



TELEVISION

John Doyle

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The Woman Who Joined the Taliban (CBC, 9 p.m. on *Firsthand*) is summarized by CBC **as**, “The tragic story of a lost woman looking for meaning and a home, but who walks into hell.” That is an understatement. Made by Vanessa Dyllyn, it is the story of Beverley Giesbrecht, a businesswoman and devout Christian living near Vancouver who, after the events of September 11, turned her life upside down, converted to Islam and started a journey that would eventually take her into core Taliban territory in the mountains of Pakistan.

It’s a bewildering story about a bewildering, complex and charismatic woman who initially saw her role as a facilitator between two warring cultures. She launched a website, *Jihad Unspun*, which presented “an alternate view of militant Islam” and then, throwing all caution to the wind, sent out to make a first-person documentary about her investigation of the Taliban. It was no surprise to others that she was taken captive by Taliban fighters who figured she had to be an American spy.

The footage from her attempted documentary is baffling. She seems outraged that the Taliban refuse to let her interview women. She is determined, but ferociously unaware. What exactly motivated her is the program’s great central mystery. And it’s a brutally poignant documentary.