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IRAQ NOTEBOOK

CUADERNO DE IRAQ

The Story of Ali & Ahmed

by Marie Gilliam

This is the story of two innocent victims of our invasion and occupation of Iraq and their road to recovery. Many people, mostly children, have had limbs blown off and their bodies burned and mutilated by U.S. bombs. I have followed the progress of two such victims, one only 12 yrs. old at the time he was injured and the other 14. Their names are Ali Abbas and Ahmed Hamza.

I first learned of Ali from a Houston Channel 11 news report at the start of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in April 2003. I could not sleep that night and prayed for him every day. His face was etched in my mind and I longed to know where he was and if he were even still alive. For several months I called and e-mailed my local and other TV stations. Then the BBC gave me the address of the London hospital where he and another boy, Ahmed, were being cared for, thanks to the generosity of the English people and donations from other caring people from countries around the world. I was thrilled to have found Ali.

Ali's entire family (16 members) was killed when a bomb hit their Baghdad home while they slept. Both his arms were blown off and over 35% of his body was terribly burned. It is a wonder that he survived at all. Ali is indeed an inspiration and an example of the triumph of the human Spirit over unimaginable suffering and loss. In another bombing, Ahmed lost a hand and part of a leg. His sister was killed instantly and his brother lost an eye.

In September 2004 my daughter took me to London for my 64th birthday. I had the honor of meeting both boys, along with Ahmed's father and their friend and interpreter, Zena Al-Ugaily. She worked for the Roehampton Rehabilitation Centre, where the boys have been fitted with artificial limbs. It was the trip of a lifetime. Meeting Ali and Ahmed, "My little heroes," face to face, was a precious moment I will never forget! They are wonderful and so sweet.

Ahmed's Father, Mohammed, is caring for the boys while they are in London. All the while he is separated from his wife and other children in Iraq and grieving the loss of his daughter besides. Yet, on my visit, he was so kind to me, an American. He treated me with respect and made me a cup of Chai (Iraqi tea.) To me, this meeting was building a "Bridge of Peace" between his people and mine. These were the first Iraqi people I had ever met, and I felt truly humbled.

Ali has learned to use an enlarged computer keyboard with his toes. He asked me how to spell my name and showed me how he keyed it in. He also showed me how he picks up a hat with his feet, bends down to put it in his mouth, sits back up, then flips the hat up to his head. He beamed with pride when I applauded his accomplishments. He is really amazing! How far he has come against all odds.

He is what I call a "real hero." How his heart must ache over losing both parents, a brother and unborn sibling whose birth he was so looking forward to and other relatives. Yet, he has risen above his grief and physical limitations.

Inside the cards he paints with his feet is this message to the world. "These paintings should be a symbol of peace. War should not happen." War is a terrible thing that only brings death, destruction and agony to it's victims. It never solves any problems but rather creates more. My prayer is that in telling this story, more people will come to realize that we need to follow the teachings of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. He would be building those bridges of understanding and love between Americans and people of every other country. I could not imagine Jesus ever dropping a bomb on a human being. Nor could I see Him with an M16 strapped to His shoulder. Rather, I picture Him with the loaves and fishes in His merciful hands, preparing to feed the people who are hungry.

No, war was not Jesus' way, neither should it be ours. God bless the whole world, no exceptions!

For more detailed information about Ali and Ahmed you can visit the website set up for them. www.aliabbas.net

Update: April 5, 2005 — *Ali is traveling to the U.S. Hopefully, some of the hatred he has felt for us will subside when he sees firsthand that there truly are good Americans. This trip will be a great healing in so many ways.* - Gilliam

Iraqi Ali Abbas is coming to New York for specialized care and to meet a fellow war child victim whose recovery inspired him. . . . Staten Island's Kenan Malkic, who lost two arms and a leg in a land mine accident in Bosnia in 1994, sent Ali a video.

In the video, Malkic clasps a fork perfectly. He takes the arms off to show exactly what his injuries are. He manipulates the controls of a PlayStation.

Malkic, now 22, made the video after seeing Ali in the news. "I want him to understand that disabled is only a word and a frame of mind. It took me awhile to understand this," Malkic said. . . . "I always say I wish I had a tape like this after my accident."

Ali grew pie-eyed at the images of Malkic demonstrating how he functions perfectly well with high-tech prostheses. He turned to his physical therapist, Nafisah Kamal Habib, while watching the video and in Arabic said simply, "Can he help me?"

"Kenan gave me a lot of inspiration and hope when I saw the video," Ali said through a translator recently. "I want Kenan to help me go on." Ali is currently fitted with prostheses that he finds too heavy. He had gotten discouraged and focused more on working with his feet — including learning to paint and play the piano. . . .

Global Medical Relief Fund on Staten Island, the same group that made Malkic whole again, is helping Ali. He will get lighter, state-of-the-art prostheses free of charge — and have them upgraded as he grows — from the Shriners Hospital for Children-Philadelphia, a partner of Global Medical Relief Fund.

"I am looking forward to meeting Ali," Malkic said. "We had similar experiences, but we must move on."

Once Ali arrives, he will see Dr. Scott Kozin, a hand and upper extremity surgeon for the Shriners Hospital. Kozin explained that many things can be done to improve Ali's ability to manage prostheses — from fitting him with lighter versions to surgical remedies such as arm lengthening and building the arms up with muscle grafts from his back.

On days when he is not at the hospital, Ali will go on field trips to see the Statue of Liberty as well as the growing Muslim community on Staten Island, explained County Clerk Stephen Fiala. "His seeing other Muslim children on American soil would be profound," Fiala said.

The former city councilman added that because an American bomb took Ali's limbs and family, "There is a moral imperative here. There is an obligation." — *Maureen Seaberg, "A ray of hope: Bosnia victim video inspires Iraq boy who lost arms."* Excerpted. [How many other Ali's are there in Iraq needing "specialized" medical care to "go on?" ~ Editor]

Baghdad 2003

If you are lucky in this life a window will appear on a battlefield when the soldiers look into the window they don't see their enemies they see themselves as children and they stop fighting and go home and sleep when they wake up the land is well again

Cameron Penny, 4th Grade, Michigan

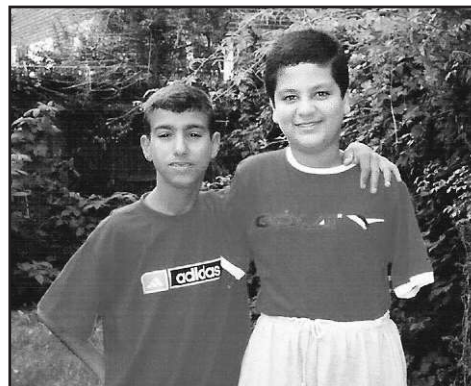
Las Historias de Ali y Ahmed

por Marie Gilliam

Esta es la historia de dos inocentes víctimas de la invasión y ocupación de Irak y su duro camino a la recuperación. Multitud de individuos, en su mayoría niños, han sufrido profundas quemaduras y han sido mutilados por bombas lanzadas por el ejército Americano al comienzo de la invasión. He seguido el proceso de dos víctimas de esos tristes acontecimientos, muchachos de 12 y 14 años respectivamente. Se nombran Ali Abbas y Ahmed Hamza.

Información inicial sobre el caso de Ali me lleo cuando miraba las noticias en el Canal 11 en Houston recién comenzada la invasión de Iraq en Abril, 2003. Ahí vi reflejada la imagen de este inteligente y despierto joven y desde entonces su rostro quedo grabado en mi mente. Esa noche no podía conciliar el sueño y oraba fervientemente por tan desvalido niño.

Por meses buscaba información a través de fuentes de información locales y nacionales buscaba información para determinar cual había sido su destino. Un día recibí una llamada de la BBC de Londres, quien me refirió a un hospital Londinense donde Ali y otro niño llamado Ahmed estaban siendo tratados gracias a la generosidad del pueblo Ingles. Contribuciones se recibían de todas partes del mundo para ayudar a estos niños con tan difícil experiencia. Al fin mi anhelo de encontrar a Ali se había realizado.



Ali and Ahmed in London, Sept. 2004

El incidente inicial sucedió a principio de la guerra cuando dieciséis miembros de la familia de Ali murieron al caer una bomba en su casa mientras dormían. Ali, el único sobreviviente de la tragedia, perdió los brazos y sufrió terrible quemaduras en 35% de su cuerpo. Su propia sobrevivencia representa un y un verdadero ejemplo de la fortaleza del espíritu humano.

Durante otro bombardeo, Ahmed el otro niño a quien trataban el hospital ingles, perdió una mano y parte de su pierna. Su hermana resulto muerta y su hermano perdió un ojo.

En Septiembre 2004, mi hija me invito a Londres por motivo de mi cumpleaños. Allí conocí a Ali y a Ahmed, y al padre de Ahmed, quien los acompañaba. Con la colaboración de Zena Al-Ugaily, asociada con el Centro de Recuperación Roehampton y quien servía de interprete, los jóvenes fueron habilitados con prótesis. No podía haber concebido una mejor celebración de mi 64 aniversario.

Completamente dedicado al cuidado de Ali y Ahmed, Mohammed, padre de Ahmed compartía el dolor de estos jóvenes mientras permanecía separado de su esposa e hijos, quienes permanecían en Irak. El comportamiento de este sufrido hombre no podía haber sido más respetuoso y acogedor.

Sin tener en cuenta mi ciudadanía y origen, Mohammed me extendió múltiples cortesías preparándome una taza de Chai, un te de procedencia Iraquí. Mi primer encuentro con estos Iraquíes, con su increíble comportamiento y respeto hacia mi, hicieron que sintiera una gran humildad. Esta visita solidificaba el Puente de Paz que un

día, sin lugar a dudas, uniría al pueblo americano y a la gente de Iraq.

Ali aprendió a operar una computadora con los dedos de su pie. Durante la visita me pregunto mi nombre, demostrándome como introducir las letras en el keyboard. Con gran perseverancia me demostró como usando los pies solamente, se colocaba un sombrero en su cabeza.

Mis aplausos lo llenaron de orgullo y satisfacción. Que increíble esfuerzo el de este joven Iraquí en tratar de valerse por si mismo a pesar de esta terrible experiencia.

Las postales que este determinado muchacho produce con sus pies conllevan un maravilloso mensaje de paz: "Estas pinturas son un símbolo de paz. No debe haber mas guerras".

La guerra solo trae muerte, destrucción y agonía a sus víctimas. Nunca resuelve los problemas existentes sino que crea otros aun mas complejos. Ruego para que a través de este relato mas personas reconozcan la importancia de seguir las enseñanzas de Jesús, Príncipe de la Paz. Jesús construiría puentes de paz entre norteamericanos y ciudadanos de otras partes del mundo. Es inconcebible pensar que Jesús bombardearía seres humanos llevando un M16 en su hombro.

Por el contrario, veo la imagen de Jesús alimentando a cientos de personas hambrientas, multiplicando los panes y peces como aprendemos en uno de los pasajes de la Biblia.

No, la guerra no es el camino que nos trazo Jesús y no debe ser el que empleamos los seres humanos Que Dios bendiga al mundo, sin excepciones!

Si desea más información sobre Ali y Ahmed, por favor visítelos en la siguiente dirección: www.aliabbas.net

Adición, Abril 5, 2005 — [Ali se encuentra viajando a los Estados Unidos. Esperamos que el odio que este joven haya sentido por los Estados Unidos se desvanezca cuando nos conozca personalmente. Este viaje puede servir para acelerar su recuperación física y espiritual. - Gilliam]

El joven Iraquí Ali Abbas se encuentra en New York para recibir atención médica especializada y conocer a otro joven víctima de similares circunstancias. Kenan Malkic, residente de Staten Island quien perdió los dos brazos y una pierna al detonarse una mina en Bosnia en 1994, le envió un video a Ali donde demostraba como agarraba un tenedor con gran facilidad.

Kenan pasa a removerse los brazos para demostrar donde fueron sus heridas. Con entusiasmo demuestra como jugar con un play station, lo cual interesa mucho a Ali. "Quiero que Ali comprenda que estar deshabilitado es solo una palabra y un estado mental. Me llevo un tiempo comprender esto. Ojala alguien me hubiera facilitado un film como el que le envié a Ali".

Ali estaba asombrado como Malkic funciona con su prótesis de alta tecnología, preguntándole a su terapeuta Nafisah Kamal Habib si el podría lograr los mismos resultados.

"Kenan me sirvió de gran inspiración y me dio grandes esperanzas ver lo que el había logrado", dijo Ali recientemente. "Quiero que el siga apoyandome durante este proceso".

Ali ha sido habilitado con unas prótesis que el encuentra demasiado pesadas. Por lo tanto se concentraba en aprender a utilizar sus pies, pintando y tocando el piano. Global Medical Relief Fund, una organización en Staten Island que ayudo a Malkic en el pasado a superar su problema, esta apoyando a Ali a conseguir unas prótesis que llenen los requerimientos de Ali en el presente y puedan superarse tecnológicamente en el futuro.

"Quisiera conocer a Ali en un futuro próximo. Hemos tenido experiencias similares que se deben superar para progresar de una forma rápida".

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