our own role in the world and our experience of ourselves as Americans; this is having a profound impact on that. And I think it's something that everyone should sort of sit up and pay some attention to, and we hope that our film can help that happen."

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Connors: Steering a keyboard through thinking on Iraq

While Molly Bingham and Steve Connors have not been back to Iraq since finishing their 10-month stint of filming for "Meeting Resistance" (they left Iraq on May 28, 2004), they still talk to people who live there and who have traveled there to keep up to date on the fluid events in the country. Journalists whose work they admire coming out of Iraq include Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, who writes for The Guardian and The Washington Post, and Anthony Shadid, The Washington Post's foreign correspondent who won the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting for his coverage of the Iraq war. Additionally, Connors scrutinizes several blogs nearly every day. Following is a rundown of sites he regularly visits and his descriptions of them. — *Elizabeth Kramer*

[www.newsnow.co.uk/newsfeed/?name=iraq](http://www.newsnow.co.uk/newsfeed/?name=iraq)

This is where I start to get updates on Iraq each day. The site says it "monitors breaking news in 22 languages from the Internet's most important online publications, including international, national and regional titles, newswires, magazines, press releases and exclusively online news sources spanning 139 countries."

[www.juancole.com](http://www.juancole.com)

My next port of call is Juan Cole's blog. Cole, a professor of history at the University of Michigan, is an invaluable resource for Middle East watchers. I've found the blog to be particularly interesting with observations in the comments sections that are of high quality. This attracts many people who want to understand events in Iraq and those willing to share the knowledge they've managed to glean from elsewhere. Cole's blog and the comments often include translations of the Arab press in Iraq and throughout the Middle

East.

**[www.antiwar.com](http://www.antiwar.com)**

This, I believe, is a conservative Web site and proof — if needed — that American Republicans do not march in lockstep on the issue of the Iraq war.

**[warincontext.org](http://warincontext.org)**

The War in Context is invaluable as a guide to what's being published, although it often repeats postings I've already come across. Nonetheless, there is often something others have missed, and the occasional comments on the articles to which it links can often reveal further avenues worthy of exploration.

**[profcutler.com/wordpress\\_blog](http://profcutler.com/wordpress_blog)**

Jonathan Cutler, an associate professor of sociology and American studies at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Ct., has plenty to chew on for anyone still scratching their heads about why the United States is involved in a war in Iraq. This is rational analysis of hitherto unexplored territory tying together the Middle East and Washington power games. Fascinating.

**[noquarter.typepad.com/](http://noquarter.typepad.com/)**

Larry Johnson is a former CIA operative who maintains contacts inside the shop. One of his aims is to ensure that the political use of intelligence in 2002-03 isn't repeated in 2007.

**[www.pkblogs.com/raedinthemiddle](http://www.pkblogs.com/raedinthemiddle)**

Raed In The Middle is an Iraqi blogger with a passion for his country, a good head on his shoulders and an excellent Rolodex. Check out the links to other blogs from this site, especially Riverbend, an Iraqi woman who doesn't post often. But when she does, she strikes at the very heart of the human condition. Be prepared to weep.

*The filmmakers have their own Web site,  
[www.meetingresistance.com](http://www.meetingresistance.com).*

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