

Inspiration

THEOPTIMIST

Q + A

She surfs sea swells



FARHANA HUQ
(CENTER) WITH
SURFER GIRLS IN
BANGLADESH

SURFING STORIES HAVE LONG BEEN about freedom and leaving the world behind on the quest for the perfect wave. That is not the story Brown Girl Surf tells. Founded in 2011 by Farhana Huq, Brown Girl Surf shares the exploits of ground breaking female surfers around the world and reveals what they must do to pursue the sport they're passionate about.

Earlier this year, Huq and Cara Jones, founder of non-profit media outlet Storytellers for Good, traveled to Bangladesh to film *Surfing Possibility*, a pair of mini-documentaries about young surfers there and in India. *The Intelligent Optimist* caught up with Huq after a screening to talk about empowerment and the possibility inherent in dreams.

What was your day-to-day interaction with the surfer girls?

"We were surfing almost every day. When we were out in the water, we would be singing dumb songs on our surfboards and just hanging out. We were very equal. But on

land, it was a different dynamic: 'You're the Westerner, and you have to help us.'"

On your website, you talk a lot about empowerment. In what sense did you see the girls becoming empowered?

"They are doing something that's attracting attention. That's a little bit outside the norm. I think the ability for them to be doing what they're doing with their bodies is empowering. They're saying, Here we have no money, we're poor girls, our future is probably going to be predetermined for us anyway, and yet we're doing something that virtually none of these people get to do or can do. It creates some level of confidence or belonging or aptitude that they can't measure in any other way in their lives, because they're not in an activity or in school."

"Live in the possibility of your dreams" is kind of a tagline of Brown Girl Surf. What does it mean?

"For me, possibility is about having no limits and being able to have power and control

over your aspirations, your body, your life."

How do you reconcile that with all the limits we've been talking about?

"That's the irony of the story. I reconcile it by looking at the ocean and the experience of the water that can create or manifest a certain possibility. It opens something up in us, and it's that coupled with all the external things happening on land. A possibility narrative on land. I don't want to paint this happy picture, like Brown Girl Surf has come in to save the day, the girls are so free and surfing has solved everything. It's by no means that. Some make steps to overcome things in their lives, and others are really at the whim of a larger force."

"It's nice to want to package everything in a little bow and say, 'See, there's surfing in India, how exotic and cool.' And I think we need to challenge these messages and narratives and maybe look a little deeper into them, because there's a lot more there." | NATHAN HURST | SEE THE VIDEOS AT BROWNGIRLSURF.COM/SURFING-POSSIBILITY.