

## Update: Shaymaa's Story Continued

By Marie Braun and Mary Beaudoin

The end of the Iraq war occasioned few reflections on the scale of destruction we have wrought there. As is our habit, the discussion focused on the costs to America in blood and treasure, the false premises of war and the continuing challenges of instability in the region. What happened to the Iraqis was largely ignored . . . American political and military leaders, like the public, show little interest in non-American casualties.

Denial, after all, is politically convenient. Failing to consider the mortality figures, the refugees, the impoverished, the demolished hospitals and clean water systems and schools is to deny, in effect, that the war ever happened.

—John Tirman, Opinion Page, New York Times, Jan. 4, 2012.



“The Forgotten,” from the series, “Warchestra” by Sundus Abdul Hadi. Multi-media, warchestra.com

Those who have forgotten us, when will you remember us?  
When will we cross your mind?  
When will you help our situation?  
Love, you have left us with no explanation; you shut the doors in our face and abandoned us.  
Where did you come from on the day you set your eyes on us?  
Where did you find us?  
Your eyes have scarred us.  
You who have forgotten us, when will you remember us?

—lyrics of a traditional Iraqi folk song (text in the painting)

This is an update on the story of one Iraq mother. The original story was printed in the February 2011 WAMM newsletter.

Shaymaa Abdulkadham Hasan first traveled to the United States in 2010, with her eight-year-old son, Mustafa, who was severely injured when he came into contact with a high-powered electrical cable that had been connected to a nearby factory, dangerously close to the family home. He lost his right leg below the knee and three toes on his left foot, and, in addition, sustained serious burns on his left arm. His ankle was also seriously scarred and his arm hung limp at his side. With the Iraqi medical systems destroyed during twenty years of sanctions and war, Mustafa could not receive appropriate medical care and the needed prosthesis.

Here is why: According to a study, conducted by the Disabled Peoples' International in collaboration with the Iraqi Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Health, there are more than one million disabled people in Iraq. The Institute for the Rehabilitation of Disabled War Victims deals with 100,000 Iraqi citizens who have lost limbs. Left-over unexploded ordinance in the form of cluster bombs and land mines continue to create additional victims today. In September of last year, Abdul Nassir Kamel, Director of the Rehabilitation and Prevention of Disability Department at the Ministry of Health, stated that ten plants in Iraq have begun producing prostheses; however, production is far less than the actual need, estimated at 20,000 prostheses per year, and adequate materials are frequently not available.

Mustafa was fortunate in that the Muslim Peacemaker Teams in Najaf, Iraq, and St. Joan of Arc Church in Minneapolis, were able to bring him, with his mother, to Minnesota to receive medical care; several medical facilities and doctors graciously offered to provide treatment free of charge.



From the series, "After Iraq" by Sama Alshaibi, photographer and filmmaker, born in Basra, Iraq. [samaalshaibi.com](http://samaalshaibi.com)

Following extensive surgery on his left arm through Mayo Clinic in Rochester, and surgery on his right leg and the fitting of a new prosthesis at Shriners Hospital in Minneapolis, Shaymaa and Mustafa returned home, expecting to return to the Twin Cities for a new prosthesis and further surgery on his arm.

It had been very difficult for Shaymaa to be away from her family and she worried daily about their well being, sometimes exhibiting outward signs of anxiety and depression. During the time that she and Mustafa were in the U.S., her four-year old son, Ali, was injured in a minor electrical accident. There was a fire at their home, necessitating her husband to move the family to his mother's house. While in the U.S, Shaymaa also learned that her husband's 20-year-old nephew had been kidnapped.

Mustafa had not been going to school in Iraq; however, during their stay in Minnesota, Mustafa attending Dowling School in Minneapolis. He loved going to school. Shaymaa's support group in Minnesota encouraged the idea of education for her children, especially for Mustafa because of his disability, which limited his choice of occupation (Iraq had a high literacy rate before it was attacked, but now 70% of school age children in Najaf are illiterate). Upon returning to Iraq, Mustafa was sent to a government school, but there are many problems with the school system in Iraq, including the fact that they use corporeal punishment. There also seems to be a lack of sensitivity to the injured; other students began to pick on Mustafa and he frequently came home with bruises. Because teachers were also not supportive, and they were concerned that there might be a setback in his recovery, Shaymaa and her husband took Mustafa out of school. The support group in Minnesota told them they would be willing to raise money so that Mustafa could go to a private school. When she and her husband met with the principal of a private school, the school refused to accept him because they did not want to be responsible for a child with his injuries. They referred him to a school that accepted children with mental disabilities. This made Shaymaa angry because she knew that such a school could not meet Mustafa's educational needs. And so he remained at home.

In the spring of 2011, Shaymaa's husband, Mohammed, was advised to have laser surgery on his eyes because his night vision wasn't good and as a taxi driver his vision was very important. But the surgery did not go well and he had to stay out of the bright sun for two months. Of course he was unable to work during this time, which had a negative effect on their financial situation.

And within five months of their return to Iraq, Mustafa was no longer able to wear his new prosthesis because a bone on the left side of his leg just below his knee was growing outward, making the prosthesis painful to wear. Shaymaa is a wonderful advocate for her children. Shaymaa called her sponsors in the U.S. and asked if they could return earlier than March of 2012, the expected date of her return, as she was anxious for Mustafa to have a new prosthesis. After several delays, including

Shaymaa having her appendix removed, they arrived back in the U.S. on January 30, 2012.

Upon their arrival in Minneapolis, we learned that while Shaymaa was in the hospital in Najaf, Mustafa had fallen six steps down the stairs of their home, causing injury to his nose and the loss of two permanent front teeth. He was taken to a hospital. After 12 hours, the family was advised that they could not treat him there and they sent them to another hospital. When they arrived at the second hospital, the doctor who was on call did not answer his page and they had to bring Mustafa to a clinic, where he was finally able to receive treatment that stopped the bleeding in his mouth. His nose required seven stitches; fortunately it was not broken.



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Shaymaa also tells us that her nephew who was kidnapped during her last stay in the U.S. is still missing, and presumed dead. His car was eventually found, but they could find no clues as to what happened to her nephew.

During the current visit, Mustafa went to Rochester for a follow-up visit relative to the skin graft on his left arm. The doctor was amazed at how well Mustafa is doing. The good news is that Mustafa does not need another serious operation on his arm this year, due primarily to his family’s persistence in following the regimen of

exercise ordered by the doctor last year. He can lift his formerly limp arm straight up in the air and out to his side; he can even wheel himself in a wheelchair with both hands.

His doctor at Shriners Hospital removed the bone spur on his right leg and Mustafa was fitted for a new prosthesis. Mustafa also returned to Dowling Elementary School for the length of their stay.

Life in Iraq continues to be very difficult. Problems that occur have exponentially serious consequences due to the destruction of the country, the breakdown of systems, and the fact that little has been rebuilt. Poverty, desperation and corruption are rampant through the land. Shaymaa does not hold out much hope for a future for Mustafa and her other five children, ages 3 to 15, if they remain in Iraq. She and her husband will continue to pursue plans to move to Turkey. There apparently is a large Iraqi population where they plan to live in Turkey and they have friends in the area. There are opportunities for better education and improved medical care for all their children and there would be work for Mohammed in a local marble factory. Shaymaa also thinks about applying to the United Nations for refugee status. She hopes to eventually emigrate somewhere— perhaps to the United States where Mustafa could get the medical treatment and the follow-up that he needs.

The struggle to survive and to try to provide for a more hopeful future for her children is never ending for Shaymaa.

Marie Braun is an active organizer against all war. She co-founded the Twin Cities Peace Campaign after traveling to Iraq during the Sanctions Period. Mary Beaudoin is the editor of the WAMM newsletter and member of Twin Cities Peace Campaign.