

Most Commonly Asked Questions About the Film

1. Why were you inspired to go?

- “In late October 2015 Sue showed me an article from the Guardian that would change the direction of my life. The story featured a female runner named Zainab. She had become the first Afghan women to run a marathon, in the first ever Marathon of Afghanistan. In the article, Zainab talked about her training. “The children were stoning us, the people said bad words like ‘prostitutes, why don’t you stay at home? You are destroying Islam.’” It got me thinking. We’re so lucky to live where we do. Every weekend, we can sign up for a race and the only thing holding us back is our desire to participate. In some countries this is not the case, particularly for women”. Martin
- “I had heard about the same kind of discrimination in Benin, West Africa, when Heather Moyse and Caroline Ouellette (RTP Athlete Ambassadors) talked to the women’s national soccer team. The team members said they were treated like outcasts and freaks. After reading the article, I made a vow. If I could recover in time, I would run the 2016 Marathon of Afghanistan and support Zainab’s efforts to show that sport is for everyone. When I told Sue, she said I could go as long as I took my family doctor with me. I immediately asked Bill Hanlon, and he said yes. Game on. In the following days, I contacted James Bingham, the race director, and James Wilcox from Untamed Borders, the trip organizer. The wheels were in motion.” Martin
- “We have the amazing privilege to document a historic moment. Imagine if no one captured Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I have a dream” speech. We have the privilege of sharing the story of women who are taking their own first steps towards equality” Kate
- “It has been my life’s work to share stories from places where we usually only hear the negative. These stories have the power to show that there is hope and that it is realistic that there could one day be peace.” Kate
- “When Martin told me he was planning to go to Afghanistan and invited me to join I knew it was an amazing opportunity to share a story that matters.”Kate
- “From the moment Kate brought this project to me, I knew it would be a compelling story. I may not have realized how big it would get... but I knew it would be compelling. While I wasn’t able to join the team in Afghanistan, working with Kate and Martin as a producer and director has been truly inspiring, and the stories we’ve captured are even bigger than I could have imagined. This is the sort of story that inspires change. It’s a personal struggle, it’s a difficult situation, it’s overcoming obstacles and standing up for what’s right. It’s a story told by a cast of characters that you can’t help but care about, going on a journey with twists and turns that no one could have predicted... and it’s a documentary. This is why I got into filmmaking.” - Scott Townend

2. What motivates you to run?

- “For me running is my meditation. It allows me to clear my head and think. I’ve also used it to help others especially children.” Martin
- “When I was a little girl I loved to run fast and feel the wind in my hair. As I grew up running became a way for me to deal with my mental health issues. For me, movement is medicine.” Kate

3. Is this a story just for runners?

“This is a story about all of us. If someone anywhere in the world is fighting for equality then we are all fighting for equality. Canada has a deep connection to Afghanistan so we have a duty as Canadians to ally with those who are courageously working towards equality. This is a story for all of humanity to remind us just as we are reminded when we go to a race that we are all equal on the start line, regardless of age, gender, religion we all have to run the same distance.” Kate

4. Why is it a secret?

“We had to keep the date and details of the marathon a secret so that the event would not become a target for terrorists. We didn’t even know the route we would be running until the week before. If the details of the marathon became public it could put those participating at risk.” Kate

5. Was it dangerous?

- “Before I left it was extremely stressful. I had never made a trip like this to a country that has been ravaged by war and terrorism. Was it even possible? However I felt compelled to support the girls and women of Afghanistan in achieving their dream.” Martin
- “When we think of Afghanistan many of us only think of a war torn country but this story of an amazing community that has come together to host a marathon helps to paint a different picture of a country that is not just defined by war but also by amazing acts of courage.” Kate
- “Six weeks before we were scheduled to leave for Afghanistan, the American University in Kabul was bombed and the country was instantly placed on a Do Not Travel advisory. The challenge is telling this story was that Afghanistan is unpredictable you can feel totally safe one moment and not the next. The hardest part of this film was knowing that we faced the risk that we might not come back. The women who are fighting for equality here put their own lives and their families at risk to tell you their story.” Kate
- “I don’t really know how to describe what it was like being in Canada while the team was in Afghanistan. As producers, Kate and I had planned for every contingency we could think of before the team left. I’ve never had to plan for kidnapping... or some even worse scenarios on a film before, but that was just the reality of this documentary. When they started their journey, I had been on the road for 2 weeks capturing everything leading up to the trip in Toronto and Cochrane, so when I got home, it was an eerie feeling. Imagine having to plan how you’ll have to react to all the worst case scenarios involving people you care about, and then going home and just having coffee... hoping the weeks planning and sleepless nights were for nothing.” - Scott Townend

6. Did you finish? How did it go?

- “This was my slowest ever official marathon but it was one of my best” - Martin.
- “Many people have asked did I finish the marathon, you’ll have to watch the film to find out.” - Kate

7. What did you take away from the experience?

- “The more things seem different, the more they are the same. Running with Kubra and hearing the men, women and children cheering us on made me realise that these people are at the leading edge of change in Afghanistan. This message must be shared with the world.” Martin
- “Being part of The Secret Marathon has taught me that those who are able to finish their own marathon are not necessarily more courageous or stronger than the next person but rather they just keep taking one more step and if you keep taking one more step eventually someone will join you and the journey will become easier.” Kate
- “When I was kid my mother used to read stories to me before bed, and although they didn’t make the dark of the night go away those stories seemed to bring a light and lessen the fear of the dark. We need stories of courage, of people slaying their personal dragons so that we know it is possible for us too. I hope that this film will bring light and hope to the dark corners.” Kate

8. What was it like to wear hijab?

“In order to participate in the Secret Marathon women are asked to wear hijab which is conservative clothing and a head covering. I trained wearing hijab in Canada so I could get used to wearing full covering which was about 5 degrees hotter than my usual running attire. The Calgary Muslim Marathon Club generously helped me learn how to wear hijab. They welcomed me into their home, treated me to a spread of delicious food and graciously shared their tips and helped me to understand how I could be most culturally respectful.” Kate

9. How many people participated in the race?

Overall:

- We had runners from Afghanistan, Iran, UK, Ireland, Germany, USA, Canada, Finland, Netherlands and Australia.
- In Afghanistan, we had runners from Bamian, Kabul, Mazar e Sharif, Kandahar and Ghazni.
- Oldest runner was Martin (60)

Marathon

- 100 Runners Total
- 18 International Runners
- 13 Female Runners
- 7 International Women
- 11 International Men
- 6 Afghan Women

10Km

- 200 Runners Total
- 60% Female Runners (awaiting confirmation from Bingham)

10. What's next?

- My new book, THE SECRET MARATHON was released on October 30th and on December 31st 2018 a fund raiser was held for Free to Run in support of empowering women and girls in Iraq through sport. Next up is the Edmonton Marathon in August when I will try and qualify for Boston in 2020.” - Martin
- “My dream is to premiere “The Secret Marathon” at a major film festival and then to take it into schools. As a former teacher, it is important to me that we use this film as a way to encourage the next generation to think about how they can create a more equitable world and pursue their own goals the way the people in our film did.” - Kate
- “After 3 years of trials and tribulations, we have finally completed the film. We are hoping to have the world premiere in the fall of 2019 in a major film festival, and are seeking distribution opportunities as we go. It’s been an incredible journey, and we hit a lot of road blocks. After we learned that some of the women in the film were receiving threats for running in the marathon, we had to completely re-edit the film. We then added an animation so that we wouldn’t lose these stories, but could keep everyone safe. This process added a full year to the production, but after everything we’ve been through, I

really couldn't be more proud of the film we've ended up with and I'm excited to see where we are able to go with it." - Scott

11. What was the race like? What makes it unique? Was it hot?

- "In total I have run 337 marathons since 2003. This was the toughest of all the road marathons I've done. It was my first marathon at 2,500 m, that is an oxygen level of 25% lower than sea level. The route was brutal, climbing for 21.1 kms then thrashing your quads on the downhill return trip. For me the saving grace was the temperature, 5C the same as I left Cochrane, Alberta." - Martin
- This marathon is unique because it is only the second time that a marathon has ever been hosted in Afghanistan. It is also unique because it is a mixed gender sporting event.
- "We will be running at an elevation of 2,500m, in a desert, with armed guards protecting us and as a woman I had to run in hijab - covered head to toe. This marathon is incredibly difficult - there's nothing like it on earth." - Kate
- "The marathon started at 2,500m and went for the first 21.5km increasing in elevation by 400m over the course of the run. At 2,900 that's like 15 Calgary towers stacked or 6 CN towers- air is a little thin up there!" - Kate

12. When did you go and for how long were you there?

The marathon occurred in the fall of 2016. We left Canada on Wednesday Oct. 26 and arrived in Kabul, Afghanistan on Oct. 28, 2016. We then flew to Bamian city in the Bamian province of Afghanistan on Saturday Oct.29, 2016 and remained there until Saturday Nov.5 when we flew back to Kabul. We left Kabul on Sunday Nov. 6 and returned to Canada Monday Nov. 7, 2016. Altogether it was a 12 day trip with 10 days spent in Afghanistan. (Oct.26-Nov.7, 2016)

13. When will it be released and where can we watch it?

We are hoping to premiere at a major film festival in the fall of 2019. We are also seeking distribution opportunities, and hope the film will be viewable on streaming services in 2020.

14. Was it hard to shoot in Afghanistan?

"Filming internationally is always challenging because you can only carry so much gear with you so you have to hope that what you have brought will meet the needs you encounter. The added challenge of filming in Afghanistan was that there were times when only the female members of our crew were able to go into a location since it was not seen as appropriate for men to be present. Because many of the women participating could be threatened by terrorists we had to consider how we would film only part of their face or hide their face behind sunglasses when we were taking a close up shot. Even simple things such as adjusting mics and sound cords can be more challenging because lifting up clothing is not considered appropriate in Afghanistan. My crew did an amazing job of rising to all the challenges." Kate

15. What were the biggest challenges leading up to the filming?

- "Trying to explain to my wife Sue why this risk was worth taking. In many ways this was an extremely selfish undertaking. If I had been killed or kidnapped the impact on Sue, my children and grandchildren would have been catastrophic. It was a leap of faith." - Martin

- “The biggest challenge for me leading up to the filming was talking with my partner and my family knowing that this could be the last story I ever did. I constantly wondered if I had planned enough, done enough to keep me and my crew safe. Planning for the unknown is hard.” - Kate
- “The struggles we had leading up to the documentary were time, money and safety. We couldn’t tell anyone or post anything publicly about the marathon, or that we were making a documentary. That doesn’t exactly help with funding. Additionally, Kate really only decided that she was going to run this thing a few months before it was actually happening... so we had very little time to prepare. On top of that, they were going to Afghanistan... which turns out to be the only country on earth where you can’t get insurance for your camera equipment. If that doesn’t have you questioning whether or not you should shoot a documentary in Afghanistan, nothing will.” - Scott

15. How many people were involved?

- “Every once in awhile a story comes along and you know it is just big enough to believe in but also just big enough that there is no way you can do it on your own. We have had so many people who have helped us get a little closer to the finish line. Viiz believed in us from the start and showed us that they were a telecommunications company that was willing to go the distance. Others have helped us with the logistics too like Garmin, Down Under Travel, Tool Shed Brewery, our amazing film crew of Scott, Colin, Liam. And of course our partners and family members who have given us the freedom to pursue this dream and turn it into a reality.” Kate
- “On the film side, we couldn’t have been a more bare bones crew at the start. It was Kate and Martin, and then they brought me in to round out the filmmaking experience. Our first shot of the documentary was Martin explaining to Kate just how hard she was going to have to work if she was going to run a marathon in a few months, and it was just me operating two cameras at once and keeping track of our audio. Humble beginnings I suppose. In Canada, most often it was just me doing the filming. In Afghanistan, it was four of them. For post production, we hired an animator, a colourist, a composer and a sound mixer, and I then did the majority of the post production myself. It has been a small team the whole way through, but a dedicated one, and I am very proud of the film we created together.” - Scott Townend

17. How can I get involved?

We need people to donate to this film to help take it across the finish line. We cannot share this story without you so please donate at www.theseecretmarathon.com