

**Bosele School for the Deaf and Blind, Lebowa homeland,
South Africa**

1990

Lebowa homeland, South Africa

1990

Shela, Kenya

1989

Abdul Rahman and his mother, Pate, Kenya

1989

**Bosele School for the Deaf and Blind, Lebowa homeland,
South Africa**

1990

**Chrissie Butterworth with her daughters at home, Griquatown
"Colored Location," South Africa**

1990

**Borana war widows Dakie Galma Sora and Dira Wako Guyo,
Ethiopian refugee camp, Walda, Kenya**

1993

**Ajoh Achot and Achol Manyen, Sudanese refugee camp,
Lokichoggio, Kenya**

1992

**Akuot Nyibol (pregnant, center) with Riak Warabek (right) and
Akuot's daughter, Athok Duom, who is recovering from
malaria, Sudanese refugee camp, Lokichoggio, Kenya**

1992

**Peter Shan (unaccompanied minor), Sudanese refugee camp,
Kakuma, Kenya**

1992

**Borana war widow Darmi Halake Gilo, Ethiopian refugee
camp, Walda, Kenya**

1993

**Tony Matayu with caged kambuna birds, Mozambican refugee
camp, Nyamithuthu, Malawi**

1994

**Lukelatabaru's (One who was born to make war) family,
Rwandan refugee camp, Lumasi, Tanzania**

1994

Wezemana (God is great) with her brother Mitonze, Rwandan refugee camp, Lumasi, Tanzania

1994

Traditional birthing attendant Nyirabahire Esteri holding newborns Nsabimana (I beg something from God) and Mukanzabonimpa (God will grant me, but I don't know when), flanked by mothers Kanyange, Mukabatazi, and Mukabatazi's mother, Rwandan refugee camp, Lumasi, Tanzania

1994

Ndimwabahari (One who was born with milk and cattle), wounded by a Rwandan Patriotic Front bullet, Rwandan refugee camp, Lumasi, Tanzania

1994

Transit center in Lokichoggio, with Sudanese mountains in the background; loading trucks for the trip to the Kakuma refugee camp, Lokichoggio, Kenya

1992

Gabbara tribal matriarch with women and children, Ethiopian refugee camp, Walda, Kenya

1993

One evening in 1992, as I sat talking with a Kenyan doctor in his compound at the Mandera refugee camp, he told me about the incidence of Somali nomad families from the border regions smothering their malnourished infants. In his opinion, these deaths were easily explained by the essentially callous and aggressive nature of Somalis.

I spent the following weeks at the feeding center, run by Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), where Somali women brought their children for medical attention and where the malnourished children (those with less than eighty percent of their normal weight-to-height ratio) were placed under a feeding program until their weight was stabilized. This often took months of treatment as many of the children had secondary illnesses and some remained in the feeding center for more than a year before they were sufficiently recovered.

—Fazal Sheikh

Nimo Haret Hussein, seven years after being treated at the Mandera feeding center, Somali refugee camp, Dagahaley, Kenya

2000

Mumino Musse Hassan and her son Mohammed, seven years after being treated at the Mandera feeding center, Somali refugee camp, Dagahaley, Kenya

2000

Saladho Hassan Ali, whose daughter, Markaba, fought off an attacker near Hagadera camp in early 2000, Somali refugee camp, Hagadera, Kenya

2000

Fatuma Hales Osman, who spent a year at the Mandera feeding center in 1993, while her son, Abdullai, recovered, Dagahaley, Kenya

2000

Fehan (Top Row/Far Right)

Fehan Noor Ahmed brought her youngest daughter, Rhesh, to the feeding center every day. In late 1990, when clan-based fighting broke out around their home in Lugh, Somalia, Fehan Noor fled on foot with her husband and their four children to Bula-hawa. But the fighting spread, and in early 1991, Fehan Noor's family realized that they must leave Somalia for the safety of Kenya.

It took them more than a week to cross the desert to the border. Nima, eight, Fartun, five, and Quresh, four, walked, while Fehan Noor carried her daughter Rhesh, who was only three months old. When they arrived at Mandera, they found only a makeshift settlement of other Somali families. In the following weeks, as more and more refugees arrived, some of them in desperate physical condition, there were many stories of people who had died on the journey. Some had been attacked by rival clans as they fled, others had been eaten by wild animals.

Early in 1992, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees arrived and began registering the refugees and issuing them with ration cards and materials for basic shelter. In the following weeks Nima and Quresh both fell sick with measles and died. When Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) arrived, they screened the refugees and Fehan Noor was told to bring Rhesh to the feeding center. They went there every day for the next five months. After this, Rhesh was transferred to another feeding

center for children who had achieved a better weight-to-height ratio. She was recovering.

—Fazal Sheikh

Hadija (Center Row/Far Right)

Hadija and her father often sat apart from the other families in the feeding center. In the first few days, I watched as she moved silently through her treatment. Her father and the feeding center staff would talk to her but it seemed that either she failed to understand what was going on around her, or refused to respond. She never struggled against those who helped her, but neither did she act on her own. I was told that she and her parents had fled from their village in Somalia after an attack by a rival clan, and during the flight Hadija's mother had been separated from her and her father.

Although he searched for his wife, Hadija's father failed to find her. Eventually, the two of them continued on to Mandera in the hope that the mother would be traveling in the same direction. But she never arrived and ever since their separation Hadija had been mute.

—Fazal Sheikh

Abshiro Aden Mohammed, women's leader, Somali refugee camp, Dagahaley, Kenya

2000

In our culture men and women are not the same. When a mother gives birth to a boy, there will be the gift of a camel for the son in the expectation that when he is a man, that one camel will have sired a whole herd, and his birthright will start him out in the world. When the son marries, his mother

will become part of his family. Any troubles that she encounters later in life will be met with his aid.

When the newborn child is a girl, there is nothing for her. She will have no inheritance to start her out in life and she will remain at home doing the domestic work as her brothers go to school at the madrasa—the Koranic school. When a girl is around seven years old, she must be given the Pharaoh's circumcision; her clitoris and the labia will be removed, after which the opening is stitched shut, leaving a small space to allow urine and menstrual fluid to pass through. Circumcision is proof of her virginity; without it she will have no value and receive no respect from her family. It is a mark of the girl's belonging to a male head of the family whose rights will be violated and wrath incurred if she is sexually invaded. This authority over the girl must be kept pure so that it can be transferred to the spouse's family in marriage.

The daughter may be married at a very young age and she has no power to choose her husband; she can be married without love. If she is unlucky, she will join a family that treats her badly and discriminates against her. But she may at first be fortunate, working with her husband to help him succeed and accumulate wealth. Often, when the husband becomes wealthy, the riches will turn his eye towards a younger bride. With a new wife in the house, the first wife may be divorced and sent from her husband's home back to her own parents. The children will remain with the husband and the divorced wife will be forced to appeal to the Sheik and Sharia law in the hope of winning the right to have some of the children. If the woman has given birth to boys, they will take care of her when she grows old. But if the woman has borne only girls, who later joined the families of their husbands, they will take no responsibility for her and she will be left alone.

When the war came to our country, Somali culture broke down completely. During the fighting, a clan was responsible for paying the blood money to compensate the members of a family whose relative had been killed. A dead man's family would be given 100 camels by the clan of the killer, but for the woman, only 50 camels were required.

When we fled Somalia and settled in Dagahaley, I became the women's leader. In the past nine years of life here in the camp, I have seen many things and I have listened to many problems of women refugees. In the early days of living here, hundreds of women were attacked in the surrounding bush when they ventured away from the camp to fetch firewood. Sometimes we walk for many hours to gather enough fuel for the family. It is there, in the bush, that we are at greatest risk of rape. When such things happen to girls, they will no longer be marriageable.

I have seen old women raped by children and babies defiled by adults. Three times I have seen newborn babies left lying on the ground. In all of the cases the babies later died; they had been abandoned by mothers who were afraid of having an illegal pregnancy. I have seen our men sitting and playing beneath the shade trees while their families sat at home, hungry and penniless. I have seen a man selling his wife's clothes to get money for *miraa* [a chewable stimulant]. I have seen men divorcing their wives in the morning out of anger and returning in the afternoon calling her "wife."

In the Somalia of the past where I was raised, I have experienced privilege, peace, and tranquility. The ability of people to listen to one another has been lost, or these events would never happen. Today in Somalia, killing has become a normal value. The Koran says that women must be honored and not mistreated, disturbed, and frustrated. If a person does not fear and respect Allah, how can he respect a human being?

From the water tower at Liboi, Kenya, looking east across the borderlands to Somalia

1992

Salado Hassan Aden and her son Ahmed, seven years after being treated at the Mandera feeding center, Somali refugee camp, Dagahaley, Kenya

2000

Fields at dawn, Vrindavan

2005

Bhajan ashram, Vrindavan

2005

Suniti Chatterjee (Good Rule)

2005

My husband was a doctor. We were both from good families, and in the fifteen years we were married we had very few problems. We educated all our children, four sons and a daughter, and when my husband died I went to work in a government company. My eldest son was thirteen when his father died. Today he is an engineer.

I arranged the marriages of all my children, and I lived with them for ten years after my retirement. But then I decided it was time to come to Vrindavan. I had been here once with my husband, and I always remembered the tranquility of the place. That was fifteen years ago. I was

already seventy years old. I lived with Kundo Lata, the head of the Bhajan ashram, and chanted there.

I knew I had to forget my husband so that I could chant and devote everything to Krishna. When I had a fever, Krishna comforted me, telling me I would soon recover. He asked me if I was sad and I said no. He told me he was with me and he would protect me. He loves me too much. There is nothing left in me, everything is Krishna's. He asks me to wear his *tulsi* [holy basil] rosary.

Rajeshwari's pet rat, Chuni

2005

Bhajan ashram, Vrindavan

2005

Krishna icons with the image of the guru at rest

2005

Vrindavan

2005

Vrindavan

2005

Tupasi's Room

2005

Dawn along the Yamuna River, Vrindavan

2005

Bhajan ashram at dawn, Vrindavan

2003

Private prayer with Krishna, Bhajan ashram, Vrindavan

2005

Pigeon Roost

2005

Suniti Chatterjee (Good Rule)

2003

Renuka

2003

I was at home alone one day when a neighbor forced himself on me and raped me. When I told my husband what had happened he said he could no longer accept me as his wife and I would have to leave. I begged him to let me stay. One of our sons had already died and the other was thirteen. He begged to go with me but his father forced him to stay. My husband sent me off with five hundred rupees, just enough to get me to the Sundarbans (on the border with Bangladesh), where I had family. I lived with them for six years before coming to Vrindavan.

My husband died five years ago, or so I was told. In my dreams he comes to me and tells me I am a dirty woman and he doesn't want me in his life. My son also comes to me in my dreams and tells me that he needs me and

wants me to come back to him. But my son is married now and living happily with his wife, and since my husband will have told him about me, I know he will be ashamed of me, so I don't go.

I dream about my boys, about feeding them and playing with them. I would like to be able to forget the past, but it still brings a great pain to my heart. When I dream of Krishna, when I dance with him and chant and worship him, it takes my pain away.

We listen to each other here in Vrindavan. All the other women in the ashram have stories similar to mine and sharing them brings us some comfort as we grow older.

Neela Dey (Sapphire)

2003

I was lucky in my marriage. My husband and his mother always treated me with kindness. We raised two sons and saw both of them married while we lived together contentedly for forty years. But after my husband died, my elder son informed me that I could live anywhere I wanted—in fact he was telling me to leave the house. His wife disliked me and wanted me out of the way. I understood I had become a burden to my son and it was best to go. I left at once, taking nothing with me, aware that I might never see any of them again. I did go back, a few months later, but they asked me what I was doing there and the message was clear: I should stay away.

In Vrindavan we are so determined in our devotion that everything else in the world is dead to us. We ourselves are dead and living with Krishna. Sometimes Krishna comes to me while I am sleeping and takes my sari and touches me or plays with me. I see him clearly and I want only to talk to him, only to see him. I can go to the Yamuna River as often as I please and bathe with his spirit. I never dream about my family.

I am seventy years old and all I want now is *moksha* and freedom from this cycle of death and rebirth that has caused me such pain.

Asha Rajak (Hope)

2003

Life has taught me that women are the enemies of other women. My husband and I were happy at first, but when I couldn't give him a child he began to beat me. Then he took another wife and we all lived together in the same house. A few months later I found out I was pregnant. This made the other wife very jealous. We carried on like this for two years until my husband fell sick and died. By this time I was pregnant again and had a second baby boy, which only made the other wife even more jealous. One afternoon she crept into the room where I was asleep with the baby and set fire to the bed. The heat and the smoke woke me up and I started to scream. The neighbors rushed in, but it was too late and my son burned to death. My brothers-in-law beat the woman and threw her out of the house, but she was never arrested or held responsible for what she had done. I suffered fifty-percent burns all over my body and my mother had to sell all her land to pay the hospital fees. They wanted to amputate my hands, but my mother pleaded with them and eventually they agreed not to do it and I was left with these hands that still do not open. I spent a year and a half in the hospital, and my parents looked after me for six months after I came out.

Later, when my son got married, he and my daughter-in-law wanted me to live with them, but my body had been so badly burned I was still in a lot of pain, and I knew it upset them to see me suffering, so I decided to come and live in Vrindavan. I still visit them, but I have no desire to live with them.

My husband appears in my dreams and tells me I should have stayed with my son. He wants us to be together. But my son never appears in my dreams, only my daughter-in-law, who calls to me for advice and help with her life. Mostly I dream about Krishna. He tells me to chant to him and to worship him and he will give me *moksha*.

Lakshmi (The Goddess of Wealth)

2003

I had a friend who made a love marriage—which was rather unusual at that time. When a marriage is not arranged by the parents, the husband does not get a dowry from his bride's family. This seemed to make my friend's husband so angry after they were married that he set his wife alight. She died from her burns. If love can do such a thing, then how can it have any meaning? After that I vowed marriage would never be for me. Since then I have seen what happens to many girls after their marriages, how their in-laws tease and abuse them, and I have never regretted my decision.

My mother died when I was fourteen and I set out traveling then and soon grew to love it. I visited all the holy places. But when I reached Vrindavan I felt something here that made me never want to leave. I am forty-five now and have never been married, but I live among the widows in the ashram as a sister.

Radha (goddess and companion of Krishna) is living in my soul, and with her there, Krishna must also certainly come. I have few dreams other than to live here in Vrindavan in their company.

Abala Dasi (Poor Woman)

2003

Although my husband was twenty years older than me, I can say that, once I adjusted to life with him, I was truly happy during our years together. It was a long time before I gave birth to our first child, a daughter, but then we had two more daughters and a son. We had already married off two of the daughters by the time my husband died, but I was left alone with our youngest girl. We were refugees from Bangladesh, and as a single woman alone with a child I faced many problems. One day I was told about Vrindavan. We came here thinking we would be able to beg for a living, but soon I started to chant at the ashram for money and food. Two years later a local man came to ask for my daughter and I agreed. They were married and

she moved into his home. They had one son together but then they found that my daughter had cancer. She died nine years ago.

I am eighty now, and every day I am visited by a monkey who calls me “Ma.” I know this monkey is calling me in just the same way my daughter did. It is the reincarnation of my girl. My grandson, her son, lives nearby and on the days that he visits me we wait for the monkey to come.

No one else will take care of me now, but Krishna will come. He is the one who called us here. My dreams are only of him.

Seva Dasi (Service)

2003

My husband was a carpenter who made very little money. We had three daughters and a son together and then, after thirteen years of marriage, my husband died. Our second son was born soon after my husband’s death, but he died when he was a teenager. I had to beg for money for my daughters’ marriages. I dealt with all the arrangements for the weddings, but I couldn’t afford their dowries, so I was lucky that their husbands’ families agreed to take them without any payment. For three years I lived with my youngest daughter and her husband, and then my son-in-law told me I had to leave, he would not take responsibility for me anymore. My daughter didn’t want me to go, but what could she do? It was his home, and she had no say in the decision. So five years ago I came to Vrindavan. I used to visit my daughters once a year, but now I don’t want to see them. I am satisfied that I have done my duty well, and though I miss them, I don’t want to be a burden to them.

In my dreams my son comes to me and tells me he wanted to live in this world but God would not give him permission. I don’t want to dream of him again because the pain of his loss was too great. No one can understand

what is in my heart. I pray that after my death I will meet my husband and son once again.

Sarla Goraye (Simple)

2003

My husband died of a fever six months after we were married. He was twelve years old. I was only five. His family said I was an unlucky person and I was to blame for his death. I was never taken into their household because they did not want me to bring them the same fate. So even though the marriage had never been consummated there was no chance I could ever be married again and I have carried this stigma for the rest of my life.

After my parents died I lived with my brothers for many years, but eventually they, too, died and thirty years ago, at the age of fifty, I moved to Vrindavan, where I have lived in this home with the other widows ever since.

Parul Nandi (The Flower)

2003

I came here fifty-three years ago when I was only twenty-two. I left home because of my husband's other wife. What will happen to me in the next incarnation is God's decision. I pray that when I die he will grant me less suffering than I have experienced in this life.

Sanjeeta, Palna orphanage, Delhi

2007

Manita, Hindu boarding school, Ahmedabad

2007

Labhuben, child bride, Chandigarh

2007

Kavita, street performer, streets of Delhi

2007

Rodi, rose seller, streets of Delhi

2007

Simran, homeless shelter, Delhi

2007

Malikh, Jai Hind squatter settlement, Delhi

2007

Rodi holding roses, streets of Delhi

2007

Ruksana, rag pickers' encampment, Delhi

2007

Rani

2007

Shabnam

2007

Rehka

2007

Ashya

2007

Poli

2007

Krishna

2007

I married my husband in an arranged marriage four-and-a-half years ago. Once we were married, he began to drink heavily. After a year I had my first daughter. When I was pregnant with my second daughter, my in-laws began to abuse me. They insisted that I get a scan to determine the sex of the child. I knew they would force me to have an abortion if it turned out that the baby was a girl, so I refused. This drove them to such fury that they put wires on my belly and plugged the other end into the outlet. I was lucky that the fuse blew, or it would have killed me. They took me and left me at my parents' home, where my second daughter, Nena, was born. Soon after that, my mother-in-law died and my husband's family allowed me to return to their home. But they continued to taunt me and beat me.

On several occasions, the police came to the house after I had been beaten. While I was married I went seven times to the *panchayat*, the local council

of elders, to seek their help following abuse, but each time they sent me back to the home and never recorded the complaints. My husband told me that if I went to the police, he would kill me. He began beating me with iron rods.

Then I became pregnant for the third time. I refused once again to get the scan. My husband was usually violent when he was drunk and most of the beatings took place only when he had been drinking. Then one day when he was sober, he told me to leave the home or he would kill me. On that day, he tried to hang me with my *dupatta* [scarf]. I was fortunate that my neighbours heard my screams and came and rescued me. After that attack, the Health Ministry ordered the District Commissioner to remove us from the house. I was taken to Shakti Vahini [a human rights agency], which is now handling my case. They are trying to get my husband to be financially responsible for us, otherwise we will have nothing.

Sita Devi

2007

Eleven years ago, when my father was still alive, my parents arranged a marriage for me. At the time, they felt fortunate to have found a man from Nepal who would marry me without any dowry. I didn't meet my husband until the day we were married. After my father died, he allowed my mother to live with us. I had my first child six years ago, and soon after that another daughter. When I was pregnant with my third child, I went through a really painful labor, but my husband refused to call anyone to help. The baby died during the delivery. It was another girl. Soon after that, my husband began beating me.

I got pregnant again and several months later I gave birth to a girl. My husband yanked the baby out of my arms and severely beat my mother and me. He took the baby and the other two children with him and we later learned that he had drowned them in the river. That same day our landlord

came and brought us to the hospital and then to the shelter here in Chandigarh. We will stay here until my mother and I have recovered. Once we are well, we may stay in the shelter, or return to our home village. People from the village have been to visit us several times and they will help us when we return. We have the address in Nepal where my husband is from and the police have registered a charge against him for the murder of our children and for beating us. They will look for him there and pursue the case and the Indian and Nepali police will work together. I don't think they will find my husband and, even if they did, he would escape blame. Our only hope is that he stays away.

Manjula

2007

I came to the shelter with my two children. My in-laws and my husband had abused me from the first year of our marriage. I was sixteen when we were married. It was an arranged marriage and I had no choice in it. After the first few years, they began to abuse me physically as well as mentally. My parents had promised me, and I could not go back home, so I tried my best in the matter. My husband was educated and I tried to compromise with him on three separate occasions before I left home. I ran away with the man I was having an affair with. Until we are divorced, he can be prosecuted for adultery under the Indian Penal Code. My husband will keep the children after we are divorced. After all, they are boys. If I had a girl child, then he would not want her. I would have had to keep her with me. My in-laws would not look after her properly. If I had a daughter, I would not want to get married again. I would be afraid that some day that man might hurt my daughter. It is common in our society for such things to happen and there is nothing the wife can do. Women are afraid of having girls. They want sons, so that later they will be powerful and establish a strict rule over their own daughters-in-law.

Kohinoor

2007

One day, one of our neighbors came and told my mother he could get me a job as a domestic servant and that I would earn good money. My mother accepted his offer and he took me on a train. It soon seemed to me that we were going in the wrong direction and very far away. I asked him, "Where are we going?" Then I started to shout and he hit me. When I screamed for help, he told the other people in the train that I was his daughter and was a bit mad. He beat me up and said we were going to Delhi. When we were at the bus stand I asked him again what he was doing. He told me to wait there for a few minutes without moving, that he would be right back. When he left, I ran away and then I met a woman with a boy who took me to the police station. That was five months ago. All I want to do is go home. I used to dream of going to Delhi, to the big city, because so many people have been able to come and work here. Now I feel like I never want to see Delhi again.

Priti

2007

I was studying when we lived in the slums in Delhi and I was doing well. Then, during my exams, the government came and leveled our home. We were evicted under threat of force. This was 2002, when our whole neighborhood was destroyed. It was so traumatic that several older members of the community died during the demolition. We protested for some time, but they began the demolition anyway. It was during the winter and it took us a further three days just to find the land on which we were to stay. At the time there was nothing here, only the barren patch of land that stretched away from the dumping ground. There was no school at all for the first two years, and during that time we tried to make do with a tent that could double as a school. In 2006 a proper school was opened, but in between the children lost two years of schooling.

I am sixteen, the eldest daughter in my family, and since the move I have been unable to return to school. My father was so traumatized by the eviction that he has been overcome by depression. My mother works, and so does my sister, who is thirteen, even though it is illegal. Together, they make a total of a thousand rupees a month, working every day of the week. There are nine of us altogether, and this is all we have to live on. I don't think that I will ever go back to school. But what good is an education when there is no way to use it?

Kalawati holding roses

2007

We go to the market and buy bundles of roses for five hundred or six hundred rupees. They will last for two days if we are careful to water them and keep them covered with rags. Then we divide them and mix them with greens to make bunches that the younger girls can sell among the traffic. One bunch costs ten rupees and if we are lucky, after two days, we might have earned almost two hundred rupees from selling them. Our parents are from Rajasthan and they were living here on the side of the road for fifteen years until they went back home last year and left us to take their place. Sometimes the police harass us, but we just stay here without bribing them. After all, we have nothing to give them and they know it. Two years ago, my sister, Soni, was hit by a car. The driver just drove on.

She was taken to the hospital, but even now the wound has not healed. Every so often, when there is a wedding, or at the end of a long year, we might go to Rajasthan and visit our village. But those visits are rare, since time away from the street means we will be without money.

Abdul Shakour's eldest wife, Najiba, Afghan refugee village, Nasir Bagh, North West Frontier Province, Pakistan

1998

Jada Maiwand, one month before Taliban conquest of the city, Kabul, Afghanistan

1996

Salim, Afghan refugee village, Badabare, North West Frontier Province, Pakistan

1997

Sisters Sima and Shahima, Afghan refugee village, Nasir Bagh, North West Frontier Province, Pakistan

1997

Shahria, Afghan refugee village, Urghuch, North Pakistan

1997

Osman and Farid, blind qari (one who knows the Koran by heart) brothers, Afghan refugee village, Nasir Bagh, North West Frontier Province, Pakistan

1997

Doctor Jan's son and friend, Afghan refugee village, Nasir Bagh, North West Frontier Province, Pakistan

1997

Abdul Manam, Afghan refugee village, Khairabad, North Pakistan

1998

Koran in young girl's hands, Abdul Kalan's madrasa, Afghan refugee village, Urghuch, North Pakistan

1997

Portraits of unaccompanied Afghan youth, North Pakistan

1997

Abdul Aziz holding a photograph of his brother, Mula Abdul Hakim, Afghan refugee village, Khairabad, North Pakistan

1997

Rohgul, Afghan refugee village, Nasir Bagh, North West Frontier Province, Pakistan

1997

Bibi Mah

1998

Our village was a place of peace. The Mujahedin were not active in the region and we thought we would be safe from communist attacks. Then, without warning, the bombing started. In those early days we thought our homes were safe enough, but we soon began to understand the kind of destruction these weapons could bring. Many of our women and children were killed during this period.

The bombing continued and we were forced to leave. We walked to the Pakistani border, traveling at night to avoid the Soviets, and once our families were safely in Pakistan, the men returned on foot to our home village of Ibrahim Khel to take up the jihad.

My son, Haji Nour Ahmed, was among them. He and his group lived in our village and conducted their operations from there. When the communists came, they would escape to the safety of the mountains. Then, during one of these Russian operations, our village was surrounded. I was told that my son left the mountains early and was captured by the soldiers. They tortured him for information about the other Mujahedin and then martyred him with a bullet.

I have never learned to read but I was taught about the Koran and the Prophet Muhammad—peace be upon him—by the mullahs of our home village. Only with honesty in one's heart may a person claim their true reward. Heaven is a desert where everyone must make their own place. The families of the *shahid* [martyrs] are guaranteed a place. I know that my son's death in the jihad has made him a *shahid*. He is blessed in heaven. Some day we will live there together. Now, when I visit him in my dreams, he sits in silence.

Qurban Gul holding a photograph of her son Mula Awaz, Afghan refugee village, Khairabad, North Pakistan

1997

Mula Awaz was my youngest son. In 1986, when he was eighteen years old, his group of Mujahedin attacked a communist post. In the exchange of fire, he was killed. Before the news of his death reached us, I dreamed that my son's body was being prepared for burial. When he had been washed and wrapped in white cloth, he was carried to the graveyard. They laid his body on the ground and turned his head towards Mecca. Then his body was covered with earth.

After that I did not dream of him again for several years. Then I became very ill and was taken to the hospital where I lay near death. Then I had the second dream of Mula Awaz. I was lying in my bed and I could hear the door to my hospital room opening. Mula Awaz appeared in the doorway and walked towards my bed. He had a scarf draped about his shoulders. As he approached, he took the cloth from his neck and offered it to me. He told me to wrap it about myself. Then without another word he turned away and disappeared into the corridor. I covered myself with the scarf and a sensation of warmth moved throughout my body. In the coming days, the illness left me and I was able to return home. I never dreamed of him again.

Abdul Aziz holding a photograph of his brother Mula Abdul Hakim, Afghan refugee village, Khairabad, North Pakistan
1997

My brother Mula Abdul Hakim and his group of Mujahedin surrounded the district administration office in our home village. They captured the area and killed the communists. One of those captured was a teacher who pleaded for his life, saying that he was a fellow Muslim. My brother set him free. Several weeks later the communists retook the area. That same teacher joined them and pointed out those who had been responsible for the attack. He identified my brother. Mula was captured and taken to the office. His body was never returned. In my dreams, he sits beside a pool in a garden, silently washing.

Haji Abdul holding a photograph of his father, Haji Gholam Sadiq, Afghan refugee village, Khairabad, North Pakistan
1997

My father, Haji Gholam Sadiq, and five of my brothers were martyred during the years of the jihad. It is a lucky family that offers the lives of their loved

ones to the cause of Allah. They have brought great blessings upon us. It was five years after his death that I dreamed of my father. He sat at a great distance from me looking away from where I stood. He was wearing a white turban and gazed off towards the horizon. I asked him where he was. He turned to me and said that I should not ask such questions, that I would meet him on the day of judgment.

Abdul Manam, Afghan refugee village, Khairabad, North Pakistan

1998

We started our jihad in 1980 with traditional weapons. As we captured small posts from the communists, we began to use the Kalashnikov [Russian rifle]. One night in 1981, the year of my twenty-first birthday, our band of Mujahedin attacked the communist post at our village of Pharash Ghani. Nearly one hundred and twenty of us laid siege to the fort and more than fifty of our Mujahedin were killed. By morning we had taken the fort and captured forty communists including their famous Commander Gholam. As was our tradition, we brought the prisoners back to our base to decide their fate. We asked the other Mujahedin to speak out if any of the prisoners had been responsible for the deaths of our people. The soldiers told us that they had been forcibly conscripted by the communists. Since no one testified against them, we agreed to set them free with the promise they would not return to fight for the communists.

When it came to Commander Gholam, we found he was directly responsible for the deaths of sixteen of our people. The brother of one of the men he had killed was given a rifle and Gholam was executed with one shot to the head. By morning, word of the night's events had reached the village at Saripul. By early afternoon three men, Abdul Ghafur, Laj Mir, and Shad Mohammed, sent messages that Gholam had been responsible for deaths in their families and thanked us for bringing him to justice. But an informer must have sent a message to the Soviets because that afternoon they came to Saripul and took those three old men from their homes. They tied them

by the legs and fastened the ropes to the back of a tank, then drove the tank through the main city of Kishem district as an example for the people. When their relatives went to the base to collect the bodies for burial, only the legs remained.

**Haji Qiamuddin holding a photograph of his brother,
Asamuddin, Afghan refugee village, Khairabad, North Pakistan
1997**

My brother, Asamuddin, was killed in the 1988 battle for control of the Mazar-Kabul road. As I sleep, he walks in the streets of our home village with his Kalashnikov slung over his shoulder, just as he did when he was alive.

**Rohullah, Afghan refugee village, Badabare, North West
Frontier Province, Pakistan
1997**

In 1981 my cousin Qari Monir, which in our language means “one who knows the Koran by heart,” was taken along with thirteen other elders and mullahs by communist troops into the desert. For six months the villagers did not know what happened to them. Then one day a shepherd minding his animals in the desert area surrounding the village saw a piece of white cloth under the earth. He pulled at it and finally he realized that it was a long scarf. As he continued to dig he saw that there was a man buried there. He ran to the village to tell the people of his news. The villagers returned to the spot and began to dig. Eventually, the fourteen bodies of our leaders were recovered. Their hands and feet had been tied and they had been buried alive.

Even though it had been six months since their deaths, their bodies had been perfectly preserved—the mullah even had on the glasses he was

wearing the day he was taken from his home. These were spiritual people and they were awaiting a proper and respectful burial. It was this incident which convinced us that the communists were willing to kill us all, not just those who were fighters. And so we decided to leave the village and take our families to the safety of Pakistan. In the months that followed, the men returned to Afghanistan to free our country from the invaders.

Drawings by children in Afghanistan and the refugee camps in North Pakistan given to Fazal Sheikh

1997

Photographs from the Maiwand Photo Studio in Jalalabad, Afghanistan

1997

The studio was closed by the Taliban, who claimed that a photograph of a living creature is a kind of idol and therefore prohibited by Sharia law. In an act of defiance, the proprietor of the studio gave Sheikh a box of negatives, in the hope they might bring the voices of Afghans into other countries around the world.

Letter of the Somali elders and panorama of the Somali refugee camp at Liboi

1994

The stories of Shahjahan Apa and Satyaranni Chaddha of the Shakti Shalini foundation, which fights domestic violence, Delhi

2008

Photographs given to Sheikh by various organizations he visited that document cases of domestic violence and dowry death.

2007

Handmade three-panel book

1992

Left panel: Borana elder Gulma Duba Salo in his tent, Ethiopian refugee camp, Walda, Kenya, 1992

Middle panel: Letter given to Fazal Sheikh from the Borana elders of the Ethiopian refugee camp at Walda, Kenya, 1992; shared burial site (trptych), Ethiopian refugee camp, Walda, Kenya, 1992

Right panel: Bashia Gababo Sharamu, Borana elder, Ethiopian refugee camp, Walda, Kenya, 1992

Nuria Barre Comane and her sister Abdia

1992

Shamsa Moka Abdi and her sister Shahil

1992

Jamaa Abdullai and her brother Adan

1992

Fatuma Abdi Hussein and her son Abdullai

1992

Fatuma Mohammed Said and Amina Ahmed Abdi (mother of ten)

1992

Anep Ibrahim Addan with her son Abdullai and daughter Ayen

1992

Amina Shamsu and her brother Ahmed

1992

Alima Yusuf Abdi and her son Hassan

1992

Fehan Noor Ahmed and her daughter Rhesh

1992

Alima Mahmoud Yusuf and her son Hassan

1992

Fatuma Abdi Sahal

1992

Karira Abdi Ali and her son Kareem

1992

Harira Abdullai Mohamoud and her son Mohammed

1992

Habiwa Abdi Addan and her son Abdullai

1992

Abdia Abdi Khalil and her son Hameed
1992

Nimsa Osman Farrah and her son Abdi
1992

Abdi Ali Omera and her daughter Asterline
1992

Hadija and her father, Badel Addan Gadel
1992

Alima Hassan Abdullai and her brother Mahmoud
1992

Fatuma Hassan Shama and her sister Alima
1992

Sahara Mohammed

1992

Mario Hassan Ayah and her brother Ali

1992

Hawa Ibrahim Ali and her sister Fatuma

1992

Amina Alio Abdi and her son Mohammed

1992

Abdia and her son Khalid

1992

Nimali Hassan Mohammed and her sister Sofia

1992

New Madonna

1992

