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Jacob Burns Center Turns Armonk Mom into Film Producer

A few years ago, Tamara Rabil was a stay-at-home mom with three young children. “I was going to coffee shops just praying to have some adult conversation,” she recalls.



Tamara Rabil

Now Rabil has just finished her first short film *Unburden*, the first professional film produced by a student of the Media Arts Lab, part of the Jacob Burns Film Center in Pleasantville, NY.

“I took 17 classes there,” Rabil says. “It was wonderful to be surrounded by intellectual, caring, creative people.”

A successful entrepreneur in the fashion world, Rabil realized after her third child was born that life would have to change. The fashion world just wasn’t flexible enough to accommodate the needs of a growing family. So she devoted herself full time to parenting. Three years later, she was ready for creative stimulation. A brochure from the Media Arts Lab arrived in the mail and Rabil promptly signed up for her first class.

Rabil found her voice as a storyteller in “Getting the Story: Introduction to Documentary Storytelling,” a class taught by Academy-Award-nominated Bobby Houston. Rabil says, “On the first night of class, Bobby asked us to bullet-point three things we were most afraid of in life. I wrote – I’m most afraid of being an unfit mother.” Her admission led to deep soul searching, and recounting an accident that happened with her six-week-old daughter. That accident and its aftermath became the basis for a story, which in turn became the basis for the *Unburden* screenplay co-written by Billy Shebar, writer of award-winning films including *Dark Matter* and *50 Ways to a Better Memory*.



Angela Pierce and Quinn McColgan in a scene from *Unburden*

Rabil hoped that by sharing her story, she could alleviate the suffering of other parents in similar situations. “I realized as I journeyed through the process of telling my story,” she says, “that many families suffer from similar experiences. Parenting is imperfect. These tragic experiences unite us. It gives us strength and confidence to know we are not alone.”

The Burns Media Arts Lab served as an incubator for *Unburden*. Several faculty members at the Burns Center became key crew, most notably Andrew L Young, Susan Todd, and Todd Sandler. Andrew L. Young served as director. An acclaimed cinematographer, his work has won numerous awards, including five awards at the Sundance Film Festival. Young's partner Susan Todd produced the film. She has directed the International Understanding Through Film Program, a fellowship program for visiting filmmakers at the Jacob Burns Center. *Unburden* was edited by Todd Sandler. He edited the dramatic-thriller, *Leave*, starring Rick Gomez, Frank John Hughes, Ron Livingston and Bryan Cranston; and worked alongside Jonathan Demme on his latest documentary, *I'm Carolyn Parker*, which premiered at the 2011 Venice Film Festival and the Toronto International Film Festival.

With her children now five, six and eight years old, Rabil is ready to grow in another direction. From 8 am to 3 pm, she focuses on her new production company Wild Angel Films. From 3 to 9 pm, she's a mom again.

Rabil has just launched a website which will serve as a hub and resource for parenting films, narrative and documentary, long and short form once *Unburden* is launched. She will solicit stories and films from around the world, serving both as executive producer and distributor.

Rabil acknowledges a debt of gratitude to the Burns Center. She states, "Producing the film has given me the opportunity to give back to other parents and the opportunity to continue learning. The Burns made this possible by offering the right combination of classes, providing a safe environment to meet and share ideas, fostering a creative community of adults and children, and providing excellent teachers that carefully facilitate the process of learning -- just like I do in my home with my kids."

Rabil graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) with a BFA degree in Fashion Merchandising. She spent most of her 20s working in New York City fashion for top designers like Ralph Lauren, Donna Karan, and Guess Jeans. In her late 20s she obtained an MA from Columbia University Teachers College in Adult Education and taught fashion at VCU. Rabil then opened her own label, TEGNA, a line of women's golf apparel that was sold in private golf courses and big box retailers all over the United States and England.

Rabil and her husband and their three children make their home in Armonk, NY.

The Jacob Burns Film Center in Pleasantville, NY, is a nonprofit cultural arts center dedicated to: presenting the best of independent, documentary, and world cinema; promoting 21st century literacy; and making film a vibrant part of the community. The Media Arts Lab is home to dozens of filmmaking and cinema studies classes for kids, teens, adults, and families.