

Navigation

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AAA S-138: Race and Global Migration

Summer of 2025

How?

Before we can answer why, we have to ask how. It was this prerequisite that shattered Sally's heart, as the question of why this happened to her innocent son echoed endlessly in her mind. But it was in confronting how that she found a way to keep his spirit alive—and, in doing so, reclaimed her own life.

How to navigate the website

Axis of Good does not follow a straight path, and neither did Sally Goodrich.

To walk this journey fully, please follow these directions carefully:

1. *Scroll slowly.* The thing I pride myself most on with this website is that nothing is filler. Even something as small as the byline reads “Fostered by Talia H. Rehill” instead of “Created,” because Foster is the name of Peter's younger brother. I'll explore more of these stylistic and structural decisions in the next section, but I say this now to underscore one truth: this story only reveals itself if you're paying attention.

2. *Watch for hidden videos.* Some videos appear as still images at first glance, but when you hover your cursor over them, you'll notice a click function that allows them to play. This applies particularly to the video of the 2002 State of the Union Address—thumbnailed by a picturesque Laura Bush alongside Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

3. *Start with Peter.* Some of the first steps you will take on this journey will lead you through the life and tragic death of Peter Goodrich. I encourage you to begin with Peter, but not to stop there because his story is not the end. Choosing to keep scrolling, is in itself an act of remembrance. That's how Peter lives on.

4. *The First Turn: "What Happened Then?"* Eventually, you'll arrive at a section titled "Mapping a Mother's Migration". There, you'll see a button:

"What Happened Then?" Click it. This will take you to an external StoryMap, where you can walk in Sally Goodrich's footsteps—from Bennington, Vermont to the most dangerous corners of Afghanistan. You can follow in her footsteps from the first message she received to the final ribbon cut on the school her grief built.

5. *Return and Scroll Again.* After completing the StoryMap, come back to the main website and continue scrolling. You'll reach the section asking: "What Happened Next?" While this question does not come as a button, it serves an important role in marking the end of her physical presence and the start of her legacy. This part is meant to make you pause and grieve, as I did.

6. *The Final Turn: “What Happens Now?”* Toward the bottom of the page, you’ll face the final button: “What Happens Now?” This is the website’s sharpest turn. Clicking it will take you to a page designed to resemble a Google 404 error screen. But look closer. The words “That’s all we know.” will light up as if they’re a link. Click them, and you’ll be taken to an external documentary, titled *All We Know*, created specifically for this project. It is hosted publicly through the webpage and serves as the final piece of the puzzle.

How to build the website

This project began with research rooted in the rural cornerstone I call home—where Massachusetts meets Vermont—and stretched as far as the dangerous depths of Logar, drawn from accounts of the dead. As I combed through local archives and international databases, I discovered that some of the most important materials I needed were no longer available. The same three digits would stop me in the tracks of my frenzied research: 404. At first, I chalked it up to the nature of small-town storytelling. Coming from Berkshire County, where a population of 3,000 means even our biggest projects get a one-night screening at the town hall auditorium, it’s not uncommon for films and articles to vanish into unarchived memory. That’s why I turned to local connections—most notably Rick Derby, a graduate from the high school rival to mine, who went on to produce *Axis of Good: A Story from 9/11*. These very archived resources that had been delivered on a platter by Derby became the early blueprint of my project. I knew I wanted to tell the story of Sally Goodrich not as a white savior story, but as a migration mapping of the woman who saw through migration myths even amidst the highest degree of hysteria.

After careful consideration, I decided the medium would be a website. It would be interactive—allowing users to map Sally’s physical and emotional journey from Bennington, Vermont to Logar Province, Afghanistan. Then, I would pivot into poetry written from the imagined perspectives of the adolescent Afghan students Sally helped bring into the U.S. education system. As a child, I had shared family dinners with some of them, unaware of the depth beneath their presence. I wanted the theory behind the site to be academically grounded, so I turned to the voices of Tanya Golash-Boza, Valeria Luiselli, and Mae Ngai—while critically counterbalancing their humanist frameworks with Dave Grossman’s deeply politicized metaphor of sheep, wolves, and sheepdogs. I hated every one of his words, but I swallowed them anyway because they revealed something I could never untaste after digesting them.

What followed were days of compiling photos, private accounts, and personal testimony—from family and friends of the Goodriches, from the private documentary, and from pulled web pages. I had built a foundation of sacred stories. As I did so, my curiosity intensified, begging the question of why aren’t more people talking about this? And then, in the early hours of Wednesday, July 23rd, my curiosity collided with a wall.

I was firmly advised that if I were to share what I had planned, I could endanger lives. Afghan families who had once worked with the Goodriches could be targeted with the Taliban’s return to power. Honor killings were no longer a distant horror—they were a daily risk sitting in Pallazina Briati beside us.

Immediately, I turned to three people who understood the limits of this censorship better than anyone—one of them was Don Goodrich, Sally’s widower and a family friend so close we

call him Poppy. Then came the hardest part: I deleted everything. With so much at stake, all of my research was suddenly tainted. And yet I couldn't walk away. If I couldn't tell the story outright, I would show what happens when stories are erased. How could I not? That was the Luiselli way.

That's when I reimagined the project not as a single narrative, but as a censorship-shaped experience. I kept the map but altered it entirely to only trace the public record of Sally's journey. I dug down to discover children's art—drawings made by Afghan elementary students that had once won awards, but now sat redacted in old archives. These became my primary resources. I paired them with blackout poetry, not to fictionalize, but to fill-in what is left behind when truth is forcibly removed.

With something so large at stake, I had to evaluate the project from the bone of its skeleton to the nitty gritty blemishes on its surface. It felt like performing an autopsy on my original idea. Every image I found was marked by time. I manually restored them through editing, then blurred all forms of face and affiliation. These people could have been targeted for simply appearing in the frame. I redesigned the website to include only ethically sound visuals and content. Then I embedded links to the StoryMap, which follows Sally from the first email she received to the school she helped build, and to a hidden documentary titled *All We Know*, which can only be found by reaching the site's 404-style page.

Next, I studied redaction patterns of what wording the Taliban actively suppresses and used that research to build a visual vocabulary of silence. I created interactive poetry where readers must watch the fragmented words of schoolchildren be buried. To do this, I overlaid

redactions in the documentary to mimic what has been removed from public memory. Knowing the Afghan people were safe through my simulated censorship, I now was free to embed meaning into every design choice: the dragonfly, Sally’s symbol for her son Peter, became the site’s homepage button, and the 404 page became its destination. At last came the long hours of testing, for both a technically and ethically sound home for this digitalized Afghan story.

In the end, I wrote this story in the only way it could be told: not by retelling what I lost, but by curating what I was allowed to keep in a non-linear fashion. It’s a story shaped by the haunting possibility that the most important voices are the ones we can’t hear.

This is the map of what remains.

Why?

Sally Goodrich watched the second plane strike the World Trade Center on the morning of September 11th, not knowing she had just witnessed the vaporization of her son until that afternoon. A shattering epiphany, the first question that gripped her was: “Why? Why did they hate us so much? And why did my good kid have to die such a horrible death. And just, ‘*Why?*’”



It wasn’t until after Sally’s death in 2010 that I would meet her adopted daughter—her only daughter, for that matter. She came in the form of a five-foot-eleven firecracker who enlivened the classroom with her gapped smile.

She was my second-grade teacher, but she would grow into so much more after a mere day-off—that day being September 11, 2013. My single mother who busted her ass working multiple jobs had dabbled in substitute teaching and was assigned to Mrs. Trimarchi's second grade class in her absence. While going over lesson plans with Kim, my mother learned of the loss of Peter and the light of Sally. Having lived in New York City for a majority of her life, this resonated with her fearful footrace just blocks away from the attack. This was rare in my pocket of Massachusetts. From there, a friendship like no other had budded, and Kim became a staple in my house. As I have gotten older, Kim is nothing short of family to me—making Peter and Sally a part of my chosen bloodline. And how lucky am I to carry the question they never stopped asking: *Why?*

But the closer I have gotten to Kim, the closer I have gotten to the guttural loss she experienced on September 11th and in the aftermath, with the ongoing erasure of everything her mother stood for in the years that followed. My *why* for this project began as a search for loopholes, but it became a journey through the loops themselves—each turn revealing how stories vanish, and how dangerous it is when they do. There's no better way to learn about the most important stories being silenced than having yours silenced in the process. While I wouldn't force my website on any Goodrich eyes that weren't yet ready, I now carry a new kind of toolbelt that I hope to use for them. Whether that means restoring carefully blurred images to the Peter M. Goodrich Foundation site, or reviving stories through redaction rather than in spite of it, I will continue the work—because silence, too, can speak. And sometimes, it's all we have left to keep Peter and Sally alive.

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