
UM AL-IRAQ (THE DATE PALM TREE) The Life and Work of Dr. Rashad Zaydan of Iraq

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2011 Women PeaceMakers Program

Made possible by the Fred J. Hansen Foundation

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A NOTE TO THE READER

In the following pages, you will find narrative stories about a Woman PeaceMaker, along with additional information to provide a deep understanding of a contemporary conflict and one person's journey within it. These complementary components include a brief biography of the peacemaker, a historical summary of the conflict, a timeline integrating political developments in the country with personal history of the peacemaker, a question-and-answer transcript of select interviews, and a table of best practices in peacebuilding as demonstrated and reflected on by the peacemaker during her time at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice.

The document is not intended necessarily to be read straight through, from beginning to end. Instead, you can use the historical summary or timeline as mere references or guides as you read the narrative stories. You can move straight to the table of best practices if you are interested in peacebuilding methods and techniques, or go to the question-and-answer transcript if you want to read commentary in the peacemakers' own words. The goal of this format is to reach audiences through multiple channels, providing access to the peacemakers' work, vision, lives and impact in their communities.

ABOUT THE WOMEN PEACEMAKERS PROGRAM

Made possible through a generous grant from the Fred J. Hansen Foundation, the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice's (IPJ) Women PeaceMakers Program annually hosts four women from around the world who have been involved in human rights and peacemaking efforts in their countries.

Women on the frontline of efforts to end violence and secure a just peace seldom record their experiences, activities and insights — as generally there is no time or, perhaps, they do not have formal education that would help them record their stories. The Women PeaceMakers Program is a selective program for leaders who want to document, share and build upon their unique peacemaking stories. Selected peacemakers join the IPJ for an eight-week residency.

Women PeaceMakers are paired with a Peace Writer to document in written form their story of living in conflict and building peace in their communities and nations. The peacemakers' stories are also documented on film by the IPJ's partner organization Sun & Moon Vision Productions. While in residence at the institute, Women PeaceMakers give presentations on their work and the situation in their home countries to the university and San Diego communities.

The IPJ believes that women's stories go beyond headlines to capture the nuance of complex situations and expose the realities of gender-based violence, thus providing an understanding of conflict and an avenue to its transformation. The narrative stories of Women PeaceMakers not only provide this understanding, but also show the myriad ways women construct peace in the midst of and after violence and war. For the realization of peace with justice, the voices of women — those severely affected by violent conflict and struggling courageously and creatively to build community from the devastation — must be recorded, disseminated and spotlighted.¹

BIOGRAPHY OF A WOMAN PEACEMAKER —
DR. RASHAD ZAYDAN



Photo credit: Sun & Moon Vision Productions

Dr. Rashad Zaydan of Iraq became a pharmacist to heal people. When her country was torn apart by war, her healing work expanded to include the physical, emotional, social and psychological needs of Iraq's women and children. As the founder and head of the development organization Knowledge for Iraqi Women Society (K4IWS), Dr. Zaydan seeks to bring hope and empowerment back to the lives of Iraqi women and children, especially widows and orphans, through the humanitarian, educational, economic, social and medical programs that K4IWS provides.

A native of Baghdad, Dr. Zaydan is a survivor of multiple wars. The year she graduated from college and became a pharmacist, Iraq entered a long, destructive conflict with Iran; then came the Kuwait invasion followed by the First and Second Gulf Wars and 13 years of sanctions. During this time, Dr. Zaydan helped create charity medical clinics, taught Qur'an to young girls, ran her own private pharmacy and raised four children.

In 2003, convinced that war would soon return to her country, Dr. Zaydan organized basic first aid emergency training for girls and women in her community. As neighbors fled Baghdad before the invasion, she moved medical supplies and medicines from her private pharmacy to her home. After the bombs began to fall and as the city collapsed outside, neighbors started knocking on her door for medical help. Dr. Zaydan converted her family's home into an emergency clinic, giving away medicines and treating minor medical emergencies out of her garage.

In the aftermath of invasion, but still in the chaos of violence, Dr. Zaydan gathered her women friends to rehabilitate their community. Dr. Zaydan's first priority was the destroyed schools, which had become impromptu bases for the Iraqi government and U.S. forces. As occupation continued, she responded to the disempowerment and loss of faith that many women felt in her community due to the lack of security and ability to move freely in the city. She had a vision of a center that would be a refuge for women, a place where they could take classes, receive medical services and, most importantly, connect with other women and share their experiences.

That was the beginning of K4IWS and their first office in Baghdad. Seeing the immediate and wide-scale humanitarian relief needed to decrease the violence, she and other Society members responded where they could and sought to build peace.

After responding to the Fallujah attacks in 2004 with relief and medical aid, Dr. Zaydan was asked to set up a permanent branch there. Another request from community leaders in Abu Ghraib resulted in a project that provided clean water to more than 700 households previously without access and the development of a charity medical clinic.

From its initial activities of distributing relief aid and providing basic classes in Islamic studies, English, sewing, computers and cooking, K4IWS has expanded its efforts over the years to include income-generating projects for women, programs for widows and orphans, continuing education programs for young women, and comprehensive medical clinics in some of the most violence-riddled parts of the country.

With a fearless commitment to support the widows, orphans and displaced in a society where violence and insecurity continues, Dr. Zaydan remains a healer. “We can’t change all bad things in the world,” Dr. Zaydan believes, “but still we can at least try to leave our repairing fingerprints here and there.”



CONFLICT HISTORY — IRAQ

The Republic of Iraq, located in the Middle East, shares borders with Jordan, Turkey, Syria, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the small but well-known country of Kuwait, and has a small southern coastline along the Arabian Gulf. Iraq is believed to be the Cradle of Civilization, and northern Iraq the location of the biblical Garden of Eden. The region that encompasses present-day Iraq, known in ancient times as the Fertile Crescent, has been responsible for some of the first movements of Western civilization. The first cities, irrigation systems, nation-state bureaucratic systems, examples of written language, legal systems, architectural breakthroughs and modern religions stemmed from the area. For millennia, dozens of Arabic tribes have called the region their home.

Unique in the region for many reasons, Iraq is one of the region's most water rich countries, with both the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers running through it. Iraq's classical name, Mesopotamia, fittingly means land between the rivers. It is rich in oil as well, with reserves second only to Saudi Arabia. Since 7000 BCE, the region has been the treasure of dozens of conquering empires including the Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Romans, Sassanians, Parthians, Abbasidians, Mongols, Ottomans, British and, many would argue, the United States. Today, the once vibrant city of Baghdad, containing one-fourth of the entire population of Iraq, struggles in the aftermath of U.S. invasion and occupation. In terms of devastation, violence and corruption, the breakdown of social services and the suffering of the people, it can be compared only to the aftermath of the Mongol sacking of Baghdad in 1258.

Some scholars subscribe to the idea that Iraq as a country is an “imagined state” — a country that can be seen “as an ideological construct that varies over time and ... over space.”² The name Iraq was referenced long before the Islamic conquests. It has also been associated with the name *ard al-Samad*, “the black earth,” because of its fertile ground. It is true that colonialism, separatist movements and the events of World War I and II (and the current reconstruction happening after 2003) had a major role in shaping the nation-state that exists at present. That said, the existence of a strong national identity in the country cannot be denied. However politically loose and ever-changing its state status might be, the majority of Iraqi people clearly see themselves as Iraqi first and members of varying secular and ethnic groups second. For Iraq's more than 27 million inhabitants, there is a strong sense of home in this land.

The Birth of Islam and the Shi'a-Sunni Split

With the birth of the Prophet Mohammad and Islam in 571, a major chapter in the region's history began. The years after the Prophet's death in 632 marked the beginning of the Islamic state and the split between Islam's two major branches, Sunni and Shi'a. Between 700 and 1250, Islam, and the refinement of Islamic thought, slowly spread through the entire region, saturating every aspect of society, including government, law and the sciences. The 700s also witnessed the birth of the capital city of Baghdad when Abu Jaafar al-Mansur, the second caliph of the Abbasid Empire, decided to build his new city on top of the tiny village of the same name, where after praying the afternoon prayer, he passed “the sweetest and gentlest night on earth.” The thriving metropolis was first called *Madinat al-Salam*, the City of Peace.

The split between the Sunni, meaning “people of the tradition,” and the Shi'a, originally known as the “Party of Ali,” occurred in the late 600s. Shi'as believe that Ali ibn Abi Talib, the

cousin and son-in-law of the prophet, should have been the first caliph after Mohammad's death and that, similar to the prophet, he was the "perfect man." They believe that only God has the right to choose a representative to safeguard Islam, the Qur'an and Sharia, and that other leaders and imams cannot be elected by common Muslims. According to Shi'a thinking, the most correct interpretations of the Qur'an and the Hadiths came directly from Mohammad's family and the descendents of Ali. Sunni, on the other hand, believe that the Qur'an and the Hadiths were mostly narrated by Mohammad's trusted companions. Sunnis are orthodox Muslims and comprise the majority of Islam's followers throughout the world.

The political power struggles that center around the Shi'a-Sunni split continue to this day, and were a major vector in the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988). When the Islamic Revolution broke out in Iran in 1979, its influence was felt within Iraq and gained support from Shi'a Iraqis. The Shi'a-Sunni split has also been a major factor, among others, of the sectarian violence that has plagued the country since 2005, especially during the years 2005-2007. Iraq enjoyed a period of relative equality between Sunni and Shi'a right after the Republic of Iraq was established in 1958. The current Iraqi government, in large part assembled by the United States, is majority Shi'a.

Early 20th Century Conflicts

The Ottomans ruled in Iraq from the 16th century until the end of World War I, when the country fell under yet another empire, the British. British rule was short-lived and ended when the British Mandate terminated in 1932. Similar to times past and times to come, outside occupation inflamed already sensitive ethnic and religious conflict in the area. The British established a Hashemite monarchy in the region and defined the country's borders without taking into consideration religious and ethnic differences, especially where it concerned the Kurds and the Assyrians in the north. Unrest resulted in these regions. The years that followed were fraught with instability as Iraq became the landing pad for varying interests during World War II. In 1945, Iraq joined the United Nations and became a founding member of the Arab League. In July of 1958, Brigadier General Abdul-Karim Qasim overthrew the Hashemite monarchy and declared Iraq a Republic. This was known as the Revolution of 1958. Kuwait also gained its independence from Britain in 1961, at which point Iraq claimed sovereignty over it.

The Ba'ath Party

The Ba'ath party came into power in 1968. Its control would not end until U.S. occupation in 2003. The first decade of Ba'ath rule saw conflicts between the government and the Kurds to the north, who had the support of Iran. The many battles and ongoing conflict between Iraq and the Kurds resulted in 100,000 deaths and little advancement on either side. A peace agreement was signed in the spring of 1970, which gave the Kurds representation in the government and broader autonomy. The Iraqi Ba'ath government also signed a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union. In the 1970s, the Ba'ath government implemented a tight infrastructure of social services within the country, including free education, literacy programs, especially for women, and obligatory professional and military service. It also took actions toward nationalizing Iraq's oil industry, which was completed in 1975. While the social programs raised the literacy rate to over 80 percent, benefited all with free healthcare and education, and gave women more opportunities for professional and intellectual development, they also became vehicles for government propaganda and increased control of the populace. The rights of devote practitioners of Islam were also increasingly repressed.

The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988)

Iran's Islamic revolution took place in late 1979 when the monarchy of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi toppled and Shi'a leader Ayatollah Khomeini became the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This revolution spun Iran into chaos and religious fervor, some of which spilled over to Iraq's Shi'a population. The chaos in Iran coupled with the growing resistance of marginalized Shi'a Muslims in his own country gave Saddam Hussein the excuse and opportunity to strike the first blow of the Iran-Iraq War — which would become the longest conflict between two bordering countries in the 20th century. The war cost billions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of Iraqi lives. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqi women were left as widows and their children fatherless, largely as a result of forced inscription of men of all ages into the popular army at the end of the war. By the time the war ended in 1988, Iraq's economy was in shambles and its oil income cut in half. More relevant for events to come, Hussein's government had accrued immense debt to neighboring Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States.

Prior to 1980, women accounted for 38.5 percent of education professionals, 31 percent of medical professionals and 15 percent of civil servant positions. In 1980, women received the right to vote and run for office, and during that decade, in large part because of the war, women's participation in the workforce, particularly in the civil servant sector, rose dramatically.³

Kuwait, the Gulf Wars and Sanctions (1990s)

A series of related events led to the U.S. invasion of Baghdad in 2003, many of which resulted from the Iran-Iraq War's aftermath. In August 1990, Iraq took military action against Kuwait. In addition to historic claims to territory and disputes over debt repayment and failed negotiations over oil prices in the region, Iraq also claimed that Kuwait was committing "slant drilling" for oil on Iraqi soil. Four days after the war with Kuwait began, the United Nations imposed sanctions on Iraq and all of the country's assets were frozen.

Outside military action soon followed the implementation of the sanctions. In January 1991, a U.S.-led coalition force began its offensive against Iraq. The campaign ended a little over one month later, when Hussein agreed to all of the U.N. resolutions passed since his campaign against Kuwait began. The coalition force's extensive bombing campaign did not distinguish between military and civilian targets. Hospitals, factories, bridges, electrical and communications facilities and water treatment plants were all destroyed in the offensive, leading to "near-apocalyptic results."⁴ With over a decade of heavy sanctions followed by the U.S. occupation in 2003, Iraq has never fully recovered from the results of that destruction.

Part of the U.N. agreement was Resolution 687, which called for the "unconditional acceptance, under international supervision, of the destruction, removal and rendering harmless of [Iraq's] weapons of mass destruction (WMDs)..."⁵ To enforce this mandate, the United Nations Special Commission on Iraq (UNSCOM) was formed to inspect Iraq's chemical weapons capacity. The group remained in Iraq for seven years. In 1998, U.S. President Bill Clinton declared that the country still had not complied with the mandate and was, in effect, hiding WMDs. Shortly after this statement was made, the United States and the United Kingdom enacted another four-day bombing campaign on Iraq called "Operation Desert Fox" (also known as the Second Gulf War). It was later discovered with clear evidence that many of the members of UNSCOM were actually U.S. agents acting as inspectors in order to spy on the country.

Both internal and external pressures added to the worsening situation in Iraq during the 1990s. Corruption, repression and the militarization of the economy were stark realities that Iraqis lived with daily. Under the next 13 years of harsh sanctions, the Iraqi economy would collapse, and by the mid-'90s the government would not have enough money to pay its 10 million workers a decent wage. Infant mortality would rise, literacy rates would drop and many Iraqis would be forced to leave the country in search of jobs and better lives elsewhere. Harvard's Center for Economic and Social Rights estimated that the mortality rates of children under 5 increased by 380 percent in Iraq compared with pre-Gulf crisis levels. Iraq was at one time considered to have the best healthcare system in the Middle East, but due to the shortage of medicine under sanctions, there was no way to treat simple, nearly eradicated diseases such as cholera, malnutrition and diphtheria. Disease rates rose, school attendance decreased, salaries plummeted and retirement benefits dried up.

The negative impacts of sanctions were felt especially by Iraqi women and girls. Many of the advances that women saw in the economic and political spheres were significantly reduced as Hussein's government began to embrace certain versions of Islamic and tribal law as a way to consolidate power. School enrollment for girls dropped dramatically, leading to increased illiteracy. According to UNESCO, as of 1987, approximately 75 percent of Iraqi women were literate; by 2000, it had dropped to 25 percent. Increasingly conservative interpretations of Islamic and tribal law throughout the 1990s and 2000s have further restricted women's movement and freedom in the legal and political spheres, and limited women's ability to work outside the home and travel abroad.⁶

The U.S. Invasion (2003)

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001, broke any stalemates that may have existed in the U.S. government regarding Iraq. After targeting al-Qaida and Afghanistan's Taliban leadership as responsible for the attacks and mounting a military campaign against them, President George W. Bush and his advisers turned their eyes to Iraq and the possibility of WMDs in the country. Bush placed Iraq within the "Axis of Evil" along with Iran and North Korea and their "terrorist allies," conjuring up memories of both the Axis powers of World War II and Reagan's "Evil Empire" (i.e., the Soviet Union) in the 1980s. Weapons inspectors returned to the country by November 2002. No WMDs were found in Iraq, yet in February 2003, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell addressed the U.N. General Assembly with presumed evidence proving that Hussein did have WMDs. This evidence later proved to be false, but the seed for invasion had already been planted. Worldwide opinion against the war was evident, with international protests gathering millions of people against military action.⁷

The United Nations refused to give its official stamp of approval to the United States' plans. Nevertheless, a coalition force consisting mostly of U.S. troops, with heavy assistance from Great Britain, invaded Iraq with simultaneous air and ground assaults on March 20, 2003, in Operation Iraqi Freedom. The city of Baghdad officially came under U.S. control on April 9, 2003. On April 14, CBS News estimated the number of Iraqi casualties to be near 6,000, but this figure was later revised and is said to be much higher. The majority of the casualties occurred in Baghdad.

The Aftermath of Invasion

The United States and supporters of the invasion promised a golden era of democracy and inclusion in Iraq once Saddam Hussein was removed, but reality fell short of this expectation. Reconstruction was left in the hands of the U.S. Pentagon and military, making Secretary of Defense

Donald Rumsfeld a major postwar decision maker. In May 2003, the United Nations passed Resolution 1483, which created the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to “ease Iraq’s transition to democracy” and carry on the country’s reconstruction. The resolution was sponsored by the United States and Great Britain, and Ambassador L. Paul Bremer, U.S. envoy to Iraq, was named head of the CPA. With the CPA’s right to “exercise executive, legislative and judicial powers,” the United States and Great Britain became, in effect, occupying powers, though this power was cloaked by the Governing Council, consisting of 25 representatives of Iraq’s diverse ethnic and sectarian groups. The Shi’a received a slight majority, and some criticized this approach as further instigating anti-Sunni sentiment.

Resistance occurred during the early months of the CPA’s authority and was spurred by a variety of factors, including Sunni factions wishing to put an end to the occupation and the general chaos reigning in the city after invasion. According to some sources, the United States had “mistakenly underestimated” the damage it had done to the city’s infrastructure and basic survival services, as well as the city’s state of deterioration from sanctions before invasion. Many cultural and religious sites, sacred to the Muslim population and for purposes of antiquity, were damaged or destroyed in Baghdad, Fallujah and elsewhere by the initial bombing and the looting that followed.

Another factor that added to the chaos was the void in professionals to keep the country and its infrastructure running due to the U.S. de-Ba’athification process. During Ba’ath party rule, joining the party was obligatory to advance professionally or to have access to certain social services. The majority of working people were therefore de facto members of the Ba’ath party in 2003, many having joined simply to continue living their lives. Fear kept these professionals — lawyers, engineers, administrators — from coming back to work. As a result, public works services came to a halt. Food and other necessities such as electricity, water and healthcare became scarce if not completely nonexistent in the city. Major databases and files left over by the Ba’ath party, which could have helped to establish a new government, were also destroyed with occupation.

Even with the capture of Saddam Hussein in December 2003 and amid growing doubts of the existence of WMDs in Iraq, the Pentagon continued to send more U.S. troops to Iraq. This spurred anti-war protests in the United States and elsewhere and strengthened insurgency activity among pro-Ba’ath organizations and others, especially young men. The CPA continued to turn a blind eye to the sectarian violence and the ancient relationship between its players.

Fallujah

A critical point in both U.S. occupation and resistance activity was reached in the upper-middle class town of Fallujah located just west of Baghdad. When U.S. troops arrived and occupied municipal buildings and some schools in the area, residents began demonstrating. A series of demonstrations in the spring of 2003 turned violent and resulted in deaths and injuries on both sides. Resistance activity spread to other towns around Fallujah, and bombings connected to Sunni-based, anti-occupation political groups — aimed at U.S. troops and military establishments and the United Nations — increased in Baghdad and the surrounding area. These activities gained more support with the general public when military experts began to join their ranks, adding organization and discipline to their efforts. Shi’a involvement in the resistance, including the Sadrist Mahdis led by Moqtada al-Sadr and newly formed al-Qaida cells, led the country to the brink of civil war. The CPA could no longer ignore the presence of the growing resistance.

The extreme and inhumane tactics used by the U.S. military in Fallujah are not widely known. These tactics included, most importantly, the use of white phosphorus gas, or MK-77, a substance identical to napalm. Since its use in Cambodia and Vietnam by U.S. troops, it has been banned by many countries through U.N. agreements, but the United States has not agreed to ban it from military purposes. Especially in the second attack on Fallujah in November 2004, indiscriminate use of MK-77 gas was evident in nighttime chemical showers and cluster bombings, as well as in tactical skirmishes. *The Washington Post*, among other sources, alluded to evidence of its use in articles published at that time.⁸ Many U.S. military officials have since admitted the use of MK-77, which they term “shake and bake,” in Fallujah.

Although most references to white phosphorus by military sources have focused on its use for strategic purposes aimed at insurgents in the area, other sources have documented its senseless use on the overall population remaining in the city in the days after the attack began. One such account by Italian journalist Giuliana Sgrena, who was in the area just after the occupation of Fallujah, states:

...I had collected ... testimonies from other inhabitants from Fallujah about the use of guns and white phosphorus. In particular, some women had tried to enter their homes, and they had found a certain dust spread all over the house. The Americans themselves had told them to clean the houses with detergents, because that dust was very dangerous. In fact, they had some effect on their bodies, leading to some very strange things.⁹

Iraq 2004-2011

In June 2004, the state of occupation “officially” ceased, although American military presence continued to dominate everyday life for Iraqis for the next four years. The new Iraqi constitution was approved in October 2005, despite protests by many as to the intentionality of the document and its poor use of Arabic. In December of that year, elections were held. Jalal Talabani was re-elected as president and selected Nouri al-Maliki as prime minister in April 2006. Saddam Hussein was executed in December of that year and further executions of his top advisers were to follow.

At the time of the 2003 invasion, there was no evidence that al-Qaida terrorist cells were operating in Iraq, even though President Bush linked this organization — responsible for the 9/11 attacks — to Iraq. Smaller organizations were beginning to make themselves known, however, as early as that summer. Most notable was the bombing of the Jordanian embassy and the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad in August 2003, which killed the U.N. special envoy to Iraq and prompted the United Nations to withdraw. By the end of 2004, fueled by growing national resistance to U.S. occupation, there was a clear al-Qaida presence in the country. According to an article published in *Mother Jones* in 2007, “... Al Qaeda only established itself in Iraq in October 2004, well after the U.S. invasion, when its leader Zarqawi fused his Tawhid and Jihad group with Al Qaeda by publicly pledging allegiance to Osama bin Laden.”¹⁰ Sectarian violence increased from 2005 to 2007 as Zarqawi played off of rivalries between Shi’a and Sunni Muslims.

Post-invasion Iraq has seen a steady decline in basic civil functionality and an increase in poverty and sectarian violence, although the tense climate of 2005 to 2007 has lessened to some degree. The average Iraqi citizen still lives with about two hours of electricity a day (in Baghdad, one hour for every four), hindrances to travel within the capital due to a heavy checkpoint presence,

slow or nonexistent social services (such as water, trash and sewage) and a curfew from midnight to 5 a.m.

In October 2011, President Obama announced his commitment to a total troop withdrawal by the end of the year. Many Iraqis have a “wait and see” attitude as the time draws nearer, and many feel that sectarian violence will be significantly reduced when American presence is completely removed from Iraq. Others state that the result would be total chaos, in large part because of heavy infiltration of al-Qaida and other terrorist cells.

According to Dr. Jeffrey D. McCausland, a retired U.S. Army colonel,¹¹ the total Iraqi deaths caused by U.S. occupation and subsequent sectarian violence as of June 2009 was between 62,000 and 90,000. As he described it, if these deaths happened on American soil, in relation to the overall population of the country, it would be the equivalent of about 1 million Americans dead. With this staggering number in mind, it becomes clear how U.S. military occupation and the senseless sectarian violence it fueled have devastated the already sanction-weakened population and social structure of Iraq.

Iraq was once one of the wealthiest countries on the planet, located in what was at one time known as the Fertile Crescent. It was the origin of modern forms of agriculture, architecture, administration and government, and much more. The people of Iraq have a unique cultural and religious identity that must be respected in order for Iraqis themselves to create peace in their land.

INTEGRATED TIMELINE

Political Developments in Iraq and Personal History of Dr. Rashad Zaydan

- 7000 BCE** Agricultural settlements are established in what was once part of the “Fertile Crescent” (now northern Iraq).
- 1170 BCE** Mesopotamia (Iraq’s classical name) becomes part of the Assyrian Empire.
- 571** Birth of the Prophet Mohammad
- 656** The “Party of Ali” is formed after Ali ibn Abi Talib, Mohammad’s cousin and son-in-law, becomes the fourth caliph. The “Party of Ali” eventually becomes known as Shi’a (or Shi’ite).
- 680** Creation of the Islamic State
- 1258** Baghdad is sacked by Mongols under Hulagu Khan. Many compare the destruction of the city during the 2003 bombing of Baghdad by the United States to this event.
- 1532** Ottoman control of Baghdad (until 1918)
- 1917** Occupation of Baghdad by the United Kingdom
- 1920** League of Nations awards Britain a mandate to govern Iraq; the terms of the mandate lead Sunni, Shi’a and Kurds to unite in revolt against British rule.
- 1932** Iraq becomes an independent state.
- 1941** The Arab Socialist Ba’ath party is founded in Syria.
- 1957** The Al Dawa party is formed.
- 1958** Brigadier General Abdul-Karim Qasim overthrows the monarchy, setting up the Republic of Iraq.
- 1959** *Rashad Mohammad Salem Zaydan Al-Ma’athidi Al-Shamaree is born in the district of Addamya in Baghdad, Iraq.*
- 1962** *Rashad’s family moves to their new house in Al-Harythya (new land for lawyers and judges) near the middle of Baghdad.*
- Rashad begins school at Al Mansur Kindergarten.*
- 1963** Qasim is overthrown and executed. Colonel Abdul-Salam Aref heads the government.
- 1964** *Rashad graduates from kindergarten and recites Qur’an.*
- 1966** President Aref dies in a helicopter crash; his brother, Abdul-Rahman Aref, is his successor.

- 1967 ***Rashad returns to Thabat Public Primary Girls School.***
- 1968 Ba'athists overthrow Aref.
- 1970 Talks between Saddam Hussein and Kurdish leader Mulla Mustafa al-Barzani lead to an agreement recognizing Kurdish identity and promising Kurdish autonomy within four years.
- 1970 ***Rashad attends Al Harythya Girls Middle School.***
- 1971 ***Rashad attends Al Yarmook Girls Middle School.***
- 1972 ***Rashad starts attending Kabools (neighborhood women's teas) with her mom and older sisters.***
- 1973 ***Rashad starts lessons in Telawat Al Qur'an (Reading the Right Way) at Al Bunia mosque.***
- Rashad begins secondary school at Al Mammon.***
- 1974 ***Rashad begins teaching Telawat Al Qur'an at Al Bunia mosque.***
- 1975 Nationalization of Iraqi petroleum industry by the Ba'athist government is complete.
- 1977 ***Rashad begins classes at the University of Baghdad's College of Pharmacy.***
- 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran
- Saddam Hussein becomes president, beginning his dictatorship.
- One student dies and five are injured (some die later) when a car bomb explodes in a march attended largely by University of Baghdad students.***
- 1980 Iran-Iraq War begins.
- 1981 ***Rashad graduates from the University of Baghdad and cannot continue on to graduate school unless she registers as a member of the Ba'ath party. She decides to remain independent and thus does not go on to graduate study.***
- Rashad begins working as a pharmacist in a governmental hospital and medical center in Fallujah (until 1983).***
- 1982 A Shi'a opposition party, the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, is founded in Tehran by Ayatollah Baqir al-Hakim.
- 1983 ***Nameer and Rashad are married.***
- Nameer is injured in a car accident.***
- Rashad moves to Baiji with Nameer and works as a pharmacist in the Ministry of Health Medical Center.***
- 1984 ***Rashad's first child, Omar, is born.***

- Rashad is denied nursery care and is forced to continue working at the Medical Center due to lack of civilian pharmacists from the Iran-Iraq War.***
- 1986** ***Rashad's second child, Ali, is born.***
 Battle of Al Faw, a major battle of the Iran-Iraq War.
- 1987** ***Rashad opens her private pharmacy, Al Tayser Pharmacy.***
- 1988** ***Rashad and her family move to Al Dora Refinery housing when Nameer gets a position there.***
 Allegations surface that poison gas is used against Kurds in Halabja.
 Iran-Iraq War ends.
- 1989** ***Rashad's third child, Zaynab, is born.***
- 1990** Iraq invades Kuwait, beginning the First Gulf War.
 United Nations imposes sanctions, which will last 13 years.
Rashad begins teaching Qur'an studies to girls at the Al Showaff mosque.
- 1991** The U.S.-led offensive Operation Desert Storm begins to liberate Kuwait; heavy bombing in Baghdad completely destroys infrastructure, taking the country back to “pre-industrial status.”
Bombing occurs at the Al Dora Refinery. Nameer is injured and the family leaves their home (coming back two weeks later).
 Iraq accedes to all U.N. resolutions; rebellions break out among Shi'a in the south and Kurds in the north.
 U.N. Special Commission on Iraq begins first weapons inspections.
Rashad helps to open a charity clinic in Al Dakalia mosque in Baghdad.
- 1992** ***Rashad retires from government work.***
- 1993** ***Rashad's fourth child, Maryam, is born.***
- 1994** ***Rashad moves her pharmacy to Al Dora to be closer to her home.***
- 1995** ***Rashad's older sister and her family leave the country.***
- 1996** Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist party “embraces” Islam in an attempt to sway the people and keep the system in place.
- 1997** ***Rashad and her family move to their private home in Al Dora.***
- 1998** December — U.S. and Britain bomb various Iraqi sites (Second Gulf War).

- 1999** Oil-for-Food limits that started in 1995 are eliminated.
- Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, founder of the Shi'a Sadrist Movement, is assassinated.
- 2000** *Rashad gives Telawat Al Qur'an lessons in four mosques when more freedom is given by the government through the "faith campaign."*
- Rashad moves her pharmacy to Al-Harythya, Baghdad's best medical center.*
- 2001** *Rashad starts a regular course to obtain the "License of Reading and Teaching Telawat Al Qur'an."*
- February — The U.S. government admits, and C.I.A. confirms, that U.S. intelligence agents posed as weapons inspectors in January.
- 2002** January — U.S. President George Bush identifies Iraq as being part of the "axis of evil" (in response to 9/11 attacks).
- October — U.S. congressional resolution authorizes use of military force in Iraq, which the U.N. does not authorize.
- 2003** February — U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell presents so-called evidence of weapons of mass destruction (evidence later proved to be false).
- Rashad organizes emergency first aid training for 25 women in preparation for the war.*
- Rashad moves her pharmacy to her house in preparation for the war.*
- March — Rashad treats people in her garage (until June).*
- March 18 — Bush issues 48-hour ultimatum for the Husseins to leave Iraq.
- March 20 — Operation "Iraqi Freedom" begins.
- Early April — Rashad organizes food provisions for patients in public hospitals where most workers have left their positions and no clear responsible authority has taken their place.*
- April 9 — Baghdad falls to coalition forces; chaos ensues.
- Mid-April — Rashad organizes a group of women to open up a local primary school. They ask military personnel to leave and they do.*
- April 28 — Demonstration in Fallujah outside U.S.-occupied girls' middle school ends in 17 civilian deaths.
- May — Rashad helps to open a free charity clinic in Al Dora.*
- May 22 — The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) is formed, headed by Ambassador L. Paul Bremer.

June — Rashad and seven other women form the Knowledge for Iraqi Women Society (K4IWS) and open its first office in Al Kadraa.

July 22 — The 25-member Iraq Governing Counsel is formed.

Several large-scale bombings kill dozens of people in the Jordanian embassy, Canal Hotel, U.N. offices and other locations in the second half of the year.

December — Saddam Hussein is discovered and captured near Tikrit.

2004

January — The K4IWS orphan project begins informally.

March — Rashad attends Iraqi Women’s Conference at Al-Elwia club in Baghdad, where she speaks out.

March — Unidentified assailants kill and mutilate the bodies of four U.S. (Blackwater) contractors near Fallujah.

Moqtada al-Sadr involves the militant wing of the Sadrist Movement, the Mahdi Army, in the resistance.

May — K4IWS receives its registration and working license from the Ministry of Planning.

June — K4IWS marks its one-year anniversary.

August — Rashad and Society members meet with Mary Trotochaud and her husband Rick of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), their first American contact other than the military.

October — U.S. forces and Iraqi security attack resistance stronghold in Samarra.

November — Operation Al Fajr takes place in Fallujah.

December — Rashad, Nameer and a medical team visit IDPs from Fallujah in Garma.

2005

April — Rashad receives the highest license of Qur’an Reading in a special ceremony with her teacher, Sheik Yaseen Al-Azawai.

May — Iraqi transitional government replaces the interim government; Jalal Talabani is chosen as president.

U.S. military opens up the city of Fallujah to returning city residents only.

Rashad and Society members meet with medical professionals and mosque leaders in Fallujah. They tour the city, speak with residents and visit the sports field where hundreds of civilians are buried.

September — The Abu Ghraib and Fallujah Society branches open, as well as the orphan kindergarten program in Fallujah.

October — New Iraqi constitution is passed.

December — Elections are held for Iraq's 275-seat Council of Representatives; 25 percent of the seats must be held by women.

2006

January — Opening of the Society's Al Dora branch

February — Bombing of the Imam al-Askari mosque is followed by sectarian violence.

March — Rashad visits the United States for the first time, giving presentations on the East Coast with an Iraqi women's delegation sponsored by Global Exchange/CODEPINK.

April — President Talabani selects Nouri al-Maliki, leader of the Shi'a Al Dawa party, to be prime minister.

May — Permanent government of Iraq takes control.

June — Rashad visits Taiwan for a women faith leaders retreat with the Global Peace Initiative of Women.

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, leader of al-Qaida in Iraq, dies after a U.S. airstrike.

November — First K4IWS water project in Abu Ghraib

December — Saddam Hussein is hanged.

2007

K4IWS is part of a team of NGOs who has shared experiences and findings since 2004. The research project (carried out Oct.-Dec. 2006) "Humanitarian Agenda 2015: Principles, Power and Perceptions," led by Greg Hansen and researchers from the Feinstein International Center and involving Iraqi colleagues living and working in Iraq, is an in-depth, field-based study of how Iraqis view humanitarian aid, its local relevance and place in global politics.

Troop numbers reach their height at 160,000. Heavy fighting and several U.S. military operations take place against resistance and supposed terrorist cell strongholds.

January — Bush commits 20,000 more troops to Iraq, marking the controversial escalation of the war.

August — Opening of the Society's Ninawa branch

September — Second K4IWS water project in Abu Ghraib

November — Opening of K4IWS charity clinic in Abu Ghraib

2008

Through its charity clinic in Abu Ghraib, K4IWS conducts a study at three primary schools in the area and finds that 68 percent of the children suffer different forms of malnutrition; the findings are later published through the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Fighting between Turkish and Kurdish forces, Iraqi security forces and the Sadrist Mahdi Army

K4IWS income-generating projects for widows in Baghdad, Fallujah, Abu Ghraib and Ninawa begin (continue until 2010).

May — Moqtada al-Sadr agrees to a ceasefire.

August — Rashad establishes the K4IWS private kindergarten to be one of the fundraising resources for K4IWS' charity donations.

2009 January — Provincial elections are held.

March — Rashad's father dies.

2010 The *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* publishes a study showing that rates of cancer, infant mortality and leukemia in Fallujah exceeded those reported in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

February — Marriage of Rashad's youngest daughter, Maryam

March — Parliamentary elections are held.

Oil rights of Maysan Oilfields are granted to China.

April — Marriage of Rashad's youngest son, Ali

2011 ***K4IWS continues its charity donation campaign, which started in 2004 for widows and orphans in its working areas, but there are now more limitations due to decreased resources.***

May — Rashad participates in an international teleconference with the Global Room for Women.

June — Birth of Rashad, Ali's first daughter

September — Rashad joins the Women PeaceMakers Program at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice at the University of San Diego in San Diego, Calif.

October — President Barack Obama commits to total U.S. troop pullout of Iraq by the end of 2011.

Prime Minister al-Maliki orders the arrests of more than 600 former Ba'ath party members after receiving a tip of a possible coup.

December — U.S. forces declare an official end to operations in Iraq.

Um Al-Iraq
To the Beloved Date Palm Tree
To Continuous Goodness for All
To New Hope for Our Dearest Country
To all whom I mention, or may not,
Your brightness in my life was behind this work

— *Dr. Rashad Mohammad Salem Zaydan Al-Ma'athidi Al-Shamaree*

NARRATIVE STORIES OF THE LIFE AND WORK OF
DR. RASHAD ZAYDAN

UM AL-IRAQ

أم العراق

The Prophet Mohammad (SAAS)¹² once asked a gathering of his followers to solve a puzzle.¹³

“There is a tree that is like the *Mohman*, those who have faith in God. It never loses its leaves, neither in summer nor in winter. It gives its fruit and benefits to the people always. Does anybody know what tree I speak of?”

Silence ensued. Nobody raised their hand. A small boy, much younger than any of the men in the room, knew the answer but did not speak out.

“It is the date palm tree,” said the prophet. “Human faith is like this tree. The Mohman keep their principles solid. The faithful are always of service, like this tree.”

The Iraqi people call the date palm their mother, *Um Mana*, or *Um Al-Iraq*. She is their song and their most popular symbol. She gathers all of her children around her and provides nutrients in the fruit she bears. Her trunk can be used as wood to craft furniture and her leaves woven into baskets and brooms. The milky-white inner part of her root, called *jumar*, is sweet and can be eaten like her outer fruit. In times of hardship, the date palm contains all the nutrients needed to sustain life.¹⁴

The young boy called after his father as the assembly dispersed.

“Father, I knew the answer to the prophet’s question! I knew it was the date palm tree!”

“Then why did you not raise your hand, my son?”

“I was ashamed. How could I possibly know the answer when those men who are so much older and wiser than me did not?”

Sometimes the answers to the important questions in life are the most direct ones. Like the date palm tree to the people of the desert, wisdom stands silently in front of us, waiting to provide shade from the scorching sun.

FIRST FRUIT**أول ثمرة**

The date was March 28, 1959, the 17th day of Ramadan, and Um-Iman¹⁵ was working hard to complete the *Iftar* for the Muslim holy month of fasting.

She was preparing the special food for her husband, Salem, and his visitors. Salem often invited friends to the house for a meal, especially during the holiday. Um-Iman was putting the finishing touches on the *boorak*, a thin pastry filled with meat and vegetables, when she suddenly doubled over in pain. Her baby was on the way.

Please don't let the pain increase until everything is finished, she prayed as her other daughters, ages 2 and 3, played at her feet. She heard footsteps. Her niece, who lived next door, had come to see if Um-Iman needed any help preparing the meal. The young girl ran out again when she discovered her aunt hunched over the sink.

“Mom! Come quick!” Um-Iman could hear her niece call as she left. A few minutes later, her own sister was by her side.

“Why are you still here? Why are you not in the hospital?” her sister scolded.

“I can't go without arranging the food first!” Um-Iman said between gasps.

“Let me help you then,” her sister said. “Salem!”

By the time Um-Iman's husband entered the kitchen, the boorak had been made and everything sat on the stove waiting to be served.

“You will have to do it,” Um-Iman said as her sister gathered her things and prepared for them to leave.

Salem nodded. He would be fine. As the two women left, he watched them from the front door until they were out of sight.

One hour later, Um-Iman was at the hospital with her sister close at hand, giving birth to her third daughter. Her name would be Rashad, which meant rationality — to be on the right way.

Back in their home among compliments and comments of goodwill, Salem served the guests the food that his wife had prepared. He did not tell them where his wife was. It was not acceptable for men to speak of such things. Inside, however, his thoughts went to her. Was she OK? What was happening to their new baby? He knew his duty was to provide for his guests on this holy day and, hard as it was, he did his best. Some of them had traveled from far outside of Baghdad to be there that evening.

Rashad would hear the story of how she came into the world dozens of times throughout her life. Each time she heard it, it helped her remember the importance of these words: Family. Responsibility. Duty. Dedication. Sharing. Hospitality.

I. GROWING UP



The Dawn's Prayer

A soft voice floated like a scent into the front bedroom where 4-year-old Rashad and her two big sisters were sleeping. It was a man's voice and with its coming, Rashad, the tiniest daughter, began to stir under her dark pink blanket. It happened this way every morning. The moment the sound reached her ears, Rashad awakened. Baba was reciting the first verses of the *Qur'an*¹⁶ for *Fajr*, the dawn's prayer.

*"Bismillahir rahmanir rabeem.
Al-Hamdu lillabi Rabbil Aalamiin. Ar-Rahmanir Rabiim..."*

"In the Name of Allah, The Most Gracious, The Most Merciful.
All the Praises and Thanks be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds."

At first Rashad kept her eyes closed as she lay under her blanket cocoon. She wiggled her toes and snuggled deep into its soft folds, listening to Baba's steady voice. As the sounds of his prayers became louder, Rashad threw the blanket off her head, exposing her naked ears to the cool morning air of a Baghdad winter. On the other side of the room, her sisters lay still in their beds. Directly across from her, three little dressers sat up against the wall. An assortment of dolls and toys waited for her inside one of them.

"Maaliki yawmid-diin. Iyyaaka nabudu wa iyyaaka nasta'in..."

"The Most Gracious. The Most Merciful.
The only owner and the only Ruling Judge of the day of Recompense.
You alone we worship, and Your aid alone we seek."

Rashad didn't pay her sleeping sisters too much mind, nor did she notice the toys just within reach. She wasn't roused out of sleep every morning to play or chatter. In the near dark, Rashad strained to hear her father's prayer. She imagined her ears growing strong enough to hear every word.

"Ihdinas SiraatalMustaqiim-siraatal-ladhiina an amtaalayhim-gayril-magdhubi-alayhim-waladdaallim."

"Guide us to the straight way, the way of those on whom you have bestowed your grace, those whose portion is not wrath and who go not astray."

It was the sweet sound of her father's voice that called Rashad from her dreams every morning. Hearing it meant that everything was going to be OK.

Memories of Al Mansur

Rashad sat in the passenger seat next to her husband, Nameer, as the two drove south down 14 Ramadan Street in the Al Mansur district of Baghdad. She looked out the window at the rows of tall buildings punctuated with side streets that crisscrossed the broken boulevard. Before occupation, those streets bustled with activity. Rashad remembered Al Ribat bakery that had been on this street and the smell of her favorite pastry, with its thick layers of fruits and spices, that she would buy every time she was in the area. The date palm trees that had lined 14 Ramadan Street with their majestic presence were now scorched and drooping; trash and rubble littered the crooked sidewalks. Many of the shop windows in this once upscale section of town had been blown out by bombings during the initial days of the invasion or had been broken during the three tenuous years that followed.

The streets that touched the boulevard, alive and vibrant before, were now strangled by stone and rock. Since the rise of sectarian violence in 2005, the American military had begun a campaign to erect walls in neighborhoods across the city. Cement barriers over 10 feet high stretched from one end to the other across every side street. They butted up against buildings and homes on either end. The barriers were similar to the ones in Gaza and the West Bank. According to the media, they were there to “prevent the free movement of terrorists and sectarian rebels.” For every sliced and quartered section of the city, there was only one way in and one way out.

Not a single terrorist had been caught by the secondhand detection devices the Iraqi army used at every checkpoint; the only thing those ugly monoliths seemed to do was make life more difficult. Rashad watched as the barrier along 14 Ramadan Street cut its way east like the edge of a dull butter knife.

“It is happening all over like this,” Nameer said. “When will it end?” Her husband’s hands gripped tighter on the steering wheel. Row after row of gray cement went by as they drove. Some sections of the barrier flashed the dramatic colors of the murals that were painted on them. Muralists were now employed by the new Iraqi government, and the murals were designed to boost morale among the frustrated and frightened populous. Every mural had a depiction of a dove on it, sometimes several, along with pastoral scenes of people fishing, farming, working together.

Are those doves supposed to be doves of peace? Rashad wasn’t sure. As the blurred images whizzed by, a mixture of anger and grief swept over her. There had been news lately of corruption and greed within the private company that handled the murals. Some leaders were pocketing the government money they received for the projects while the artists who created them were paid a pittance.

Rashad thought of the barrier that stood between the street where she and her husband now lived and their old home, where their married son and his family currently resided. A leisurely walk to see their new granddaughter used to take 10 minutes. Now they had to drive more than half an hour to see her.

Rashad was 4 years old when she first came to Al Mansur. 14 Ramadan Street’s familiarity, even in its current condition, was like looking into the face of an old friend. Soon they would approach the street where Rashad’s own kindergarten had been so many years ago. She lifted her eyes just as the intersection came into view. It had been a while since she had passed this way. A large slab of cold, gray stone, three times a person’s height, greeted her. Just beyond was the tiled

roof of the building that had once housed one of the richest families in Baghdad. But after the Revolution of 1958,¹⁷ it became the home to Al Mansur Kindergarten.



The year was 1962. Behind the flowing robes of her mother's *abaya*,¹⁸ 4-year-old Rashad peered out at the scene before her. What she saw made her eyes widen: color, all around the large room. In one corner, there was a neat pile of multi-colored blocks. Above her head, rows of paper chains looped from one beam to another on the high ceiling. And in the middle of it all was a strong wooden table, where 20 boys and girls munched on biscuits and drank orange-colored liquid out of small plastic cups. Rashad could smell the aroma of orange juice and fresh baked bread. A young lady with a warm smile approached her mother. Would this be her new teacher?

“*Marhaban!*” the woman said as she and Rashad’s mother exchanged greetings. “Here is your daughter’s registration form and a list of items that she needs to bring with her when she comes tomorrow. Remember to bring the items in a cloth bag so she won’t lose them.”

The two women chatted while Rashad continued to hide in the soft folds of her mother’s black robe. Eventually, after saying their goodbyes, Rashad and her mother stepped out into the bright afternoon.

It was there in the front garden of the kindergarten that she spied the most exciting thing of all. An entire playground spread before her — a seesaw, swings and a jungle gym, a sandbox and shovels and toys to play with. How could she possibly wait until tomorrow to start school?

“Mama, can I go play *now*?” she asked, pulling on her mother’s robe. She couldn’t stay still. Her mother smiled down at her.

“Not now. You will have plenty of time to play tomorrow when you are registered as a student.”



“Your kindergarten is being rented out by Asia Cell now,” Nameer said, nodding to the top of the building in the distance. “You know, the cell phone company? It’s their headquarters.”

Rashad turned around just in time to see the signal tower that jutted out from the front of the building. *That must be the garden where my playground used to be*, she thought. How many afternoons had she played on those swings and slides, diving into the timeless place where children go? Now the garden hummed with digital signals and satellite waves.

More than 40 years ago, on the patio of that garden, her kindergarten graduation had taken place. Rashad had sat in a metal chair, a loose, white scarf draped over her head, as was the custom when girls read out loud from the Qur’an.¹⁹ The part of the Surah²⁰ she was to read was long, but she was not afraid as she sat in front of the crowd of parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles who waited for the ceremony to begin. The passage spoke about the prophet Luqman (A.S.),²¹ to whom Allah had given wisdom. Luqman had passed that wisdom on to his son, telling him that those who remain steady in their prayers and give wealth to those in need will receive protection from Allah.

The Surah also spoke of respect for one's parents. Rashad recited the first verses clear and strong, and in perfect Arabic.

*“Walaqad ataynaluqmana alhikmata ani oshkur lillabi waman yashkur fa-innamayashkuru linafsihi waman kafara fa-inna Allaha ghaniyyun hameedum...”*²²

It was unusual for someone so small to have the responsibility of reading the Qur'an in public. That privilege was normally reserved for those elders who had learned to recite its beautiful passages in formal Arabic. Um-Iman and Salem had taught their daughter well.

Rashad had been so courageous as a child. She had not been afraid of anything. Now worry gnawed at her incessantly; the sensation of fear was something that she, like everyone else in this city, attempted to keep at bay, with little success. Rashad took a deep breath and closed her eyes. She had seen enough.

“What are you thinking?” Nameer asked, sneaking a sideways glance at his wife. Rashad began to sing a familiar tune. It was the first English song she had learned in kindergarten.

*Mother, mother I am sick,
Bring me the doctor quick, quick.
Doctor, doctor I shall die,
No my daughter, don't cry.*

II. MEHARAB AL NOOR/TEMPLES OF LIGHT

محراب النور

Beauty in Diversity

“...We all speak the same language. That is why we can work together as a community.”

The bell rang for recess just as Rashad’s teacher finished the Arabic lesson.

“Be back in your seats in 10 minutes, please,” she called out. The classroom burst into shouts and the scuffling of seats as everyone went for the door at once.

In the little hallway between her fourth grade classroom and the playground, Rashad pulled an apple out of the pocket of her dark blue uniform and began to munch. She had just started classes at the public school last week. It was hard at first, but already she was making friends.

“Hi Bushra,” Rashad said as her friend straightened the white ribbon that held up her thick ponytail and took a small sandwich out of her bag. “How are you?”

“I have a question for you,” Bushra said.

“What is it?” Rashad replied.

“Are you *Sunni* or *Shi’a*?”²³

Bushra’s strange question caught Rashad off guard. What was she talking about? She had never heard either of those words.

“I don’t understand.”

“Aren’t you Muslim?” the girl replied, slightly agitated.

“Of course I am.”

“Then you are either Shi’a or Sunni. So what is it?”

“I don’t know.”

Bushra took a few steps toward Rashad.

“How can you not know?” Her voice was raised as she spoke. “This is your religion. What kind of Muslim are you?”

Sunni. Shi’a. What did those words mean? And if they were so important to Muslims, why hadn’t her parents ever mentioned them before?

That evening at dinner, Rashad sat at the small table with her little sister and brother while

her parents and two older sisters sat at the large one. As the family passed around a plate of warm flat bread, Rashad couldn't stand it any longer. She had to know.

“Mama,” she said, “are we Sunni or Shi'a?”

“What did you just say?” Um-Iman said sharply. Her father moved a little in his seat, but said nothing.

“Someone asked me today at school.” Had she said something wrong?

“Let's postpone this talk until we finish eating,” her father said. “Do not speak about it now.”

Rashad's family usually discussed everything together. Family events, major decisions, trips they were going to take — her parents made a point of getting input from their children on most topics. And the dinner table was usually the place where these subjects and others, such as religion, were shared.

Why don't they want to talk about this?

After dinner, Rashad went to her room to finish her homework. But her parents' avoidance had made her all the more curious, so she came back down into the kitchen where her mom was cleaning up. Rashad helped with the dishes for a few minutes before speaking.

“Mom, you didn't answer my question. What are we? I need to know.”

“Daughter, I told you that it isn't right to discuss these subjects,” her mother said. She did not look up from her dishes as she spoke.

“But my friend said that if I was a correct Muslim, I would know what I am.”

Her mother turned off the water and faced Rashad. Anger showed on her face.

“Religion is supposed to gather people together, not divide them!” Her mother's voice made Rashad wince. “Tell me that girl's name and I will speak to the school manager!”

Rashad took a step back. What was causing this outburst?

Sensing the confusion and hurt in her daughter's face, her mother calmed down a bit before continuing.

“Some people are trying to divide the Muslim people into two parts. In reality there is no difference. You are young and you have to look after your studies. Your friend was not right to ask you this. If she upsets you again, tell your teacher. If your teacher does nothing, let me know and I will talk to her.”

The Day of Ashura

The airy front room was filled with the sounds of women. Teacups clinked and the smell of *Kliatcha* cake²⁴ filled the room. Light chatter could be heard as the wives of the Hay Al-Muhamen and Hay Al-Harythya neighborhoods of central Baghdad settled in for their meeting to start. Monthly *Kabool* was a custom 13-year-old Rashad had grown up with since the family had moved to the area when she was 4. The real purpose of these teas was to provide a space where neighborhood women could connect and share.

In less than a decade, the gatherings would become a space of solace for these same women, some of whom would suffer the loss of husbands and sons in the Iran-Iraq War.²⁵ But in 1972, a more peaceful existence had settled into these upper-middle-class homes built by the capital's legal and administrative professionals and their families. In those happier days, stories of death and sorrow were balanced with announcements of births, celebrations of marriages and anniversaries, holiday activities and the everyday goings-on of busy wives and mothers.

Um-Iman's days were as full as the next woman's, and perhaps more so. Not only was she raising six children, she also worked full time as a language teacher in one of the most prestigious girls' secondary schools in Baghdad. She never missed a monthly *Kabool* though. Starting in middle school, Rashad accompanied her mother and two older sisters to these meetings. She would continue to do so throughout her college years.

The *Kabools* were structured so that each woman had a chance to be host. The previous month, it had been Um-Iman's turn. To her relief, this time her neighbor, Um-Said, was in charge. Um-Said stood up to announce that the meeting was about to begin.

"Um-Ali, can you start?" Um-Said said, nodding to a plump woman in the far corner of the large circle.

"Sisters, I am exhausted!" Um-Ali said as she adjusted her *juba* and stood to address the group.

Several of the women nodded.

"As many of you know, I am preparing for the Day of Ashura on the 10th of *Muharram*²⁶ and there is so much to do! I need to clean more than 30 kilos of rice, pick out all of the fine stones and prepare it to be cooked on that day. And, remember, on the 14th I will be distributing *Kubiz Al Abbas*²⁷ to our neighbors, as per tradition. There is so much to do before the beginning of the year. *Inshallah*,²⁸ we will get it all done in time for this important remembrance. Thank you!"

After everyone spoke and Um-Iman had said her final *Ma'a al Salama*,²⁹ she and her daughters began the short walk back to their home. What Um-Ali had said stuck in Rashad's mind as they entered the house. Just what was the Day of Ashura?

"Mom, what are Um-Ali and her family going to celebrate during Muharram?"

"Um-Ali is a Shi'a Muslim," her mother said casually. "They practice their own way."

“And why don’t we do this?”

“We are Sunni. We don’t have this holiday.” It was the first time Rashad had heard one of her parents describe their family’s Muslim faith this way. But it was clear by her mother’s short answer that the conversation was over.

Rashad was too young to understand the politics of the time. Still, she felt only half-satisfied with her mother’s answer. Ever since her classmate had approached her about the subject, conversations with her mother, her sisters and even her close friends had proven fruitless, but had deepened her curiosity to *know*. As she grew older, she began to join her sisters in the family’s vast library, researching all sorts of subjects, including this one. Slowly she was putting the pieces of the puzzle together on her own. She was discovering that, although both Sunni and Shi’a pray five times a day, do *hajj*³⁰ and fast for Ramadan, other details of their worship were different.

In 1972, Muslims in Hay Al-Muhamen and Hay Al-Harythya intermingled peacefully and some even intermarried. But the things that set them apart would become exaggerated for Rashad and every other young Iraqi, Sunni and Shi’a alike, in the years to come.

Summer School

Fifteen-year-old Rashad loved Fridays. Friday was a holy day in Islam and there was no school. It was also the day that her mother made a special lunch for the family. From midmorning on, the house was filled with the smell of rice, meat and simmering sauces that bubbled and boiled invitingly. On that particular Friday, her mother was making *Macluba*, one of Rashad’s favorite dishes. Macluba was made in a pot: layers of fried eggplant, potato and green pepper cooked with meat, tomato and onion, then covered with a thick layer of red rice. As per tradition, her mom waited until all members of the family were seated before serving.

Rashad heard her father return from Friday prayer at the mosque. A few minutes later, he entered the kitchen to join them. As soon as he was seated, her mother placed a large tray on top of the pot, and as the girls and their father watched, Um-Iman flipped the pot onto the tray. The part of the stew that had not absorbed into the rice created a steaming cascade of vegetables and meat that drizzled down the sides of the colorful mound.

Her mother placed the tray in the middle of the table. The family watched as Salem served himself a small plate in preparation for the lunchtime *Doab Al-Tabam*.³¹

“Oh Allah, bless us with what you give us and pull us out of the fire...”

When he finished, Um-Iman passed the dish around.

“Do you know what I heard the imam say at mosque today?” Rashad’s father began. “Al Bunia will be giving special lessons to girls to help them learn *Telawat Al Qur’an*.”³²

In 1974, most mosques had sections specified for women to pray, but actual classes to learn the Qur’an were rare. In most cases, the mosques that did have these services had added them on as an afterthought. The common thinking of Iraqi Islamic scholars at the time was that girls could look after their schoolwork and women could look after their jobs, but religion need not occupy their

minds much at all. At the state level, the Ba’ath party, which had been in power since 1968, was promoting modernity and secular values that did not encourage Islamic tradition.

The magnificent Jamae Al Bunia, a newly built mosque located in the middle of the city’s bustling transit hub, stood as a challenge to both points of view. Its impressive environment attracted serious Islamic practitioners and scholars while its progressive nature challenged both strictly traditional and ultra-secular ways of thinking. The imam of Al Bunia, Mahmood Gairb, came from Egypt, where women were a vibrant part of the Islamic community. Al Bunia also hosted a well-known and respected Egyptian Islamic scholar, Mohammad Helal, who had taught Qur’an studies to girls in that country for many years.

In Baghdad, however, Islamic scholarship for girls was something new. The classes would be the first in the entire city.

“He said that Helal is ready to receive his new students this coming Monday,” Rashad’s father said. “What do you think, Um-Iman?”

Um-Iman had exposed her daughters to the literary classics of the West from the time they were old enough to read them. Classics such as *Wuthering Heights*, *Gone with the Wind* and Shakespeare’s plays lined the shelves of the family library. She also taught her daughters to appreciate their own rich Arabic language. Of course she wanted them to study the Qur’an in depth and be exposed to the extra Arabic language tutelage. At the same time, her mind grew weary at the thought of running them to yet another activity.

“If you are willing to take them, I think it would be wonderful,” she said to her husband.

“And what do you think?” her father asked, looking over at his daughters.

Rashad couldn’t wait to begin.



One year later, Rashad and her older sister walked the familiar route toward the Al Bunia library. Along the massive hallway that connected the mosque’s entrance to its inner rooms, the cobalt blue of the glass windows ricocheted sunlight onto the smooth cement floor as the sounds of children came in from outside. Inside the library, high bookshelves stretched from floor to ceiling along the far right wall. Dark vinyl couches filled the expansive room. There were enough seats for an assembly of 200. As the sisters entered, they were welcomed by a group of about 25 young girls. Rashad felt a rush of excitement. Today she would not just be a student of Qur’an at Al Bunia; she would be a teacher as well.

“*As-Salāmu ‘Alaykum*,” she said as she stooped down to greet a little girl who was standing by the doorway. “What’s your name?”

The girl just smiled in response, her dark brown eyes widening at the fact that a “grown-up” had spoken to her. Rashad smiled back before walking over to where the other teachers, including her sister, were congregated in the far corner. As she joined them, she recalled the sense of awe she felt one year ago as she entered this grand room and met her new teacher for the first time.

But now Rashad would teach as well as learn. Sheik Gairb entered the library and began talking to Seham, a college student and the oldest of the teachers. Seham was to put the students in groups and organize the initial activities. The sheik warned them all that throughout the next week, the number of students would increase as the word got out about the classes.

“Be flexible with your plans,” Sheik Gairb said with a smile as he headed out the door.

Being the youngest teacher, Rashad was assigned to the youngest students. On that first day, she happily marched her three charges to the far corner of the room for their first day of summer school. By the end of the month, just as the sheik had predicted, she was teaching *Telawat Al Qur’an* to a class of more than 30.

Rashad had studied the *Qur’an* at Al Bunia for over a year before she was asked to teach. During that time, she learned to appreciate the beauty and power of those words — the words of God — and the responsibility that came with teaching them to others.

The First Spark

It was 10 in the morning when the students of the several colleges³³ at the University of Baghdad gathered on the central lawn. Rashad and her best friend Rafida were among them. Classes had been canceled that morning. The male members of the Iraqi Students Union could be easily recognized by the dark ribbons on their arms, and many of the girls wore black clothes to show their sorrow about what had occurred the day before. Some of the thousand or so students that had gathered had heads bowed while others looked determinedly ahead. The unusual quiet of the crowd was broken only by traffic on Al Wazayria Street, the main thoroughfare along campus.

The head of the Iraqi Students Union began to speak. His voice echoed across the quad.

“We will stand for a moment of silence for the spirit of our fellow scholar. She died yesterday because of the cowardice of our enemies.”

When the minute was over, many of the university’s deans and professors spoke about the good character and martyrdom of the young woman who had been killed. Then the students gradually began filling the hallways on their way back to class, and Rashad and Rafida were joined by some of their friends who had been at the march. Thousands of students had taken to the streets yesterday. The gathering was encouraged by the government — in support of Iraq and against the Iranians — and was spurred on by the first border skirmishes with Iran. When the student union members leading the march passed an unmarked car, a bomb went off inside. The female student was killed and five others were injured.

Tension filled the university’s hallways, including those in the College of Pharmacy where Rashad was in her fourth year. Young people who two days prior wanted nothing to do with politics were suddenly enraged by what had occurred. They wanted to do something about it. Continuous media accounts and government propaganda spurred these sentiments on.

“If I had been in the front yesterday, I might have been one of those injured students!” their friend Maha said, shaking her head. Her long braids moved from side to side, accentuating her point.

“Or you might have been the one killed,” Suzan said, looking dramatically at her friend. Suzan and Maha were usually the ones everyone in their eclectic group could count on to keep things light and fun. But that day fear dampened their normally high spirits and sorrow could be seen on their frowning faces.

Rashad and Rafida stole glances at each other as the other girls continued to talk. They had planned on going to the march as well, but at the last minute decided to stay behind and catch up on their studying.

What if we had gone too? Rashad wondered.

A Place for Prayer

It was just about noon and time for *Dhuhur*, the noon prayer. When their bio-chemistry professor finished talking, Rashad and Rafida left the lecture hall together.

“I’ll meet you downstairs,” Rashad said, frowning.

“Is everything OK?” Rafida asked.

“Yes, it’s just...”

“Did you see a new *ealan*?”

Rashad nodded, recalling the black banner she had seen that morning announcing yet another death and date of condolence.

“Anyone we know?”

“I don’t think so. But still...”

“I know,” Rafida said, looking down at the ground. Then she looked up, smiled and locked arms with her friend as they headed to the first floor bathroom

“I’ll come with you today,” Rafida said.

Since the conflicts on the border had started the year before, their lives and entire community had been turned upside down. Now they were in their fifth and final year of college and the country was at war with Iran.³⁴ How did this happen? Rashad, 21 years old, knew a little about the politics of the war. But she knew a lot about how the war was affecting herself and her friends at the university.

She still remembered how close the bombs sounded when she and her siblings had slept on the roof of their family home that previous summer.

“Come down now!” their father had yelled up at them as they were awakened by blasts that resonated in their chests and pierced their eardrums.

Looking out the bus window every morning and evening on her way to school and back, Rashad saw the ealans hanging ominously on the exterior walls of buildings along the bus route. There were so many of them, put up by grieving families announcing the date, time and place for receiving condolences for sons, brothers, fathers and husbands who had died in a bombing or the line of fire. For the last year and a half, Rashad and her friends had been swallowed up in a strange and unfamiliar sadness. Whereas before they had thought only about living their young lives, now reminders of death appeared on every corner.

When Rashad and Rafida entered the front area of the first floor restroom, Rashad unfolded her prayer rug while Rafida slipped quietly past her to use the facilities. Rafida was a Christian, but she often came with Rashad as she did her prayer between classes. The girls had met in their first year of college. Though they came from different backgrounds, they shared the same deep connection to their faith and down-to-earth personalities. Rashad also appreciated how Rafida had supported her since the beginning in her struggle to create a place for prayer at the university. The Ba’ath party discouraged religious practice and, especially since the war started, had become stricter in their prosecution of open observers.

Rashad wasn’t involved in the growing student movement around the war, nor was she interested in challenging the established order with her religious views. She was simply a young woman who wanted a place to take off her head cover, to rest and to pray. Nevertheless, she had been summoned by the dean’s office several times for questioning. At first, she and the handful of other traditional students had been granted a space in one of the painting studios to practice *Dhuhur* and *Asr*, the two daytime prayers. But that gift had been taken away at the beginning of last year. In response, the group had decided to make use of the first floor bathroom, the only place available to them.

Since then, both Sunni and Shi’a girls and boys at the College of Pharmacy had prayed in the makeshift mosques Rashad and others had set up in their respective restrooms. Traditional students had no choice: If they wanted to keep up with the demands of their studies and follow their tradition at the same time, it was either the restroom or nothing. Rashad remembered the first day she had prayed there. On that day, a young girl had entered the bathroom just as they were about to begin.

“Can I join?” the girl had asked with a shy smile.

“Of course.”

Rashad had watched the young woman take out a small piece of fire-glazed clay about the size of a piece of soap. Later, Rashad learned that the girl was Shi’a and the clay piece was called a *Turba*. It was needed for her to rest her head upon as she bowed.

That day seemed so long ago. Since then, much had changed. Some of the Shi’a girls who had initially shared space with her for prayer between classes no longer came. Many had been taken by the *Mubabarat*, the Intelligence Ministry of the government. Some had been questioned and then released. Others had gone to jail. Most did not come back to the university.



She had only a few minutes to pray before her fifth-year lab class started. A few more girls, their heads covered loosely with pale-colored scarves, came into the room. Two years ago, Rashad was one of the only students at the University of Baghdad to wear a *hijab*. Since war had descended upon the country, more students were embracing spiritual practice, despite the persecution. Everyone in her soon-to-be graduating class, nicknamed *Qādisiyyat Ṣaddām*³⁵ after the war, knew someone who had died or been wounded.

As Rashad and the other girls began their prostrations, the door to the restroom swung open. Two young women in modern clothing, their heads not covered, came in. Their high-pitched laughter was in strange contrast to the low voices of those already in prayer. As they entered, the girls lowered their voices slightly. One of them carefully stepped around the group and approached the mirror. She began applying lipstick to her already pink lips while the other took a dark blue pack of *Sumers*³⁶ out of her bag. She pulled a thin stick out, lit it and quietly inhaled.

A few minutes later, the girl in the corner put out her cigarette and left with her friend. Those in prayer rolled up their rugs and filed out shortly after. The smell of cigarettes hung in the air.

Postscript: The Most Advanced Degree

Thirty-one years after beginning her studies in Telawat Al Qur'an, Rashad stood in the front corner of a large main hall. She watched as the large room filled with people. It seemed that everyone had come out today to help her celebrate, despite the dangers of the post-occupation Baghdad streets. Um-Ali was there along with Um-Mundar, Um-Tebeha and her students from the mosque in her home district of Al Dora. Rashad's mother and father were in the front row, sitting tall and proud, waiting with the others for the short ceremony to begin.

When all had quieted, Rashad's husband led Sheik Yaseen Al-Azawai, an older blind gentleman, to the front of the hall where a small table and a chair had been placed for the famous Islamic scholar to rest. He began with a simple Qur'an recitation. Rashad closed her eyes as she allowed the sacred words to flow over her.

*“Bismi Allabi alrrahmani alrrabeemi...Alrrahmanu...AAallama alqur-ana...Khalaaqa al-insana...AAallamahu albayana...Alshshamsu waalqamaru bibusbanin...Waalnnajmu waalshshajaru yasjudani.”*³⁷

Sheik Al-Azawai's soft voice filled her with peace, as it always did. There was compassion in his gentle words and melody in the way he articulated each part of the verse. This was why people all over Iraq, and other countries, listened to him on the radio and TV during the holy days. For the last two years, it had been Rashad's privilege to study under his supervision. Her journey with the Qur'an had not been easy. Raising children, running a business and the hardships of war had all prevented her at times from continuing her Qur'an studies. But she had not given up. In early 2003, she obtained the license for “First Reading,” which proved her proficiency, but not mastery, in Qur'an recitation. Then her husband's consent and the circumstances of her life had allowed her to study with Sheik Al-Azawai.

The “Scientific License for the 10th Qur'an Way of Reading”³⁸ was a prestigious award given out by the *Jamet Al Koraba Wah Al Mujaoweden*, the Society of Qur'an Readers, a group made up

almost exclusively of men. There was an absence of women holding degrees in Qur'an reading because advanced Qur'an study required hours of daily reading and listening — hours not easily available at that time. But Sheik Al-Azawai had agreed to start, for the first time, a course for women. Rashad believed that God's care was behind this agreement. After that day, Rashad would be one of a handful of women with official mastery in Qur'an reading. She would be able to teach and give the license to others — and she would be paving the way for other women to do the same.

“I give this license to Rashad Mohammad Salem Zaydan Al-Ma'athidi,”³⁹ Sheik Al-Azawai said. “She is ready now. She can read Qur'an and give licenses to anyone she deems capable of this responsibility and honor. Keep this license in faith, guard it and serve it well.”

Sheik Al-Azawai handed Rashad the certificate written in elegant, calligraphied Arabic and stamped with the union seal. As she reached out to receive it, she glanced for a moment at the crowd of people who had come to support her. Her father's eyes were moist and her mother was radiant. She saw the smiles on the faces of all her friends and loved ones before her.

War is outside. People are killing and fighting. But yet here we are in this grand hall, celebrating.

III. WAR AND SANCTIONS

الحرب والعقوبات (المحاصر)

The Meaning of Marriage

It was Ramadan, 1983. Rashad and her new husband Nameer, one of his brothers and his parents were gathered in the front room of Nameer’s family’s home to share Iftar. That night Nameer would drive his brother to the military facility on the outskirts of the city for training, then drive back to Baghdad. The young men ate quickly before leaving.

Shortly after Rashad and Nameer were married, Nameer himself had been transferred out of the army and, to both of their delight, into a civilian engineering position at the new oil refinery in Baiji about three hours away.

“*Wajibik bulu!* You are lucky for me!”⁴⁰ he had said to her when they heard the news. The couple had been married no more than three months, but already so much had happened between them. Nameer had moved to Baiji shortly after the marriage to start his new position while Rashad stayed behind, working to complete her government work obligation in Fallujah. She had not seen her new husband in more than a week and was excited for their reunion when he came home that night.

As the two young men left for the evening and Rashad settled in to wait, she was on the verge of making a decision about joining her husband in Baiji right away. She was entering her second year of government work. By the end of the year, she would fulfill the obligation that all state school graduate professionals had — to contribute their first two years of work to the government. Her plan had been to open her own private pharmacy in Baghdad after the two years were up. But the more she contemplated the situation, the more she relished the thought of being alone with her husband in one of the fully furnished homes built exclusively for engineers and their families at the refinery.

As she waved goodbye, she recalled with a smile how it had taken her time, a heart-to-heart conversation and much prayer to finally make the decision to marry.



“How long can you continue to live with Mother and Father? It’s time you started your own life and your own family,” Rashad’s older sister had said to her one evening a year ago. That day, Rashad had gotten off work at the medical clinic in Fallujah a bit later than usual and had missed the bus back to Baghdad. Whenever that happened, which was often, she would stay the night at her sister and brother-in-law’s house there.

“Your studies are finished,” she continued. “There are no excuses. Listen, there’s a young man my husband knows. He was asking about you. He just finished his studies in engineering. At least look after his biography and his family.”

“Can’t you understand?” Rashad asked, the blood rising to her face. “I have just started working and I have a lot of responsibilities. I need to get settled first before I can start on anything else!”

My decision not to marry has nothing to do with the person. It is the subject of marrying in general. I need to get my feet on solid ground first. Why can't anyone understand that?

“Dearest Rashad,” her sister responded in a slightly softer tone, “I understand because I am close to you. But others cannot. You are embarrassing our father with your indecision. We are in a war now and everything is changing. Will you at least do the *Salat Al-Istekara*?⁴¹ Ask God to tell you the best way to go.”

That night, Rashad slept very little. Her mind was filled with her big sister’s words. Was it time for her to make a change? Rashad decided she needed more information before she could answer that question. She was a deeply spiritual person but she was also someone who thought about things logically. She knew that any question, including this one, needed adequate information and evidence before it could be answered. She would do the *Salat Al-Istekara* and, at the same time, would seek the advice of one of the most well-known Islamic scholars at the University of Baghdad.

When she returned to the city, she wrote the scholar an anonymous note stating her dilemma. His response came 10 days later, delivered by a friend to her family’s doorstep. “*Na’am*,” the letter said. “Yes. Accept the idea of marriage. Look after this young man and his behavior, his family, his religion. If everything is satisfactory, then start thinking about creating your own family.”

The day the letter arrived, her mother told Rashad that they had had a visitor.

“Who?” Rashad asked absentmindedly, clutching the opened envelope. It was the mother of the young engineer her sister had talked about.

“She will be coming back soon to meet with you,” her mother said.



“I will not change my clothes,” Rashad said. She and Um-Iman were in Rashad’s bedroom. The mother of the young engineer was to arrive at any moment.

“Daughter, please,” Um-Iman said with a sigh. “All your sisters, even the youngest one, are married. It is going on five years now and you refuse to even discuss the subject. You were making excuses before, saying you were having a tough time with your studies. Your father and I were excusing you then, but now you have finished school. We cannot look after you forever. Nameer is a good man from a good family.”

She had heard this all before from her sister. But this time, Rashad knew her mother was right. She could not stay at her family’s house for the rest of her life. Graduate school was not an option for her: She refused to become a member of the Ba’ath party, a stipulation for entrance into any Iraqi doctorate program. She was fairly comfortable with her job in Fallujah and her life had settled down a bit. Difficulties with school or work were no longer good excuses.

I guess I should at least give this young man a chance. Rashad sighed and looked at her mother.

“It is God’s will. I will meet her,” Rashad said. “But I will go like this and she will see me without my head cover, naturally.”

When the older woman came in, Rashad saw that her eyes were friendly behind her thick glasses. Um-Iman led her into the visitor’s room while Rashad fetched some juice from the kitchen. When she returned with three glasses, she sat quietly as their guest turned her attention to her.

“Nameer is not the oldest of my sons,” she said to Rashad with a smile, “but he is the one who is ready to marry now. My oldest son is in graduate studies in politics and will finish his studies first...”

Rashad listened for a while before excusing herself.

“What are you doing?” her mother said, coming into the bedroom where Rashad sat on her bed reading. “Sit with our guest! You have to make some conversation!”

Rashad put her book on her lap but said nothing. *Why do I need to make conversation? We met. Wasn’t that enough?*

Um-Iman sensed her daughter’s trepidation. She walked over to the window that faced the front garden and lifted one of the blinds. There, two men were talking. Apparently, the young engineer had come early to pick up his mother and Um-Iman’s oldest son had greeted him in the courtyard.

“Come see,” Um-Iman said, motioning to her daughter. “There he is.”

Rashad swallowed hard and looked nervously toward the window. “I am not saying yes, mother. When I say yes, then I will look after him.”

“Just come and have a look, daughter,” Um-Iman said. Then she said with a shrug, “Who knows? Maybe you won’t like him at all.”

Rashad came slowly over to where her mother was standing. She slid her fingers between the blinds just wide enough to take a peek.



Rashad, along with Nameer’s parents, had been waiting for Nameer’s return for hours. It was almost midnight when the phone rang.

“What is he saying?” Rashad asked her father-in-law as the older man held the phone in his hand, his face stern and his brow pinched.

“It is OK, my daughter,” her father-in-law said. “It is nothing. Just a little accident.”

An hour later, the door opened and two hunched figures walked in. Nameer’s shirt was covered in blood and his face was pale and drawn. A thick bandage encompassed his entire left hand.

“He was resting his arm out the window when the military truck came by,” his brother said. “It all happened so fast...”

“It may take months for him to recover...”

“Let’s get him to the bedroom so he can rest...”

Rashad heard the family’s frantic words as muffled sounds coming at her through a long tunnel. A familiar feeling of panic came over her. The late nights worrying about him on the fire line, not knowing if he was alive or dead on so many occasions — all the memories came flooding back to her. Then all went black as her body collapsed on the living room floor.

Baiji

“Abdu, do you see? You have to hold the bottle like this if you want the milk to come out.”

Rashad picked up her little son, Omar, from his tiny crib and held him in her arms. She placed the bottle of milk gently between his lips. The baby’s tiny cheeks moved and his little eyes squeezed closed as he sucked. Rashad felt her heart ease a little as she held her child, deciding for just a moment to ignore the thick smell of antiseptic and the clamoring of the pharmacy patrons in the front lobby of the store. But the line was getting longer. She could not ignore it forever.

“*Dhonnobad*,⁴² ma’am. *Shukran!*”⁴³ Abdu thanked Rashad in his hybrid language of Bengali, Arabic and English. He smiled broadly and Rashad got the feeling that the man was blushing underneath his dark Bangladeshi complexion.

This is a strange and unnecessary situation for both of us, Rashad thought. She handed her child over to Abdu, who quickly adjusted the sagging clothes that hung on his thin frame before reaching out awkwardly to take Omar. Rashad turned to go. She did not look back when she heard her son whimper. She knew that if she did, she would not be able to resist picking him up again. Heartbreaking as it was, she left the tiny, windowless room and entered into the front space where the pharmacy counter was. She turned to the next person in line.

“Give this medicine to your child three times daily,” she said mechanically.

How long can I go on doing this?

In the mid-‘80s, even as the war with Iran raged on at the border, the government still honored its agreement to allow Iraqi mothers six months of paid nursery leave and an optional six additional months with half-time pay after the birth of each child. When Rashad had her first son, Omar, at the end of the summer of 1984, she was in need of the rest. It had been a hard pregnancy, especially during the first term. Besides, she, like any mother, wanted to have the precious extra time to be with her child during his first year. When her boss at the Ministry of Health told her that he would not grant her full nursery leave, she was speechless.

“I don’t have another pharmacist,” her boss said when she visited his office two months after she gave birth. He sat on his high, leather chair and looked down at her through his glasses as he spoke. “If you take more time, I will have to close the pharmacy.”

Rashad knew the situation in the country as well as anyone. All available male pharmacists and doctors had been transferred to military hospitals while most female professionals preferred to stay close to family and friends in Baghdad. When she had first arrived at the Baiji Medical Center, in the middle of this small town surrounded by sand dunes and plagued by the constant drone of high winds, everyone had said that her coming was a gift.

If my coming here was such a gift, then why am I being treated this way now?

“You have to ask the ministry,”⁴⁴ she had told her boss. “They are responsible for giving you another pharmacist.”

“We are in a war, young lady!” he responded. “You must serve your country!”

Rashad *did* want to serve her country. But she did not want to do so at the expense of her own child’s right to his mother’s love and nourishment.

“What am I going to do with my baby when I am at work?” Rashad asked. Baiji was too far away for her mother or mother-in-law to help and there were no nurseries in town for her to take a 3-month-old to even if she wanted to.

“Here is what I can do for you,” he said. “I will give you three extra months leave with pay and then you must come back to work...” Her boss tapped his pen on his desk for a few seconds before continuing. “And when you come back, I will try to help you as much as I can. I will transfer one of the medical center employees to the pharmacy. I’ll also give you one of the baby beds from the central hospital to put your baby in while you work.



From the front lobby of the pharmacy, Rashad heard Omar’s piercing wail. The sound sent stabs of panic throughout her entire body.

“Please excuse me,” she said to the young mother standing at the counter. The woman hoisted her 2-year-old up onto her hip and nodded.

“What’s wrong?” Rashad asked, perhaps a bit too sternly, as she came into the back room.

“*Bujhte pari ni*,⁴⁵ ma’am,” Abdu said in Bengali. He shrugged his shoulders. “He just won’t stop...”

Abdu scrunched up his face, trying to imitate a baby crying. At that moment, Rashad knew she had no other choice. She would not be coming back to work the next day.



“What did you say?” *Could they really do this to us?*

“We have no choice,” Nameer said. “You have to go back.”

For one whole day after she left the medical center, Rashad had felt like a real mother again. She had nursed Omar and laid him down for a nap while she cleaned the house and did some mending. She had even been able to take a short nap just before he woke up. It had been a perfect 12 hours. Apparently, it was not to last.

“Men from the Security Ministry came to the refinery, Rashad,” Nameer said. “They made me sign an oath. I’ll get five years in prison if you don’t go back.”

Rashad felt the lump in her throat melt into tears.

“It won’t be for long,” her husband said, trying to be of comfort. “The war is sure to be over soon and then they will have all the pharmacists they need.”

Wishing for Stability

“Nameer, I would really like to help,” Rashad said as the couple settled their two small boys, Omar and Ali, into the backseat of their white Fiat. Rashad held newborn Zaynab’s tiny baby carriage on her lap in the front seat. The baby was quiet and observant as her parents spoke.

“Rashad, we just moved from my family’s house. Al Dora is all the way across town. Plus you have three children to look after now. How can you do it?”

She knew there was some truth to what her husband was saying. Still, she hadn’t taught Qur’an since they’d left Baghdad for Baiji more than four years ago. Now that they were back in the city and had moved into their own place at the Al Dora Refinery, she felt the familiar urge to teach. The imam from the Al Showaff mosque, whose parking lot they were sitting in, was the same imam who had taught her *Al Fiqh*⁴⁶ more than 15 years ago. Now he needed help teaching the girls of the mosque Telawat Al Qur’an. Rashad had learned much under his tutelage and she was grateful. The least she could do was repay him by teaching the girls that summer.

“It will be easy,” Rashad said nonchalantly. “I don’t have to return to work for another six months and my mornings are free. The boys can go to their class and Zaynab can stay with me while I teach. You know she will be no trouble at all. She is so quiet.”

The couple discussed a bit more. Finally, Nameer consented to his wife’s plan.

“He said you can start next week,” her husband said, returning from inside the mosque where he had been talking with the imam. “Classes start at 9 a.m.”

“Thank you,” she said.

And she meant it. The eight years they had been married had not been easy. But during that time, Rashad had been surprised by the ways she and her husband had increasingly worked as a team to raise their family. He had met her halfway on many things, including helping to take care of their

first child Omar in the evenings when she was forced to work both shifts at the Baiji Medical Center. It was not normal for men in her culture to help with the everyday routines of child-rearing. That realm was relegated almost exclusively to the woman, even if she was working outside of the home. But Nameer had seen with his own eyes how hard she had tried to stay with her child. Even though it was difficult for Rashad to leave her son to go to work at night, she had felt at peace knowing he was safe with his dad.

Necessity had produced a situation in which both Rashad and Nameer were needed to raise their children. She could not do it alone. What was more surprising, Nameer had finally agreed to Rashad opening her own private pharmacy. Shortly after the family returned to Baghdad, she rented a store and began tending to it in the evenings. After their first daughter Zaynab had been born, she hired another pharmacist to work for her temporarily. Rashad knew that not all husbands were this accommodating.

The hardships of life in Baiji were over, the war with Iran had come to an end and Rashad had a private pharmacy. Their first daughter had just been born and Rashad had been granted full maternity leave from her government employer. And now they were in Baghdad again, living in their own house at the Al Dora Refinery where Nameer had been hired as a communications engineer. It seemed to Rashad that a new, hopeful chapter was beginning in their lives.

Kuwait

“Girls, let’s hurry now,” Rashad said as she handed out the practice test for her students to work on. “We only have a few more days of summer school and we have a lot of material to cover.”

As Rashad gave a single sheet and a pencil to a small girl in the front of the class, the girl smiled and handed little Zaynab, whom she had been holding, back to Rashad.

“Thanks Fatoma,” Rashad said as she took the baby. “She really likes you.”

“I like her too,” Fatoma said.

Rashad smiled back gently even though inside she was troubled. There was another reason why time was so short for their studies. What she couldn’t mention was that it looked like Iraq was going to invade Kuwait — and soon.⁴⁷ There was no telling how their lives would change after that. Rashad had been teaching at Al Showaff mosque for less than two months, but already she had built a bond with her young students and was familiar with many of their mothers. She cared deeply about what the future held for them all.



“Ask him if it’s from Kuwait,” Rashad whispered in her husband’s ear. Rashad and Nameer were at Al Karada, one of the largest shopping districts in the city. Finally, she was going to get a Hoover vacuum for the house. She had wanted one for so long.

Rashad knew a person could get thrown in jail for even asking such a question out loud, but it was important to both of them to know. They had agreed that items obtained from Kuwait since the invasion were off limits for their family. According to the principles of Islam, if a person takes

something against another's wishes or purchases it in an unfair way, as merchants in Kuwait were forced to do after the Iraqi invasion, it is equivalent to stealing.⁴⁸

It was easy for Rashad and Nameer to resist buying new goods — fabrics, appliances, clothes and electronics — that had been saturating the markets in the last months of 1990. Chocolates, giant *Masala* lollipops and shiny new toys were more difficult for Omar and Ali to resist. After 10 years of war, Rashad wanted so much to spoil her children just a little and it pained her that she could not. But she and Nameer were dedicated to teaching them the deeper values of human decency, compassion, honesty and respect.

The merchant looked around briefly before responding.

“This vacuum is not from Kuwait,” he eventually said, throwing Nameer a knowing glance. “No way.”

The merchant looked trustworthy enough, but how could they be sure? They couldn't. They could only take the man at his word.



“Are you going to leave, Um-Omar?”⁴⁹ her neighbor asked, using Rashad's familiar name. The two women stood on the sidewalk watching their children play.

“Where would I go?” Rashad said with indignation. “This is my home.”

“But do you know what they are saying?”

Rashad knew. They will bomb all the places that helped Iraq invade Kuwait — the military bases, the communication stations, the electric stations and, of course, the precious oil refineries, where the Iraqi government processed and produced their largest and most lucrative export. The Al Dora Refinery was a state-of-the-art facility and the largest of its kind in the area. It was a prime target and they were living a stone's throw from it.

“But what of our husbands?” Rashad asked. “Are they going to leave too?”

“No,” the woman said, “they must stay here and keep the refinery working.”

“If my husband stays, then I stay too.” Rashad's answer could not have been more clear.

The Charity Clinic

It was the end of April 1991. The bombing of Baghdad by the United States and its allies the previous month had marked the start of the first Arabian Gulf War. The campaign had destroyed the majority of Iraq's infrastructure — water and sewage treatment plants, telecommunications towers, roads, bridges, factories — leaving the country in what some would later call a “pre-industrial status.”⁵⁰ Sanctions, which had been officially imposed by the United Nations four days after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, were now firmly in place. Everything from chlorine bleach to school pencils were suspected as possible ingredients for chemical weapons and thus banned from

entering the country. The Oil-for-Food program would not be enacted by the United Nations for four more years, but a national food rationing program guaranteed every Iraqi citizen ample supplies of rice, sugar, soap, beans, tea, cooking oil and other staples, feeding the population to at least the minimal nutritional level.

After the bombing, the medical situation in the country was even more dire. Every day individuals came into Rashad's pharmacy asking for medicines and left empty-handed as she began to run out of supplies. So when the imam at the Al Showaff mosque asked Nameer if his wife would be willing to help establish a new charity clinic at another nearby mosque, Rashad jumped at the chance. If the lack of medicines was making it impossible for her to do her job in her own private pharmacy, then perhaps she could be of service in this way instead.

"It is at the Al Dakalia mosque," the imam said. "They say they will open the clinic soon, so the earlier you can get there, the better."

When Rashad and Nameer arrived at the mosque the next day with their three children in tow, the imam of Al Dakalia led them up a flight of stairs to the women's prayer section. Rashad was surprised to see a room stocked full with boxes of medicine.

"Who brought all of this?" she asked. It was her first experience with the world of international relief. Rashad could see that some of the boxes had writing on them in other languages. She recognized English, French and German.

"People heard what had happened to our country," the imam said. "Some of them brought blankets, others food. This organization brought medicine. Somebody needs to arrange them."



By September, the charity clinic was thriving. In those initial weeks, Rashad and Nameer had arranged a makeshift pharmacy upstairs and prescriptions were soon being brought to her on small squares of notebook paper from the single doctor seeing patients down below. She had set up a table and had identified most of the foreign-marked medicine using her *Pharmacopoeia*, the official book used by pharmacists worldwide that listed hundreds of thousands of medicinal drugs, their uses and brand names. At first, the clinic was open just two days a week. Rashad and the attending doctor alone treated the trickle of patients who came in. But as their client base expanded exponentially, so did the number of doctors, dentists, gynecologists, pediatricians and pharmacists who came to the mosque offering to help.

"They need some syrup again. You don't have any?" the young assistant who ran up and down the stairs with prescription orders asked. Rashad shook her head. Lack of fever-reducing syrup had become a real problem. Her supplies contained a large amount of adult-sized analgesic tablets, but they were not appropriate for children. The taste was bitter and the dose was far too large. Every day, more and more mothers brought their very young children into the clinic with high fevers. Rashad had searched the shelves of her own pharmacy and others for the pediatrician-dose sweet tasting anti-pyretic,⁵¹ but it appeared that the whole city was out. The factory that normally produced this simple medicine had been bombed and international relief agencies could not be relied on for specific medical requests. Rashad knew that an epidemic was close at hand in her community.

The young assistant walked back down to the woman waiting at the bottom of the stairs. From the top of the stairs, Rashad saw the desperate look in the mother's eyes. Her heart ached.

There has to be something that I can do.

Rashad eyed the rows of adult-dose medications they had on hand and an idea began to form. That night before leaving the clinic, she took a few bottles with her. Before coming home, she stopped at the market and bought nutritional-based food coloring.

It is such a simple idea that it just might work.



“Can you take a look at this for me?” Rashad asked the woman standing with her in the clinic pharmacy. Hadeel had only been helping at the Al Dakalia Charity Clinic for a month, but already the two pharmacists had become good friends. Hadeel worked at Samaria Drug Industrials, a governmental lab facility that estimated and evaluated drugs before they went to the city's pharmacy shelves and hospitals.

“What is it?” Hadeel asked, surprised as Rashad handed her a bottle of pink-colored liquid. Rashad explained what she had been working on. At home the night before, she had made her own children's syrup using dissolved adult tablets, water, sugar and food coloring. The important thing, however, was to find out whether or not the active ingredient had been lost through distillation and if the right children's dose could be found.

“If you find that the amount of the active ingredient is the same as what it says in the Pharmacopoeia, then we can produce it.”



“Rashad, I think you are on to something!” Hadeel said as she came into the mosque. “The dosage activity is accurate. In fact, it exceeds the correct amount. With a little tweaking, I think we have ourselves a syrup!”

For the next three months, Rashad and Hadeel distributed syrup to hundreds of clients through the Al Dakalia Charity Clinic. There were plenty of pharmacists and doctors now who could help in the actual distribution, so Rashad worked mainly from her home with the help of her two boys and Nameer. The two pharmacists had found a supply of small bottles at a local manufacturing plant and Rashad set up a mini-factory in her kitchen, making one large pot of syrup at a time. The boys washed and dried the bottles while Nameer carted them in cardboard boxes to the clinic.

Rashad had learned the science of medicine-making in college. But never in her wildest dreams had she thought she would use that knowledge in this way.

We may be suffering, but we don't have to be victims. We can help each other through these times.

Postscript: The Empty House

Rashad opened the door to her oldest sister's house in Baghdad's Zayona district and walked inside. The front room was still filled with furniture, the shelves lined with books, the cabinets crammed with knick-knacks. The everyday things that made a home out of a house had been eerily frozen in time since her sister's departure for Libya five months prior. It was November 1996 and Rashad's sister was gone. She had left with her three children — a boy in secondary school, another in middle school and a girl in primary school — to meet up with her husband who was taking the Board of Surgery exam that would allow them to eventually work and live in the United Kingdom.

The front room was cluttered with things. Clothes were still scattered about the room and a blanket lay crumpled on the couch as if someone had just gotten up from a nap. But Rashad only felt the emptiness in the space once filled with the laughter of her niece and nephews and the sounds of her big sister making tea in the ample kitchen whenever she came for a visit.

Her sister had made the decision to leave sanction-ridden Iraq and create a better life for her family elsewhere. She had packed lightly and left quickly. Even though everyone knew she was probably going to leave, the suddenness of it came as a shock to the entire family. It had not been more than a week between her announcement that she was leaving and her actual departure. Once she and the kids had settled in Libya, she had called Rashad and asked her to pack up their things.

Rashad understood why her sister had left. It was the same reason so many others were leaving those days: to seek a better life and decent work away from the desperation of their home country. The people had suffered greatly in the last five years. Those days, Iraqis were scattered everywhere they could go — Egypt, Libya, Algeria, England, even the United States.

Normal, everyday items that Rashad and her family once took for granted, like new clothes, school supplies, medicines, meats and fruits, were now a luxury. Rashad had learned how to bake her own bread in her neighbor's old *tenur*⁵² oven, using tree branches, old papers and palm fronds to save on fuel. She mended her children's clothes until there was nothing left to mend and found creative ways to cook beans and potatoes so that they imitated meat. The government had no money left to pay its 10 million workers. A monthly teacher's salary brought in enough to buy a box of 30 eggs and the salaries for doctors, engineers, pharmacists and other highly-educated professionals like Rashad and Nameer was enough to pay only half of their monthly expenses.

After Rashad finished cleaning and packing the front room, she made her way to her little niece's bedroom. Several pieces of dingy brown paper, used in children's notebooks since the start of sanctions, were scattered across the floor. Some were marked with gray pencil drawings of rainbows and stick-figure princesses. Rashad smiled.

Even in dull colors, a child's imagination shines brightly.

She picked up a piece of paper with a drawing of what looked like a banana. Rashad remembered that Zaynab had brought a similar picture home from school the other day. Children born after sanctions started would not be able to recognize foods like apples and bananas, common imports prior to 1991, unless they read about them in books or were asked to draw them by their teacher. And still, they may never know what these fruits taste like.

As she placed the pieces of paper in a large trash bag, Rashad thought about the many times she and her husband had been given opportunities to work outside the country. In each circumstance, they had agreed that they would stay put. Always on their minds were their mothers and fathers. How could they leave them here to suffer alone? Her brother-in-law's family lived out of the country, so Rashad could understand why he and her sister had left. But both Rashad and Nameer's families were in Iraq. No, they would endure as the older members of their families had to endure. For them, there was no other way.

Rashad made one final sweep of her niece's room to make sure she hadn't missed anything. She picked up a few stray scraps of litter from inside the child's closet. Then she noticed something familiar sitting on the top shelf. She stood on her tippy toes to retrieve it. It was a toy dog made of soft, lime green plastic. As she stared at it, Rashad realized that it had been *her* toy when she was a child. Why was it in this closet? Rashad had given it to her oldest nephew long ago and forgotten all about it.

She slipped the little, laughing dog in her handbag. Her father had bought it for her when she was 4, on one of the family's many trips out of the country while she and her sisters were still very young.

Finding the little toy dog was a gift and a sign. She would keep it with her from now on, as a reminder that more prosperous times were bound to come.

IV. OCCUPATION

الأمة

Preparing for What May Come

Rashad stood in the front of the large hall at the Iraqi Red Crescent (IRC) center in downtown Al Mansur. It was February 2003. As the women began to trickle in, they found seats in the circle of desks in the middle of the room. They had come from all over the city to participate in a free week-long first aid course. During the next five days, they would learn how to clean a wound, treat a burn, use analgesic and much more. As the 30 or so ladies settled into their places, Rashad welcomed them and outlined the format for the week ahead.

“During the next week, you will be learning information that could potentially save a life...”

Each woman present had overcome hurdles in order to attend the workshop. Many had negotiated with families who were concerned about them traveling outside their neighborhoods. None of them knew exactly what was going to transpire over the next couple of months as the city streets began to fill with Iraqi soldiers and sandbag walls were stacked along the outer edges of government buildings. But every one of them felt the need to be prepared.

At the end of 2002, when news of another possible invasion by the United States started to spread,⁵³ Rashad began feeling the same sense of anxious urgency she had felt at other pivotal moments in her life: as a college student during the Iran-Iraq War and then as a working mother during the First and Second Gulf Wars. But this time was different. From that first moment of concern, she decided that she had to do something. She started talking to her friends, many of whom were professionals also concerned about what was happening in the country. She spoke with others too — acquaintances, colleagues, neighbors, friends of friends, anyone who would listen — as a single question propelled her: *What do I have to offer that would be of direct benefit to the people?*

Over the following days, an idea had begun to form. She could provide a workshop to teach women how to respond to minor health concerns that may arise in this time of crisis. And she could require that every woman who took the training teach five others the information they had learned.

As interest grew, she developed a curriculum. Then she approached the IRC, which she had been a member of for years, to negotiate the specifics. The IRC liked her idea but wanted every participant to pay 300,000 Iraqi Dinars (ID).⁵⁴ At a time of continued sanctions, that represented about two month’s salary for the average government worker, an impossible amount to pay. Rashad knew from the beginning that she wanted the training to be available to all participants for free. To cut down on costs, she made photocopies of the training materials herself and provided the necessary first aid kits from her own pharmacy. In the end, she lowered the total cost of the training to 250,000 ID, which she paid from her own savings.

I hope they will never need to do any of the things that this training will discuss, Rashad thought as she introduced the first trainer for the day. The sound of military vehicles and soldiers’ voices outside brought the possibility of war inside the large room. The Iraqi army had begun to mobilize in preparation for the worst.

At the break, Rashad had a chance to speak to the trainer for that first morning. He was a doctor who shared Rashad’s concern for the health of the people if the Americans invaded.

“Child mortality rates are already high because of the sanctions,” the doctor said. “What will happen if the borders open up?”

“There will be no way to monitor and prevent the spread of disease,” Rashad said. She didn’t care for the heavy-handed and sometimes abusive policies of the Ba’ath government any more than the next person. But she did have to admit that the government’s strict border entry policies had paid off in terms of disease prevention. In the beginning of 2003, there were under 500 known cases of AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases in the country.⁵⁵ Those who wanted to enter Iraq had to undergo a detailed physical and round of blood tests; individuals infected with HIV, TB and other communicable diseases were quarantined in Al Tuatha hospital on the outskirts of Baghdad. This procedure had been in effect since the early ‘90s.

“I suppose that time will tell,” Rashad said.

“Yes it will,” the doctor said. “But I am very concerned.”⁵⁶

February

February 25, 2003

Rashad shut the hatchback door of the family’s white Kia Sportage. Inside the car, she had placed three cardboard boxes filled with bandages, cotton, gauze, antibiotic pills, analgesic tablets and an assortment of other items. Rashad and Nameer had gathered the supplies that afternoon from Rashad’s private pharmacy before heading to their home on the other side of town. The small storage closet between their bedroom and their daughter’s room would be a perfect place to store the supplies.

I will just bring enough medicine for the family and a few of the neighbors, Rashad thought as they pulled away from the pharmacy parking lot and out into the darkness of the street. She recalled carrying items just like these back to her house during the First Gulf War. Was the country heading for the same desperate situation? There was no telling. She felt her stomach tighten and the pain in her head increase.

Many of her friends were making plans to leave the city. Every day that week, one of her neighbors had approached her or her husband, inquiring about what they were going to do. Many had been shocked to learn that the family was staying behind. The latest conversation was with Abu-Salam, an old man who had lived on their street for years.

“Um-Omar!” he called out as Rashad came out of the house. “What are you doing?”

“Hello *Amu*,” she said. Rashad was very fond of the old man and was in the habit of calling him “uncle” as a term of endearment. “What do you mean?”

“Everybody’s left!” he said, shaking his head. Just then, Nameer came out of the house. The old man turned his scolding to him.

“Move your family out of this place!” he said to her husband. “It is too dangerous for them here.”

Rashad knew what his answer would be. They had been through this same scenario together several times during their 20 years of marriage.

“We either all leave or we all stay,” he said, stealing a glance at his wife. Nameer knew Rashad would never be convinced otherwise. Through three wars and more than a decade of hardships brought on by sanctions, they had established a firm family policy. In times of crisis, they stay together no matter what.

March

March 20, 2003

“Come and sleep with us in our room tonight,” Rashad said to her two teenage sons as they finished their simple dinner and settled in to watch some TV before bed.

“Mom,” Omar replied, speaking for both of them. “We’re not kids anymore.”

“Then at least bring your pillows and blankets and stay in the hall so we can be near each other,” Nameer said. His matter-of-fact tone hid his underlying concern.

“It’s OK,” Ali said. “We will sleep in our room.” Then he added, looking at his dad, “Don’t worry Baba. We’ll be fine.”

Rashad’s family was used to preparing this way for war. During the First Gulf War, the young family of five — their youngest daughter Maryam had not yet been born — had all fit under the stairs of their small house near the Al Dora Refinery as the bombs went off. During the Second Gulf War, Ali, Omar and Zaynab were still children and Maryam was a baby. The four children had huddled in their parents’ bedroom as the house shook and the windows rattled. Since 1997, the family had lived in the sprawling house in Al Dora with its separate bedrooms and adjoining bathrooms. The house had taken three long years to build and was Rashad and Nameer’s legacy to their children and, eventually, to their children’s children.

Earlier that morning, 17-year-old Ali had discovered on the internet that, according to international news, American troops were attempting to enter the border to the south and could do so by the following morning. Rashad breathed in and exhaled deeply, trying to calm her nerves. With the exception of 9-year-old Maryam, this time around their children were practically adults. They had the right to decide where they wanted to be that night. As they finished their prayers and turned out the lights, Rashad heard the doors to the boys’ rooms shut. Difficult as it was, she tried to close her own eyes to sleep too.

It was 1 in the morning when the high, undulating wail of the civil defense drill began to sound. Rashad and Nameer jumped out of bed. They reached the hall just as Ali and Omar were staggering down the stairs toward them.

“Mama, what’s happening?” Maryam asked as Rashad held her close.

“It’s going to be OK,” she said. “We’re together now.”

Omar reached for the TV and flicked it on just as an emergency announcement was being made by the minister of media.

“The enemy has done it,” the minister said. “They have invaded the country.”

March 23, 2003

It was a little past 7 in the morning when Rashad awoke to the rustling of her husband in the kitchen.

“What’s this?” she asked as she shuffled into the room. Nameer was boiling water on the stove. Steam vapors rose from the pot, creating beads of condensation on the wall behind it.

“Those poor soldiers came in the middle of the night,” he said, glancing at the back door. “They were sent here to guard the area. They don’t have their supplies yet and they are cold.”

Rashad suddenly remembered hearing sounds coming from the backyard in the middle of the night. The noises had woken her and she lay in bed in that dreamy state between wakefulness and sleep for quite a while, listening to the far-off sounds of truck engines. Eventually, she drifted off to slumber again. In the morning, she thought she must have been dreaming.

Now Nameer was telling her that overnight the whole city had been covered by thousands of Iraqi soldiers. They were preparing their defense and setting up rocket-propelled grenade stands in abandoned lots and buildings across the city.

Rashad left the kitchen and gathered the bundle of wet laundry from the washing machine. She put the clothes in a basket and carried it up to their rooftop to hang on the line. Next to their home was a house that had been abandoned in mid-construction several months ago. The structure had no roof, just unfinished walls and a crude foundation. Next to it was a piece of land where bags of cement and sand lay open and exposed to the elements and reed cane plants grew spottily here and there. This property, like several others in her neighborhood, had been the project of some ambitious family before the threat of war came.

As she hung each item of clothing out to dry, she could see the men: There must have been more than 100 of them dressed in pea-green military uniforms and moving around like hurried ants. The soldiers were in the *ja sha shabi*, the popular army, and were of all ages and occupations. Iraq had always had a popular army whose main purpose was to protect the country inside its own borders. Their ranks swelled during the Iran-Iraq War when thousands of men, young and old, had been deployed to the fire line.

From the rooftop, Rashad could see that the soldiers’ supplies still had not come. She imagined that if they did not arrive by nightfall, they would give them a bit of kerosene with which to heat their tea. The soldiers’ presence confirmed what she and many others had sensed long ago. War was coming.

April

April 6, 2003

When the first bombs fell on the city, they fell to the south, not far from Al Dora, where a large number of Iraqi military facilities were located. It was early morning and Rashad and Nameer were already up, praying the early morning Fajr. The children, who before the explosion had been sound asleep upstairs, were downstairs within seconds.

Rashad could feel the vibration of each explosion assault her body with its violent force.

It has begun.

As morning came, the bombing subsided. Rashad was not afraid. Instead, a heavy sadness descended upon her as she reached up to the top shelf of her bedroom closet and pulled out a long roll of simple white cloth. She set the roll on the bed and smoothed out its jagged outer edges.

Perhaps what I am about to do is not so strange, she thought. Death is something that can easily happen. These days, it seems closer to us than life.

She called the children to the bedroom. As they filtered in one by one, they eyed the roll suspiciously.

“I want you to know what to do if any one of us should pass away during this time,” Rashad began. “When a person dies in our tradition, his body has to be arranged in the proper way and buried quickly...”

Rashad began to unroll the fabric, called *Al Kefin* when used for this purpose. Soon it covered the entire length of the bed.

“This is ridiculous!” Omar said.

“Yeah,” Ali agreed. “What are you talking about, Mom?”

Zaynab and Maryam stood silently in the bedroom doorway, their faces pained as their gaze shifted from their brothers to their mom.

“We have to be realistic,” Rashad said. “Right now, they are bombing the city. They could reach the capital or our neighborhood any day. We need to be prepared.”

Rashad began cutting along the edge of the roll, making note of the length that would be needed for the head, the upper part, the lower part and the whole body. Back in February, as the possibility of invasion became more real, she had bought 25 meters of the cloth to keep in the house. She remembered what had happened during the First Gulf War. People had been unprepared for the number of casualties that occurred.

Historically, the Islamic preparation of bodies after death was done only by specially trained individuals. In 1991, when the United States and its allies bombed Baghdad for the first time, many of these professionals were not within reach and the stores that supplied burial items were closed.

Not knowing what to do, people had kept the bodies of their loved ones, killed in the explosions, inside their homes for days. By the mid-‘90s, Islamic burial training was being provided for ordinary people, and Rashad had taken such a class for women. Not too long after that, she had assisted in a burial preparation when her husband’s aunt died. In early February, Rashad began offering this training to the women who came to her for Qur’an lessons at their local mosque. If she was encouraging those young women to be responsible and prepare for death, why would she not educate her own children?

“Now watch how I am cutting the fabric so you will know how to wrap the body,” she said. Her hands made a steady motion as the scissors cut a straight line across the white cloth.

“I’m not going to hear any more of this!” Omar stormed out of the bedroom and walked toward the kitchen.

“Omar!” Rashad called after him. “Come back and learn!”

“You are talking about death all the time, Mom,” Ali said, watching his brother leave. “Why don’t you just take us out of this place?”

“You know it was not just my decision to stay,” Rashad said. “It was everybody’s decision.”

Nameer had heard the shouting and came into the bedroom to see what was going on. Omar trailed behind him, the anger still visible on his face.

“We have to learn,” Nameer said, his low voice trying to bring some reason to his sons. “Even if, Inshallah, no one dies, you still need to know ... just in case.”

April 8, 2003

Rashad threw herself on one of the soft couch-like chairs in the library. She had just finished cleaning the kitchen and every bone in her body ached with fatigue. She looked around at what had once been her sanctuary, a place where she could close the door and immerse herself in another world of books and inquiry. In mid-February, she had started the process of moving supplies from her private pharmacy to her home. At first she thought she would only bring a few items. As the days wore on and the anxiety in the streets heightened, she had brought more and more until finally, by the end of March, the shelves of her pharmacy were completely bare.

Books had always been an important part of her life. When she was in the first class of primary school, her father had installed a low shelf in the far corner of his massive law library. She and her sisters loved to sit on the floor among all their father’s volumes, reading. The shelves in her own library once held her favorite books as well, many passed down from her father’s collection. Now dozens of medicines, neatly organized and categorized, sat in rows on those same shelves. The desk area where Rashad habitually placed current reading materials and papers served as a first aid tray. Bandages, cotton, adhesive plaster, forceps, scissors — everything she may need to perform quick first aid procedures was there.

Although there was no sign on her door, those who had stayed behind in her neighborhood knew by now that she had the skill and supplies to offer basic first aid. The cases so far had been

simple. A broken bone, a burn, a scrape, a fever — everyday conditions that would normally be treated at a neighborhood clinic. The Americans had completed the main part of their bombing campaign during those horrifying first few days of April, but bullets were still flying between American soldiers and Iraqi resistance fighters in some areas. Smaller bombings continued to occur here and there. Most of the hospitals and clinics had been closed for more than two weeks, so those who lived nearby came to Rashad.

I remember when this was my favorite room in the house, Rashad thought. *Look at it now.*

Her thoughts were interrupted by the sound of a car engine. She could hear its humming as it approached and then idled in front of the house.

What is someone doing driving at this time of night? Although vehicular movement was not prohibited, most residents were afraid enough of the tanks and hummers on their streets and the weapon-wielding young men who drove them to stay off the roads in those early days, especially as it got close to sunset. That was when the U.S. military made their rounds. Anyone caught moving while those giant tanks and hummers rolled by could be shot.

Nameer and the boys were talking in the living room and her daughters were in their room playing. The library was the closest room in the house to the enclosed courtyard that faced the street. She must have been the only person to hear the vehicle. A few seconds later, she heard a weak knock on the external gate. Her heart beat faster.

“Nameer!” she called out, walking toward the living room to fetch her husband.

Her husband came into the kitchen as the knocking grew louder.

“*Minu?* Who’s there?” Nameer called from the kitchen door that faced the outer courtyard.

“*Ani!* It is me!” came the answer.

Nameer took the oil lamp from the table and went to the outer gate to see what was going on while Rashad remained in the kitchen. She could only make out a few muffled words — injury, hospital, bleeding — and she could see the vague outline of a Volkswagen Brazili in the gray twilight. The car’s headlights were off. Ten minutes later, Nameer returned inside where Rashad and the two boys, who had come in from the living room, waited to hear the news.

“There is someone who needs your help,” Nameer said, setting the oil lamp back down on the kitchen table. “A man is in the car. He was in the hospital and a gang entered and stole everything, including his bed. He was on the floor when his brother found him. He was injured when his house was destroyed in one of the early attacks on the city.”

Rashad looked quickly from her husband to her boys. *I am not a trained doctor. How can I help?*

“I tried to tell the man’s brother that you are just a pharmacist,” Nameer said, reading his wife’s mind.

“And what did he say?” Rashad asked.

Nameer looked directly at Rashad. “He said that he believed he would die if he did not get help tonight. He said that if you did your best and he didn’t make it, not to blame yourself.”

“Mom, we can just say no,” Omar said. “We can tell him we cannot help and he can go.”

“Then nobody is going to help him, Omar,” Ali said. “Where is he going to go tonight? He will die.”

“Listen,” Nameer said, looking at his wife with concern, “just take some time to decide.”

Rashad had already made her decision. How could she allow someone to die when there was a slim chance she may be able to help him?

“No,” she said. “We will do what we can. Ali, go get the old blanket at the foot of the carpet in the living room. We will use that to lay him on. Nameer and Omar, bring him into the garage.”

After Nameer and Omar left the kitchen, Rashad rushed to the library to gather the things she would need. Gloves, gauze, the bottle of diluted Habitine. She had made a special trip to the private medical supply store to get several gallons of the highly active disinfectant back in February. Who would have thought she would need it for this purpose now? When she was done in the library, she opened the downstairs closet and held the lamp up to see what was in there. On one of the shelves were packets of sterilized sewing needles and thread. She hesitated a moment, then decided not to bring them along.

Perhaps I will only need to clean the wound, she thought as she shut the closet door and let the yellow light of the oil lamp lead her to the garage.

As she opened the garage door, Omar, Nameer and the man’s brother were carrying him slowly in by the shoulders. He was doing his best not to cry out in front of a woman, but Rashad could see that the pain was almost unbearable. She could hear his muffled groans as they laid him down on the blanket.

“We are so sorry to disturb you,” his brother said. “To come into your home...”

“As-Salāmu ‘Alaykum,” she said, suppressing a gasp as she saw the man’s right pant leg soaked in crimson red.

One of the boys brought the oil lamp close and Nameer carefully cut the man’s right pant leg off, exposing the mangled flesh so Rashad could get a closer look. She could smell the sickeningly sweet smell of old blood and infection. It was difficult to see with just the light of one lamp, but she thought she noticed areas where the blood was dark and crusty and where the gauze had adhered directly to it. New blood was also oozing out of areas where the cut was deep and old stitches had burst loose with movement. The wound was dirty, that she was sure about. She could see pieces of dirt and lint caked in with the dark blood and gauze. The first step was obvious. She would have to wash the wound thoroughly.

“I think you may have to stitch him,” Nameer whispered in her ear as she quickly poured more disinfectant on the wound, allowing the excess to drip onto the old blanket. She had removed all of the old gauze. The leg was still bleeding.

“How can I do that?” she said.

“You’ve sewn up the children’s clothes many times,” Nameer said.

Why does he think it’s so easy? But she knew the answer. He did not know about muscles, veins and tendons or how easy it would be to damage them if she made one wrong move.

“Keep him steady,” she said, removing her vinyl gloves. “I’ll be right back.”

“Girls, bring your lantern! Hurry!” Rashad called as she entered the kitchen.

Zaynab came out of her room carrying the glowing orb. Maryam trailed behind.

“What is it, Mom? Is he going to be alright?”

“Shine the light in the closet! Quick!”

She was sure she had seen the sewing kits somewhere in there. Where were they? She threw the other supplies onto the floor as she hunted for them.

At last. She grabbed a couple of packets and headed back to the garage.

“Be brave,” Nameer whispered in her ear again. She could not see her husband’s face as he stood behind her. She held the thin, curved tip of the suture needle delicately in her hand. The only thing in view was the illuminated area around the man’s leg and the deep crevice that spread its way down its side. Images flashed through her mind and sensations filled her: dissected rabbits in graduate school, doctors sewing up wounds at the hospital where she had done her training, the bitter smell of formaldehyde. Carefully, she inserted the sharp point just underneath the man’s flesh and brought the sterilized thread up to keep it straight. When she had finished the first stitch, she knotted it and prepared for another.

“Scissors!” she called out, not realizing that they were just within reach.



“Is there someone that can give him injections when you get home?” Rashad asked the man’s brother after they had cleaned up a bit. The man was on the blanket, resting.

“Yes, we have a nurse on our street. She can do it.”

“Good. Make sure he receives the antibiotics every 12 hours and use the antiseptic. As soon as possible, make him eat a good meal.” Rashad handed the man the antibiotics and a small bottle with the diluted antiseptic.

“I shall pray for your family and your safety,” the man said.

“Make a prayer for peace safety in our whole country,” she responded.

As she and Nameer cleaned up the rest of the garage and put the old blanket in a bag to wash later, Rashad was amazed at what she had just done.

The Holy Qur’an states that “if anyone saved a life it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind.”⁵⁷ Rashad had not been thinking about whether this person in need was a man or woman or if interacting with him in that way would be frowned upon by the community. He was a human being. I had to do my job.

April 11, 2003

As quickly as it had begun, the Americans’ bombing campaign came to an end. In a few days of consistent explosions and gunfire, they had hit targets all over the city — first the government offices, then the communications centers and finally the electrical services. Because of error, or strategy, entire neighborhoods, hospitals, mosques and gardens where children once played had been decimated along the way. Miraculously, Rashad’s neighborhood had been spared a direct hit.

The sun was setting into the hazy twilight as Rashad and her two daughters sat on the white iron swing next to the garage that faced their enclosed garden.

The boys had gone with their father to the mosque for prayer and to hear the latest news from the other men who would be gathered there. Much of this information was, of course, secondhand and some of it contradictory, adding to the confusion that already enveloped their precarious lives. Nevertheless, in the limbo state of those early days in April, Rashad and her family considered news from their neighbors just as reliable, if not more so, than what was being shown on the U.S.-run television station *Al Hura*.⁵⁸

“This process is like a surgery,” the man on TV said the first time they discovered the station. “You, Iraqi people, are processing this surgery to remove all of your pain and sadness. Be patient. This process will affect you a little bit now but soon you will take a full rest. You will have freedom and all that you need.”

With those words, they knew what kind of news they would receive through Al Hura. But it was all that they had, so they continued to watch. The electricity had been cut off two days into the bombing, and the family was able to get the channel’s weak signal only in those few minutes when they turned their house generator on to do laundry or run other appliances.

With no electricity, the family often found themselves outside at this time of night, memorizing Qur’an passages, telling stories, studying or just talking. Rashad felt the soft swaying of the swing as she took in the strange and ominous silence of the city. Her daughters were looking up at the sky. The pillars of black smoke that curved their way up and spread out across the expanse came from fires still burning in bombed-out factories, military installations, the ministries and homes along the highway just to the south of them. Small pieces of paper from these buildings fell like white feathers on top of the green ficus and flower bushes. The air was pungent with the smell of

burning — furniture, buildings, plastics, oil — but outside was better than being indoors where the odor of the kerosene lamps would be even more intense.

“*Allahu Akbar*,”⁵⁹ the familiar voice resonated from the nearby mosque. It was time for *Maghrib*, the sunset prayer. The girls straightened up as they listened to the call. The imam continued his announcement.

“It is very important for each person in the area to be unified. Look after your homes. Arrange yourselves well. Take care of each other and do not go through other people’s things.”

These were common Islamic principles, but the words sounded strange and somewhat urgent to Rashad.

What happened today?

She took the girls inside. When Nameer and the boys came back less than an hour later, she and her husband went into the kitchen to talk.

“What is going on?” Rashad asked.

“The imam says that he heard the Americans have occupied the city,” Nameer said. “He also said that there was not much resistance to their coming. Perhaps by tonight they will enter the neighborhoods.”

What would this mean for the family? Rashad had no idea.

Nameer went on to explain that the imam had also heard of some looting and stealing around the city, which was why he made the announcement.

“He said that there is also talk of thieves⁶⁰ around the city. Some claim that many are not Iraqi and have been brought here from Egypt, Syria and Kuwait by the Americans. They say they entered the government and ministry offices while the American soldiers did nothing.”

April 15, 2003

Rashad stood at the high door that separated her front yard from the street, calling for her husband. She did not expect to see her neighbor, Um-Mustafa, standing at her doorway across the street. Um-Mustafa was the only woman neighbor she knew who had not left as the war began. She was suffering from rheumatism and Rashad knew that it would be difficult for her to live in another house. The older woman was looking for her son. Her face was lined with worry as her eyes scanned the street on either side of her.

“As-Salāmu ‘Alaykum, Um-Omar!” Her eyes rested on Rashad.

“It seems that this is the end!” the older woman continued. “My husband was upstairs just now and he thought he saw a line of hummers and tanks moving our way. It was far away, though, so he couldn’t be sure.”

It had been close to two weeks since U.S. troops had taken the capital and the bombing of those initial days had stopped. As the grayish-brown dust rose omnisciently from the rubble, the chaos that followed had prepared them all for a possible American presence in their neighborhood. Still, up to that point, this inevitability had remained a vague, albeit horrifying, hypothetical in Rashad's mind. She was caught off guard by what Um-Mustafa had said. She had to see for herself.

"Where are you going Rashad?" her husband called after her as she headed for the stairs. She was already halfway up to the rooftop when she heard him.

As she approached the landing and reached the roof, she saw for herself. A long line of greenish colored tanks moved slowly by. She saw the red, white and blue of the American flag flapping above the first tank. She stared at them as they made a wide turn down the main street of their district and onto the side street that accessed their neighborhood. The city was quiet except for the sliding of the tank's rubber tires upon the pavement.

"Come down!" she heard Nameer call, his voice a mixture of anger and frantic concern. "Someone will snipe you!"

Rashad did not respond. She was watching the massive machines travel down the middle of the road. There was no line of well-wishers as Al Hura had been reporting. Instead, the neighborhood was devoid of life. Crude Arabic words spewed from the lead tank's hidden speakers, spilling out onto the empty street.

"All people stay in your homes. Do not go outside."

"Any movement in any house will be assumed as an enemy movement."

"Anybody who goes outside will be shot."

"We came here to save you."

Rashad could do nothing to stop what was happening, nor could she stop the tears that streamed down her cheeks. She realized at that moment that she was witnessing the saddest sight of her life.

Postscript: Midnight Visitors

Up until 2005, when the Iraqi government finally passed an ordinance stipulating that home searches past 11 p.m. needed to be pre-arranged and accompanied by a member of the community, the Americans had the right to enter homes on any day at any time. And they did. For three years they came without warning, in the middle of the night, filling the house with the sour smell from their clothes.

The first time they came, they got mud on Rashad's favorite carpet. She had kept it downstairs until that first day they entered her home. It was thick with white and yellow flowers; her father had given it to her when they first moved into the house in Al Dora. It came from Iran and was very expensive. When they came that first time, they broke open the front door, exposing the gleaming metal of their guns. Their walkie-talkies cackled.

What's your status? Is everything OK? Hold on, I'm going in...

Those young boys stepped, with their big, muddy boots, on her beautiful carpet as if they were walking on the street. After they left, Rashad scrubbed it for hours but she could never get rid of the smell of mud.

That was in April, shortly after occupation when the family still lived in the big house in Al Dora and Rashad still had all of her medicine on the shelves in the living room.

“What’s all this?” one of them said, waving the muzzle of his weapon in the direction of the library.

“My wife is a pharmacist,” Nameer had said. “She helps people with those medicines.”

The soldier relaxed a little once he realized that both Rashad and Nameer spoke English. Other families had not been so lucky; many had been shot for no reason other than moving a hand to cover up a wife, to close a bedroom door, to get an identification paper. Many were killed because they did not speak English. Many were killed because an American soldier did not understand the culture he had been thrown into.

The last time they entered Rashad’s home was in December 2005. Rashad and her family had moved from Al Dora to the Al Kadraa district, to a small house with one sleeping room upstairs and one downstairs.

Rashad was recovering from back surgery and was bedbound. When they came into their bedroom and shined the bright lights of their headlamps on Nameer and Rashad, she could do nothing. She wanted to wake her husband who was sleeping next to her but she was paralyzed. She wanted to call out but her tongue was too heavy to move.

Rashad could feel the warmth of her husband’s hand resting close to hers. That warmth moved through her and gave her the courage to reach over and squeeze his hand. He woke up immediately and was able to take control of his fear faster than she.

“Good evening, good evening,” he said.

Those few words in a foreign tongue saved them — again.

All she wanted to do at that moment was hug her children. She just wanted to know that they were safe.

V. PLANTING SEEDS

آسرة البذور

The Good Gather Together

Rashad had just finished meeting with yet another neighbor in need of medicine and was preparing lunch for her family when she heard a knock on the outer door.

Her two boys had arranged themselves to take turns answering the constant stream of visitors who came and went through their home from morning until late into the night. At the moment, it was Ali's turn. Rashad watched through the kitchen window as her son opened the latch and spoke to whoever was outside. There were still no clinics or pharmacies open in the area and the number of people who came to her door requesting medical advice and seeking treatment was growing every day. She was committed to helping in any way she could, especially now that the warm weather and continued lack of services had brought a host of medical issues — respiratory infections, skin diseases and digestion issues — to her neighborhood. But she also wanted to keep the integrity of her family's inner sanctuary intact.

“Mom, there's a doctor outside!” Ali called as he came back inside. “He says his name is Dr. Saied.”

Rashad instantly recognized the name. She had received four or five prescriptions for medicines with his scrawling signature on the simple piece of paper that substituted for a prescription form. She had often thought that it would be good to collaborate with this doctor more.

“I have been wondering about him,” Rashad said to her son as she wiped her hands with a dishtowel.

“He said the same thing about you,” Ali said.

“Will you tell your father that we have company?” Rashad asked her son as she headed for her room. She needed to put on her hijab so she could welcome their guest. When she returned, she and Nameer brought the plastic chairs from the kitchen to the porch outside. Then she brought out some juice for all three of them.

“I am sorry we do not have any ice,” she said, frowning. It was a hot afternoon in May.

“It's OK. I think we're all in the same situation,” the good-natured doctor said.

Dr. Saied was in his mid-50s with thinning hair and wire-framed glasses. He wore a dark suit with wrinkles along the edges. Ironing had become a luxury in a city with no electricity, and Dr. Saied's appearance showed this quite clearly.

“It is so good to meet you,” Nameer said. “We were surprised to discover another household providing medical service in Al Dora. We thought we were the only ones.”

“As did I,” said the doctor. He, his wife and two children lived in the southern part of the district, near the highway that, at the beginning of the war, was home to a large number of Iraqi military bases and checkpoints. The doctor had saved his money for 17 years in order to buy his home. It was everything he had; he would not leave it.

“There were so many people that passed by that highway every day. From our house we could see them. When the explosions started, many of them were gunned down or bombed as they drove by.” The doctor looked down into his juice glass for a brief moment before continuing. “By the second day, everyone from the Iraqi army had gone but I was surprised to see one small platoon left on our stretch of highway, only about four or five men. A short time later, they got hit by a cluster bomb.”

Rashad and Nameer had heard this story from their neighbors. Now they were hearing it firsthand. As the bomb descended, it shot out tiny shards of metal that dug into the sides of the houses and into the earth. Three of the soldiers were killed right away. Another was struck in his legs as the last remaining soldier looked on.

“I was in my house and I could hear the shouts of that soldier,” he said. “As soon as the bombing stopped, I ran outside and called over to him. I told him to leave his friend. It was obvious he was going to die. ‘Save yourself,’ I said. ‘You cannot do anything for him.’ That boy wouldn’t leave his friend.”

Rashad excused herself quickly, telling the men that she needed to check on lunch. Instead, she went into the downstairs bathroom just as the tears started to fall.

I just don't know how many more of these stories I can take.

Before leaving the bathroom, she washed her face in the sink. The water’s coolness helped her gather herself again. When she returned, the men had changed the conversation.

“I have heard a lot about the good things your wife is doing, Nameer,” the doctor said sheepishly as Rashad returned. He was embarrassed that he had made her cry.

“It is our duty to our country and our profession to help, right doctor?” Rashad said.

“Although lately it seems like there are more needs than our house can accommodate,” Nameer said. The doctor nodded in agreement.

“I know what you mean. Sometimes people knock on my door at midnight. I want to help and I do. But it is disturbing for my wife and children. There has got to be a way to reach more people and do so outside of our homes.”

As the three spoke, the solution became clear. They would combine forces and find a small place to house a charity clinic. The space would have to be centrally located yet off the main thoroughfares. At this point, American hummer patrols were stationed on every corner and could not be approached without the threat of being shot. Once they found an adequate place, they would have to walk the medical supplies from Rashad’s home to the clinic — and do so carefully.

Rashad felt a wave of gratitude come over her as the plans were finalized and the doctor agreed to come back for a visit as soon as he had found a building.

Are we really going to be able to help the people and return our home back to normal?

Dr. Saied's coming couldn't have been timelier. Rashad still believed in miracles.

Haram/The Pure Place

It was 10 o'clock on a mid-April morning in 2003, and Al Shurta'a Street in the southern part of Baghdad's Al Dora district was quiet. Inside a modest kitchen three blocks from the primary school, four women gathered to do what seemed, at the moment, to be the unimaginable.

The air in the room was pungent with the sweet scent of *a'as*, the beloved green plant that still grew in the gardens of the city despite the destruction all around it. Traditionally, the plant's thick green leaves could be found on wedding trays and in funeral displays throughout the country. On that day, four bunches sat on the wooden table in the center of room.

The women who gathered around the table were quiet, their faces pensive. Rashad was among them.

This plant is like our people, Rashad thought. We give our best in every situation.

Her stomach tightened and she felt the tension in her neck increase as she arranged the sprigs into separate bunches for the women to hold along with baskets of candies. Outside, she could hear the guttural sounds of military vehicles. It seemed that wherever the American hummers went, the tanks went too, as if the two slow moving vehicles were giant beasts, part of the same inseparable herd. Five and a half months after invasion, it was still this way in most neighborhoods. The street where Rashad's youngest daughter went to school was no exception. Yet despite this, the American-run newspapers, television stations and radio stations still sent the message to the people that it was time to return to their "normal way of life."

How can people with no electricity, no freedom of movement, no access to healthcare and schools still being used as makeshift bases for the American military return to any kind of "normal" life?

Still, we must try, thought Rashad. She knew the women who had come felt the same way. We must get back to normalcy not because the Americans tell us to, but because it is what we must do for ourselves. And our normal lives include honoring what is most sacred: our children's future.

Occupied or not, it was time for the children to return to school. Everyone knew the law. According to the Ministry of Education, if students did not go back to the classroom by the middle of April, they would be assumed as having missed the entire school year.

"God will help us," Rashad's friend Um-Ali, a retired school principal, said from the other side of the table. Rashad prayed that she was right.



“Are we ready?” Rashad asked.

“Let’s pass out the a’as first,” said Um-Ali. Rashad nodded. When the members of their community had decided that the men would be seen as too much of a threat and the safest strategy would be for the women to make the initial attempt to open up the school, many husbands did not allow their wives to join in. Understandably, they were afraid of what would happen to them in the face of armed American soldiers. “I will go,” Rashad had said on the day the decision was made, “but I cannot go alone. Who will go with me?” Um-Ali had volunteered immediately.

“Does everyone have a clump?” the older woman asked. As she looked around the room, Rashad felt a wave of gratitude toward each woman present.

Today, they would not be carrying the customary white flags held whenever a person went outside in the precarious months after occupation. The universal symbol of surrender, a white flag was supposed to guarantee that the carrier would not be shot by the other side. But this was not always the case. Stories abounded of individuals — mostly men and some on their way to Friday mosque — who had been shot by American soldiers, even while carrying the flags. Usually the excuse was a soldier who thought that the victim was hiding a weapon in his free hand. The women wanted to make it clear that they were a threat to no one. They would carry nothing with them except a small clump of a’as and a basket of small candies. Something in each hand. Rashad hoped the items would protect them, but she knew that they carried these items for their own reasons as well. A’as was a plant dear to the hearts of people throughout the country. Baskets of treats were the customary gift given to school children across the country on the first day of classes. These items would give the women strength for what they were about to do.

Rashad led the group out of the house, with Um-Ali following behind and the two younger women taking up the rear. Their long, colorful jubas billowed as they stepped outside into the hot air. The breeze blew dust from the street into their eyes and noses as they walked the two blocks to the school. Dust storms used to happen only occasionally on the streets of Baghdad. But since the bombings, the dust swirled constantly in the city, giving the sky above a light brown hue.

A few minutes later, they rounded the corner. They were within eyesight of the school and the American military personnel that surrounded it. The rubble-filled street was obstructed by a large sinkhole, so they decided to cross and stand in the median. From there, they could clearly see the line of four soldiers who had positioned themselves along the wall of the school. Next to them, a hummer emitted radio sounds and white noise into the stuffy air. One soldier was lying down and appeared to be sleeping. Two others were sitting while the last one stood with his back against the wall. To Rashad, the soldiers looked like they were sunning themselves on the beach, not standing guard in an occupied Baghdad neighborhood.

Rashad motioned at the two women in the back of their small line.

“Stay behind,” she said as she felt her heart quickening. “That way if something happens to us...” She stopped before she could finish her sentence. By the expression on the two younger women’s faces, she knew they understood. Um-Tebeha, whose kitchen they had used to prepare themselves that morning, was a widow, as was her daughter. Her husband had been killed in an earlier war while her daughter’s husband had been killed in the beginning of the occupation, leaving

her alone with two beautiful girls, ages 2 and 3. Um-Tebeha knew the sting that death could bring. She had no one to support her and her children, yet here she was, supporting others.

What have I done? Rashad thought. *How could I have brought these women to such a dangerous place?*

Rashad and Um-Ali crossed the empty avenue. The soldiers saw them coming and quickly stood up, gathering their weapons. A soldier in his early 20s, about the age of Rashad's oldest son, approached them, smacking a thick wad of gum.

“Good morning,” Rashad said in halting English. She felt her mind racing as she thought of the right words to say in this foreign tongue. “My friends and I need to clean the school. We need you to give us permission to go inside.”

The soldier turned to his friends. One of them shrugged in response.

“We’ll ask our sergeant,” the soldier said.

He returned a few minutes later with another man, twice his age. Rashad noticed that the older man wore a badge with his name on his fatigue shirt and a string of badges on his left sleeve.

“Good morning ladies!” the sergeant said in a loud, boisterous voice. “Nice to have you here! Can I help you?”

Why is he talking to us as if we are old friends? Rashad wondered. She did not understand these Americans and their strange behaviors. She took a deep breath and tried to calm herself.

“I have told these soldiers that we need to go into this school,” she said. “We need to clean it. It is time for the children to come back.”

“Are you the manager?” the sergeant asked. Rashad hesitated a moment before answering.

“No,” she said finally. “I am not. But this is the school of my child and she has to start learning.”

The sergeant told them to wait. While he was gone, one of the soldiers eyed the tiny basket Rashad carried in her hands. He whispered something to the soldier next to him, chuckled, and held out his hand to his friend.

“Ma’am, can I have a candy please?” he said in a high, mocking voice. “Please, please, pretty please?”

All four soldiers burst into peals of laughter.

“*Shday Guloon?*” Um-Ali whispered to Rashad in Arabic, wondering what they were talking about.

“*Ma Aadre*,” Rashad responded, shaking her head. She knew exactly what the soldiers were saying, but how could she tell her friend that they were being made fun of by the same young men that could shoot them at any moment?

Rashad and Um-Ali heard radio chatter and movement inside the school. It blended with the babble of the hummer radio as they waited for the sergeant. After 10 long minutes, the two women decided to return to their colleagues across the street. Rashad felt her tension lessen a bit as she explained what was happening.

“There he is,” Um-Ali said just as Rashad finished talking. The four women watched as the sergeant emerged. “What shall we do?”

This time, the women decided to stay together.

“Ladies,” he said as they approached. “I just called my lieutenant who is responsible for the area and he has agreed. We will empty the school but we need some time. Would half an hour be OK?”

Rashad could barely believe what she was hearing. “Half an hour will be enough,” she said. “We will go now and get our things.”

She paused a moment before leaving. “It’s OK then?” she asked. “We got the word?”

“Yes,” the sergeant said. “You got the word.”



Al Humdo leh lab,⁶¹ Rashad whispered under her breath as she made long strides down the sidewalk. She had to hurry. They had only half an hour to tell the other women waiting to lend a hand what had happened, gather the supplies and meet back at Um-Tebeha’s house. And she still had to go home to tell Nameer and the children what was going on.

“We did it!” she said as she entered her house.

“Do you want me to take you back in the car?” Nameer asked.

Rashad *did* want her husband to accompany her back to the school but she knew that it would be too dangerous. A man would die to protect the honor of his wife and family, and recent history had proven that the trigger-happy soldiers would shoot any man without a moment’s hesitation. The women could endure humiliation that the men could not. It was just the way. This time, like before, she would have to go alone.

“Why don’t you drive us to the corner? We should be OK to walk from there.”

Maryam heard her mother’s voice and ran into the front room to meet her.

“Mama!” she called. “You came back! Now can I go see my class? You promised I could go! You promised!”

Rashad smiled at her daughter's innocent excitement. One of the reasons she had done this was so her daughter would no longer be afraid, not of the soldiers and especially not of going back to school.

"Of course," Rashad replied as calmly as she could. "And you will be responsible for cleaning your own class. Now hurry and get ready so we can go."



Forty-five minutes later, 19 women stood on the side of the street where only four women had stood less than an hour earlier, unsure of how the day would unfold. They carried mops, brooms, buckets and old rags. The women watched the massive, gray tank and its companion hummer drive up the street to the far western corner of the school complex. Then, to their surprise, the engines went silent. Two soldiers got out and leaned against the side of the hummer, their eyes on the women.

Let them watch, Rashad thought. We have work to do.

Rashad opened the door to the first classroom and a wave of sharp odor hit her. She put her hand over her nose. It was as if something living had died; the air in the classroom dripped with it.

"What is that smell?" one of the women asked.

"How are we going to clean in here?" asked another.

The women looked around the room. A pile of empty brown plastic bags, carrying cases for military food rations, was stacked four feet high in the far corner along with miscellaneous trash and bits of food left from dozens of soldiers' meals over the past months. Cigarette butts littered the floor and the students' desks were propped up one against the other as if a battle had occurred inside the small classroom. Some sand bags sat along the base of the walls, left over from the beginning of the invasion when the Iraqi army used the school as a base. Along the upper walls, colorful decorations and posters clearly marked this as a first or second grade classroom.

"What kind of animals would do this to a school?" one of the women said, her voice shaking.

"It's OK. Let's just begin the cleaning and we will be done in no time," Rashad said. "And look, here are some windows. As soon as we open them, the smell will leave." She did not tell the other women that she herself felt as if she would vomit at the smell and the state of the classroom.

Do these soldiers not have children of their own?

The women set out with their cleaning. They dragged the sand bags and all the plastic food containers into piles on the playground, where all the inner doorways of the classrooms faced. Within a couple of hours, the women were dusty and dirty but making progress. But the women fell into a dreary silence as the afternoon wore on and weariness overtook them. Rashad had an idea.

“Maryam!” Rashad called to her daughter. “Bring in the hose so we can fill up these buckets!”

Maryam dragged the long, thin strip of plastic into the classroom. With the electricity out, the city water purification systems were down. The water was unsafe to use for anything other than cleaning — and they needed lots of it to clean the windows caked with dust and grime. Rashad also wanted to make sure that there was at least one person cleaning them at all times. She wanted to show their presence to the soldiers outside and keep an eye on their movements.

“You are doing so well and your classroom is almost clean,” Rashad said. “But we need a song to keep us going! Do you feel like singing?”

“Mama, we can’t sing. The soldiers will hear us!”

“Right now, we need everyone to hear us, especially our friends that have come to help clean your school.”

The women had divided themselves into groups to be most efficient. Some of them were in other classrooms; she and Maryam would have to sing loudly to be heard.

“Are you ready?” Rashad asked.

“OK!”

*“Tala al Badru alayna / min thaniyyattül Wada / Wajabu al-shikrualayna / Mada a Lillahi da / Mada a Lillahi da...”*⁶²

The song described the face of the prophet as a full moon shining over the people, bringing goodness to all. It was a song the women had sung hundreds of times before, from childhood on.

It was a song of hope, promise and beauty.

Eventually, Rashad heard voices in the other rooms joining in. Their singing was soft at first, but with each verse the volume rose. The last few minutes of cleaning passed quickly as they sang together, lifting their spirits and their hopes for what the future may bring.

When they were finished, the women gathered all of their supplies in one of the classrooms for safekeeping. They would return the next day to finish the job. Then they cleaned themselves as best they could, washing hands and faces from the spigot before returning to their families for lunch.

“It is late. Our husbands are worried about us,” one of the women said.

“Or maybe they are worried about their stomachs,” said another. Everyone laughed.

“Let’s meet early tomorrow,” Um-Tebeha suggested. They agreed to begin again at 9 a.m. and each bring family members and friends to help.

“With enough people,” Rashad said, “we can finish cleaning the school in no time.”

As the women prepared to go their separate ways for the day, hugs, handshakes and smiles turned to tears at their bittersweet victory. It had been a successful day. They had faced their fear and gained back the place of *Haram*, the “sacred place of purity” for their children. But their celebration was tinged with the sadness of what had happened to their community over the last months.

Rashad held her daughter’s hand as they started their walk back home. The American soldiers were still watching them from their lookout point on the corner. She wondered what the future would hold for her children in the face of this menacing reality. Still, she had hope in knowing that today they had taken the first step, however small, toward regaining control over the simple things in their lives — the things that mattered the most.



Rashad and her husband walked out of the Omar al Muktar mosque after Friday prayer. Though the mosque was outside of Al Dora district, they sometimes went to services there. As they approached the parking lot, two women came up to them who Rashad had not seen since the last time she attended mosque there.

“What are you doing now?” one of the women asked. Rashad couldn’t help but tell the story of opening up Maryam’s primary school a few weeks earlier. Attendance at the school was still low, but it was growing. The women listened attentively then shook their heads.

“What an idea!” one of them said. “I wish we could do that in our district.”

“But we don’t have strong women in our community,” said the other. “We are under occupation. In our neighborhood, those hummers and tanks are right outside our door! What can we do?”

Rashad thought a moment before responding. How could she express that these women were just as powerful as they had been that day?

“I don’t think there is a single person in the city who does not want their child to return to school,” she said. “And all it takes is for someone to take the first step.”

After they had said their goodbyes, Rashad and Nameer headed to their car. A large clump of a’as was growing along the side of the parking lot fence. Its dark green leaves stretched out to catch the rays of the hazy sun. Rashad smiled.

What happened that day had nothing to do with one woman being braver or stronger than another. Surely there are others around the city who have done the same thing. I know we are not the only ones.

VI. AL MAAREFA/KNOWLEDGE

المعرفة

From Dream to Reality

Rashad had just finished giving a lesson in the women's hall at the mosque nearest her house and was sitting on the ground gathering her things when she felt a gentle nudge from behind.

“Um-Omar,” a low voice whispered in her ear. “I need to talk to you.” Rashad turned around to see Um-Sama, a middle-aged woman who often attended Rashad's lectures. She was alone and looked like she had not slept in many days.

Rashad was accustomed to women approaching her for advice after her lessons. Over the more than 30 years she had been teaching Qur'an, she had developed a reputation for open communication, strong leadership and practical advice with the women she served. During the days leading up to occupation, Rashad often used her lesson time to connect core Islamic principles to practical issues of real concern to the women in her community. In now-occupied Iraq, these issues included safety, hygiene and first aid, as well as how to keep a strong faith during very troubling times. She set down her papers to give the distraught woman her full attention.

“What is it sister?” Rashad asked.

“It's my daughter, Um-Omar,” she answered. “I am afraid she is going to lose her faith.”

The woman explained that her daughter, who used to attend classes at the University of Baghdad before the occupation, was becoming more withdrawn as the months wore on. She had refused her mother's invitation to join her in the mosque and now refused to go outside at all.

“Do you know what she said to me the other day, Um-Omar?” Um-Sama said, frowning. “She yelled at me and said, ‘Why are you going to pray? God is not helping us! Oh, Um-Omar, I feel as if my heart is breaking. What am I going to do?’”

Rashad held the woman's hand in hers. What she was describing was not unique. She had heard this same story from many other women. Fear of violence had made most women in the city homebound since the Americans and their heavy artillery arrived. She had also seen signs of depression and anxiety in her own daughters. No matter how many projects she gave them around the house, the life they led now was a far cry from the personal freedom they enjoyed before. She too felt anxious and nervous these days. Like many women in her neighborhood, the mosque was the only place she could really go to connect with others and her visits were infrequent at best these days. The rest of her days were spent at home with her daughters; human contact was mostly relegated to those who came seeking medical advice. To make matters worse, the Americans were now in the initial stages of their de-Ba'athification activity, arresting individuals suspected of being Ba'ath party supporters. This added to the paranoia that already saturated the city.

“Um-Sama, my sister,” Rashad said, “this situation is nothing to be ashamed of. I know that many women here have the same concerns about their daughters. Would it be OK for me to share this important issue with the others?”

Um-Sama nodded and looked out at the room, where about 20 people were still mingling.

“Sisters!” Rashad called out in a clear, strong voice. “We have just a few minutes before it is time to leave. For those of you that can stay a bit longer, I would like to share something that I know has been on the minds of many of you lately...”

Rashad reiterated her own dilemma with her daughters and the drain on their spirits that occupation had caused. Many women nodded their heads in agreement.



That night, Rashad couldn't sleep. She thought back to the times in her life when she had needed the support of other women and the power she had seen it give to her and to others. When she was still a teenager going to the Kabools with her mother, she had witnessed the healing and support the women provided to each other during the Iran-Iraq War. Then, during the later years of that same war, she had felt the vulnerability of not having her female family members near when she was alone with her child and forced to work at the pharmacy in Baiji. She had seen the proactive strength that came through her own network of friends as well. Without their help, she never would have been able to successfully organize the first aid trainings at the end of 2002. Rashad's thoughts returned to the present and the particularly daunting form of isolation that the women in the city were now experiencing.

We will die if we are left in our houses alone for much longer. The women in our community should be with other women for connection and support. And we need more than just lessons in the mosque. We need a safe space, a place that will be comfortable and inviting. We especially need a place to connect with each other. The men have the mosques, the marketplaces, the streets. We have nothing.

How could she create such a space? Over the next few days, an idea began to form in her mind.



“You can't even get to your pharmacy these days! How do you expect to create a society?” Nameer asked, slamming his fist on the kitchen table. Rashad knew he did this just for effect. Throughout the years, the two had had their disagreements over courses of action in their lives. But it had not been since the late '80s, when she wanted to open her private pharmacy, that she had seen him this adamantly opposed to something. With the pharmacy, he had eventually come to understand her point of view. She hoped he would do the same this time.

As her own parents had done when she was growing up, Rashad shared all major life decisions with her family. The decision to start a society, if she decided to do it, would be a major undertaking. All of the children were present in the kitchen that morning when Rashad first introduced the idea. Zaynab and Maryam were young; they just observed as the older members of their family spoke. The boys and Nameer were aligned on the issue.

“Mom,” Omar said, “you don't need any more problems.”

“Nor do you need to bring any more problems into our home!” Nameer said.

“Baba’s right, Mom,” Ali said. “This time, why don’t you just let it go until things settle down a bit?”

Rashad looked at the three men in front of her. Along with her daughters, they were the most important people in her life. She did not want to cause them distress. But she also wanted to help her bigger family — her community.



“So what do you think?”

Rashad sat at a low wooden table in her friend Um-Hayder’s kitchen. The women were drinking tea and catching up. They had not seen each other since the occupation began. Rashad needed the advice of a woman she could trust. Rashad had known Um-Hayder, now a civil engineer, since she was in middle school and she knew she could always rely on her friend’s steady wisdom and practical insights.

“Yes,” Um-Hayder said, setting her teacup down on the table. “I believe something like this is needed right now. I am getting the same feeling about my daughter. She is not herself these days and I am concerned. A place like this would be a good chance to bring some hope into their lives.”

“And our own as well, Inshallah,” Rashad said.

“But how can we do it?” Um-Hayder asked.

“I am trying to find others who will support the idea,” Rashad said. “Will you be one of the founding members?”

“Yes,” her friend said. “But I have to ask my husband first.”

“Of course, take your time.” Rashad rose from her chair and headed toward the door that separated the kitchen from the living room, where Rashad’s husband and Um-Hayder’s were talking. “Speaking of husbands, Nameer and I had better get going. We still have to visit with his family before heading home.”

On the way back to Al Dora, Nameer and Rashad stopped at one of their favorite mosques in the Al Yarmok district just as Allahu Akbar was being called for Assayer. They decided to do their prayers quickly before heading home. They often came to this mosque when they traveled between Nameer’s family home and their own. It was not near where they lived, but they especially liked the imam’s sermons. His poignant and timely words were always filled with relevance to their lives.

On the way out, Rashad was surprised to see two women she had known from the first aid training she had given at the IRC so long ago. One of the women lived near the highway in Al Dora. The American military had invaded her house on their second day in the city.

“I was in the bath when they came in!” she told Rashad. The anger that had been inside her since that day rose to the surface again. “What was I supposed to do?”

The other explained that because her office was near the government buildings, she had not been able to work for some time.

“My family is going crazy,” she said. “My husband and children are tense all the time and so am I.”

Rashad listened intently to the women’s words. Their stories were all too familiar.

“I am thinking of something that may help our situation,” Rashad said. She began to explain the concept of forming a society.

“What a great idea!” one of them said. “I will support you in any way I can.”

Three positive reactions in one day! Rashad thought. *It has to be a sign from God.*

Now there was no doubt in her mind that a society for women was going to be created. The only questions were where and when.



In the large women’s prayer room of the Al Yarmok mosque, seven women sat in their places on the dark red carpet as the sunlight slipped through the tall windows. They were professional women — well-educated, worried about their country — who had come together for one reason: to help bring about the vision of a society that Rashad had seen over two months ago.

Rashad looked around the room. She had taken risks to bring them all together. She had risked her life and that of her sons, driving and taking taxis all over the city, barely missing the curfew on several occasions and skirting past bombings and traffic jams on others. And she had tested the patience of her husband, who was still mostly opposed to the idea.

Has it been worth it? We shall see.

Rashad had done everything she could to prepare. She had a complete budget, a list of goals, a list of tasks to complete those goals, a list of committees and a list of names to fill those committees. When the meeting started, she explained her action plan to the women.

“As you know, I am thinking of putting together a society for women,” she said. “This society will have a charity clinic for women and children, a space for women to learn computer skills, a place for sewing, cooking, English and Arabic classes, and a preschool where women can leave their children in a safe place while they learn.”

Next Rashad outlined the list of needs and committees to fill those needs. She knew beforehand who was going to be at the meeting, so she had taken the liberty of filling in specific names to serve on specific committees. She gave a quick description of the budget and a plea for contributions from each woman so that their work could start right away.

The women sat quietly while she spoke. Rashad noticed the looks on their faces. Some looked overwhelmed and daunted by the task while others appeared excited at all the possibilities that awaited them.

“I have one more thing to say,” Rashad said. She had planned that the women would break into groups to discuss the details of their work, but first she needed to bring something up that was not open for discussion.

“I would like to make one thing very clear from the beginning. The society we are about to create will have no political agenda and will not be involved in any policy activities whatsoever. It will be neutral and will work for the good of the people. It will welcome women of different races and religions. We do not need to hold anybody else’s vision. We have our own vision and we will work for the benefit of the Iraqi community as a whole.”

And thus, in that first meeting of seven women at the Al Yarmok mosque, the Knowledge for Iraqi Women Society was born.

Cleaning House

Rashad, Nameer and their four children stood in front of the abandoned corner house in the Al Kadraa district, looking up at the massive frame.

“Well, it doesn’t do any good to just stand here. We better go in,” Rashad said with a sigh. Ali and Omar pulled the cleaning supplies out of the back of the Kia with Zaynab’s help while Rashad and Nameer worked on opening up the house.

It was a true gift from God that one of the newly formed society’s members had found the house and generously contributed money for the first month’s rent. The space was large and the rent was not cheap. Still, it was a start. If the Society could just keep itself going for the first year here, Rashad was sure they would be OK.

“Where do you want these mops, Mom?” Omar asked, carrying them inside.

“I’ll take them to the kitchen. I think we can use the broom on the rest of the house for now.”

Nameer had already begun his tour of the house, checking for structural damage and water leaks. They had seen the house only one time before, right before they signed the lease. Rashad had been shocked at the amount of dirt and grime caked on the windows, shelves and counters. Then again, no one had even entered this house for more than two years.

As the girls climbed the stairs to explore the second floor and the boys accompanied their father, making notes of things that needed to be repaired, Rashad decided to make her own journey of the premises. From the front door she walked past the large room that would eventually be used for lectures and large workshops and down a long hall to the kitchen. She set the pile of mops in a corner and made her way back up the hallway that connected the kitchen to the front door and branched out into four other rooms. Rashad knew that each room would have a specific purpose —

a computer lab, a preschool, a clinic, a sewing center. As she walked into each one, she tried to imagine what the space would look like when everything had been settled in.

In the end, it was her dear husband who had helped them purchase and transport most of the furniture they had so far. As the Society had become more of a reality, Nameer had become less resistant to the idea. And here he was on this day, lending a hand, his occasional grumblings more a matter of habit than anything else. Her parents had helped out too. Rashad's father had contributed money for a new air cooler, something that would be extremely useful in the summer months. Her mother had supplied the funds for extra plastic chairs for the main hall and for setting up a small library. As Rashad poked around one of the smaller rooms closer to the kitchen, she tried to imagine bookshelves along one of the walls and desks with computers and chairs along the other.

Maybe. Rashad took out her black agenda book and a pen. She made a note; everything from insights and appointments to phone numbers and to-do lists went into that agenda. As she closed the book and continued to walk down the hall, she remembered the game she and her sisters used to play in the summertime when they were children. While her mother and father sat in the garden in the cool part of the evening, drinking their tea, the three girls would run from the family's well-stocked library to the garden with questions written on tiny scraps of paper.

"Who published this book?" one of her sisters would ask their father, handing him a scrap. Their mother would lean over her husband's shoulder, reading what was on the paper, a sly smile on her face. She knew the answer if her husband didn't. But most of the time, he did.

Just then she heard Omar's voice from one of the rooms off the main hall.

"Disgusting!" he said as Rashad came in to see what was going on. Then she saw the cause of his outburst: the bodies of a pair of gray doves. They must have died a while ago. Their feathers were decaying into the hard tile floor. One of the room's big windows had been broken out, perhaps from looters but more likely from the bombings since there were no other signs that someone had entered the space.

The doves must have come here seeking shelter, just as we women are doing now.

At that moment, Rashad knew she had found her library.



"Ali!" Rashad called down from the second floor. Even with the stool, she wouldn't be able to get the grimy curtains down. Rashad wasn't sure if she was going to clean them or just throw them away. Either way, they had to come off that window.

Ali came into the room.

"How's it going down there?" she asked.

"OK," he said. He wiped some sweat off his brow and sagged his shoulders.

"Tired?" she asked.

“Yeah, a little.”

“I think we are almost done here,” she said, wrapping her arm around her son. She was so proud of how hard he and the rest of the family had worked that day. “I think *Beebe Um Baba*⁶³ is making her special *Doulmb*⁶⁴ for us tonight. Your uncle called and asked if we could come for dinner. Can I just get your help for one more minute and then we can start cleaning up?”

“Sure,” Ali said good-naturedly.

“I need you to help me get this curtain down, but be careful.”

Ali took the stepstool and lined it up as close as he could to the wall. Then he stood up on his toes to unfasten the first hook from the curtain rod. As the dirty fabric came loose, cascading dust and spider webs onto their heads, Rashad let out a shriek.

Ali stepped quickly backwards off the stool. Rashad reached over to try to catch him if he fell, but he was nimble enough to come down on his own.

Zaynab and Maryam heard their mom’s squeal and ran into the room just in time to see four large, gummy geckos scatter in all directions from their resting place in the curtain.

“Gross!” Maryam said.

“Cool!” Ali said.

Zaynab stepped back a few feet, not taking her eyes from the largest one that was trying to burrow his way into a corner.

More squeals from the girls sent peals of laughter out of Ali and then Omar, who had come in a few seconds after his sisters. Soon they were all laughing, even Rashad.

This is hard work and they may not like me most of the time for making them do it, Rashad thought between giggles, but at least we are no longer stuck in our house, pining the hours away. We are doing something good. And we are doing it together.

A Widow’s Story

“I’m sorry I have been away for so long. I’ve been consoling a neighbor,” Nada said as she came up to Rashad and the three other women who were talking in the main hall. Nada was a student in the sewing class. Rashad had not seen her, or Um-Mahmod, the sewing instructor, for three days.

“And have you seen Um-Mahmod?” Rashad was glad that Nada was back but was still concerned about the Society’s only sewing instructor. She had to cancel the classes for the week because of her disappearance. Rashad knew that Nada lived on Um-Mahmod’s street.

Nada frowned. “Do not be mad at Um-Mahmod. She is the neighbor I had to console. Her husband was killed four days ago.”

Nada explained that Um-Mahmod’s husband was coming back from running an errand for the family when a bomb went off on a hummer nearby. The American soldiers opened fire in the street and he had been killed — simply for being at the wrong place at the wrong time.

After the girl left, Rashad and a few Society members decided to pay the grieving seamstress a visit. Um-Mahmod and her late husband had lived with his parents and siblings in a small house in a district not far from the Society office. When the ladies reached the house, Um-Mahmod answered the door. The surprised look on her face quickly changed to sadness.

“I am so sorry I could not make it to teach the class. This is all happening so fast. What am I going to do?” she said.

“God will replenish you,” Rashad said tenderly. “Take care of your children now as best you can.”

The woman nodded, wiping away her tears. From where they were sitting in the living room, Rashad could see inside the simple space where she and her three children were staying. Baskets of children’s clothes and toys sat on the scuffed cement floor. The bed and other furniture in the room were in the same condition as that in the living room — old wood, shabby upholstery and cheap, simple decorations. It was clear that there was no room for extras in this home.

What will this woman and her children do now that her husband is gone?

When the ladies returned to the Society center, they discussed Um-Mahmod’s situation at length. In the past, widows whose husbands had perished in the Iran-Iraq War, the Kuwait invasion and the First Gulf War had been compensated by the government. Many received an ongoing salary, a car and land, and their children were given special concessions for university admission.⁶⁵ By the time occupation came in 2003, these programs were no longer in effect. Um-Mahmod was a skilled seamstress and, under normal conditions, she would have been able to make a decent wage herself. But these were not ordinary times. Jobs had been scarce for some time under sanctions and now, with the occupation, they were even more so. Even if one had a job, security issues made it almost impossible to maintain outside work for long. There had to be a way that the Society could help their friend. The salary that Um-Mahmod earned as an instructor at the center was modest, but the least the women could do was keep it going for another month.

“Let’s each commit to paying for a week’s worth of her salary,” Rashad suggested. Three other women committed to helping too, and soon a plan had been formed.



Through the transparent walls of her small office, Rashad had seen her friend Um-Hayder coming from across the large hall, hand in hand with Sumaya, a Society member who was also an interior designer. Sumaya and her husband had created the space that was now Rashad’s office. Before that, she had been a floating director, doing her paperwork and meeting with people in any available room. She was shocked to see that, over a recent weekend that she had been away, an old

air cooler had been removed from the small room off the main hall and a glass wall and door had been installed to create an open and inviting space for the director. Other members, young girls so full of life and energy, had created decorations and arranged for a desk and chair. The new office space would take some getting used to. *What right do I have to this luxury while others are living with such hardship?* Rashad had thought when she first saw it. Still, the new office did allow her more productivity and peace of mind while she worked.

“My sister, can I talk with you?” Um-Hayder asked when she reached the door to the office.

“Of course, you know you don’t have to ask,” Rashad responded. Over the course of the last six months, she and Um-Hayder had become even closer friends as they worked together.

“I have been thinking,” Um-Hayder said, sitting down on a chair opposite Rashad. “I would like to create a program to help the widows and orphans in our area. I have talked to so many women just around here and you have seen the reports I have been writing. More innocent men are getting killed for no reason and there seems to be no end in sight. Did you know that in the Al Amerea district alone, there are nine families who have lost fathers in less than one month? And those are just the ones that I know of. I am sure there has to be more.”

Rashad thought for a moment. Yes, she had read Um-Hayder’s reports and had talked to her about many of these cases. And, like most women with husbands and families, she had been troubled as well.

“This is what I propose,” her friend said. “Let’s create a program where every member and her family commit to supporting just one extra child. Even just 35,000 Iraqi Dinars⁶⁶ a month would help so much. Surely most members can afford that, especially those who are still getting retirement compensation.”

Rashad was intrigued by Um-Hayder’s idea and inspired by her vision. At the same time, she was uncomfortable with starting something that they may not be able to follow through on. What if they promised these families assistance and then were not able to deliver over the long term?

“Let me make an announcement in the next weekly meeting,” Um-Hayder said. “Then we will see what comes.”



Um-Hayder approached the front of the packed main hall where the Society members had gathered, holding a small journal. Inside she had written some notes for what she would say that evening. Um-Hayder had always been a woman with a strong faith and she knew that it had brought her through some very challenging times. She was so grateful for the quiet confidence she had maintained as she helped her family go through the last months. Now she was entering a new phase in her life. During her work in the Society, her passion to serve others had deepened. As she stood at the head of the hall and prepared to speak, she wanted with all her heart to convey her vision of how they could assist the women in their city.

“Most of us here are mothers,” she began. “I have three children. Um-Omar has four. Um-Ahmed has two. As mothers, the thing we long for most is to provide for our children. As you

know, there are many women who are not able to do that now. Our prophet says that the one who sponsors an orphan will be next to me in heaven. Aren't each of us able to care for just one more?"

Rainy Days Shouldn't Stop Us

On the second day of *Eid*,⁶⁷ Rashad awoke early for Fajr. She could hear pattering on the rooftop and, though it was still dark, she drew the bedroom curtain a bit to look out the window. Beads of water splashed onto the ledge on the other side of the screen. Today she and her husband, along with a handful of Society members, would visit the Central Hospital for Children in the district of Al Iskan. As the rain lightly drummed outside, she contemplated what the day would bring.

"Are you still going to the hospital on such a rainy day?" her husband asked sleepily as he got out of bed. "It's Eid. Maybe nobody else will show up."

Listening to the rain as Nameer shuffled out of the bedroom to prepare for the day, Rashad remembered one of the stories her father used to tell her when she was young. Before he met her mother, Rashad's father worked for his future wife's brother, a respected lawyer in Baghdad. Salem was just out of law school and Um-Iman's brother had been his mentor.

One time we were having a case in a village about 150 kilometers south of Baghdad, he would begin. Rashad recalled with a smile how her father would blink his eyes dramatically a couple of times every time he started a story, as if doing so brought it more into focus.

The roads to this place were mostly dirt, he would continue, the expression on his face turning serious. On the day we had to travel there, it was winter and it was raining heavily. The roads were sure to be filled with mud. 'Abu-Munther,' I said to my boss that morning. 'Are we going to postpone the trip because of this bad weather? Surely the other side will not come and we could get stuck.' Do you know what my mentor said to me, Allah Yarham⁶⁸ Abu-Munther?

Of course, Rashad and her sisters knew. Still, they hung on Baba's every word, eagerly awaiting the resolution. After a brief but effective pause, he would continue.

'Salem,' my mentor said, 'these people have hired us to defend them. When they came to us, we did not agree that we would just work on sunny days!'

Rashad knew that, Eid or not, everyone would show up.

"Let's get going," Rashad said to her husband as he entered the bedroom again. "We have to get the fruit for the gift bags by 7 a.m."

Rashad, Nameer and Ali drove up to the general market just as it was opening its doors. The produce manager was waiting for them.

"I have picked out the freshest fruits for you to give to the children!" he said, smiling broadly. Rashad felt a lump in her throat at the kindness of this man, a complete stranger until two days ago. Over and over in this work, her spirit had been supported by the kindness of her fellow Iraqis.

“*Kul Am Wantom Bekayer!* Happy Eid!” they called to the man as they drove off. The back of the Kia was filled with boxes of bananas and apples.

When they reached the Society center, two young women were waiting for them. They stood in the rain in their new holiday júbas, ready to help bring in the boxes.

“You are going to get your new clothes wet!” Rashad said to the girls as she got out of the car and covered her head with the hood of her rain jacket. “We will bring them in. But let’s be quick! There isn’t much time and we still have to arrange everything!”

As she, Nameer and Ali each carried a box inside, Rashad smiled to herself.

Keep your word and work for the people — my father’s lesson is still so relevant, especially on this day of Eid and in these times of crisis.



The rain had tapered to a slow drizzle as Rashad, Nameer, Ali and four Society women stood in the front lobby of the children’s hospital.

“*Why* are you here?” the hospital receptionist asked, eyeing them suspiciously. The hospital staff was not used to having visitors those days.

Rashad held up the box she was carrying for the receptionist to see. Inside were the small bags she and the women had put together that morning. Each bag held two pieces of fruit and a small toy — figurines of cartoon characters for the boys and hair decorations for the girls.

“We have come to give the children some treats for Eid,” Rashad said.

“Go inside. The doctor is waiting for you,” the woman said.

One of the volunteer doctors at the Society center also worked at the hospital. She had put the Society in contact with the doctor they were about to meet.

“Nobody is coming to visit these children,” the volunteer had said as she sat in Rashad’s office explaining the situation. “An adult can understand the reasons why he is in the hospital all alone. A child cannot.”

“As-Salāmu ‘Alaykum,” the doctor said. “Please follow me.”

Inside the large room were 12 long beds. The children who occupied the beds ranged in age from 4 years old to about 10. Some were sitting up. Others were sleeping. Next to each bed was a woman. Most mothers had been with their children in the hospital since their child arrived.

The doctor explained that some of the children had been wounded during the bombings, especially during the first couple days of the invasion. Rashad could see bandages, splints and bruises in various places on many of the children’s bodies. Others had been brought in when they started to

show signs of sickness. No one could explain why, but hospital staff had noticed a large number of children coming in with cancer and other illnesses during the last months.

“*Ani! Ani!* Me! Me!” a thin little girl called out. She wore a dirty pink dress with white ruffles on the collar. Rashad handed her one of the bags and she began opening it quickly.

“Soon you will be back at home with your friends,” Rashad said as she helped the girl open her bag. She tried not to look at the space below the little girl’s right knee. Her leg was missing from the knee down and her thigh was covered in a heavy white bandage. She looked into the girl’s dark brown eyes instead and tried to smile.

How can I tell this young girl that everything is going to be OK?

“We are lacking in many medicines, especially treatments for the cancers and other sicknesses,” the doctor said as he led the group out of the room. “What can we do? We can’t send them home. We have to give them care.”

Celebrating the Dream

For the first year celebration of the Knowledge for Iraqi Women Society, Rashad did something no one expected. She, and she alone, was preparing a feast for the 50 or so Society members and guests who were to arrive that day.

She began preparing the delicate traditional dishes two days prior. From her kitchen at home, she made the appetizers and salad mixes and packed five dozen sets of plates, glasses, spoons, knives and forks in the Kia to take to the Society. On the Society’s special day, they would not eat on cheap plastic or throwaway paper plates. They would dine in style.

On the morning of the event, Rashad arrived early to the Society center with the back trunk of the Kia filled to capacity. She unloaded it all with the help of some young women who had taken an active role in the daily operations of the Society. A year ago, these women had been stuck in the quagmire of depression and hopelessness that had overcome them after occupation. Now they brimmed with life, hope and promise.

“Listen girls,” Rashad said. “I am going into the kitchen until the guests arrive. If anybody comes early, can you greet them and get them some juice?”

“Of course,” one of them answered as they took a stack of plates out of the car.

When the coast was clear, Rashad dragged all of her cooking supplies into the kitchen and locked the door from the inside. She took off her hijab and started to work. Um-Ahmed, the cooking instructor, would arrive shortly, but for the time being, as she unloaded all of the vegetables and meats and the bag of rice to prepare, she was alone with her thoughts.

Has it really been an entire year? She wondered how many of the people she had encountered along the way thought that her vision for the Society was just a dream that would never come to fruition. Yet here they were. Inspired by what Rashad, Um-Tebeha and Um-Ali had done at Maryam’s school, the Society had created a program in its first months encouraging students to

return to their studies. They had visited children in hospitals and elders in the local *Dar Al Museenene*.⁶⁹ And, most significantly, they had created the Society center, a safe space for women to connect and share. All the Society's classes — computers, sewing, cooking, English — were filled to capacity. The preschool was clean and well-staffed. And the main hall held workshops on a number of topics, many of which Rashad taught herself. The library and computer lab were polished and organized. The widows and orphans project was finally underway, and now they could rest easy after finally receiving their legal registration from the Ministry of Planning.

Rashad and the Society members responded to crisis after crisis that came up in their community, and they did so with no agenda other than to spread goodness and healing to those who needed it most. As Rashad peeled and sliced the onions and potatoes for the *kozy alsham*, the small pies filled with meat, cooked rice, nuts, green beans and potatoes that would be their main dish, she felt a simmering excitement at what the special afternoon would bring. Mainly, though, she felt a sense of deep satisfaction — not because of the fancy meal she and her friends would eat that day, but because she, a normal Iraqi citizen, had actually done something to make a difference. She had dreamt about a women's society and then had created it from scratch, gathering the vital ingredients — the people who would help — along the way.



“Did you make the lunch today, Um-Ahmed?” one woman asked. Um-Ahmed shook her head. “No, Dr. Rashad did it.”

Once everyone had filled their plates with baba ganoush, humus, salad and one delicate round of the *kozy alsham*, they were ready to eat. But first, each woman who had been an integral part of creating the Society had a chance to speak. Um-Hayder spoke to everyone about the new widows and orphans project for the first time. Rashad's mother wiped away tears and spoke of the older generation's experience through war and how proud she was of her daughter, praying to God to save them all. Next, the thankful mothers of the young women who were helping at the Al Kadraa branch stood up and offered their words of gratitude. Um-Abdullah, Rashad's longtime friend who had just returned home after years of exile in Malaysia, spoke of her awe at the Society her friend and the other members had created. Finally, Um-Noor, one of the original members of that meeting of seven, stood up to speak.

“Ladies,” she said. “I have something to say. When I first heard Dr. Rashad spell out the plan of the Society in such detail at the first meeting — the classes, the center, the preschool — I thought, ‘This woman is dreaming. She cannot create all of those things!’ But at the time I decided that I would just keep working with her and see what would come later.”

Rashad, smiling and standing at the other end of the table, spoke up:

“Now you see — this is what came later!”

Postscript: Violet and Cream

It was a cool March morning, one year after occupation. The invitation to the day's conference was tucked securely in her bag as Rashad got out of her husband's car and slipped past the squad of hummers and tanks that circled the large tent in front of one of the biggest country clubs in Baghdad.

She felt a surge of excitement as she got in line at the first security checkpoint and took out her identification and invitation. Other women in front and behind her, some wearing hijabs and some not, clutched their invitations too as the line moved closer to the checkpoint. The cream-colored cards were printed on stationery normally used for weddings and special celebrations. She could see the delicate violet bows on their shining covers and the monogrammed lettering on the inside, embossed in brilliant gold, as each woman handed their invitation to the female inspector for review. The inspectors were Iraqi and each wore a hard-covered policeman's hat over their hijab. Incoming participants were asked to turn off and hand in their cell phones, and each woman was searched thoroughly from head to toe. Rashad was given a small tag with a number and her cell phone was placed in a basket next to the inspector.

As she gathered the rest of her things and proceeded to the entrance, Rashad realized that she was about to enter a place she had never been. Prior to the American invasion, this club was where wealthy families related to Ba'ath ministerial heads and their supporters dined, recreated, socialized and worked deals away from the gazing eye of the public. Now it was home to many large conferences concerning the New Iraq. She signed her name on the registration form, turned in her identification and entered the expansive hall to the chatter of hundreds of women. The high ceiling echoed and amplified their voices. Thick cream-colored curtains tied with golden ribbons hung to the floor, and light purple valances cascaded in waves across the top. On the stage, an arrangement of flowers in the same colors graced the space in front of a small podium. A banner behind it announced the day's topic: "A Better Future for Iraqi Women Under Freedom and Democracy."

Rashad had participated in many such gatherings in the previous months. The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), the interim governing entity in Iraq, began encouraging the "free citizens of Iraq" to take greater responsibility and become involved in the formation of their new country shortly after occupation began. Rashad knew many professional men and women who were better suited to attend these meetings than she. But many were afraid to go back to their jobs, let alone attend meetings about the restructuring of Iraqi society. Thousands of government employees, civil servants, former military personnel and academic professionals were members of the Ba'ath party, as registration into the party was required for consideration into these sectors. Rashad was unique in that she had always remained independent, as had her parents. She had never registered as a party member, even when it meant her exclusion from graduate studies. Whether she liked it or not, Rashad was in a relatively safe place from which to lend her voice. And she was trying her best to do so and contribute to the healing of her wounded country.

De-Ba'athification was bringing the capital to a screeching halt while desperation, fear and anger were swelling the country to a bursting point. But another emotion was also building: fervor over the possibility of something new. Meetings were being held and committees were being formed on everything from farmers' issues to doctors' rights. Even though Baghdad's volatility sometimes made it dangerous for her to travel to these meetings, Rashad had made it to a recent gathering

about the proposed Iraqi constitution. It was at that workshop that she was handed the fancy invitation for this meeting.

This looks like the largest one I have been to yet, she thought to herself as she looked for a place to sit among the throng. *Perhaps this meeting will be different.*

When the crowd had quieted, a young man wearing a crisp, black suit approached the stage and stood at the podium. His petite figure was dwarfed by the large table and chairs around him.

“As-Salāmu ‘Alaykum, dear attendees!” the man said in a high, excited voice. The beginning surah of the Qur’an was read by another man as an invocation to the day. Then the master of ceremonies announced the lineup for the first part of the conference. Women representing various organizations all over the country would each give a short address. None of the names were familiar to Rashad, but that did not surprise her. So many organizations claiming to provide assistance for women had sprung up since occupation began. She couldn’t keep track anymore.

“It is time for the rights of women in this period of freedom and democracy!” the first woman to approach the stage said. Rashad, along with a few others in her row, did not clap.

How can this woman say it is a time for freedom when so many Iraqi people are being arrested and continue to suffer?

“The women of Iraq were poor,” the speaker continued. “They were uneducated. They had no chance for work. Now they have everything! We have to communicate and arrange ourselves! We no longer have a ministry to speak about women’s rights, so now we have to form a new council and select its leadership. We will spread our activities around the country and help the women!”

Rashad listened as woman after woman stepped onto the stage to preach about the opportunities of “freedom” and the situation of the women of Iraq who have suffered under Ba’athist dictatorship. Looking around, she saw a few familiar faces in the audience — fellow pharmacists, women she knew from the Society, some from her college days, Islamic scholars. On stage, however, there was no one she recognized.

Then tension filled the room as a tall man in his late 60s, clearly an American in his gray, tailored suit, appeared. Five or six well-armed men, also American, many with tattoos along their arms and all with communication devices in their ears,⁷⁰ surrounded the older gentleman as he approached the front row. As a group of women wearing *hashimis*, traditional clothing still found in western and southern Iraq, read poetry on stage, the American and his entourage were quickly ushered to their seats. When the women were finished, the man was welcomed onstage as a representative of Ambassador L. Paul Bremer, head of the Coalition Provisional Authority.⁷¹ He spoke in English as his words were translated into simple Arabic.

“I am welcoming you in the name of the ambassador,” he began, the sweat on his white face glistening under the hall lights. “You are the women of the country. I encourage you to speak out and organize for your rights. I encourage you to participate in this new freedom.”

Some women from the front rows clapped and shriled in response. Others in rows farther back, including Rashad, did not. Rashad saw a few women around her shuffle in their seats. Many

looked suddenly nervous, as if noticing for the first time the line of Iraqi guards in black suits perched on the balconies above them and spread out around the hall.

The representative's speech was followed by another speaker, this time a woman. She spoke about the importance of creating a "union of women" and "working together to create the best future." Then the Islamic Republican Iranian Women Committee was welcomed. A group of women wearing long, black abayas stood up to be acknowledged, and one of them took the stage. Rashad could only see the woman's thick spectacles and her dark, flowing robe as she spoke.

"During the last regime, what were the women of Iraq doing?" the woman asked in a biting tone. "They were supporting their country that was killing people in Iran!" Her sharp, heavy words against the former regime and strong encouragement for the new council of women sounded strange to Rashad.

What right do these Iranian women have to speak about the needs of Iraqi women?

Rashad felt the heat rise to her face as the tension in the room intensified. Some of the women began murmuring in protest. For many, and Rashad too, the Iranian women's presence was an insult to the efforts of millions of Iraqi women who had struggled to keep their families and their country going during the 10 long years of the Iran-Iraq War.

Scattered applause followed as the Iranian woman stepped off stage and an announcement was made for lunch. The rows emptied and the women made their way to the back of the room. Rashad noticed that some of the women from the front row were being ushered into another area to the left of the main hall. Meanwhile, the majority of the participants lined up in front of a long table, where male servers offered each woman a simple lunch of breaded chicken or fish and Coca-Cola.

The events of the morning had dulled her appetite. Rashad poured herself a cup of water and stood in the back of the room, sipping and watching the others as they ate. Another woman in a modern white and blue suit stood next to her.

"Where are you from?" Rashad asked with a tender smile.

"From the north," replied the woman.

"And what brings you here?"

"My cousin is part of a society helping women here in Baghdad," the woman began. "She called me two days ago and said, 'Come and bring five of your women friends with you! We will arrange for you to stay in a hotel and we will pay for your travel!' I had not seen her for a long time so I was excited. And it was a chance to see Baghdad after all these changes."

"But did you know why you were coming to this conference?" Rashad asked. The woman thought a moment.

"No, I guess I didn't," she said, shrugging. "But, oh, the hotel was very nice! But then we just wanted someone to come get us so we could see the city a bit. No one came, though, and we stayed in the hotel until morning. Then they came in a van to get us and brought us here."

Another woman, older than most and wearing the glistening fabric of traditional Kurdish dress, approached them. Rashad tried to welcome her but the woman only spoke Kurdish. She smiled and nodded and Rashad smiled back. The woman stayed with Rashad's little impromptu circle despite the language barrier, perhaps sensing kindred spirits. Then another young lady, wearing her scarf loosely around her head, introduced herself to the informal group.

"I'm from the south of Baghdad," she said. "I run an organization for women in Hela'a and we were approached by the people who are organizing this conference. They brought us by bus to Baghdad early this morning and will take us back to our homes this evening."

The theme among them all was the same. The women were encouraged to come but were given very little information.

As people started to file back to their seats, Rashad turned to face the area where some of the women had been led at the beginning of lunch. She moved toward the open door and was surprised by what she saw. *Biryani*,⁷² chicken, kabob and other main dishes were displayed in steaming trays, and fruits and sweets sat invitingly on another table. As Rashad passed by, several Iraqi women and the women from Iran came out of the room. Clearly, a different level of hospitality was being given in this room.

She moved back to her seat and felt a tap on her shoulder.

"Rashad, Rashad," a voice said. She turned to see a young woman with a kind smile. She did not recognize her at first and tried to put the woman's face into some context.

"Have you forgotten me?" the young woman asked. Suddenly Rashad remembered. The two embraced. It was Swha, the daughter of a well-known Islamic scholar and a neighbor of her family's. The tension Rashad had felt building inside her all day dissipated as she connected with her old friend.

The room quieted and soon the only people standing were the cadre of media personnel lined up along the back wall with their video cameras poised, waiting for the conference to resume. The petite man in the black suit approached the stage again and began to speak.

"This conference consists of Iraqi women from different governorates and backgrounds," he said in a loud voice, "but all are supporting the construction of a council that will take its leadership from a number of educated, patriotic women in the country. This council will be led by one of the most patriotic women of all."

As the woman's name was mentioned, loud clapping could be heard from the first rows while, again, most in the other rows remained quiet. This particular woman had become well known after the invasion and was associated with the new American-led regime. Her elegantly flowing pantsuit matched the décor of the room and her white headscarf brocaded with gold shimmered as she took her seat at a table that had been placed in the middle of the stage.

“Who will volunteer to sit on this council?” the young man said. Three other women, all from the front rows, were called upon in rapid succession and they took their places to the right and left of the first.

“This council will be responsible for all women’s affairs in the country,” the man continued. “It will be the main liaison with the United Nations and the American Embassy. It will have the major authority in the country concerning women and all NGO⁷³ activities. All civil society organizations who work with women’s issues and women’s rights will have to register with it.”

As all attention focused on the four women on stage, 10 Iraqi security guards moved quickly toward the front of the stage, letting all in the hall know who they were protecting.

Why must we be exposed to such sights in this meeting? Isn't it enough that we see guns and conflicts constantly on the streets?

Rashad’s thoughts were cut short by the whispering of her neighbors.

“Is our new country to be built by those who bring all this distraction?”

“Is *she* going to be the head of our women’s movement?”

Rashad felt her face flush with anger as the reason why so many women were invited to the conference became crystal clear. She and all the others were mere props in this grand theater. Rashad watched as some of the women asked for a chance to speak but were refused. At the final break of the day, she joined a gathering of women in the back of the hall — some of them she knew and others were new friends.

“Do you agree with this?” Rashad asked. The women in the huddle shook their heads.

“We are returning to the same regime!” one called out.

“This is just like the women’s union that was led by the Ba’ath party,” said another. “It is true they were doing many things for women but it was all under one party. This is not right.”

Then Swaha spoke out.

“I will go to the people who are organizing the stage,” the young girl said, determination in her eyes. “I will give them my name and try to speak.”

A few minutes later, the young girl returned, defeated.

“I told them I wished to speak for just two minutes,” she said. “I even told them who I was. Still they said they had no room on their agenda for me.”

They invited us to come, saying they needed our ideas and that we all can share in the building of the new Iraq. Yet they do not even have time to hear us. Are we going to be controlled in the same way as before, but this time in the false name of “the Iraqi people”?

“I am sorry,” Swha said in a small voice. “I am young. What can I do?”

“I will try to speak,” Rashad said. She did not know how she was going to do it. She just knew that someone had to say something.



A few minutes later, the final segment of the conference convened and the wrap-ups began. The members of the new council came to the stage to say thank you, and then the audience members were directed where to locate their personal items.

“We have about half an hour left for comments, if anyone would like to speak,” the petite man announced. Several hands shot up, many from the front, and a new microphone was placed between them. A woman in the third row was called on first. She smiled nervously as she approached the microphone.

“Shukran!” the woman said. “I just wanted to say what a wonderful process this is and I am so excited to be a part of this new era of freedom...”

As her friends around her applauded loudly, Rashad rose from her chair, walked the few feet to where the woman was standing and grabbed the microphone. While the shocked woman still clutched it, Rashad pulled the metal piece toward her.

“I wish to speak,” Rashad said in a loud, clear voice. The man guarding the microphone quickly stood between her and the other woman, attempting to lead her away from the mic.

“I wish to speak,” Rashad said again, this time with more clarity than before.

“As I was saying...” stammered the other woman as the man led Rashad a few feet down the aisle and motioned for her to stay there.

“*Na’am*,” said Rashad. “All right.” She stood in the aisle waiting. When the woman finished her speech to a now silent audience, she handed the microphone to the man and glanced once at Rashad before tentatively taking her seat.

All eyes were on her as the man handed Rashad the microphone. Her heart raced but she knew what she had to say. She took a deep breath and began.

“Thank you for this good organization, these good colors and these good decorations I see all around me,” her voice quivered at first but then grew strong as she felt her words resonating across the room. “It is true that we have forgotten to look after the beauty in this country after this occupation.”

Rashad paused just long enough to let her words penetrate through the silence.

“But I would like to mention some points that have been missed. I am a pharmacist. I did not finish my graduate studies because I refused to be a member of the Ba’ath party. I had my own pharmacy at one time and now I have my own Society that works for women in Iraq. Our Society

has turned in all the documents to be registered as an organization with the Ministry of Planning. But I understand that the organizers of the council formed today did not get this registration before calling this meeting.”

Again Rashad paused as she noticed two guards approach the stage. One of them whispered something into the ear of the woman in the glistening hijab. The woman nodded.

“So I ask you,” Rashad continued, “who gave you the authority to organize all women’s activities? You cannot be the only custodians for women’s affairs in Iraq. Our freedom is still limited. There are tanks and hummers outside these doors right now and I am witnessing the immense suffering of many women. I agree that women need to be organized, but not organized under one umbrella. We are the Knowledge for Iraqi Women Society and we are independent. We do not belong to anybody. We work for the whole Iraqi community and we — and by this I mean everybody including you — have to respect the new freedom of Iraq.”

The applause that followed was deafening. Rashad felt the blood pulse through her veins and across her temples.

“Thank you for your...” the man said, reaching for the microphone. But Rashad held tightly to it.

“Please, let the council head answer,” she said, nodding to the woman on the stage. “This is a conference for women and I have yet to hear her speak.”

As she returned the microphone back to him, she felt hatred oozing toward her from the small man. She had interrupted him and spoken her mind. Rashad did not look at him and instead joined the hundreds of pairs of eyes that had turned to the stage waiting for the head of the council to speak.

“Yes, thank you for your comments,” the woman said. “Now I know that Iraq has full freedom because before now no woman could ever say such a thing!” A trickle of applause and some chuckles followed as the woman smiled ironically and the conference ended.



“I must shake your hand!” said a deep voice as Rashad packed up her things to file out of the conference with the others. She looked up to see a tall man in a Western-made suit standing before her. She could see from his face that he was not American.

“I am sorry, I cannot shake your hand.” She smiled to soften the blow.

The man nodded in understanding. According to traditional Islamic principles, it is not acceptable for a man to touch a woman, other than that woman’s husband or sons. Not all Muslim women follow this tradition, but Rashad did. The man was a Kurd from the north who had come to the conference with his wife.

“Then I must say thank you for speaking out,” the man said. “If you ever run for office, you have my vote!”

The man beamed down at her from his six-foot frame. She was stunned but felt that he was sincere. Run for political office? She had never even entertained the idea.

“No,” she responded. “I will not be doing that. I was merely saying what everybody was thinking. Everybody in the hall wanted to say those words.”

“Rashad!” She heard Swha’s voice call out through the crowd and turned to see her friend coming down the aisle toward her.

“Thank you,” she said to the man as Swha approached. “Now if you will excuse me...”

“We must leave now!” Swha said. Rashad looked at her friend, confused.

“I was watching the guards that were standing along the balcony while you were speaking. They were aiming their guns at you!”

Rashad felt light-headed. She took a breath and looked up at the sitting areas above their heads. Sure enough, the same kind of Iraqi guards that had flanked the woman in the glittering hijab when Rashad was speaking were stationed at intervals above the hall. There must have been at least eight of them. Two were talking on walkie-talkies and looking directly at her. Rashad felt like she was going to faint.

“We need to get out of here and get our IDs back from security before they come for you!” Swha said, pulling her back into reality.

Sometimes God brings a person unheard of courage to say the things that no one else will say. Other times he brings that person an angel who could save their life. Rashad felt as if she had just been granted both of these precious miracles.

Allahu Kayron Hafidan waboa Arbamo Al rahmin, Rashad said under her breath as she slipped into the taxi with Swha. *God is the greatest protector and he is the most merciful.*

VII. FALLUJAH AND ABU GHRAIB

الفلوجة و أبو غريب

Going

The group left early in the morning on Dec. 23, 2004. It had been more than a month since the bombing of Fallujah. Rashad, her husband and the three male doctors going with them that day — she was the only woman — knew that the city was still closed, as was the major highway connecting it to Baghdad. Their mini-caravan of one seven-passenger GMC and an ambulance packed with supplies would take the back roads instead. What was usually a 20-minute trip was expected to take them three hours.

Conflict in Fallujah had started in April 2003 when residents marched to a local girls' school, protesting the U.S. military's use of it as a base. According to most accounts, when the crowd became increasingly aggravated, soldiers opened fire on the citizens, killing at least 17 and wounding 70. Another protest two days later resulted in three more casualties.⁷⁴ Resistance to U.S. occupation increased in Fallujah in the months following, spreading to nearby towns and leading to a series of large bombings, including an attack on U.N. headquarters in Baghdad that killed 22.

The increasingly volatile situation was exacerbated in March 2004 when four Blackwater contract workers heading to a nearby American military base were ambushed and killed. Some say the perpetrators were “insurgents.” Some say they were “resistance fighters.” Still others state they were simply young men who chose senseless violence to express their outrage at what was happening to their community. The young men hung the bodies of the contract workers from a nearby bridge that spanned the Euphrates River. Within minutes, the assailants were gone. Within hours, the international media, already swarming Baghdad for the one-year anniversary of the fall of Saddam Hussein, had disseminated the bloody images throughout the world. Within days, the United States reacted with outrage and ultimatums.

Meanwhile, the city of Fallujah was left behind. Its 300,000 inhabitants would pay the price for what had occurred.⁷⁵

While many residents decided to stay in their homes, two-thirds of the population fled in the weeks leading up to what was later called Operation Al Fajr.⁷⁶ Some stayed with family in other areas of the country; others set up makeshift camps in abandoned schools and vacant buildings in the surrounding region. By then, the chill of winter had descended. Many residents of Fallujah, now internally displaced persons (IDPs), had left their homes quickly and did not have the resources to survive the cold.

As founder of one of the most respected societies for women in Baghdad, Rashad had been contacted by a local branch of an international relief organization based in Baghdad to provide and distribute medicine and other supplies to the IDPs. After giving the request some thought, Rashad agreed to participate. The majority of the women from Fallujah were traditional Muslims. They could not speak to a man, let alone allow a male doctor to treat them. A woman was needed to see to female IDP health needs. That day they were to go to Garma, about 40 kilometers from Fallujah, to distribute food, blankets, clothes and medicine, and perform routine examinations.

Their route would take them all the way south around the city and then to the west toward Fallujah. As they made their way out of central Baghdad, Rashad thought about the many interactions she'd had with the "City of Mosques"⁷⁷ throughout her life.

Family members, friends, acquaintances, people from college, professional contacts — so many people that were close to her once called that city their own.

Most still do, she thought. I wonder what it is like now for those who have stayed behind.

Neither the U.S. military nor the U.S.-run press had made mention of when the city would be reopened or the extent of the damage done by the Americans. There was only speculation. Rashad remembered what one of her good friends who lived in the area had said just after the Americans occupied the girls' middle school last April.

"I've seen what they are reporting on Al Hura, Rashad. It's just not true." Indignation rose in her friend's voice. "The American soldiers set up their base at the school without any warning, and on the day before the monthly exams. When the girls arrived that day, they found the soldiers on the roof and inside their classrooms. The tribal leaders went down to the school themselves and asked to speak to who was in charge. That's when they started shooting. I don't understand. Why did they have to do that?"

Rashad could understand the volatility of men. She sometimes saw this rising anger in her own young boys. But she could not understand the ignorance these American soldiers displayed in the face of a culture vastly different than their own.

Shortly after she graduated from college, Rashad had worked in Fallujah for almost two years. That was in 1981, the second year of the Iran-Iraq War. Most of the men in the country had been deployed to the fire line, so opportunities for women to work in positions of leadership, especially in the medical field, were suddenly available. When she had gone to the Ministry of Health in Baghdad to discuss options for work, she was told she could choose any place she wished because of the high degree and grades she had earned in university. She chose Fallujah. She soon began working at the new medical center, dispensing medicine and consulting with women and children. It was during that time that she discovered Fallujah's uniqueness. The people she met there were intelligent and kind. They were also steeped in tradition. Many tribal leaders, descendants from the oldest Arab families, called Fallujah home. Rashad witnessed a deep sense of community with the people she met. At work, she was somewhat of an anomaly — the only woman, surrounded by a support staff of mainly older men. She was the one with the most advanced degree and was therefore in charge, but she was also young and wore the hijab, unusual in the early '80s when secularity was encouraged. During those first few weeks of work, Rashad began making changes that she felt would better serve the medical center's clientele. To her surprise, the men who worked under her were open and even grateful for these changes. She was a pharmacist and a traditional Muslim woman. In their eyes, that made her someone to be respected.

Rashad was jolted out of her reminiscence when the tires of the GMC hit something in the road. They were entering south Baghdad. This was the first time she'd had the chance to leave the central part of the city and see this area for herself. She knew that the southern end of the capital was heavily fortified by the Iraqi military in the early days of the war. It was also the area with the most civilian resistance and was the most heavily bombed. Even so, she was not prepared for the

complete and total destruction that surrounded her. As the men commented on what they saw, Rashad kept her words to herself. But she could not control her tears.

“God is generous,” her husband said out loud when he saw Rashad’s reaction. “He will replenish us.”

What have they done to my city?

It was a question that came from the deepest part of her, beyond political rhetoric, economic reasoning, even anger and indignation. The question was filled with an agony comparable to finding a loved one sick and in pain. Rashad wanted to ease the suffering of her country but at that moment, all she felt was helplessness.

As the GMC continued to crawl south, the driver took care to avoid the rubble, potholes and cracks caused by the bombing. They were driving past the mangled remains of factories, warehouses, storage facilities and shops that looked as if they had collapsed on themselves. In some areas, it was difficult to make out where one building ended and another began; it was all a mass of twisted, charred metal.

Rashad saw hummers and tanks, left over from the abandoned Iraqi army, in varying degrees of mutilation. Some were toppled on their side or upside down. As they moved further west, the landscape became rural. Abandoned farmhouses and overgrown fields moved past them. Some buildings — Rashad assumed they were once simply built clay homes — were now merely collapsed mounds of dust and light brown brick.

Then she saw the date palm trees that lined the side of the road. Their once graceful trunks were snapped in two like toothpicks. The fronds that in any other circumstance would be unbreakable were charred or missing all together.

Um Al-Iraq. Mother tree of Iraq. She gives so much. Now she is broken like her people.

Entering

Six months had passed since Rashad had visited Fallujah. The U.S. military was slowly allowing people to return, but only those residents who had stayed in the city and only to go to Baghdad and other areas and then return. She wasn’t exactly sure how her small group had been given permission to bring their red Volkswagen bus filled with people and white truck filled with humanitarian supplies inside the city. *Al Humdo leh lab*, she thought. Thanks be to God.

Now she sat against the windowed wall of one of the most famous mosques in Fallujah, together with three of her colleagues from the Society and the imam from Al Yarmok mosque in Baghdad, whom she had asked to travel with them. There were also two medical colleagues — a dentist from Baghdad and his wife, a pediatrician. On the other side of the small, narrow front entrance, the imam of the Fallujah mosque sat with his assistant and a gentleman working for a Baghdad news service.

“*Haya Kum Allah*. God welcomes you,” the imam said to them. “We are surprised to see a group of women willing to come here. It gives me the feeling that the Iraqi people shall never stop helping each other. All efforts are needed, especially from women.”

Rashad had learned so much from her trip to the IDP camps last winter. When they had finally arrived in Garma on that last trip, the women had opened up to her about their most delicate concerns.

“We are from traditional families,” one young woman had said. “Even in our homes and with our cousins and uncles, we are not in the company of men or boys without an escort. But here, there are only two restrooms for all these hundreds of people! We have to walk past those men every time.”

“Our mothers have to go with us,” said another. “And the line is so long. Most of the time I just don’t go.”

Not surprisingly, Rashad had discovered many urinary tract infections that day, caused, no doubt, by the precarious circumstances the women and girls found themselves in. Women’s cycles were another issue. In the camps, young women did not have access to products usually available during menstruation. Rashad had made a note of these issues and sent feminine products back to the camps the minute she returned to Baghdad. These issues were very real and, if not addressed practically and in a timely manner, could lead to epidemics in the future. She knew that the Society was in a unique position to make sure these needs were met.

And then there were the children. Some of the children at the camps were experiencing what could have been the beginning stages of toxic exposure, including respiratory problems, skin lesions and intense vomiting. One little boy Rashad had met had strange bruise-like marks over his legs and abdomen with no concrete explanation of the cause.⁷⁸

Six months after the bombing of the city, there were now many relief organizations beginning to set up in Fallujah, as they had come to Baghdad the previous April. Although their intentions may have been good, they came without knowing the traditions of the area. The people in these organizations wore modern clothing and had foreign ways. Also, by necessity, most of these organizations filtered their relief efforts through the U.S. military. Nobody in Fallujah trusted them and very few responded to their acts of kindness. The Society, on the other hand, was formed in Iraq by Iraqi women. Rashad explained what she had seen at the IDP camps to the imam. As delicately as she could, she addressed the health concerns of the women there. The imam was grateful for the information. Then Rashad explained what the Society was about.

“Yes, the Society gives aid,” she told him. “But at the same time, we try to build the minds of the women.”

“Dr. Rashad,” the imam said, “we need a branch of your Society in Fallujah.”



The five women and three men got out of the red Volkswagen and stood quietly on the edge of what used to be a sports field. The large lot of light brown earth rose and fell with the mounded

graves. As each member of the group silently approached the space, they sensed the buoyancy in the air. There was peace in this place that housed the bodies of hundreds of people.⁷⁹ White phosphorus powder, used by the U.S. military in Operation Al Fajr, sticks to the skin, is difficult to remove and burns deep into organic matter, sometimes leaving non-organic material such as clothing intact. Many who perished could not be buried: Their charred remains simply disintegrated upon contact.⁸⁰ Those who survived buried their loved ones during ceasefires granted by the Americans for this reason. They did their best to do the job quickly; each ceasefire was short and Islam instructs that a dead body be buried as soon as possible.

The people buried here were *Shu Hada*. They had died as martyrs and did not need to be cleaned with water or wrapped in *kefin*.⁸¹ Instead they were buried in their clothes, still charred or soaked with blood, in a mass grave in the sports field.

The late afternoon sun still shone brightly to the west as the visiting imam whispered words for the people buried there. Rashad and the others stood silently, their eyes closed and their hands raised slightly up toward *Jana* — toward heaven.

The people in Fallujah had not prepared their dead for burial. There was no logical reason why Rashad should smell the delicately sweet fragrance of *Al Misque*, the perfume traditionally used to scent the dead, as she stood at the edge of the field with the others. But she did, every time she inhaled. The smell was unmistakable and it penetrated the air around her with its earthy aroma.

The visit to the sports field was the last stop. Just before sunset, the red Volkswagen made its way back home.

“I smelled Al Misque too,” one of the women said when Rashad told her what she had experienced. Driving down the deserted highway in the near dark, everybody confirmed that they too had smelled the musty scent as they stood in that now sacred place, making Doah.⁸²

Returning

The first order of business for the Society upon returning to Baghdad was to create a special fund to help the people of Fallujah with their immediate needs — tents, blankets, food and cooking supplies. So many families were lacking in the very basics of survival. As relationships were formed with each subsequent visit, local women in Fallujah took on leadership in the Society’s projects there. By mid-September 2005, the first preschool was opened in conjunction with the Society’s new Fallujah branch.

All the children in the preschool had lost their fathers. In some cases, both parents had been killed in the November 2004 bombing or in the violence that came before. Similar to the project in Baghdad, compassionate individuals sponsored the needs of a single child. But in Fallujah a preschool specifically for the children of widows was set up from the beginning. The Society transported the children by bus to the school, fed them two meals a day and took them home in the afternoon. The idea took some time to catch on. Most families were suspicious of charity efforts, thinking that perhaps the Americans were behind the good deeds. And most mothers were not accustomed to sending their children to school at such a young age. Before Fallujah was destroyed and despite the sanctions, many fathers were still able to provide sufficient income so their wives

could stay home and raise their children. Gradually, however, the Society's program began to grow, and soon the preschool had more requests than it could handle.

One week after it opened, Rashad traveled to Fallujah to tour the new Society facilities. Watching the 30 children hard at play in the humble yet warmth-filled preschool room, she could not help crying.

"They do not have high degrees in education," the manager said of the three teachers in the room, "but they have high degrees of compassion and love." Like the majority of the widows who had signed up for the program, most of the teachers in the room were young.

The manager explained that the children were experiencing various degrees of post-traumatic stress as a result of the bombings. When asked about their memories of those horrifying days, many children described loud voices, a big flash and then nothing. Some described seeing the dismembered bodies of their loved ones. Over the course of the previous months, others had begun to develop physical distress. As time went on, these cases would be added to by more intense conditions — cancer, severe respiratory problems and heart conditions — in children who had already been born and birth defects in those who were entering the world.⁸³ But in September 2005 these cases were only beginning to emerge.

"What is going on with that little boy?" Rashad asked. In the far corner of the room, a tiny child, no older than 3, held his teacher's hand as she arranged some toys on a low shelf. Wherever that teacher went, the boy was right with her.

"He is one of the special cases," the manager said, looking tenderly in the same direction as Rashad.

On the day of the bombing, the boy had not been in the house where he lived with his mother, father and 17 other relatives. He had been with his grandmother as she went to visit another relative across town. What the little boy witnessed that day when they returned was something a child should never have to see. The boy and his grandmother lost 19 members of their family that day, including his parents and many siblings. The once talkative little boy had not said a word since that day.

"That teacher takes him with her everywhere — to the garden, to the kitchen when she prepares snack, to every part of the nursery room. She is doing her best just to give him all the love that she can," the manager said. The Society normally ran a fairly strict schedule of playtime, mealtime and rest for their preschoolers. This child was an exception.

"Please give him whatever he needs while he is here," Rashad said through her tears.

There had been many moments when Rashad questioned whether the work she was doing with the Society was worth the distress it caused to herself and her family. Were they even making a difference?

But she knew the Society had made it possible for that teacher to give back the love that had been unjustly and violently taken from that child.

For this reason, I continue to do this work.

Postscript: Water

“You are concerned with the health of the women and children in Abu Ghraib,” Abu-Raied said matter-of-factly. “This will help them.”

The respected tribal leader with the kind smile and prominent features, wearing the traditional black and white *keffiyeh*⁸⁴ of his tribe and a dark blue *dishdasha*,⁸⁵ had traveled across five checkpoints from Abu Ghraib to the Society office in Baghdad to speak with Rashad. She was stunned.

We are just a Society for women. Why is he asking us for help?

Yet what he said was true. She *was* concerned about the severity of the digestive maladies that were afflicting the people in Abu Ghraib, especially the children. She had seen the dramatic rise in these cases over the last year and a half and now children were dying. Hundreds of homes in Abu Ghraib had been without adequate sources of clean water for the last three years.

In 2002, the government had begun a piping project to bring water to undeveloped areas around Abu Ghraib. This caused a boom in house construction in the area. Of course, the project was abandoned in 2003 with the occupation, but by then there were more than 3,000 people living there, hoping that water supplies would eventually come. For the first two years after occupation, tanker trucks brought in hundreds of gallons of water a day from the piping facilities on the outskirts of the capital. But by the end of 2005, sectarian violence had reached such a state that Abu Ghraib was literally cut off from the rest of the country, including Baghdad. And by the fall of 2006, residents had been forced to siphon water from stagnant pools of rainwater and agricultural runoff. The people in this community, like most in the country, had little fuel for boiling their water, so they mostly drank it unsterilized. Rashad recalled on many occasions seeing sediment and tiny insects swimming in water jugs as they sat in the desert sun.

And when the pools dried up, the people went without.

The Society first came to Abu Ghraib at the end of 2004 after hearing that there were still some IDPs from Fallujah staying in the area. When they arrived and began meeting with families in their homes, they discovered quite a different picture. There were not *some* refugees still there. There were hundreds, in addition to many local people, suffering from lack of services and the constant U.S. military attacks attempting to flush out potential “insurgents.” Crudely constructed homes that once housed families of 8 to 10 now held 20 or 30 people. Rashad and her friends were amazed to see that the people of Abu Ghraib — many who had lost their jobs in the army or local government factories and were themselves struggling to survive — had opened their doors to relatives and friends from Fallujah. And so many men had been taken to prison or killed that, similar to Baghdad and Fallujah, the number of widows in the area had skyrocketed.

Because of the dire needs of the people in Fallujah and the Society’s commitment to assisting them after the bombing, opening a Society branch in Abu Ghraib was postponed many times. But by the end of 2005, the new branch was opened. Illiteracy was higher in Abu Ghraib than other places, so the Society designed their curriculum to include Arabic reading and writing classes

for women and children, as well as the usual menu of workshops, a small clinic and a preschool for the orphans.

True to form, leaders emerged in the hundreds of women who became members of the Society in Abu Ghraib. The branch became known for its master seamstresses and entrepreneurs. Women with little or no experience in sewing progressed from “primary” to “advanced” courses, perfecting their skills and obtaining certificates of completion along the way. They created colorful skirts and blouses, simple T-shirts, jackets, durable jubas for women, sturdy dishdashas for men and children’s clothes. All of these items were shown in exhibits at the end of each class session. The women could take the classes, use the sewing machines and obtain the material from the Society for free. If someone decided to keep her creation, she could do so. And if she decided to sell it, then the money was hers to keep; she need only pay one U.S. dollar to the Society to help cover the cost of the fabric. In 2005, there were no markets open in Abu Ghraib and most people were not willing to risk the trip to Baghdad for these items. The small shop where the women sold their clothing became a popular site for the community to buy quality, handmade garments at a low price and help their sisters, aunts and mothers in the process.

Many other organizations had offered assistance to people in Fallujah and Abu Ghraib in the months after invasion and before sectarian violence scared most international relief efforts away from the area. These groups came mainly from Europe and the United States and most worked through the American military to provide aid. Similar to in Fallujah, the people in Abu Ghraib did not trust them. But they could trust Rashad and the Society, women who had also suffered through the last three years. Abu-Raied had seen the changes in the women of his community because of their involvement in the Society. These changes were for the better and they extended to their children and the community as a whole. He knew that if anybody could make water flow again in Abu Ghraib, it would be the Society.

“We want you to know that we really appreciate the work you have done in the community so far,” Abu-Raied said. “But clean water is something that we urgently need. And we need your assistance to do it.”

Rashad sighed. The project that the tribal leader was talking about was massive, effectively connecting water piping to about 300 homes. Rashad was also dealing with a stark reality: The Society was hanging on by a financial thread. Many individuals and families who in the past felt the urgency to give now felt their pocketbooks tightening as jobs remained scarce and resources even scarcer.

How can we even consider taking on something like this now?

Rashad knew that if there was even the slightest chance they could pull the project off, they could not do it alone. Her work with the Society over the last three years had taught her many things, the most important being that if a project was going to be successful in the long term, the people it would most benefit needed to share in its development. They had to have the *harees*, the desire, to see it done and the willingness to work for it.

“For a project like this, *Haji*⁸⁶ Abu-Raied, I will need to see a breakdown of the cost and I will need a guarantee that you will secure local men to oversee the project.”

The older man nodded.

“I will also have to ask the other Society members about it and let my husband review your engineering plans. As you know, we have never done anything like this before.”



“There is a story that our prophet tells about a good woman and a prostitute,” Rashad said as she stood at the front of the main hall in the Al Kadraa Society center. She had called this last-minute meeting for all Society members and volunteers only two days before. Despite the short notice, the hall was packed.

“The good woman was praying and fasting and doing everything that a person was supposed to do for themselves in the religion,” Rashad continued. “But she was speaking badly about the people. When someone mentioned what she was doing to the prophet, he said that because of her negative actions toward others, all her fasting and praying were of no use.”

Rashad paused a moment. All eyes were on her as she continued.

“Then there was the prostitute. Every member of the community agreed that she was a very bad woman. One day this prostitute was in the hot desert and she was thirsty. She found a well and she went down to have a drink. When she came to the surface, she saw a dog approaching. He was so thirsty that his poor tongue was sticking out and he was panting. Do you know what she did? She went down into the well to get some water for that dog. She did not have a container to hold the water, so she scooped a cupful in her shoe and went up to give the poor dog a drink. For this one act of goodness, God forgave her all of her bad actions.”⁸⁷

The room was silent as the Society members took in what Rashad had said.

“Now we have the chance to provide water not only to one thirsty being, but to a whole community that desperately needs it...”

Rashad went on to present the situation in Abu Ghraib to her friends and supporters. Would her speech be able to convince enough people to contribute the money they would need?

It is up to God now. But, Inshallah, it will.



The four women in the white Toyota pulled up at lunchtime on the second day of trenching. They were supposed to arrive in the morning, but checkpoint delays had made it impossible to get there any earlier. As they drove down the dirt roads to the work crew, they saw children standing in the doorways of their simple houses. In a few of them, their mothers stood in the background, smiling and waving as the truck drove by.

“*Barak Allah Ficum!*” they shouted. “God bless you!”

When they arrived at the site, the yellow bulldozer was stationary. Three men rested against its large, knobby tires. The trench was in front of them: two feet wide and three feet deep with its straight line spanning the length of the long road.

Rashad got out of the truck and stood at the side of the road, peering down at the shallow hole of soft, brown earth. She couldn't believe that just a few months ago, she had almost dismissed the Abu Ghraib water project as impossible. She hadn't known how she would secure 20 million Iraqi Dinar⁸⁸ from the Society's already strapped members. Yet they had done it. The women had gone home that night to tell their husbands, sons, daughters, sisters, brothers, mothers, fathers and neighbors what was happening in Abu Ghraib. And they had told them there was something *they* could do about it. By November 2006, the Society had the money they needed. Abu-Raied had spoken with one of his friends on the Abu Ghraib City Council who was sympathetic to the cause, but the council member laughed when Abu-Raied asked him what money he could contribute from the council coffers.

"Money? Sorry my friend. We don't have any. We are a council in name only. But we do have a bulldozer you could use."

The entire Society was anxious to know about the progress of the water project. Soon plastic PVC piping would be laid in the uniform trench, connecting each home with the main water source on the outskirts of town. With the photos she and her colleagues were bringing home, Rashad would be able to show everyone in Baghdad the beginning stages of the water system that was expected to benefit initially more than 6,000 people.

VIII. FRIENDS NOT ENEMIES

أخبرناه وليسوا أعداء

Evening 2011

The yellow taxi pulled away from the Sheraton Hotel and out into the San Diego night. Rashad watched the twinkling of the city lights on the bay as the car drove along the rippling waters on the way to the freeway. She rolled the window down; the air smelled like the sea. Yet at that moment, her mind was suddenly in Baghdad, in her kitchen where her computer usually sat and where she had first met her friend Linda through Skype. The women — one Iraqi, one American — had spent quite a few nights together through the internet last February, preparing for the Global Room for Women teleconference. Linda, the organization's founder, had set up the conference to take place that May, when Rashad would be able to tell her story and field questions from women around the world.

Earlier that evening, Rashad had gotten out of a similar taxi in front of the Sheraton on her way to dinner. As the cab drove away, leaving Rashad in the outside valet, suddenly there was Linda, just as Rashad had remembered her in digital form. With the valet attendants looking on, smiling awkwardly, the two women hugged.

“It’s you!” Rashad said.

“It’s you!” Linda replied. They both laughed.

That night over bowls of soup, steamed vegetables and herbal teas, Linda, Rashad and 12 of Linda's friends talked into the night. Rashad shared her story and listened to theirs. They were social workers, counselors, healers, writers and business owners, all in San Diego for a conference on how to help their small businesses grow. They seemed like good people to Rashad — open, friendly and warm. And they wanted to hear her story.

This was the second time Rashad had been in the United States. And still she was amazed, as she often was, at the stunned silence that night as she began to tell the tale of her country.

Bombs, checkpoints, late-night searches, shootings, curfews, sickness, death. How many widows did you say were in your country? And why? Rashad repeats the number: 1.5 million. Most husbands shot as casualties of war, as innocent bystanders, making the wrong move or because they didn't speak English. Looks of confusion and then sadness, turning to helplessness, turning to compassion. There were no terrorists in Iraq before the invasion. Really? I had no idea ...

Rashad had long ago stopped equating the American people with their government. She was beginning to learn that there was a big difference between the two.

At the end of the evening, the yellow taxi picked her up to take her back to where she was staying.

“Keep in touch, my sister,” Linda said. Rashad promised that she would.

Watching the darkened city from the back of the taxi that evening, Rashad thought of Brian, one of Linda's friends at dinner that evening. In the middle of eating, he had turned to face her. A boyish grin hid the gravity of what he was about to say.

“On behalf of all Americans, I wish to apologize for what we did to your country.”

Silence followed and then tears, coming from Brian, Rashad and others at the table. His grin had turned to a look of pain. The tears were as real as the actions that caused them.

“Thank you.” Rashad could barely get the words out. Brian's innocent sincerity took her back to 2006, to the first time she had come to the States.

The Invitation

Rashad stared at the computer screen. The little cursor blinked innocently at the end of the line of text.

“Nameer! Come read this quick!”

The email was from Mary Trotochaud of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). Mary was a dear friend who had been helping the Society since 2004. She was the first American Rashad had ever met and, admittedly, it had taken a while for Rashad to trust her. Before Mary, her impression had been that all Americans were the occupier and everyone who lived in the States supported President Bush's destructive, nonsensical foreign policies. But the first time she met Mary at the Al Kadraa Society office, she felt an instant connection to this simple and unpretentious Quaker woman. Mary and her husband Rick were decent, compassionate people dedicated to bringing peace into the world. Meeting them had shifted Rashad's paradigm of America and Americans.

Since then, Mary and Rick had been solid supporters of the Society's projects, donating computers for the Al Dora branch and paint for the orphan program in Fallujah. Now Mary was inviting Rashad to be a part of a tour organized by the U.S. women's peace organization CODEPINK. If Rashad accepted, she would join three other Iraqi women on an educational campaign about the U.S. occupation in Iraq and its aftermath.

The tour would start in Washington, D.C., in one and a half month's time.



“No way, Mom. Don't do it. You'll be going into the land of the enemy,” Ali said as the family gathered in the kitchen to discuss the matter.

“I agree,” said Omar. “It's too risky. Who knows what will happen to you.”

Zaynab and Maryam sat quietly, but their faces were drawn in concern. Zaynab reached out for her mom's hand. She gave it a squeeze.

“We just want you to be safe,” she said softly.



Rashad hung up the phone just as Nameer came into the kitchen.

“Who was that?” he asked.

“One of the women who will be going on the tour. She wants to meet.”

Two days later, Rashad and Nameer sat in a nearby restaurant with a modern-dressed, middle-aged Iraqi woman of short stature and piercing brown eyes. Eman was a journalist who had published dozens of articles about the country both before and after the occupation; she had also worked with Global Exchange, the umbrella organization of CODEPINK, to publish a book about Iraq before the war.

“There are many organizations in the United States that are working against occupation,” Eman said. She went on to explain that at the start of the invasion, millions of people all over the world had taken a stand against it, including hundreds of thousands of Americans.⁸⁹

Of course, Rashad knew about AFSC and the work that organization was doing through Mary and Rick. But she was surprised to hear that there was a whole movement against the war.

“You are doing good work here and that is why they want you to be a part of the tour,” Eman said. “And listen, if you go, we will be with you. We will be your sisters.”

Rashad was quiet as she and Nameer drove back to the house that afternoon.

“What are you thinking?” Nameer asked.

“I don’t know,” Rashad said, shaking her head. “Is it even possible for me to go? The boys have their examinations coming up and there is so much to do with the Society.”

“And...” Nameer said. He knew his wife well enough to know that she was at least thinking about it.

“And at the same time, it might be a chance to let the people there know what is really going on. I mean, if they really don’t know, then it is time that they do.”

Nameer drove the car into the garage and turned off the engine.

“I will pray for you,” he said. “I will make the prayer for *Salat Al-Istekara*.⁹⁰ If it is good, then it will come easy. If it is not, then may all bad things stay far away from you.”

“Thank you, Nameer,” Rashad said with a smile. “And you are right. Whatever is to happen, it will be God’s will.”

First Night in America

“Rashad!” The woman with the short strawberry-blond hair and hot pink scarf came up to her with a warm smile. “It’s so good to see you!”

“Gail!” Rashad knew right away who this fiery woman greeting her at the airport was. “I am so sorry that I am late. The security...”

“Not your fault,” Gail said. “I am sorry they gave you such a hard time in Chicago.”

Hard time was putting it mildly. The minute Rashad got off the plane in Chicago, she and several other passengers from other Arab countries had been shuttled to a separate office where they were made to fill out lengthy point-of-entry forms similar to the one Rashad had filled out in Amman when she applied for her visa. Because of this and the many security checkpoints she had to pass through — *Even in their own country, they are lovers of checkpoints!* — she had missed her connecting flight to D.C. She had spent two terrifying hours gathering her bags and arranging for another flight before she eventually boarded the plane. She met several people during those two hours, some just as panicked and lost in this English-speaking country as her, and one security officer who wanted to chat with her about his tour of duty in Iraq.

“Welcome!” he had said with a hearty grin when she asked him where the public phone was. “I was in Iraq once...”

Finally, she met a man from India who let her borrow his phone so she could call Gail and tell her of the change of plans.

“Let me get those,” Gail said, taking Rashad’s bags. She was now among friends in this country.



An hour later, Gail led Rashad into the darkened house. It was well past 2 a.m. and the other women were asleep. Up one, two, three flights of stairs they climbed until they finally reached the attic bedroom where a simple mattress and a pile of blankets awaited her.

“We have dogs,” Gail said. “I thought you might be more comfortable up here away from them.”

Rashad was surprised that Gail knew the Islamic teachings about these creatures and grateful that she took the time to learn about Rashad’s adherence to the custom concerning them.⁹¹

“There is a washroom downstairs on the second floor,” Gail said with a weary smile. “I’ll see you in the morning.”

It had been a long 24 hours. Rashad spent a quick minute arranging her things. Then she got under the thick layer of blankets, ready for rest.

Suddenly her eyes opened. Something was wrong. Silence.

I have not heard quiet like this since I was a child. No sirens, no bombs, no gunshots. Not even the sound of the generator.

The only noise she could hear was the thin screech of a lone tree branch against the glass of the bedroom window. Rashad lay on the tiny mattress listening to the strange lullaby for almost an hour until finally she fell into a deep sleep.

Washington, D.C.

What time is it? Where am I? What is happening?

Rashad shot out of bed and looked around her, disoriented. She saw the simple white walls of the room, and an old oak tree that stood like a sentinel on the other side of the small window.

I am in America, in Washington, D.C. I arrived late last night, while everyone else was sleeping.

She glanced at her watch. 10 a.m.

Quickly, she got dressed and ready for the day. As she headed down the stairs, she heard the sound of women laughing and voices talking in English and in Arabic. As she rounded the corner, she saw them. Gail was there and so was Eman. Dr. Intisar, a pharmacist at Yarmok Teaching Hospital in Baghdad, was also in the kitchen. Faiza, a civil engineer also from Baghdad, was out. The other women had already been in the country for a week while Rashad had stayed in Jordan waiting for her visa. Two of them welcomed her that morning with warm hugs and greetings in their native tongue. The sound of Arabic was like a balm to her soul.

“Would you like to eat something?” Dr. Intisar asked. “We have bread for toast and coffee.”

Bread for toast? Rashad did not understand.

Dr. Intisar took out a thin slice from a loaf of wheat bread on the counter. Then she inserted it into a slot on the top of a rectangular appliance. Rashad’s confused look urged explanation.

“I know,” Dr. Intisar said with a laugh. “It is not the same as our *Samoon*,⁹² but you get used to it after a while. This thing is called a toaster.”

After a light breakfast, Gail announced the plan for the day.

“The ADAMS Center is the main mosque for the D.C. area. I have arranged for you, Rashad, to go there for Friday prayer. You will also be giving a short lecture in the side hall afterwards. They are very excited to meet you.”

Gail explained that the other women would be going to other events around the city that day and Gail herself would be taking Rashad to the mosque.

Within the hour, she was out in the cold March air of America’s capital.



In the back of the large auditorium at the ADAMS (All Dulles Area Muslim Society) Center, Rashad made the final prostrations for the Friday prayer. As the services ended, she looked at all the faces around her. She had heard that there were Muslim communities in the States, but she had never imagined there would be so many people. Among them, there must be Iraqis as well.

How do they feel about what is happening in their country? she wondered.

Just then, her thoughts were interrupted by a woman who caught her eye. Rashad squinted to get a closer look. Could it be?

“Rowkya!” Rashad called out. The woman immediately turned her way. Her eyes widened as she recognized the person who had called her.

“Minu? Who’s that?” the woman said as she walked toward Rashad with her old mother and daughter in tow. “Is that really you, Dr. Rashad? What are you doing here?”

The two women hugged. Rowkya was a relative of Rashad’s through her sister’s husband. The last time she had seen her was in Baghdad, and that had been many years ago. Rashad knew that Rowkya had moved to the United States, but she had no idea where. She quickly explained about the tour and that she would be in the States for about a month.

“I will be giving a lecture in a few minutes. Would you like to come?”

“Of course,” Rowkya said. “You know I can’t say no to family.”



Rashad had been in the United States for three days and she could not stop crying. She had participated in a number of events already and every time she spoke about her country, she felt the familiar lump in her throat and had to excuse herself to the bathroom.

She had endured 10 years of war, 13 years of sanctions and three years of occupation. She had gotten used to swallowing her tears. Why, then, here in this land, when all she was doing was talking about the situation, was she on the verge of breaking down completely? Yesterday had been the worst. Mary had come for a visit — it was so good to see her again — and announced that there was an interfaith solidarity rally for Iraq in front of the White House. They were requesting that Rashad speak. Of course she had gone, but as soon as she heard the others — Christians, Hindus, Jewish rabbis, others Muslims — speaking about the abuses happening in her country, she broke into tears.

These people who have never even been to Iraq before are here on the White House lawn, speaking out for my people. I never knew there could be this much heartfelt concern and support from others halfway across the world.

As she sobbed, the cadre of press personnel on hand suddenly turned their cameras away from the stage and on to her. She walked away from the gathering to the sound of a dozen clicks.

On their way home that evening, Gail made a suggestion. “Rashad, let’s change the schedule a little. It looks like you need a break.”



Rashad felt her feet touching the soft earth as she took slow steps on the tiny dirt trail that wound its way through the tall pines.

“Walk,” Gail had said when they arrived at her mountain home on the outskirts of Washington, D.C. “Sometimes it is the best thing you can do.”

So Rashad had walked. With nothing but the trees rustling in the late winter breeze as her companions, she walked along the little trail until it seemed she had walked out every last drop of confusion, angst and fatigue that had built up inside her since she arrived.

She rounded the corner and wound her way back to the vicinity of Gail’s tiny mountain cottage. There, she sat on a small bench that had been carved out of a large granite rock and watched the slow flow of the stream that rippled by.

She felt calmer and more at peace than she had the day before. Still, sadness plagued her.

Rashad thought again of the first time she had journeyed outside the city after the occupation. She had been on her way to Fallujah when she saw the abandoned farming fields and the adobe shacks on the side of the road turned to piles of dust. She especially remembered the date palms. Rows of them broken and charred, mere skeletons of what they had once been.

The beauty of nature exists in this country. They must know how special it is and want to protect it. And if they do, why would they want to destroy it in another land?



Two days outside the city had left Rashad feeling rested and renewed. She was ready to resume the whirlwind speaking tour that the organizers at Global Exchange had arranged for her. And she was ready to visit the halls of Congress.

On her last day in D.C., she and Gail were taking the elevator down to the main hallway of the congressional building. They had spoken with several representatives that day, including Senator Obama from Chicago and U.S. Representative Lynn Woolsey from California, and they were both exhausted. As they stepped out into the hallway, they saw a young man coming toward them.

“That’s Matthew,” Gail said under her breath. “He was in Iraq. When he came back, he was halfway mad. He comes here every day.”

Matthew approached them and Gail made some quick introductions. The young man looked at Rashad for several seconds before speaking.

“I was there,” he began. “Fallujah, Abu Ghraib. I pushed the door open with my foot. I heard the sounds of the children in the dark. We didn’t know who was in front of us. We were so afraid.”

Matthew got down on one knee and looked up at Rashad. He shed the same kind of tears as she. They came from the same place. She recognized them immediately.

“I’m so sorry,” he said. “Since I returned from Iraq, I come to Congress every day. I tell them it is madness to send people to Iraq. I saw all the death with my own eyes. I tell them they have to bring the troops home.”

Charlotte

It was the third week in March and Rashad had been going nonstop since her mini-retreat at Gail’s house almost two weeks prior. She had spoken in dozens of rallies, television and radio shows, mosques, libraries, bookstores and college lecture halls up and down the East Coast. For part of her journey, she had taken the train. It was her first time to do so in any country. There were so many firsts on this whirlwind trip.

Never would I have thought I would be here, in this country, meeting so many people and telling my story.

She had looked out the window of the fast-moving locomotive, watching the brown tones of early spring whiz by. The tops of the trees were bare and the sky was gray. She was a messenger of the truth. Allah had willed her to come to the States and speak. Even though she was scared, she had taken up the challenge. Inshallah, she would live up to the task.

Now she was on her way to Charlotte, North Carolina. For this leg of the tour, she took the plane. As she walked out to the baggage claim area at Raleigh-Durham International Airport, she was suddenly greeted by a welcoming party. A half dozen children ages 5 to 7, holding pink, white and yellow flowers, stood by the exit door. Among them was a petite, 30-something woman with short blond hair holding a sign. DR. RASHAD ZAYDAN was written in big blue letters.

The kids giggled as Rashad bent down to greet each one.

“Welcome to Charlotte!” the woman said as the children smiled.

Al Humdo leh lab. At that moment, there was so much to be grateful for.



Rashad had just finished speaking at the Quaker Friends House⁹³ on the outskirts of Charlotte. It had been an intimate evening with only 20 or so people gathered. She was getting ready to leave when a man in his 70s approached her.

“I am sorry that we came to your country,” he said with a bow. “I am sorry for the destruction and I am sorry for all those people who died there.”

Why is this man saying he is sorry? He is old. He had nothing to do with those who gave the orders.

“Don’t be sorry. It was not you...” Rashad began. Then the old man spoke again.

“We thought our son was going there to build schools,” he said. His wife stood behind him, listening in silence.

Rashad put the papers she was carrying down on the table. It was clear that this man had more to say.

“You see,” he said, “my wife and I only had this one boy. And we wanted to give him everything. We tried our hardest to give him a good education so he could have a good job. The problem is, we are not rich. We chose the military because we thought that way he could get a scholarship and go to college. We never thought that our son would be taken there to kill children and destroy homes. We never thought that he would be taken there to lose his own life.”

Rashad glanced over at the man’s wife and then back at the man. She noticed the wrinkles on his face and on hers. They became more pronounced as they spoke about the boy they had lost. Their faces were folded by life and by pain.



Rashad stayed with a kind Iraqi family during her last few days in Charlotte, a husband and wife originally from Baghdad. As it turned out, Rashad knew the man’s cousin. He had graduated from the University of Baghdad’s College of Pharmacy the same year as her. The husband was to be Rashad’s translator at the rally that day.

When they arrived in the grassy lawn where the rally was being held, Rashad saw the large crowd that had gathered, awaiting the list of speakers against the war. She also heard the clamoring of another group on the outskirts of the area. As each participant stood up on the stage to speak, the small group blew horns and crashed cymbals to drown out the speaker. They carried signs supporting President Bush and yelled accusations at the rally participants.

“When it is your turn to speak,” Shannon, a CODEPINK representative, said to Rashad, “just speak loudly and try to ignore them.”

God give me the strength to speak the truth, Rashad thought as she waited her turn in the queue. Then she realized she did not have her tiny Iraqi flag pin that she usually wore on the bottom part of her hijab.

That flag would have given me strength, she thought.

“Wait!” the translator’s wife said when Rashad told her about the dilemma. “I think I can make you one.”

The woman called for her son, a sweet 9-year-old boy, and asked him to give her the crayons he had been using earlier in the morning. Within minutes, she had made several tiny flags of red, white and black and distributed them to Rashad and the other speakers. Rashad knew she would wear this tiny offering for the rest of her trip.

A few minutes later, it was Rashad's turn to speak. She remembered what Shannon had said about speaking loudly and staying focused. She would do her best.

“I come to speak only with those who have a living heart, not those whose hearts are made of stone...”

As her voice resonated across the space, she could no longer hear the clamoring from the other group. She spoke her truth with clarity and conviction for all to hear.

Morning 2011

It was morning in San Diego. Lying in bed, Rashad recalled the events at the Sheraton the night before. Her thoughts turned to 2006 and how Brian had reminded her of the young soldier in the halls of Congress. These thoughts merged with others in the in-between state of just-waking-up — how the branches scratching on the window at Gail's D.C. house were like the rain tapping on the thick glass of the university apartment, and the water rushing through the stream in Gail's backyard was like the lapping of the Pacific against the smooth shores of Coronado Island. She thought of all the places she had gone on that last trip: Washington, D.C., North Carolina, St. Louis, Chicago, New York. And here she was again, this time on the West Coast and long enough for life in America to become almost normal. Almost.

She gazed up at a small slice of sky peering in from a crack in the closed curtains and realized that back in 2006, when she had first come to the United States, she had no idea what to expect. She had only the knowledge that she was about to step foot into the land of the enemy.

Where was that enemy now? She wasn't sure anymore. He was not in Brian, or in the soldier who walked the halls of Congress. He was not in the old man in Charlotte who had lost his son. She was not in Gail or Linda or the faces of the children who held colorful flowers for her at the Raleigh-Durham Airport.

The enemy is the one whose only aim is to create more of himself. To multiply hate, divisiveness and separation. To grow in greed and control and power over others.

In 2006, she had chosen to go to what she thought of then as “the land of the enemy” in order to be a messenger of the truth of what was happening in her country.

Once there, she never expected to find so many friends.

LAST FRUIT

التمر الأخرى

It was 1 o'clock in the morning on June 26, 2011, when the soft tunes of Rashad's mobile phone woke her up from a light sleep. She quickly stepped outside the bedroom to answer it.

Rashad's son Ali was on the line. His voice was shaking.

"We need to get to a hospital quick, Mom," Ali said. "Safa is having labor pains."

"I don't understand, Ali," she replied. "Why don't you call Safa's mother? She's a doctor."

"Mama, did you forget the curfew? It's after midnight. How can they come from such a long distance?"

"Right. I'm sorry," Rashad said. "I'll be ready in 10 minutes."

As she prepared herself to go, she thought about the dreaded curfew that had loomed over their lives ever since the American invasion and occupation began eight years before. She thought of all the stories she had heard of burst appendices, seizures, high fevers and broken bones going untreated because these emergencies happened in the middle of the night.

Now I am about to experience one of these emergencies for myself. She prayed that they would be able to pass quickly through the checkpoints without trouble.

When she was ready, she waited in the garage for Ali's white Lexus to arrive. Omar, Zaynab and Nameer were awake and waiting with her.

"Do you want me to go with you?" Nameer asked.

"No need. Safa's family will be meeting us in the morning. We will be fine."

"Call me," Zaynab said as Rashad and Ali headed on their way.

Five, six, seven — finally they reached the last checkpoint before the hospital. With each stop and explanation as to where they were going and why, Rashad felt her heartbeat increase.

Safa's parents arrived just past sunrise. Soon after, the child was born.

This was Rashad's first grandchild. She could not describe the feelings — pride, exhilaration, relief. Finally, she was a grandmother. Every part of this child was perfect. She wanted to take in every bit of her before the nurse took her away to the prenatal care room for her first bath.

During the last two months of Safa's pregnancy, Rashad had chosen two possible names for her son's first child, as was the loosely-held custom in their family. She had kept these suggestions secret, however, until she knew that the baby had come into the world safe and sound.

"So, what's it going to be, Mom?" Ali asked as the family waited in the hospital room for the baby's return.

"What about Remas?" she said. Ali shook his head.

“When they start to call me Abu,⁹⁴ I want my name to be an original,” Ali said, referring to the common Arab custom of renaming parents after their firstborn child.

“What about Allaeh?” Safa’s mother suggested. Ali didn’t like that either.

“I’ll be right back,” he said after a few minutes had passed.

When he returned half an hour later, he held a thin piece of paper in his hands. It was his daughter’s birth certificate. He had just registered her new name: Rashad.

There was a time when it was customary to name sons and daughters after mothers, fathers, grandfathers or grandmothers, keeping the memory of these important people in the heart of the family always. But now the name is an individual event, unconnected to anything except personal preference.⁹⁵

In naming his first daughter after me, Ali is returning to his roots.

Her son and his wife looked on as Rashad wiped away her tears. This time, they were tears of joy.

A new day has begun by remembering yesterday; the future has been born while honoring the past.

A CONVERSATION WITH DR. RASHAD ZAYDAN

The following is an edited compilation of select interviews conducted by Nikki Lyn Pugh between Sept. 16 and Nov. 4, 2011, an interview conducted by Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies Assistant Professor Ami Carpenter on Oct. 13, and a lecture given by Dr. Zaydan in Dr. Carpenter's class on Oct. 4.

Q: After the U.S. invasion and occupation of your country in 2003, you dedicated your life to helping your community by starting the Knowledge for Iraqi Women Society. What was your life like prior to this time?

A: Prior to 2003, I was just an ordinary Iraqi woman. I was a pharmacist and mother of four. I worked in my private pharmacy in the morning and the evening. I took care of my children when I returned home, looking after their lessons and their study. I was looking after my house, my job and trying hard to bring a better future for my children.

Q: And how did this change after 2003?

A: Suddenly, in March 2003, with the beginning of the heavy military occupation of my country, my life changed. Everything became black and white, no color. I was trying hard to keep on with my own life. Then there was the moment when I had to stop working just for my smaller family and remember my larger family — my community and the widows and orphans whose numbers had increased in a frightening way.

Q: Currently Iraq has 1.5 million widows and 4.5 million children who have lost one or both parents. Many of these deaths occurred because of sectarian violence but a large number were also at the hands of U.S. military personnel. What particular circumstances led to so many deaths in the first months of U.S. occupation?

A: If you are going to be a player on a basketball or football team, you have to ask, “What is the rule of this game?” You are sending 160,000 young men and women to Iraq without giving them information about what is there, how the people are and what the traditions are. U.S. soldiers were in our country without any responsibility. For example, you are just sleeping in your bed and you suddenly see a soldier with a weapon to your head.

Q: This happened to you and your family?

A: I was with my husband and my children in the same room and we were awakened. Three American soldiers were holding weapons in our bedroom. They came through the roof. They broke the upper lock of the door and then they came in. My husband is a computer engineer. He speaks English well. And I am a pharmacist. I also speak English. Our two boys as well — one was in the university and one was in the secondary school. They spoke in English to the soldiers and tried to settle them down. Other people are not very well educated, however. They cannot speak English.

Q: So cultural ignorance, especially concerning protocol with families in their homes, led to much of the unnecessary violence?

A: What is the first thing that an Iraqi man is going to do when he sees those soldiers in his home? The first thing that comes to mind is to go quickly and cover his wife, cover his daughter. But the soldiers thought that he was going to bring out his weapon. So they shot. This happened thousands

of times. They were assuming that all Iraqi people were their enemies. It was the U.S. military's way of saving themselves.

Q: Right before the invasion, you moved all the medicine you had in your pharmacy to your house. Explain how you were able to help people in your community in those beginning weeks of the occupation.

A: I had been, through the early days of the occupation, helping people from inside my home. People were just knocking at my door. They knew I was a pharmacist and there was no other pharmacy. I was also cleaning simple wounds, giving injections, things like that. It is not my duty to do that but there were no doctors to do it at that time.

Q: In April 2003, you and three other women approached the soldiers in front of your daughter's primary school, asking them to leave so the children could return to their studies. You and the other women risked your lives to do this. Why was this action so important?

A: Even with this conflict, even with all this blood, the children have to finish their education. We believe that education is the best way to solve problems and we believe that occupation in our country happened because there was a big shortage of education. I know it is the feeling of every mother who worries about her children. The first point is that their children finish their education, even with the war.

“I am sure that the same situation occurred in many places in Iraq, but the chance did not come for those women to tell their stories.”

Q: And what were your feelings at the time?

A: On the day that we approached the soldiers, I was having mixed feelings. It was a kind of sadness. I thought, *I have no power, I can do nothing*. But at the same time, I believed that this was the best way to get our rights — to speak, to communicate, to at least try to share our ideas with them. After we got the agreement, I knew it was just the beginning. I am sure that the same situation occurred in many places in Iraq, but the chance did not come for those women to tell their stories.

Q: How did the organization Knowledge for Iraqi Women Society begin?

A: Later on, it became very difficult for me to receive so many people in my house. So I negotiated with some friends of mine. They were educated women — one dentist, one engineer, some teachers. We were saying that this situation needs us to stand up and start working for our country. We were saying, “We will not wait for others to come and help us. Nobody will come and help.”

The truth is that we just started simply to help the women. We didn't have a fixed plan. You are in the crisis. You have to stand and work and help the others.

Q: How did your organization's name come about and what is its significance?

A: The key word is Maarefa, which means knowledge. We try to give women different kinds of knowledge that is needed for their lives. Reading and writing were the keys we put in the hands of some. Sewing skills was another key. Computer skills was another, especially with the women who already had a certain amount of education. We believe that to have any amount of progress, you need knowledge. To solve any problem, you need knowledge. So we wish to give the opportunity to have this knowledge to Iraqi women.

“We believe that to have any amount of progress, you need knowledge. To solve any problem, you need knowledge. So we wish to give the opportunity to have this knowledge to Iraqi women.”

Q: What direct needs were you responding to when the Society first began?

A: In the beginning [June 2003], women had been kept inside for more than three months because of the military movement outside their houses. It was not safe for them to go to public areas, the colleges and the shops. The women were tense and under stress, and this reflected on their children. So we said we will just make a place for women to gather in.

We found it very necessary for their minds and for their character to come and communicate with each other and to speak about what they were facing. So it started in this way. We listened to those women, to what they needed and what they wanted us to do for them. We started a charity clinic for the women and children. We started courses for education — English language, religious training, computer training, sewing and other activities. We did not think that we were going to open other branches. We were not thinking about income generation for widows, the orphan projects, the water projects. Those came later. At that time, everything started based on need.

Q: Your scope soon expanded to include humanitarian aid.

A: We found the number of women who were in need of food items increased, so we applied for a project to distribute food to them. When the crisis of Najaf happened, we decided to take medical supplies there. Then within a month, it was the crisis of Fallujah and it was our activity to look after the IDPs who had been run outside of that city.

There was no access for us to enter the city [Fallujah] at first because it had been closed by the military for six months. I think it is known by many people the reason behind that: It was to remove the traces of white phosphorus powder that was used in the bombing. So we were just looking after the IDPs who were around the city, based in schools, in buildings and in tents. We made a medical team and we went to check on them and give them medicine.

After a while, there was access to enter the city again. We took food items, clothes and cooking implements there and found out what the people needed. It was shocking to see the thousands of houses that had been completely destroyed. So the first project was to supply these people with tents

to at least have shelter. Every week we discovered new problems that had to be solved and we tried our best to move with those needs.

Q: You also had some projects in Abu Ghraib, including a project that eventually brought water to more than 16,000 individuals. What were the specific dynamics that made working with the community in Abu Ghraib unique?

A: Many have heard of the hot zone of Abu Ghraib in regards to the scandal of the prison, but I am talking about the city. The prison is in the west part of the city. Abu Ghraib is a rural area. The people there are not well educated; they were just looking after their agriculture and their animals. They are very simple people, but at the same time they have very strict traditional tribe relations. When you attack one of their houses, the other households will make their revenge on you. This was not understood by the U.S. troops.

We found the reasons for the high increase in conflict there was poverty, the absence of fathers and husbands, being surrounded by the troops all the time and having no access to water and medical care. Also, some women had been arrested or shot when they traveled to a clinic or to do something else in another area. What happens then? That woman's son — maybe he is just 14 or 16 — feels that he has been greatly insulted by this. What does he do? He goes quickly and gets a gun.

Q: Was it easy to get a gun in Abu Ghraib at that time?

A: It was so easy to get a gun in Iraq. At that time, it was one of the worst plans of the former government; they were distributing weapons for the popular army before the occupation and they kept these guns in some of the schools. When the invasion happened and the army left the schools, they left their weapons too. Many people went to these places to take these weapons.

Q: What would that boy whose mother had been arrested or shot do?

A: If somebody talks in a bad way or does a bad thing to a woman, it will be a problem. The tribe, all of them, will go and fight. The second day after the mother's arrest or her death, you will find this son holding a gun. He is going to either kill Americans or commit a bombing. We were looking into this in the Society because we had gotten so many stories from those widows there.

Q: Did the Society create programs to address this problem?

A: We were thinking, what can the solution be? We are not the government. We are so weak to stop all these troops, these 160,000 strangers inside our country. But what we can do, we have to do. You will be asked by God about what you *can* do; you will not be asked about everything.

So we arranged a workshop for those young men for working on cars. At least we can take them from the conflict and get them to do something that would be of benefit in the future. At that time, there were no cars. Who is going to have his car repaired? But you have to at least keep them busy.

Q: What was the benefit of these workshops?

A: The benefit is you can do something. You can work for a step of peace. During their training, we were giving them lectures about forgiveness. We were getting benefits from our religion. At that time, nothing could satisfy those young men to stop. So how can we stop them? We can return to our roots. There is no law, no education, but you can speak to them in this way. We said, "You can

start to forgive those soldiers. Try to be patient. Try to be hopeful. Hope will come one day. Change will happen.”

When you keep a young man in a community of 20 men for several weeks with good relationships, speaking about things other than the conflict, then he will not keep speaking about what has happened. If he has something to read and to make, he will change his mind.

*“...what we can do, we have to do.
You will be asked by God about what you can do;
you will not be asked about everything.”*

Q: It sounds like the boys you are describing have a deep sense of honor when it comes to the women in their families. In your opinion, what role do women have in Iraq? Are women seen as second-class citizens, as many in the West may believe?

A: In the Middle East, the woman is the leader of the family, even as some people are looking at her and saying that she is of the second class. For us, no. For us, the woman is leading the family. Her rule may not be seen by others, but you can find it. I can say it this way: The husband cannot move a chair from one place to another in the house unless he gets the agreement from his wife. She controls everything.

And she is responsible for solving all problems. Women, whatever they believe, all the time try to connect everybody. I am speaking from my view now. In the house, there is a good boy and there is a boy that will not listen to his mother. This one wants to play and the other wants to watch TV. The father wants to listen to the news. So she has to make harmony with all this. She has to connect them because she is the woman, she is the mother. She is responsible for giving all the ideas to her family, either conflict ideas or compassion ideas. And this is the reality of the Iraqi community.

Q: Some of the women who have participated in the Society have not been traditional Muslims. Does the Society reach out across religions and sectarian divides?

A: If I can express the feeling of every patriotic Iraqi man and woman, this “sectarian” term was not in our country before occupation. All the time we were living together — Muslims, Christians, Assyrians and other religions — and within Islam, the Sunni and Shi’a. All the time, you could find families consisting of both sides. The relations were so normal. All these things — I can explain from my view — had been created from a certain agenda after the occupation.

As a pharmacist, I would not mind if the person buying the medicine is Sunni, Shi’a or Christian. It is the same for the doctor when he is going to do an exam. And when we go to work in our Society, there are different women who share in our activities. I still keep in my memory book a letter from a Christian girl. She shared in one of our educational programs in 2005. When I remember her words, I cannot stop myself from crying. In her letter she said, “This is the first time that I know that a Muslim and a Christian are the same.” She felt as if she was among her sisters.

Q: You speak a lot about the “religion merchants” as the cause of the divide between religious groups and the resulting strife in your country right now. In your view, who are the religion merchants and what is their agenda in your country and the world?

A: We belong to this country, Iraq, but what has been created inside our country has been created from different agendas. Those who created these conflicts are the religion merchants. They try to benefit from religion. They try to use religion to have a large number of followers so when they go to the election, they can win. For the civilian Iraqi man and woman, this is something that is not accepted.

Q: Can this term also be used to define those who try to perpetuate conflict between Muslims and Christians?

A: They are trying to make it a war between Christianity and Islam. But Muslims believe that all religion comes from God. And God will not make conflicts between his creations. As Muslims, we have to believe in Christianity and we have to believe in Judaism. This is part of our religion. We have to respect all of those prophets and we have to take care of all of those people.

The Qur’an says the people who are nearest to us are the Christian people. As God mentioned in our Qur’an, “All mankind I created.” That means all men and women, tribes and communities.

*“They are trying to make it a war between Christianity and Islam.
But Muslims believe that all religion comes from God.
And God will not make conflicts between his creations.”*

Q: What are some principles of Islam that you think are important for non-Muslims to know about?

A: We Muslims believe the creator would not like people to be in conflict. He would like them to be peaceful. I can give you a very simple example. The greeting *As-Salamu ‘Alaykum* means “May God bring peace to your life.” It is the common way for Muslims to welcome each other. We say this word all day and it will not be acceptable for somebody to say it and the other person to not answer. You have to answer with *Wa Alaikum Salaam*. That means “May God also bring peace to you.”

From my many years of study, I have found that there is no religion, especially not Islam, that would like to go through conflict. We have something in Islam called *Al Fikh*, the study of the details of the religion. I have studied this for many years and I have not found such a word asking the people to be differentiated as Shi’a or Sunni or to hold a weapon and kill people. This is something outside the religion. It has been created in the last years for different agendas.

We keep telling the people, “We are not to be like this.” The problem is that the United States was far away from the religion. Now the people are returning back to their roots. And let’s hope that going back will give them a new vision to look after other people and a way to respect and understand. We need to try to understand each other, to try to communicate and cooperate. All of us are living in the same world.

Q: What can people do to ease conflict and promote understanding between Christians and Muslims?

A: We have a very big job to do, the Muslim people and the Christian people. We have to show our followers that there is no conflict between the religions. It is the conflict between advantages and benefits.

Q: You developed a very special friendship with another PeaceMaker who is a Christian while you were here in San Diego. Can you talk about that friendship?

A: I am having so much hope from my colleague and sister [and fellow Woman PeaceMaker] Wahu Kara. She has been with me as a roommate at USD. She is from Kenya. We have been talking about what is happening all over the world. We have been discussing this subject all this time and we have fully agreed that there is no conflict between Islam and Christianity.

Also, I got a promise from her that in every Sunday speech she will mention that “Muslims are not your enemy.” And I will mention in my speeches in mosques in Baghdad that “Christians are not your enemy.”

Q: How does your personal faith give you the strength to help people and to bring peace to your community and the world?

A: I have a good faith, thanks to God. All the time I say that my faith has helped me very much in all these dangerous eight years. Many times I have gone into the hot zones and the places where there is fighting — like in Fallujah, Abu Ghraib and Ninawa — and many people have told me, “Why are you going to these places? You are crazy! You are going to die!” Because I am a woman of faith, I know that I will die on the day that has been written for me, so I can move so easily. I can do the work and help the widows and look after the orphans.

This is our peacemaking, as we are now describing it. But at the time, we [Rashad and the other Society members] were not thinking of this as a “peacemaking path.” We were just thinking that it is our duty. It is our job to go. Those people needed our help. We were thinking, *We are educated women, we have our families, so let's go and look after those people who lost their families. Let's try to absorb this hate they have inside by supplying their daily needs.* We were not giving them much, just simple things but with a very compassionate word so they can feel another's feelings and they can change.

Q: It sounds like you and the other members of the Society were helping people on the inside as well as the outside.

A: There is a rule in psychology and it is also in our religion as part of what the prophet says: You cannot change the community unless you change yourself. You cannot make the peace outside unless you bring it to yourself. I cannot be in tension and be nervous and impatient and not have faith, and still make peace with the other. I have to practice it for myself. And from my experience, religion has had much effect on helping me be more patient, to absorb the shock of working in this world and to not be afraid of many things. I just believe that life is in the hands of God. He can give it and he can take it away. So no matter what, I can go there.

Q: How do you maintain that faith while witnessing all that is happening to your country, your family and your friends?

A: Maybe some things you just cannot explain. You just can feel. You have this faith. You have this strength. And now when I think about what I was doing through these eight years, I am so surprised! I was so courageous to make all these things while men were not able to.

This was especially so when we were working in Fallujah. The United States closed the city for six months after bombing with white phosphorus. Then afterwards, the men were not allowed to enter the city [for fear of being targeted as insurgents]. We were the women. We could go. We felt that it was our duty to bring food and clothes to those poor women and children who had been kept inside the city.

I cannot describe what I saw and how hard it was to reach the city. We had to walk about five kilometers. They did not allow you to take your car inside. Then we found the marines. Thanks to God at that time they were respecting the Iraqi women so the women [marines] were checking us, not the men. Then we entered the city. I was shocked to see what was there. There were about 30,000 soldiers in the area but I was not afraid. From where did this courage come?

*“You cannot change the community unless you change yourself.
You cannot make the peace outside unless you bring it to yourself.”*

Q: Wasn't your family concerned that you were going to these dangerous places?

A: I have two boys and two girls. When I get tired or sick, they say, “Mom you have to take rest. You have to look after yourself.” And all the time I tell them I am kept by the prayer of those widows. There is a job I have to do. And for that reason I ask God to keep me healthy so I can return to help them.

Q: You spoke of a particular child in Fallujah who gave you inspiration. Can you share that story?

A: We had a child in the Society kindergarten. He would not talk to anybody; he just kept silent. I found out that 19 people from his family had died in the bombing [of November 2004]: his mom, his dad, his two sisters, his brother and his uncle's family. That child was 3 years old and he saw it all that day. He saw all the bodies, the head of his mother, something from his father, all of it.

The teacher was trying hard to help him, holding his hand all the time, going with him to the garden, hugging him. When I went there to visit, the children had been coming to the kindergarten for about a week. And I found him holding her hand all the time and going just with her, not with anyone else. The manager was telling me the story and I started to cry. Then, after just one month at the kindergarten, the child had chalk and was writing on the blackboard. He became friendly with the children, and then he spoke. He finished two years with us and he went to the primary school.

That child is a message. Sometimes I get so tired, I get some ideas from the family that I have to stop. But when I hear such stories, I say I cannot stop. I say, “It is not my wish to come to this place. It is God's will to come so I can help this child.” I am a pharmacist; I have a family and I can just keep on. I have many friends who just keep on. They go to Amman or Syria and live with the

same luxury that they lived before; they are just taking care of themselves. But I am choosing to come to this place because of this child. Somebody has to look after him.

Q: One reason that the United States had for entering your country was to bring democracy and freedom to Iraq. What is your definition of freedom?

A: I have discovered that there are many different meanings for “freedom,” depending on who is putting out the plan. For me, as a simple civilian woman, I think that freedom for a human being is to be able to behave in a way he likes without crossing the freedom of others. That means, for me, I can go to my school, I can finish my studies, I can work, I can have medical insurance. I will have moderate economic growth so I can raise my children. I am not looking for power. All these are the things that I think are important and could be understood as freedom.

*“If you are going to treat a conflict, you cannot use conflict.
If you want peace to come to the country,
you have to use the most peaceful ways to reach your goals.”*

Q: Do you feel that the country is enjoying more democracy and freedom now? Is it better off now than it was before 2003?

A: From my viewpoint, before the invasion, we were living our lives. There were some very big mistakes made in my country before, I know. Iraq had never settled down since the first revolution in 1958. All the time there was some bloody crisis in the country. There are fights between people. There is war. There are victims. But from my vision, the way to free such a state will not come through more conflict. If you are going to treat a conflict, you cannot use conflict. If you want peace to come to the country, you have to use the most peaceful ways to reach your goals.

At the point of occupation, many Iraqis were thinking that there was another possibility for solving these problems — making negotiations and trying to change things in another way. But suddenly, we got these military activities.

What came after the occupation was worse than what we had before. Before, there were some people who were suffering, but not the majority. The majority were living not the best life, but an average life. Now the majority of Iraqi people are suffering. They have no access to medical care and education is poor. In 1987, there was a report from the United Nations stating that Iraq was the best country in the Middle East for education and medical service. Now Iraq is the worst country on these points.

If I am going to understand freedom in this way, I would say no, we are not better off and we do not have more freedom. But for people who say that freedom is having 40 women and 380 men in leadership positions in the parliament and them speaking freely to the media — yes, they can say that they got it. For me, just putting those 40 women in a good position with a high salary, giving

them a very good life, having them travel everywhere, while 15 to 20 million Iraqi women are suffering, I think that is not right.

So you find that the answer is in how you are describing freedom and democracy.

Q: Have you seen any improvements in the city of Baghdad in the last few years?

A: To be honest, there have been some improvements. These improvements are very few compared with the large destruction, but if we are discussing everything, then yes, there is a little bit more security. Now children and students can go to school, but still there is fear inside every mother's heart because of all the bombings.

Regarding healthcare, I don't think it has progressed. I was in the pharmacist syndicate and I was asking about the situation of medicine for this year [2011]. It was very frightening because every medicine that entered the country before had to be looked after. Now there is no controlling it.

Also, now Iraqi people are suffering from different kinds of cancer that were not in Iraq before. One-fifth of the children are suffering from leukemia and we don't have enough drugs to cure them. So you find that a child goes to the hospital, is kept there for two to three weeks, and then they say, "We are sorry, we don't have the chemo."

This is the medical sector. But, as a whole, I would like to say the worst disease we have right now is the corruption, which we got from the "democracy and freedom." As we are following the United States on everything, we have to follow on this. Iraq had to spend money on repairing the electrical system [that had been damaged in the invasion]. The budget for this was 60 billion Iraqi Dinar. From 2003 until now, we get this electricity for one hour every four hours. Sometimes even this one hour we do not get. We have to depend on generators and we have to pay at least 200 U.S. dollars a month for this.

Q: Most people in the United States have a certain concept of people from the Middle East, especially Muslims. The stereotypical image of Muslims as "terrorists" and "the enemy" is perpetuated by the U.S. media. What is the most important thing that people in the United States can do to overcome these negative images?

A: I would like to ask them for a deep historical study to understand what made up the relations between the Islamic countries and the United States in this situation. If they just go back not more than 25 to 30 years, they will understand that relations were very good between the United States and the Islamic countries at one time. They will learn how the United States supported Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War and the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan.

Then, the Cold War was over and the United States did not have an enemy. So they turned quickly to their strategy to make a new one. The most suitable enemy is the Islamic people who have been raised in conflict due to U.S. support. I would like the people who want to be balanced and logical in their judgment to look after the history and tell me: In the 1970s, were there any Mujahedeen in Afghanistan? Were there any al-Qaida in Iraq? Were there any terrorists in Sudan? Just look after the history.

If I am a good pharmacist, as I assume myself to be, I will not say to the patient who comes to me with a high temperature, "Just take a pill." You have to look after the cause first. So this is my answer: Look after the cause. What was the cause for those people to be in conflict in this way?

No human being, when he is born, is in conflict. There is a very important reason behind being in conflict, being a criminal, being a fighter, being a killer or a thief. The people now are just looking at the outer picture and saying, “The terrorists are in Iraq.” All you have to do is look after what brought them to this.

*“I will not say to the patient who comes to me with a high temperature,
Just take a pill.’ You have to look after the cause first ...
There is a very important reason behind being in conflict, being a criminal,
being a fighter, being a killer or a thief.”*

Q: As of November 2011, President Obama has pledged that he will pull the troops out of Iraq by the end of the year. What are your feelings on this?

A: We are just waiting. Then Iraq will be controlled by its people and we can see what will happen. Many insurgents are announcing that if the troops leave the country, they will stop their activities. If we get this chance, then maybe the country will settle down. Security is the most important thing. You cannot create factories, you cannot have education and you will have no access to healthcare unless you have security. So we are just waiting for December and then, Inshallah, we will see progress.

BEST PRACTICES IN COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND PEACEBUILDING

The best practices described in the following table represent only a fraction of the activities that Rashad and the Knowledge for Iraqi Women Society have engaged in from 2003 to the present, and especially during the years 2003-2009. The activities are presented in chronological order and the common thread throughout is their origination as a response to the immediate needs, security concerns and physical, emotional and intellectual well-being of the women in the community.

In all circumstances, the overall strategy remains consistent, straightforward and practical. It can be summed up in two simple questions: What are the immediate needs at this time? What is our capacity to help? This organic and heart-centered approach, backed by a strong sense of faith, enables Rashad and her courageous Society colleagues to undertake projects in some of the most dangerous places in Iraq, if not the world.

In order to understand the organic development of these activities, it is important to first look at the constantly changing environment in which these activities have taken place:

- Despite the effect of years of sanctions on Iraq, prior to March 2003 Baghdad was a fully functional city, with electricity, food supplies (in the form of rations and in some markets), jobs, communication systems, water supplies, educational institutions, medical facilities, police and military all fairly stable. The months leading up to occupation were filled with tense anticipation as the inevitability of invasion became clearer. Rashad's work at this time represents preventative measures in response to this possibility.
- March through May 2003 represents a period of complete paradigm shift for the residents of Baghdad. The U.S. military's heavy bombing of the city created a near apocalyptic situation where all normal functions of life for Iraqi citizens came to a screeching halt. In March, the presence of rogue bands of thieves became a serious security concern. By April, the U.S. military saturated the city with thousands of troops. They toppled the Ba'ath party on April 9 and quickly began their random and unannounced inspections of homes and checkpoint inspections of cars as part of their de-Ba'athification process. In addition to the initial bombings, this scenario resulted in hundreds, if not thousands, of deaths and continuous retaliatory bombings throughout the city. At that time, citizens could move around by foot and by car during certain non-curfew hours, but they did so at great risk. The work of Rashad and her neighbors during this time represents action taken by brave, concerned citizens directly affected by extreme crisis.
- Rashad and seven female colleagues formed the Knowledge for Iraqi Women Society in June 2003, responding to the immediate security and emotional well-being of women in their communities. The initial work of the Society represents the response of individuals still being directly affected by fear, violence, intense insecurity, lack of resources and inability to move outside of their homes, but at a time when the extreme crisis (i.e., total lockdown of the city) had lessened somewhat. As the visionary of the Society's first branch, Rashad informally assessed the needs of the women in her community and developed a plan for long-term service in light of a new reality vastly different from that prior to occupation.

- Late 2004 through 2006 represents work done in an environment of slightly increased mobility (the curfew was shortened) and a decrease in inspections (after a law passed in 2005 stopping random home inspections after midnight). At the same time, sectarian violence and retaliatory bombings by resistance fighters increased, reaching its height in 2007 and 2008. Troop presence in the country also rose to its height of approximately 160,000. The Society's relationships with trustworthy U.S.-based organizations began at this time; they also started fielding requests from members of the larger community to work on sustainability oriented community development projects. Again, the Society went where the most need existed, especially in the rural community of Abu Ghraib.
- From 2008 to 2009 the Society was further established as a respected source of services for the community. They continued to provide for the needs of orphans and women, respond to medical concerns and offer educational programs in Baghdad and surrounding areas. Abu Ghraib, a continuous hotbed of violence during this time, was of particular focus.

The Knowledge for Iraqi Women Society (K4IWS) is an inclusive organization that responds to women's immediate and long-term needs to have a secure and nurtured life for themselves and their families. The Society's origins are in a brave and compassionate desire for action in the middle of extreme crisis. The majority of its members draw from the deep well of their Islamic faith to do the work that they do.

“You will be asked [by God] about what you *can* do; you will not be asked about everything,” Rashad says. “What we can do, we have to do.”

Strategy	Activity	Description	Purpose/End Result
Providing preparatory measures	Organizing first aid course for women (February 2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating with the Iraqi Red Crescent to arrange the trainers • Communicating with the community for women to participate • Arranging kits and curriculum • Completing the week-long training 	Invasion by the United States seemed inevitable. If it did occur, it would be very important for women to have basic first aid knowledge to help themselves, their families and other community members. This training was successfully completed in February 2003 and resulted in more than two dozen women gaining a solid understanding of basic first aid and being able to share that knowledge with others (which many of them did).
Personally providing basic medical care and medicine in an extreme crisis situation	Rashad treating individuals in her neighborhood with basic first aid and providing medicine on an as-needed basis (March-June 2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving all medicine and pharmacy equipment to Rashad’s home prior to invasion • Treating her neighbors when no other services were available • Dispensing medicine free of charge when no pharmacy was available • Patients hearing about her services through word of mouth 	From March through June 2003, Rashad treated minor emergencies — cuts, bruises, burns, broken bones, some sutures — in a makeshift clinic in her home. She also dispensed medicine for those in need during that time. Her service to her neighborhood filled a void in medical services created by the crisis of occupation.
Providing educational opportunities for children	Conducting communication between mothers/local primary school teachers and U.S. military personnel in order to clean and reopen schools before the end of the first semester (April 2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing needs: children needed to get back to school • Developing a strategy: spoke to women in mosques, held community meeting, addressed gender issue (if men approached the soldiers they may get shot), decided that women would approach the soldiers • Developing a strategy of approach • Taking action on the day 	Initially, parents were concerned because children needed to return to the primary school before a certain date or else they would have to repeat the grade they were in prior to occupation. This initial needs-based grassroots action was successful; more than 20 women were involved in the initial cleaning and setting up of the school. The general concept was later expanded into a formal program promoting school returns

Strategy	Activity	Description	Purpose/End Result
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing supplies and other women to help with school cleanup 	<p>and retention in the first months of the Society (September-October 2003).</p>
<p>Providing basic medical care and medicine in an extreme crisis situation</p>	<p>Assisting in the creation of a charity medical clinic (May 2003)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnering with a local doctor • Helping to secure a space and move medical supplies clandestinely at a time when all movement was suspect • Training pharmacy staff members and overseeing pharmacy once a week 	<p>There were no medical services at the time, and Rashad and the local doctor were individually helping increasing numbers of patients, which was disturbing the sanctity of their homes. The clinic was operational by the end of May 2003 and grew to include more practitioners until its closing in 2008.</p>
<p>Creating a safe space for women during extreme crisis</p>	<p>Establishing the various K4IWS branches for women and children, which include classes in computers, English, cooking, sewing and Qur’an studies, a preschool, a library and a medical clinic (The Al Kadraa Society office was established in July 2003)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing the need and creating the vision • Gathering founding members • Securing and preparing the space • Implementing curriculum • Hiring teachers • Advertising mostly through word of mouth, but some through mosques • Responding to ongoing and changing needs: adding/adjusting curriculum and services according to population and situation 	<p>Occupation was taking its toll on Rashad, her friends and their daughters. Being homebound had created anger, depression, hopelessness and loss of faith. The solution was to create a space where women could gather, take classes, socialize and connect. There was also a charity medical clinic and a preschool where women could leave their children while they took classes. The first office in Al Kadraa was the model for other branches to follow in Al Dora, Fallujah, Ninawa and Abu Ghraib. The model was extremely successful, filling a gap in women’s lives and giving them hope and interaction with others, which translated to more peace and security in their homes. The Society space was also the starting point for other programs, including humanitarian relief for IDPs in Fallujah and around Baghdad, and the orphan and widow projects.</p>

Strategy	Activity	Description	Purpose/End Result
<p>Personally providing medical care and relief for IDPs</p>	<p>Accompanying a relief effort sponsored by the international relief organization LIFE to deliver medical care and supplies to IDPs from Fallujah (December 2004)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to a request from LIFE that Rashad accompany an all male team of relief workers to Garma, where many Fallujah IDPs had relocated. A female medical professional was needed to provide services to traditional Muslim women at the camp. • Deciding to go, accompanied by her husband, two doctors and assistants taking relief and medical supplies • Helping IDPs in two different camps 	<p>Hundreds fled the city of Fallujah before heavy bombing by the U.S. military took place in November 2004. Rashad and the relief team treated many of these individuals in two camps in and around Garma, about 20 kilometers from Fallujah. Rashad discovered the particular needs of the women and sent supplies to the area once she was back in Baghdad. This trip paved the way for her to return to Fallujah in 2005, when she met with medical professionals and mosque leaders. Shortly after, the Society opened a branch in Fallujah, providing a kindergarten for orphans and a curriculum of classes.</p>
<p>Providing educational support for secondary- and college-aged women</p>	<p>Helping secondary and college students develop their skills through computer and other training and certificate courses at a time when students had no access to their institutions (2005 to present)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing needs and past Society activities in this capacity • Fulfilling obligations to various institutions in order to be qualified to conduct classes and give officially recognized licenses • Hiring certified trainers • Purchasing equipment • Holding classes 	<p>The Society has been providing classes for young women since its inception. In recent years, however, the Society has been addressing the needs of young women who have lost years of their secondary and post-secondary education due to occupation and its aftermath. This is a primary focus of the Society at present.</p>
<p>Providing economic and educational support for widows and fatherless/parentless children (orphans)</p>	<p>Establishing the orphan project through the Al Kadraa office, spreading later to other branches (started in 2005)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing needs through informal and formal observations and survey of communities surrounding the branch • Gathering the funds: interested parties support through yearly or monthly memberships 	<p>The orphan program was started by Society members concerned with the increasing number of widows whose husbands had been killed in the streets near the branch; most were caught in the crossfire between the U.S. military and resistance fighters, killed in a bombing or shot by a soldier who</p>

Strategy	Activity	Description	Purpose/End Result
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing the kindergarten • Selecting the recipients: started out small, with 25 children and their mothers • Setting up monthly distribution system for funds and in-kind gifts to each recipient 	<p>thought they had a weapon. Up until 2003, widows of conflicts were compensated generously through government programs, but when those programs ended, thousands of widows and their children had no means to survive.</p> <p>The orphan program began small but grew to include all branches of the Society and provided services to thousands of children. The kindergartens provided two, sometimes three, meals a day and loving teachers. The widows were given monetary and other gifts once a month to be used on their children.</p>
<p>Responding to and supporting community initiated development projects</p>	<p>Completing the infrastructure to deliver potable water to 300 (and then an additional 450) homes in Abu Ghraib (2006)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to initial request from an Abu Ghraib community leader • Assessing the budget and feasibility • Generating support from Society members • Connecting with local government to secure in-kind support • Hiring workers • Implementing and completing the water project 	<p>Residents of Abu Ghraib had no access to a water source for at least a year and a half after occupation. A water project originally started by the previous government was abandoned in 2003. In the interim, residents transported water from Baghdad. But when sectarian violence increased there in 2005, the area was cut off from Baghdad, its main supply of resources. The community was forced to do without or to drink water from available irrigation runoff and rainwater pools, resulting in high levels of typhoid, cholera, diarrhea and other serious digestive system problems. The completion of both projects — in 2006 and 2007 — resulted in clean drinking water to more than 700 homes, an estimated 16,000 residents.</p>

Strategy	Activity	Description	Purpose/End Result
<p>Supporting the medical needs and health education of women and children</p>	<p>Developing a healthcare clinic for women and children, and a corresponding hygiene awareness and clinical checkup program for children and teenagers in Abu Ghraib (2007 to present)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Securing outside funding • Securing equipment, doctors and staff (administrative staff is comprised of widows who are Abu Ghraib Society members) • Setting up the clinic • Developing and implementing community program for teenage girl hygiene education at middle schools and clinical checkups for primary school students • Developing and implementing data collection system for specific issues — such as communicable diseases and child malnutrition — and sharing findings with other NGOs and in published journals 	<p>The Abu Ghraib Medical Clinic provides gynecological, pediatric, dental, laboratory and other services for the rural residents of Abu Ghraib. The clinic has been able to directly respond to recurring symptoms reported by teachers and parents of low academic achievement, fainting spells and digestive issues in area children in recent years. Studies conducted through the clinic in 2008 and outreach programs discovered that 68 percent of children in Abu Ghraib are malnourished.</p>
<p>Educating the global community and networking with other humanitarian organizations</p>	<p>Communicating with international supporters (beginning in 2004) and attending Amman-based networking meetings of international and regional NGOs working in Iraq (beginning in 2005)</p> <p>Traveling to the United States on an educational tour with CODEPINK, and to Taiwan for interfaith dialogues with</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to various requests for speaking engagements, tours and webinars to educate the global community (mainly the United States) about Iraq and the U.S. occupation • Participating in dialogues and networking with other women in faith-based, humanitarian and anti-war communities in the United States and elsewhere • Attending various NGO collective meetings to network, learn and gain support for K4IWS 	<p>In 2005, Rashad began attending regional and international meetings of various NGOs, such as the NGO Coordinating Committee for Iraq in Amman, adding the voice of K4IWS to the dialogue of NGOs working for and in Iraq. Because of her sincerity, leadership, strength and commitment to serving her people, Rashad has gained the respect of many international and regionally-based organizations and leaders. She has been asked on several occasions to speak abroad and partner in projects.</p>

Strategy	Activity	Description	Purpose/End Result
	<p>other religious women leaders from Asia and elsewhere (2006)</p> <p>Participating in international teleconferences with Global Room for Women, and in the Women PeaceMakers Program at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice (2011)</p>		

FURTHER READING —
IRAQ

Books

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BIOGRAPHY OF A PEACE WRITER —
NIKKI LYN PUGH



Photo credit: Michele Zousmer

Nikki Lyn Pugh is a writer, editor and teacher with a B.A. in ethnic studies from UCSD and an M.F.A. in creative writing from the University of New Orleans. Pugh has been privileged to use her pen as a tool for education and consciousness-raising in a variety of capacities. As an undergraduate, she worked as media coordinator for the Support Committee for Maquiladora Workers in San Diego and with homeless rights organizations in Los Angeles. In her first year at the University of New Orleans, she was evacuated during Hurricane Katrina and assisted in gathering dozens of narratives as part of the two-part anthology *Voices Rising*.

As editor of the San Diego-based *Vision Magazine* and a freelance journalist, she has published articles on human rights, cross-border organizing, personal development, alternative health and education. Pugh has a bilingual education teaching credential and has taught for eight years in California, Hawaii, New Orleans and Lafayette, La., where she created a specially designed classroom for kindergarten children affected by Hurricane Katrina.



Photo credit: Rio Hahn

JOAN B. KROC INSTITUTE FOR PEACE & JUSTICE

The mission of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice (IPJ) is to foster peace, cultivate justice and create a safer world. Through education, research and peacemaking activities, the IPJ offers programs that advance scholarship and practice in conflict resolution and human rights. The institute, a unit of the University of San Diego's Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies, draws on Catholic social teaching that sees peace as inseparable from justice and acts to prevent and resolve conflicts that threaten local, national and international peace.

The IPJ was established in 2000 through a generous gift from the late Joan B. Kroc to the University of San Diego to create an institute for the study and practice of peace and justice. Programming began in early 2001 and the building was dedicated in December 2001 with a conference, "Peacemaking with Justice: Policy for the 21st Century."

The institute strives, in Joan B. Kroc's words, to not only talk about peace, but also make peace. In its peacebuilding initiatives, the IPJ works with local partners to help strengthen their efforts to consolidate peace with justice in the communities in which they live. In Nepal, the IPJ has been working for more than a decade with Nepali groups to support inclusiveness and dialogue in the transition from armed conflict and monarchy to peace and multiparty democracy. In its West African Human Rights Training Initiative, the institute partners with local human rights groups to strengthen their ability to pressure government for reform and accountability. And the Guatemala Justice Project is currently implementing a legal empowerment program in the indigenous region of Quiché.

In addition to the Women PeaceMakers Program, the institute has several ongoing programs. The Joan B. Kroc Distinguished Lecture Series is a forum for high-level national and international leaders and policymakers to share their knowledge and perspective on issues related to peace and justice.

WorldLink, a year-round educational program for middle school and high school students from San Diego and Baja California, connects youth to global affairs.

Community outreach includes speakers, films, art and opportunities for discussion between community members, academics and practitioners on issues of peace and social justice, as well as dialogue with national and international leaders in government, nongovernmental organizations and the military.

In addition to the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice, the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies includes the Trans-Border Institute, which promotes border-related scholarship and an active role for the university in the cross-border community, and a master's program in Peace and Justice Studies to train future leaders in the field.

UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO

Chartered in 1949, the University of San Diego (USD) is a Roman Catholic institution of higher learning located on 180 acres overlooking San Diego's Mission Bay. The University of San Diego is committed to promoting academic excellence, expanding liberal and professional knowledge, creating a diverse community and preparing leaders dedicated to ethical and compassionate service.

The university is steadfast in its dedication to the examination of the Catholic tradition as the basis of a continuing search for meaning in contemporary life. Global peace and development and the application of ethics and values are examined through campus centers and institutes such as the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice, the Values Institute, the Trans-Border Institute, the Center for Public Interest Law, the Institute for Law and Philosophy and the International Center for Character Education. Furthermore, through special campus events such as the Social Issues Conference, the James Bond Stockdale Leadership and Ethics Symposium and the Joan B. Kroc Distinguished Lecture Series, we invite the community to join us in further exploration of these values.

The USD campus, considered one of the most architecturally unique in the nation, is known as Alcalá Park. Like the city of San Diego, the campus takes its name from San Diego de Alcalá, a Franciscan brother who served as the infirmarian at Alcalá de Henares, a monastery near Madrid, Spain. The Spanish Renaissance architecture that characterizes the five-century-old University of Alcalá serves as the inspiration for the buildings on the USD campus. The architecture was intended by the founders, Bishop Charles Francis Buddy and Mother Rosalie Hill, to enhance the search for truth through beauty and harmony. Recent additions, such as the state-of-the-art Donald P. Shiley Center for Science and Technology and the new School of Leadership and Education Sciences building carry on that tradition.

A member of the prestigious Phi Beta Kappa, USD is ranked among the nation's top 100 universities. The university offers its 7,500 undergraduate, graduate and law students rigorous academic programs in more than 60 fields of study through six academic divisions, including the College of Arts and Sciences and the schools of Business Administration, Leadership and Education Sciences, Law, and Nursing and Health Science. The Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies opened in Fall 2007.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFSC	American Friends Service Committee
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority (2003-2004)
ID	Iraqi Dinar
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IPJ	Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice
IRC	Iraqi Red Crescent
K4IWS	Knowledge for Iraqi Women Society
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
SA	<i>Aalayhi s-salām</i> (Peace be upon Him) — written after the name of any prophet other than Mohammad
SAAS	<i>Ṣall Allāhu ‘alay-hi wa-sallam</i> (May Allah honor (pray on) him and grant him peace) — written after Prophet Mohammad’s name
WMD	Weapon of Mass Destruction
UN	United Nations
UNSCOM	United Nations Special Commission on Iraq
US	United States
USD	University of San Diego

ENDNOTES

¹ A version of this paragraph first appeared in the article “‘Women Cannot Cry Anymore’: Global Voices Transforming Violent Conflict,” by Emiko Noma in *Critical Half*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2007). Copyright 2007 Women for Women International.

² Fattah, Hala. *A Brief History of Iraq*, XIV.

³ Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper. “Background on Women’s Status in Iraq Prior to the Fall of the Saddam Hussein Government.” November 2003. www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/wrd/iraq-women.htm

⁴ According to Joy Gordon, author of *Invisible War*, “... in the Persian Gulf War in 1991, the U.S.-led allied forces bombed all of Iraq’s infrastructure — water treatment plants, sewage treatment plants, telecommunications towers, roads, bridges. The country was reduced to a dysfunctional country in every regard almost overnight. U.N. envoys going into Iraq reported that Iraq has been reduced to a preindustrial country.” Source: Democracy Now interview transcript, Sept. 1, 2010.

⁵ Fattah, Hala. *Brief History of Iraq*, pg. 234.

⁶ Human Rights Watch (see endnote 3).

⁷ Associated Press. “Thousands Protest Iraq War on Third Anniversary.” March 20, 2006. www.msnbc.msn.com/id/11887714/ns/world_news-invasion_iraq_3_years_later/t/thousands-protest-iraq-war-rd-anniversary/

⁸ Tyson, Ann Scott. “U.S. Used Phosphorous Munitions In Fallujah.” *The Washington Post*. Nov. 16, 2005.

⁹ Ranucci, Sigfrido and Maurizio Torrealta. *Fallujah: The Hidden Massacre*. RAI State Television, Italy. Nov. 8, 2005. www.rainews24.rai.it/ran24/inchiesta/video/fallujah_ING.wmv

¹⁰ Cruickshank, Peter and Paul Cruickshank. “Al Qaeda in Iraq: Self-Fulfilling Prophecy.” *Mother Jones*. Oct. 31, 2007. www.motherjones.com/politics/2007/10/al-qaeda-iraq-self-fulfilling-prophecy

¹¹ Lecture by Dr. Jeffrey D. McCausland at the Joan B. Kroc Institute of Peace & Justice, University of San Diego, Sept. 27, 2011.

¹² *Ṣall Allahu ‘alay-hi wa-sallam* — “May Allah honor (pray on) him and grant him peace.” A customary phrase said after naming the Prophet Mohammad.

¹³ This story can be found in Bukhari, Bk 1, Vol. 3, Hadith 58.

¹⁴ Dates have been a staple food of the Middle East for thousands of years. They provide a wide range of essential nutrients, and are a very good source of dietary potassium. In addition to sugar, dates also contain protein, fiber and trace elements such as magnesium, selenium and zinc. Dates have high tannin content and can be used as an astringent for intestinal troubles. Many people have told Dr. Zaydan over the years that they believed eating dates during the lean times of sanctions helped their families survive and be healthier. No scientific studies have been published regarding this hypothesis.

¹⁵ In Islamic tradition, when the first child is born, the mother and the father are given a new name used by people familiar with them (like family members or friends). For example, if a couple has a daughter named Su for their firstborn, the mother would be called Um-Su and the father would be called Abu-Su.

¹⁶ The Islamic holy book. According to Muslim beliefs, the Qur'an is composed of works directly from God.

¹⁷ The Revolution of 1958 occurred in Iraq when Brigadier General Abdul-Karim Qasim overthrew the monarchy, setting up the Republic of Iraq.

¹⁸ Typically black, an abaya is a simple, loose over-garment worn by many Muslim women, mostly in Middle Eastern countries.

¹⁹ Muslim girls do not typically wear head coverings until they reach physical maturity.

²⁰ A division of the Qur'an similar to a chapter.

²¹ *Aalayhi s-salām* — “Peace Be Upon Him.” A customary phrase said after naming a prophet other than Mohammad.

²² Surah Luqman 31:12-19. English Translation: “We had bestowed wisdom on Luqman that he may be grateful to Allah. Whoever is grateful, his gratefulness is for his own good, and whoever is ungrateful, then Allah is indeed Self-Sufficient and Self-Praiseworthy...”

²³ Sunni and Shi'a (or Shi'ite) are sects within Islam. They have the basic tenets of Islam in common, have the Qur'an as their holy book and believe in the message of the “final prophet” Mohammad. For more on the differences between Sunni and Shi'a, see page 7 of the Conflict History in this document.

²⁴ A traditional Iraqi pastry of flaky crust rolled and filled with dates.

²⁵ Half a million Iraqi and Iranian soldiers and civilians are believed to have died in the Iran-Iraq War. In Iraq, the death toll was in the hundreds of thousands. Source: Fattah, Hala. *Brief History of Iraq*, pg. 226.

²⁶ Another name for this Shi'a holiday is the Mourning of Muharram, which takes place in the first month of the year (Muharram) in the Islamic calendar. The event marks the anniversary of the Battle of Karbala when Imam Hussain ibn Ali, grandson of the prophet Mohammad, was killed by Umayyad caliph Yazid I. His murder intensified divisions between Shi'a and Sunni. The mourning reaches a climax on the 10th day, known as Ashura, when Yazid's forces killed the 72 individuals who fought and took the women and children as prisoners. During this holiday, it is customary to provide free meals, which are seen as special and holy and an act of communion with Allah and humanity.

²⁷ Typical Iraqi bread made with various kinds of herbs such as mint and basil.

²⁸ A common phrase meaning “God willing” in Arabic.

²⁹ “Goodbye” in Arabic

³⁰ Hajj is the pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia that “every able-bodied Muslim” should make. Considered to be the “Fifth Pillar of Islam,” Muslims do hajj to have solidarity with other Muslims and with God.

³¹ Words of gratitude to God that can be performed anywhere at any time. In Islam, official prayer can be done in any clean, pure place: a mosque, a house, outside — anywhere after washing exposed body parts (a ritual known as *Wudu*).

³² The study of the language of the Qur'an and the proper way of reading and orally reciting its Surahs.

³³ There are currently 11 colleges at the University of Baghdad's main campus, specializing mostly in scientific disciplines. The College of Pharmacy was one of them in the 1970s.

³⁴ The Iran–Iraq War was an armed conflict between Iraq and Iran caused initially by a movement stemming from Iran's Islamic Revolution and, ultimately, by territorial disputes in the oil-rich region. It lasted from September 1980 to August 1988 and was the longest conventional war of the 20th century. It came at a great cost to the Iraqi people in lives lost and economic consequences. The debt that Iraq acquired from Kuwait in financing the war was a factor in Iraq's invasion of that country in the early 1990s, subsequently resulting in the First and Second Gulf Wars and 13 years of sanctions.

³⁵ Or *Saddam's Qadisyyah*, another name for the Iran-Iraq War that refers to the conquest of Iran and the defeat of Persia in the 7th century Battle of al-Qadisyyah. It was common at the University of Baghdad to give each graduating class a nickname.

³⁶ Iraqi brand of cigarettes

³⁷ First six lines of the Surah Ar-Rahman (55). English translation: The most gracious! / It is he who has taught the Qur'an. / He has created man: / He has taught him speech / The sun and the moon follow courses computed / And the herbs and the trees both bow in adoration.

³⁸ Historically, there were 10 different people who lived with the prophet at various times and were told how Mohammad was reading the Qur'an. Each of these people was said to present a slightly different way of rendering the reading in terms of pronunciation and meaning. The 10th reading is said to be the most literary and phonetically pure of all the readings. Those who obtain the *Al Ijaz'a Al Miem* have read the Qur'an from beginning to end using the highest and purest pronunciation standards possible. After obtaining mastery, one can teach others and grant the license to others.

³⁹ Rashad's full name is Dr. Rashad Mohammad Salem Zaydan Al-Ma'athidi Al-Shamaree, but the name on the license appears as it is in the story.

⁴⁰ The direct translation in English is “Your face is lucky to me!”

⁴¹ A special Islamic ritual prayer for guidance in choosing the best option in practical matters.

⁴² “Thank you” in Bengali

⁴³ “Thank you” in Arabic

⁴⁴ Iraq Ministry of Health in the Ba'ath government (prior to 2003)

⁴⁵ “I don't know” in Bengali

⁴⁶ An Arabic term meaning “deep understanding” or “full comprehension.” The process of gaining knowledge of Islam through jurisprudence.

⁴⁷ Iraq invaded Kuwait on Aug. 2, 1990, after Iraq accused Kuwait of stealing oil by performing “slant drilling” onto Iraqi territory, and after Kuwait refused to forgive Iraq’s enormous debt incurred during the Iran-Iraq War. The invasion resulted in Iraq’s 7-month occupation of Kuwait, the First Gulf War and the imposition of heavy sanctions by the United Nations only four days after the invasion.

⁴⁸ Holy Qur’an, Surat Al-Baqarah, 2:88

⁴⁹ Um-Omar, Rashad’s familiar name, literally means “Mother of Omar” in Arabic.

⁵⁰ See endnote 4.

⁵¹ Medication that prevents or reduces a fever by lowering body temperature from a raised state, but will not affect normal body temperature if the patient does not have a fever.

⁵² A round clay or metal oven with a large, open top used mostly for baking Arabic flatbread.

⁵³ The 2003 invasion of Iraq took place March 19–May 1, 2003, and was known as the Iraq War or Operation Iraqi Freedom. It was primarily a U.S.-initiated aggressive action, although the U.K., Australia and Poland played roles. The Allied Forces involved in the action did not have the endorsement of the United Nations. The stated aim was to invade Iraq, take control of the capital (which it did on April 9, 2003) and topple Saddam Hussein’s regime. The U.S. Congress endorsed the offensive when supposed evidence was discovered proving the possibility that the Hussein regime was hiding weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). This was seen as a continuation of issues from the First Gulf War in 1991, although the alleged WMDs were never found. President Bush began drawing up plans for the invasion two weeks after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York.

⁵⁴ About 100 U.S. dollars

⁵⁵ According to the CIA World Factbook, there were less than 500 cases of AIDS in 2003. The adult prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS was 0.1 percent in 2001. Iraq ranked 151 (1 being the highest) out of 163 countries surveyed for prevalence in 2003.

⁵⁶ There is little current data on the situation (most statistics are pre-2003). But many social changes in Iraqi society indicate a rise in communicable disease since 2003. Dr. Zaydan had seen this rise herself in the community of Abu Ghraib as early as 2005. There could be many reasons for this, including the bombing of the Al Tuatha hospital by the Americans during the invasion, after which the surviving patients left the hospital on their own and went back to their families. Also relevant is the increasingly accepted practice of Muta’a, a Shi’a custom of short-term marriage (sometimes for just one day) that has led to a specific type of prostitution and promiscuity. Iraq’s current lack of controls and increasingly open borders could also be a factor in addition to interactions between soldiers and civilians and overall unsanitary conditions.

⁵⁷ Holy Qur’an, Al-Maeda verse 32

⁵⁸ “The Freedom” in Arabic

⁵⁹ Arabic call to prayer

⁶⁰ These individuals would later be called *Al Hawasim*, “those who became thieves.”

⁶¹ “Thanks be to God” in Arabic

⁶² Oh the white moon rose over us/ From the valley of Wada/ And we owe it to show gratefulness/ When the call is to Allah/ When the call is to Allah.

⁶³ “Grandmother” (Nameer’s mom) in Arabic

⁶⁴ A traditional Iraqi food of grape leaves, onion, eggplant and green pepper, filled with rice and meat and cooked with tomato paste.

⁶⁵ It is estimated that by 1991, more than 20 percent of young Iraqi women were widows. Laws passed at the beginning of the Iran-Iraq War allowed for widow compensations, but with the collapse of the Iraqi economy by the mid-1990s, most compensations could not be met by the government. Source: Al-Jawaheri, Yasmin Husein. *Women in Iraq: The Gender Impact of International Sanctions*, pg. 104.

⁶⁶ 25 U.S. dollars

⁶⁷ Also called Eid Al Fitr, the holiday takes place in the days right after Ramadan.

⁶⁸ “God rest him” in Arabic

⁶⁹ “Elder home” in Arabic

⁷⁰ These men were most likely members of the former Blackwater USA security force, now known as Xe Services LLC, a private military company and the largest of the U.S. State Department’s three private security contractors. Blackwater played a key role during the Iraq War: In 2003, its first high-profile contract was a \$27.7 million deal to guard L. Paul Bremer, the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, and in 2006, it was contracted to protect foreign diplomats at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. More recently, the Obama administration awarded Xe Services a quarter-billion dollar contract to work for the U.S. State Department and the CIA in Afghanistan. Source: CBS News Investigates. “Blackwater Firm Gets \$120M Gov’t Contract.” June 18, 2010. www.cbsnews.com/8301-31727_162-20008238-10391695.html

⁷¹ The transitional government set up by the United States and its allies following the fall of Saddam Hussein’s government in 2003. It was led by L. Paul Bremer following the invasion and had powers in all three branches of government. It was dissolved in June 2004.

⁷² A traditional Iraqi spicy rice dish covered with nuts, fried potato, cooked carrot and meat.

⁷³ Nongovernmental Organization

⁷⁴ Fallujah-Iraq War 2003. Source: Fattah, Hala. *A Brief History of Iraq*, pg. 255.

⁷⁵ U.S. forces believed that the assailants were part of the “insurgency” and had retreated to Fallujah to hide. This justification was used to begin a siege of the city shortly after to find them. Many members of the Iraqi Governance Council were encouraging negotiations between the U.S. military and leadership in Fallujah to curb an all-out military attack on the city and were outraged by the violence occurring against citizens by U.S.

troops. The men that committed the crime were never found. Source: Associated Press. “Anger Grows on Iraqi Governing Council.” April 9, 2004.

⁷⁶ According to Fallujah’s compensation commissioner, 36,000 of the city’s 50,000 homes were destroyed in Operation Al Fajr, which culminated in heavy bombing and the use of white phosphorus powder by the U.S. military in November 2004. Sixty schools and 65 mosques were also bombed. U.S. reports list the death toll as 600 to 2,000, mostly resistance fighters. Later reports filed with Iraqi NGOs and medical workers place the toll at closer to 4,000 to 6,000, with a large number being women and children. Mike Marqusee states in his *Guardian* article, “U.S. sources claimed between 600-6,000 insurgents were holed up in the city—which means that the vast majority of the remaining inhabitants were non-combatants.” Sources: Marqusee, Mike. *The Guardian*. “A Name that Lives in Infamy.” Nov. 9, 2005. www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/nov/10/usa.iraq; USA Today.com. “Fallujah death toll for week more than 600.” April 11, 2004. www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2004-04-11-fallujah-casualties_x.htm; GlobalSecurity.org. “Fallujah.” www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/fallujah.htm

⁷⁷ Fallujah is often called “The City of Mosques” with more than 200 mosques in and around the area (pre-2004 statistic).

⁷⁸ The 2010 study “Cancer, Infant Mortality and Birth Sex-Ratio in Fallujah, Iraq 2005-2009” found that “there had been a 38-fold increase in leukemia, a 10-fold increase in female breast cancer,” significant increases in lymphoma and brain tumors in adults and a disproportionate ratio of females to males being born in Fallujah since 2005. The study also found that the rate of genetic damage in many surveyed pointed to some use of uranium during the November 2004 bombing raid of the city. Source: Cockburn, Patrick. “Toxic Legacy of U.S. Assault on Fallujah ‘Worse than Hiroshima.’” *The Independent*. July 24, 2010. www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/toxic-legacy-of-us-assault-on-fallujah-worse-than-hiroshima-2034065.html

⁷⁹ See endnote 78.

⁸⁰ See endnote 9, as well as: Popham, Peter and Anne Penketh. “U.S. Intelligence Classified White Phosphorus as ‘Chemical Weapon.’” *The Independent*. www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-intelligence-classified-white-phosphorus-as-chemical-weapon-516523.html; BBC News. “U.S. Used White Phosphorus in Iraq.” Nov. 16, 2005. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4440664.stm>

⁸¹ White cloth used for burial in Islam; see Occupation section on page 55 in this narrative.

⁸² See endnote 31.

⁸³ See endnote 80, as well as: Simpson, John. “Fallujah Children’s Genetic Damage.” BBC News Video Clip. July 10, 2010. www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-10721562

⁸⁴ Head covering worn by Arab men (and some Kurds) made of cloth; patterns and colors are connected to tribal affiliations for some.

⁸⁵ A long robe-like garment, also called a thawb, that is the traditional dress of Arab men.

⁸⁶ In Islamic culture, Haji denotes a person who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca. It is also a term of respect given to elders.

⁸⁷ Sahi Bukhari, Bk 54, Hadith 538

⁸⁸ 16,000 U.S. dollars

⁸⁹ See endnote 7.

⁹⁰ See endnote 41.

⁹¹ Dogs are seen as unclean in traditional Islamic teachings, as referenced in several hadiths. Being in the company of or allowing contact with dogs is generally discouraged.

⁹² Iraqi brand of toasted bread

⁹³ The meeting place of members of the Quaker religion. Quakers are doctrinally against war of any kind and historically have been active in social and political activities, especially against war. Quaker Friends Meeting Houses are often the site for secular humanitarian and peace-related activities and events.

⁹⁴ See endnote 15.

⁹⁵ It is still the custom in Iraq that the father names the child.