

VOICES

FOR CREATIVE NONVIOLENCE

July 2013

Dear Friends,

One of the least desirable tasks in the APV house - the Kabul home of the Afghan Peace Volunteers - is heaping bags of trash onto a wheelbarrow and hauling them to the local dump. During my last visit to Afghanistan it was Ghulamai, the youngest in the group, who agreed to make the trip.

As he pushed the garbage through the crowded, uneven sidewalks and streets, four very young Pashto boys, riding bicycles, approached him. These boys were working as trash collectors, picking up neighborhood refuse later to be sifted through for salvage. Ghulamai offered to stop and let them pick through the plastic bags in his wheelbarrow for anything they might find to be of value.

Grateful, the child workers made quick work of the contents of our waste bags. While they sorted, they pointed at a high rise "poppy palace" visible from the neighborhood. "Look at how the people in that castle live," one of them commented, "and look at how we live." The boys didn't find much of value in our trash: some bits of bread, some paper that could be used for fuel.

It was a young trash collector who, in a very real sense, started the Afghan Peace Volunteers. In 2002, a Pashto youngster named Najib was collecting trash in a Quetta refugee camp, when he met our friend Hakim, a Singaporean medical doctor who at the time was in the camp doing relief work.

"I began as a humanitarian worker," Hakim tells us, "nine months after September 11, having realized that my

medical training did not sufficiently educate me about life."

"Impoverished young Afghans, who have a harsher life than youth elsewhere, changed my outlook with their peaceful resilience and love. It was in 2002 that I met Najib, a Pashtun orphan who collected trash to survive and whose grandma got angry when I asked Najib to smile for my camera. 'Why are you asking him to smile?' she demanded. 'Najib has no reason to smile.'"

Starting with that photo, Hakim began to assemble a website full of the photos and stories of the young people he met in Afghanistan - called "Our Journey to Smile" (ourjourneytosmile.com). And that was the seed that grew into the Afghan Peace Volunteers.

On the entrance wall of the APV home are random sketches, part of an art project still in formation. The smallest is done in pencil and shows only a boy's eyes. I felt haunted by that particular sketch, and for a few days my young friends told me to keep guessing whose eyes they were. I knew I had seen those eyes before. "Who was one of the first to be part of our history?" Abdulhai asked me. Immediately, I realized it was a sketch from that first photo Hakim had taken of Najib.

Every portrait of an Afghan living under U.S. occupation, under the consequences of U.S. warfare, has eyes to look back at us. The palaces and elaborate military compounds that loom over these youngsters are not invisible to them. We should be haunted by the eyes and the words of the child workers whose survival means digging through trash, and our

troubled feelings should propel us to seek a different world for them.

Soon they may be picking through our tanks. According to Ernesto Londoño of the Washington Post, the U.S. military is "in the process of junking \$7 billion worth of military equipment as it exits Afghanistan. The Pentagon found it would be too costly to ship the no-longer-needed equipment back to the United States, and most of it can't be given to the Afghan government or an allied nation. So the military is destroying most of it and selling it on the Afghan scrap market for a few cents per pound."

"We're making history doing what we're doing here," said Maj. Gen. Kurt Stein, the general in charge of Afghan drawdown. "This is the largest retrograde mission in history."

This newsletter, which includes activists' reports from various parts of the world, points toward other ways to "make history," prodding us toward ongoing dissent.

Najib's willingness to smile, in spite of facing a bleak and hard life, was an act of dissent which we hope will guide our future actions. We thank you, most sincerely, for all the encouragement, support and solidarity you've given us.

Sincerely,
Kathy Kelly on behalf of Voices Co-ordinators Buddy Bell, Cathy Breen, Josh Brollier, Nicole Heiden, Gerald Paoli, and Brian Terrell

VOICES
FOR CREATIVE NONVIOLENCE
1249 W Argyle St #2
Chicago, IL 60640
vcnv.org
info@vcnv.org
773.878.3815

Wardak Nightmares

by Jake Donaldson
June 2, 2013

On a peace delegation to Afghanistan to visit the Afghan Peace Volunteers, I found myself one dusty afternoon in early May in Kabul sitting across the room from three men from Wardak Province, one of Afghanistan's most intense areas of fighting. The men came to share their stories.

Two of the men — Abdul Samát and Hayatullah — were perhaps in their 50s or 60s, and were dressed in traditional Afghan garb. The third man — Roohulah — was younger and wearing a white shirt and sport coat. After introductions, the men decided that Roohulah should be the first person to speak.

"I have so many things to say to you," he started. "So many stories. I don't know where to begin." He was choked up already, eyes red and swollen, and I could almost see the lump in his throat. "My own sister was killed in the war. But that is not what angered me the most. I am most angry about losing my cousin. He had a wife and two small children, and now that he is gone, they have no one to care for them."

Roohulah then told the story of how his cousin and a good friend were visiting family members one snowy evening when they heard the ominous, familiar sound of an American helicopter landing nearby. Frightened, the cousin and a friend decided to run home to be with their families. But when they neared their village, they realized that the Americans were there already, so the two men decided to continue onto the next village, where they would stay until the raid was finished.

But when they cut out into the open, crossing a dry riverbed, they were spotted from the air by a drone or helicopter and a bomb was dropped that killed them both. The remains of their bodies were found the next day by following their tracks in the snow.

Roohulah then told of the home the Americans had decided to raid that same night. An old man was in the house with his nephew — both of

them civilians who had recently taken a loan out from a rich Taliban man. A drone overhead had spotted the visitor a few days earlier, leading the Americans to believe these men were supporting the Taliban.

"But they wanted nothing to do with the Taliban," Roohulah said. "The man had merely come to their house to collect the money that was due to him."

When the Americans burst into the house that night, the younger man pleaded with them to take him instead of his uncle, as his uncle was ill. In response, they killed the young man and took the older man into custody, releasing him the next day when they learned the truth behind the Taliban visit.



Jake, some of the Afghan Peace Volunteers and several people living in a refugee camp in Kabul: They fled from violence in Wardak province.

Two days later, however, the old man was killed when a bomb exploded on his motorcycle while he was going to the village funeral for the three men who had died. The village people all believed it was the Americans who planted the bomb.

After Roohulah finished this story, I asked him and the other men how many people being killed in Wardok are civilians. Abdul Samát, who was sitting next to Roohulan, responded to me with force.

"Almost all of them," he said. "Last year, we counted the number of deaths over a four month period. 91 people were killed. Only three were Taliban. In fact, there are only 20 Taliban living in our small district now. Why don't the Americans just kill them and leave the civilians alone? They are so bad at killing Taliban, and so good

at killing civilians, that we have come to believe the Americans are supporting the Taliban, not fighting them. It is as if both sides just want to kill innocent people."

When Abdul Samát said this, I was confused. The people believe Americans are supporting the Taliban, not fighting them? Our translator — a strong Afghan-American woman who has spoken extensively with people in the war zones — read the confusion on my face and told me that not only did I hear her correctly, but that this belief is widespread among Afghans in areas of more intense fighting.

Abdul Samát then told a story of his own. "One time, the Americans came to our village for several days," he said. "To protect themselves, they used as their base the elementary school. The children were their shields."

When I heard that American soldiers were using children as shields in war, my heart sank. He then explained that the Americans also closed down the village clinic and used it to stockpile weapons, warning the people when they left that anyone who entered the clinic would be killed.

By this time, Roohulah and Abdul Samát both needed to leave; but Hayatullah was able to stay and speak further with us.

"When Afghans speak the truth, our lives are in danger," he began. "But I am an old man now, and am no longer afraid to die."

Hayatullah told us how one in four people from the Wardok province are now refugees, having fled from the violence. Hayatullah is one of these refugees, now living in Kabul, and he told us why.

One night, when he lived in Wardok, the Americans raided his home, killing his brother and two nieces. His brother's name was Nurogar, and he was shot in the face while peering out the window during the raid. His nieces were named Shakila and Ammzai. They were young women, and Ammzai was a school teacher. Both of them were shot in the head.

“Our house was next door to a Taliban house,” Hayatullah told us. “With their night goggles and all their fancy surveillance equipment, how could they not know that they were entering the house of civilians? How could they not see my nieces’ long hair and realize they were women?”

The next day, Hayatullah, who is a journalist, wrote a summary of the incident and sent it out to local newspapers and radio stations. He also knew that all night raids are filmed by one of the soldiers, and demanded that the video of the raid be released. When the word spread, an official investigation was carried out by the government and NATO forces.

“The investigation concluded that the soldiers raided our home because they were being shot at by us,” said Hayatullah, with anger on his face. “This was a lie. Nor was the video of the incident ever released.”

Since this visit, I have tried to reconcile the stories of these men with what we see in America’s mainstream media. It is clear to me that what we hear in our media is far from the reality on the ground. I learned from the Afghan people that for every Taliban who is killed by NATO forces, many civilians are also killed. As a result, the Afghan people have only grown more angry with America. If our leaders truly want to make Afghanistan — and the world — a better, safer place, then they need to listen to these marginalized voices and start thinking about solutions other than military intervention.

Sharing a Meal with Qasim El Sabti

By Cathy Breen
May 29, 2013

“My gun is my art, the bullets are the colors.” – Qasim El Sabti

“Don’t be alarmed if you hear an explosion” Ahmed said to me. It was not yet 8am. “A bomb has been found nearby, and it will be detonated.”

Later in the morning, we were going to visit an artist at his gallery. I felt the need to be nourished and uplifted by beauty, by the arts. Although I had never met the artist personally, I felt I knew him already. Maybe six or seven years ago I went to an art exhibition of Iraqi art at a gallery in New York City,

actually very close to where I live. Of all the artwork on display, Qasim El Sabti’s pieces were the ones I could not forget. And now I was to meet him. “You must come to eat mosguf,” he had told me over the phone the day before. Mosguf is a dish of fish cooked over an open fire.



Qasim Al-Sabti

The night before we heard that militias had attempted to take several of the main highways in Baghdad. As we drove down one of the highways on our way to the gallery, we spotted a tower of billowing black smoke up ahead. There was a charred car still burning, and firemen were trying to put out the fire. It was apparently a car bomb. Tragically, this is the reality in Iraq these days, not only in Baghdad.

When we met with Qasim, he spoke about another fire, back in 2003 right after the U.S. forces entered Baghdad. “I was sitting on a balcony watching the American soldiers pass by in the street. Moments later there was a huge fire and I went to see what had happened. The fire was in the library of the Academy of Fine Arts.” This was a place very dear to his heart as it was there that he had studied. The library shelves had been emptied and the books had been set on fire. His beloved Academy had become another victim of war. “I felt like a fireman desperately in need of finding survivors,” said Qasim. He noticed some soot-covered books that had seemed to survive intact, but when he picked one up, burning his fingers, the text fell to the floor. The pages scattered around him. Holding only the cover, he was fixated by the little details of life that filled the inside cover: strips of cotton, some Arabic verses scribbled in pencil, notes written by the librarian. “My imagination was reborn. Here I found the essence of life deeply inscribed as signs of one book’s extensive journey,” Qasim told us. “I was filled with a new sense of life and hope.”

“Like the fireman realizing that some victims were still breathing, I collected as many covers as I could.”

Back in his studio he went immediately to work with “passionate fingers” to transform them. It was here that his art style took a dramatic turn. “People usually read the text, but I wanted to transfer the text to the cover, to help people understand what happened. After World War II there were art experiments made from residuals of war, like Hiroshima for example.”

In an exhibition of Qasim’s work in Japan in 2008, a Japanese man stood silent for a long time, his gaze fixated on one of the art pieces. “Mr. Qasim, I see what you mean.”

“This happened to our land. It seems my work comes out of tragedy,” Qasim continued. Under the economic sanctions he had to sell 400 of his books in order to buy milk for his children. “Art began to die under sanctions....bad colors, bad covers.... not durable. Specific colors were stopped as they ‘could be used for dual purposes.’”

“I am a Bedouin at heart. My decision to stay is a kind of resistance against the dirty war. ...It wasn’t Saddam. He could have been taken out at a parade. There was a plan to destroy my country.”



Students Against Sectarianism gathered on campuses across Iraq in May, 2013

“The new style wasn’t premeditated, it came from the soul....a message for others outside of the covers. Covers are like people, they need a cure, ...respect.” He struggled for words. “We must love books because books are part of Iraqi culture, when combined with love and feeling, others will find what I mean.”

Now and then our host, a gentle yet forceful man, rose to tend the mosguf he was preparing. I felt privileged to be among his guests. I am sad that my time in Iraq is coming to a close. Let us hope and pray that the Iraqi spirit may remain strong and resolute as Iraqi people struggle for peace.

Bradley Manning Should Win the Nobel Peace Prize

As a peace prize winner myself, I am nominating Manning for this honor for his work to help end the Iraq War and other conflicts.

by Mairead Maguire
Northern Ireland, June 30, 2013

Peace is more than simply the absence of war; it is the active creation of something better. Alfred Nobel recognized this when he created alongside those for chemistry, literature, medicine and physics, an annual prize for outstanding contributions in peace. Nobel's foresight is a reminder to us all that peace must be created, maintained, and advanced, and it is indeed possible for one individual to have an extraordinary impact. For this year's prize, I have chosen to nominate US Army Pfc Bradley Manning, for I can think of no one more deserving. His incredible disclosure of secret documents to Wikileaks helped end the Iraq War, and may have helped prevent further conflicts elsewhere.

I recently visited Syria, where I met a few of the millions of refugees and internally displaced people whose lives have been torn apart by the ongoing conflict in that country. I learned from those I spoke to, both within the government and in opposition groups, that while there is a legitimate and long-overdue movement for peace and non-violent reform in Syria, the worst acts of violence are being perpetrated by outside groups. Extremist groups from around the world have converged upon Syria, bent on turning this conflict into one of ideological hatred.

In recent years this would have spelled an undeniable formula for United States intervention. However, the world has changed in the years since Manning's whistleblowing –

the Middle East especially. In Bahrain, Tunisia, Egypt, and now Turkey, advocates of democracy have joined together to fight against their own governments' control of information, and used the free-flowing data of social media to help build enormously successful non-violent movements. Some activists of what has come to be known as the Arab Spring have even directly credited Bradley Manning, and the information he disclosed, as an inspiration for their struggles.

In a Middle East newly dedicated to democratic flow of information, those who would commit human rights violations can more easily be held accountable. If not for whistleblower Bradley Manning, the world still might not know of how US forces committed covert crimes in the name of spreading democracy in Iraq, killing innocent civilians in incidents such as the one depicted in the "Collateral Murder" video, and supporting Iraqi prisoner torture. Now, those who would support foreign intervention in the Middle East know that every action would be scrutinized under international human rights law. Clearly, this is for the best. International peacekeepers, as well as experts and civilians inside Syria, are nearly unanimous in their

view that United States involvement would only worsen this conflict.

Around the world, Manning is hailed as a peacemaker and a hero. His nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize is a reflection of this. Yet at his home in America, Manning stands trial for charges of espionage and "aiding the enemy". This should not be considered a refutation of his candidacy – rather, he is in good company. Burmese politician Aung San Suu Kyi and Chinese writer Liu Xiaobo were each awarded the prize in recent years while imprisoned by their home countries.

Last week at Manning's trial, the public learned that at the time Manning released his information, WikiLeaks stated they wanted to publish "the concealed documents or recordings most sought after by a country's journalists, activists, historians, lawyers, police or human rights investigators". Manning's disclosures to Wikileaks only "aided the enemy," as his prosecutors charge, if the enemy is international cooperation and peace itself.

Manning is the only one on trial, yet what of those who committed the atrocities he revealed? The United States, the most militarized country



Mairead Maguire with Basir Bita of the Afghan Peace Volunteers in Kabul, Afghanistan, December, 2012. Photo: Patrick Kennelly

Final Day of Covering Ground to Ground the Drones

on earth, should stand for something better than war. Its government must be open to "debates, discussions and reforms" concerning its foreign policy, to use Manning's own words. By heeding Pfc Bradley Manning's message on the importance of transparency, America's government can once again rebuild its image in the eyes of the world, and spread democracy not through foreign invasions, but through setting a strong example.

I hope American leaders will embrace the U.S. constitution, and base their national and foreign policies on ethical values, human rights and international law.~

The Path of Nonviolent Change Begins with One Step

Excerpts from the Walk Journal of Diane Lopez Hughes

Day One, 6/10/13

With 14 other hardy souls, today I embarked on a 20-day Walk, Covering Ground to Ground the Drones, from Rock Island Arsenal to Des Moines National Guard.

Day Two, 6/11/13

Before I left Springfield, when I told a friend about the walk she told me about a former soldier she knows who actually deployed drones from a remote location in the US (similar to what the Iowa National Guard will soon be asked to do.) He is now suffering from PTSD, and related that he is feeling extreme guilt over the many innocent lives that he believes just happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time.

What would our local officials do if innocents were being bombed indiscriminately? How would our communities react? Why should we expect people from other countries to behave any differently?

Day Four, 6/13/13

This Walk is a wonderful way to see the lovely green state of Iowa and to



meet some of her friendly denizens. I could swear we're actually seeing the corn grow. We're definitely noticing some of the not-so-pleasant odors of an agricultural state, like those emanating from livestock farms. We also did see some very cute pygmy goats this afternoon; and inviting barns; and patches of early summer flowers with colors and shapes that lifted our spirits.

Most folks waved, many drivers gave us wide berth as we travel the long roads. Even the buffalo gnats seemed to have pity; or maybe it was the lovely breezes that kept them from landing.

So, with such a lovely experience here In Iowa, I imagine the wonderful people and flora and fauna existing in the places that our government bombs without seeming to care about the cost in lives and environmental consequences. Other lands are beautiful, too. As are their people.

Day Six, 6/15/13

It was our first day of real rain: a cleansing, cooling rainfall, softened for us by the canopy of trees through which we traveled. Stories of some aches and pains were shared: after 75

miles of walking it's no surprise that our bodies might complain in some fashion.

What physical pains we experience can't come close to the destruction, dismemberment and death - and severe psychological scars - wrought by the bombs from the drones guided by soldiers who, when they leave their shifts at the end of a day of surveillance and strikes, go home to mow the lawn, to tuck in their kids at bedtime. This, while children in Afghanistan and Pakistan and too many other countries are afraid to fall asleep because of their real and personal experiences with the drones.



Buddy Bell and Maya Evans in Mitchellville

Day Nine, 6/18/13

the sky
so lovely, breezes bountiful
and clouds like cotton galaxies

why must we fill them
with drones meant
to harm
to kill
to hinder any progress that could
make enemies into friends

the sky is much too lovely
and we are far too loving
to accept such an end.

Day Eleven, 6/20/13

from the Iowa Veteran's for Peace
excellent handout:

"The Air Force has announced plans to have the Des Moines-based 132nd Air Wing of the Iowa National Guard pilot MQ-9 Reaper drones."

"The MQ-9 is a larger, heavier, and more capable aircraft than the earlier MQ-1 Predator; it can be controlled by the same ground systems used to control MQ-1s. The Reaper has a 950-shaft-horsepower (712 kW) turboprop engine, far more powerful than the Predator's 115 hp (86 kW) piston engine. The power increase allows the Reaper to carry 15 times more ordnance payload and cruise at almost three times the speed of the MQ-1. The aircraft is monitored and controlled by aircrew in the Ground Control Station (GCS), including weapons employment. The aircraft can also fly pre-programmed routes autonomously."

Meanwhile, the human cost is beyond comprehension. Imagine yourself in the place of a child, woman, or man who fears for their very survival....

Day Fourteen, 6/23/13

We reached the end of our road at the Iowa Air National Guard. Many folks were there to greet us, and, more importantly, to raise their voices together to call for a halt to drone warfare in their name. In our name.

Over the past days we have grown a lovely and powerful community. I've never experienced anything like it. These many hours spent together have strengthened my resolve to educate

more folks on the insidious horror of drone warfare. And my respect and admiration for each of the walkers - from the hardy folks who've walked each day to those who joined us for a shorter time - have grown with each step.

Growing community. Wherever we are, whoever we are, why not try the radical path of planning and acting together with others to create nonviolent means for change? It begins with one person taking one step, then another, in solidarity...

"Transparently" Brazen:

The U.S. Drone Program Is a Criminal Disgrace

By Buddy Bell

Governments have historically shown a pattern of trying to take actions to benefit the people with most influence at the expense of those who have less. They have been able to do this with varying degrees of effectiveness, but in all cases, somehow they must address the will of the public who are opposed to being used and cheated. This is accomplished using various means, often some combination of induced ignorance, propaganda, violence, and intimidation.

The U.S. government is not an exception: moneyed interests have continued buying influence in the Obama administration just as they did before he was in office. The current drone policy is necessarily a reflection of what people with the most influence want. We might speculate on the reasons why they want drones—profits in manufacturing drones and arms come to mind, along with the enhanced ability to intimidate other countries and subordinate their markets— but the crucial question for people concerned with human rights is how the government is able to mitigate public opinion around this issue. We may be able to compel a change in policy if we can effectively interfere with the methods.

From the reluctance of government to release classified documents, it is clear that control of information is a

decisive component of the permanence of the drone program. This reluctance is not just demonstrated in the Office of the President, but also appears when Congress hesitates to issue subpoenas, and when judges issue reckless rulings, like one which says that U.S. citizens or organizations may not pursue legal injunctions against future damages related to drones because these programs are still classified, and the potential plaintiffs will not have been authorized to know about any infractions committed against them. The sheer arrogance of such actions has frayed the ropes holding down public opinion. From the *New York Times* to the *Daily Show*, government pretenses are openly mocked.

It turns out that is not enough. Even when government corruption is laid bare, for various reasons—intimidated concern for safety, relative ease in avoiding controversy, long-suffering acceptance that nothing can be done to change government policy—many people still accept the narrative that drones effectively eliminate those who would otherwise eventually carry out attacks in the United States, while putting less U.S. troops at risk. Never mind that drone crimes are so blatantly heinous and cold that militia groups are constantly able to recruit fighters by invoking them. "Homeland security" has always held a subordinate position to profit-making and monopolistic control of markets.

What is still suppressed in U.S. popular media and narrative orthodoxy are stories about how drones affect the people on the ground in the countries where they are used. This missing link is crucial. With these bits of information, most people in the U.S. would not only be able to dissolve mainstream misconceptions about the drone program; they would also make the relational connections to the issue that people from many other parts of the world have already been making.

Although people in the U.S. imagined hearing the crack of a rifle splitting the air in a room full of Connecticut school kids, did they ever hear the screech of a buckling tin roof and the smash of 11 children's bodies crushed to death in Afghanistan?

Although they have taken pride in the courage of the spontaneous civilian responders to the Boston wounded, have they ever been in awe of the courage of Pakistani civilians helping a wounded member of wedding party targeted by a drone even though they knew they risked being targeted in what the U.S. calls a “double-tap” strike?

Although many (but not enough) people agree it is wrong for a police officer to make a traffic stop based solely on the perceived race of the driver or cultural markers such as the presence of a rosary on the rear-view mirror, are they ever faced with the criminal disorder of letting age, gender, and the presence of a gun— in a region where adolescent and adult males typically carry guns— become the basis of a decision on whether to fire a missile to kill a person?

Although they think drones keep U.S. soldiers safe from the battlefield, have they ever determined the psychological effect of actually being able to see the result of the pressed button: limbs flying and the spatter of blood?

Although a mother in the U.S. takes steps to protect her child from danger and injury, does she realistically consider the possibility of another country dropping a bomb that removes that child’s legs by the force of the explosion or that burns away the sweet smile that afterward only exists in her memory?

It is important to remind members of the U.S. public that the use of drones is a crime committed against many innocent, courageous, compassionate people. Polls show that support for the drone program is still a majority, but a diminishing one. The more activists are able to chip away from that support, the sooner will they have power to affect actual change.~



Workers cutting firewood, taking a break. Kabul, Afghanistan.
Photo: Johnny Barber

Announcements:

Reparations Now!

Please stay tuned as Voices explores an “interstate teach-in” about the moral imperative to provide reparations to the people of Afghanistan and Iraq. We are aiming to visit cities along a route from Chicago to New York City this autumn, traveling by train and bus. In Afghanistan and Iraq, enormous sums are being spent on dismantling and reconfiguring the U.S. military apparatus while ordinary people still struggle to find secure neighborhoods, clean drinking water, adequate food and basic infrastructure after decades of crippling warfare.

If you are interested to help organize or participate in the project, please contact us at info@vcnv.org.

More Than A Story

A new book of poetry by David Smith-Ferri, is to be published September, 2013.

More Than A Story is comprised of poems about the work of Voices for Creative Nonviolence in Afghanistan and in Gaza. It portrays both the effects of war and occupation as well as the remarkable strength and resilience of Afghan and Palestinian people. The book will have a foreword by Ann Wright, retired US Colonel and peace activist. For more information, contact David at dsmithferri@gmail.com.

VOICES

FOR CREATIVE NONVIOLENCE

1249 W Argyle St
Chicago, IL 60640

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We didn't intend to go to the bomb site. But as we had already planned a day to clean the neighborhood streets, it became quite natural to clean around that area and along the street. We recognize the pain caused by the bombing, both the loss of lives and injuries, and also the damage to the environment. We ask for healing. We want the place to be healed. We also want to make a statement: whatever it is the powers that be want for Afghans, we want something different. We don't agree with their violent methods.

—Afghan Peace Volunteers, June 21, 2013

Statement

By David Smith-Ferri

After a roadside bomb exploded shattering every window in our home and shaking the foundations of this neighborhood, our wild hearts kicked and reared and pulled at their tethers in terror. We cut their ropes and when they leaped the corral fence, we followed them to the bomb site only a few dozen meters away. With straw brooms, we swept the glass and garbage off the street. And for a moment, in silence, our hearts beating in sync, we circled the bomb crater remembering those who were killed or injured, and also in silent protest.

Afterward, without any need for ropes or tethers, we led our hearts home.