



Authoring Justice

Capstone Projects 2025

Tamana Farewar

Orphaned by Fate, devastated by the Taliban, and Sentenced to Life

A Story of heavy pain, wounds, and resilience of an Afghan father

Tamana Farewar

Choghadak District lies quietly on the fringes of Mazar-e-Sharif city, a place neither too distant to forget, nor too close to be changed by the city's stream. According to locals there, this place was named after owls that once lived among the ruins, creatures that made their home far from people. In my younger years, I often saw them in the old garden of our neighbor above the big and old Platanus tree. It is also said that the first khan of the Mongol Empire, Chagatai Khan, during one of his great military campaigns, once paused in the Choghadak briefly to rest. People there are mainly not well-educated but are busy with livelihood, shop keeping, agriculture, and handwork. It seems the lack of education and slow pace of modernization has not reduced the district's conservative and cultural values. The district might be one of the last areas where the municipality of Balkh province allocated time and resources to concrete the streets and valleys.

Almost at the end of its longest and smallest valley, where cars cannot reach, is a big house made of mud and clay with water furrows crossing it. This peaceful house, which is the most desired place to be, especially during the 40-degree summer of Mazar, belongs to an orphan boy who lost both his father and mother in early childhood. He was too young to discover the meaning of life, left alone and lost among pain and sorrow.

His name is Jamal, which means 'beauty', a name that suits him perfectly. He grew into a tall, well-proportioned young man with a bright, flawless good looking face with his appreciating thin, high-bridged nose. Of medium height, he had full, thick, connected eyebrows and a lean, well-toned body without a trace of extra fat. He can barely remember his parents faces, voices, or any memories. He went through many ups and downs in life to live on his own after all five of his elder sisters got married and separated. When his mother passed away, he was like a traumatized child who didn't know where to go, until his elder sister opened her arms to him.

Jamal remembers how her sister healed his pains and never took a risk that might hurt him. Even when he was a teenage boy, she would lift him up to put him on the donkey, to carry wheat to the mill for flour or to travel somewhere. A strong woman, both physically and spiritually, but this shelter didn't last long. Later, his sister was forced to immigrate to Pakistan with her family, and Jamal found himself back at the starting point, alone once again. And now after decades, he is no longer a little boy, but a retired teacher, broken by fate, punished by the system, the father of 13 children, and a grandfather in his early 80s, whose body and spirit are both severely broken after the diaspora and displacement of his children following the fall of Afghanistan in 2021.

In his time, over 80 years ago, education was a rarity for an Afghan orphan like him to pursue. But he knew that only education could save him from such a miserable life by bringing a light of identity and respect by his society. So, from the time his tiny hands could pick up objects, he worked, as a farmer, a daily wage worker, and a street vendor, while still attempting to follow school. When he was accepted into vocational training to become a schoolteacher, he took a deep breath. In the blind of eye, he felt satisfaction in life with a thought that at last, the physical labor is over, and a new chapter as a young and hopeful teacher begins.

But life didn't allow him to pause and his job required him to travel to very remote district schools. That's how he left this big house behind, filled with all his uncertainty and loneliness. His dedication to education and schoolchildren became his purpose in life. After serving many years in underprivileged schools, he eventually moved back to city schools, closer to home and his married sisters.

This time, he returned as a respected and educated man, one of the few educated people in his district. He found a woman he admired and married her, hoping to fill his home with people, love, and laughter, things he needed most. Now life was kind to him for a while as he started a new life with his wife, building from nothing: no parents, no siblings to help, no money, no friends, no support, no high morale, and no real hope. To him, the only possible option was to keep going and not give up.

He threw himself into work to provide a good life for his family and beautiful children. When his fifth child was born, just a week later, his beloved wife, his life partner, passed away. This pushed him into trauma like never before. Providing for his children, maintaining his job, dealing with life outside, and now raising five children, especially a newborn, overwhelmed him.

But he showed that no matter how far life may push him down, he has to have the strength to stand again. For seven years, he played both mother and father, taking responsibility for both home and work. In the middle of this hardship, he had another chance to marry again, this time to an orphaned neighbor girl with beautiful soft skin and rare green-and-blue, two colored eyes.

His life, after a long struggle, entered a calmer phase. His children from the first marriage began to build their own lives. Due to restrictions on girls' education, his daughters married young, around sixteen or fifteen. His eldest child, a smart boy became a

doctor, filling him with deep pride, and moved to another city. His youngest boy moved to Pakistan to avoid being recruited into the domestic war of Afghanistan.

Now Jamal lived with his wife and the children from his second marriage. His wife became his main source of patience and comfort. But once again, his life was shaken, not by exhaustion or work, but by war. The conflict between the Taliban and the Afghan government, especially after the U.S. targeted the Taliban following the September 11 attacks, forced him to send his family elsewhere, including his three sons and two daughters.

Witnessing the fighting and the fall of the Taliban regime for the first time in 2001 destroyed much of what he had built. But as the head of the family, he stayed strong. He remained hopeful. A newly elected government was in power, and international investments flowed into Afghanistan. He hoped this time thing would change.

His elder daughters didn't finish school or go to college, but now, with more freedom, he had real hope that his younger children could live a peaceful life with access to education and work. As time passed, age and illness began to weigh down his body. Years of hard physical work left him tired and sick. His children grew up and started helping with the house, the garden, and small income-generating activities.

Eventually, the time came to retire from teaching, even though he didn't want to. He didn't choose to stop, but he had no choice. After retirement, he began to feel useless staying at home. He tried to stay busy by reading books, working in his garden, and growing different vegetables and fruits. His big family rarely needed to buy from the market, they had fresh produce and fuelwood from his garden.

He fully stopped his livelihood activities, as it became hard to manage. His children didn't enjoy living in a farmhouse either. But cultivating beautiful flowers gave him great joy. He always told his daughters, "I grow them so you feel happy." Spending his entire days in the garden, even late into the night to water the trees, brought him peace. Walking through the garden and breathing its scent gave him purpose, to wake up before sunrise every day.

But as aging and constant sickness limited his work, he had to stop the heavy gardening. This deeply broke his heart. Watching the plants he loved die and the autumn face of his garden made him feel like he was losing loved ones. Even after constant requests from his children to rest, he would still go to the garden, even when he was seriously ill. It was his joy.

As his children grew up and moved abroad in pursue of education, his sadness grew. His children from the first marriage had already moved or married when they were young. He had always hoped to see them during Eid or Nawruz (New Year). Despite all his heartbreaks, nothing brought him to tears until life's hardest hit came when the Taliban retook Afghanistan overnight in August 2021. His children, like the collapsing government, disappeared overnight.

This crushed him completely. He felt like someone who had lost everything after decades of struggle. Saying goodbye to each child, his life's entire purpose, put him into unimaginable trauma. Since nearly four years, this pain consumes him from the inside. Being separated from his beloved children, who brought him joy and happiness, felt like living in a prison of sadness. He never stopped his children from emigrating. He knew that after years of studying, working for justice and human rights, and building dreams, they would be in danger if they stayed in the country. So he chose their safety over his own comfort and preferences. But in the meanwhile, the death of his beloved and only friend, with

whom he had shared both the best and worst moments, hit him deeply, leading to an unbearable period of grief.

Now, alone with his wife and youngest child, old age, white hair, a tired heart, and a weary body took him faster than expected. He felt more broken and old than a normal aging process. Sometimes, he wondered if life would have been easier had he been born somewhere else. Perhaps his efforts wouldn't have been wasted. Perhaps he wouldn't have had to live apart from his children and grandchildren.

World leaders play games of power, but ordinary people like Jamal suffer across generations. Millions like him, orphans who struggled all their lives, saw everything they built fall to pieces due to regimes that care only about extremism, fascism, and authoritarianism.

Millions of parents like Jamal fight their lives to head up from the misfortune to have an extremely basic life and to raise their children properly, but is in any context unfair to lose them in war, poverty, sickness, suicide bombings, insecurity, or in the search for a better life. Why did humans make the world such a miserable journey to some people like him? Why did they sentence to such trauma? Now under an authoritarian regime, they continue to pay the price. Elders endure unbearable pain, while their children suffer from injustice, statelessness, loneliness, depression, and being last-class citizens elsewhere.

Yet, even after all of this, Jamal's story is one of knife edge resilience. Though life broke him again and again, he stood up, again and again. He gave everything for his children and dreamed of a better future, even if he wouldn't live to see it fully realized. This world owes him a decent, happy, and peaceful life where he can hug his loved ones and have dinner gathered

around a Dastarkhwan (dining table) rather than suffering so extremely.

Padar Jan (Dear Dad), I need your jacket to stay warm. You always checked on me late at night to see if I was cold, placing your jacket or Patoo (Shawls) on my shoulders. I was always cold, just didn't fall asleep to study, but I melted in your love and sacrifices. I just wish I could go back, love you more, and spend every possible minute with you. I may be lost in exile, but I live on in you, as you are my forever home and identity.

From 12 May to 20 July 2025 the Global Campus of Human Rights ran the second edition of its online course called "Authoring Justice". The course focused on how to write powerful narrative nonfiction works about human rights and social justice issues – using storytelling to touch the hearts and minds of readers and affect change around the world. The second iteration included lessons from award-winning authors, activists and publishers, including Professor Andrew Leon Hanna (the main lecturer), Kao Kalia Yang, Sheila Watt-Cloutier, Shahram Khosravi, Jemma Neville, Casey Gerald, and Joel Rickett.

The cohort of students included human rights experts, journalists, climate activists, professors, and researchers from across the globe with a wide range of focus areas – from migration to racial justice, from youth-led social movements to climate advocacy and beyond. The following pages feature a few selected examples of the students' "Capstone Projects," which were designed to be either standalone long-form works or components of books they are now beginning to write.

E-Learning Department
Global Campus of Human Rights
Monastery of San Nicolò
Riviera San Nicolò, 26
I-30126 Venice Lido, VE
P +39 041 2720911
F +39 041 2720914
e-learning@gchumanrights.org
www.gchumanrights.org