



## **We Are Afghan Women: Voices of Hope**

*George W. Bush Institute , Laura Bush (Foreword)*

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Here are Afghan women in their own words. Words that are by turns inspiring, moving, courageous, and heartbreaking. Their powerful stories create a compelling portrait of the lives, struggles, and successes of this extraordinary nation and its extraordinarily resilient women. With an introduction by Laura Bush, honorary founding co-chair of the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council.

Afghanistan has been described as “the worst nation in the world to be a woman.” More than fifty percent of girls who are forced into marriage are sixteen or younger. Too many women live in fear and in many areas, education and employment for women are still condemned. The women featured in *We Are Afghan Women* are fighting to change all that. From rug weavers to domestic violence counselors to business owners, educators, and activists, these courageous women are charting a new path for themselves, their families, their communities, and their nation. Told in their own voices, their stories vividly capture a country undone by decades of war and now struggling to build a lasting peace.

Meet Dr. Sakena Yacoobi, who ran underground schools for girls until the Taliban fell, and today has established educational centers across Afghanistan to teach women and girls basic literacy. Or Freshta Hazeq, who as a female business owner, has faced death threats, sabotage, and even kidnapping threats against her children. Naheed Farid is the youngest female member of Afghanistan's parliament. During her campaign, opponents cut Naheed's face out of campaign posters and her family risked complete ruin, but her husband and father-in-law never wavered, encouraging her to persevere. Here, too are compassionate women such as Masooma Jafari, who started a national midwives association. Her own mother was forced into marriage at age twelve and gave birth to her first child at age thirteen.

With an introduction by former First Lady Laura Bush, *We Are Afghan Women* chronicles the lives of young and old, daughters and mothers, educated, and those who are still learning. These determined women are defying the odds to lead Afghanistan to a better future. Their stories are a stark reminder that in some corners of the world the struggle continues and that women's progress in society, business, and politics cannot be taken for granted. Their eloquent words challenge all of us to answer: What does it truly mean to be a woman in the twenty-first century?

## We Are Afghan Women: Voices of Hope Details

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## **From Reader Review We Are Afghan Women: Voices of Hope for online ebook**

### **Brenna says**

If you want to read a book about some incredibly strong women this is it! I am so thankful I read this book. I gained some insight into the lives of some Afghan women. The things that these women have gone through to get where they are was incredible. My heart bled for these women. My heart soared for these women. My heart has been touched by these women.

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### **Kristin says**

This book was a compilation of stories from mostly women who have at some point in time lived in Afghanistan. They were sad and hopeful. All the stories focused on the fact that education is the key to solving the destruction of an entire nation. Another point was made in that traditional gender roles can not be changed overnight and that the most sustainable changes will be made over time.

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### **Linda S says**

I enjoy books about people whose life experiences are very different from mine and what influences make them do what they do. This is a collection of stories about different Afghan women and how they are working to improve the lives of other Afghan women. There was a common thread among these women, the majority had the support of fathers/brothers, were educated and most left Afghanistan during the Soviet & Taliban years. I admire that these women are so unselfish and focused on their desire to improve the lives of others, many in very bad circumstances. The biggest lesson was to meet the most basic needs first, if a mother has hungry children feed the children and then help her develop skills so she can feed her children. It is senseless to talk women's rights when she needs to feed her children.

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### **Lindy says**

If you've never been to Afghanistan, you should read this book. If you live in the US, you should read this book. A fascinating, inspiring, tragic, powerful look at what women are facing in this small, war torn country--most of them struggling for basic human rights, having dreams of learning to read, or higher education, or the freedom to leave their house barred from them simply because they are female. Most are cut off from modern society, some are abused, but many are fighting and have hope of change and peace in their beloved country.

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### **Dina says**

Touching,horrrifying, inspirational and raw are just a few of the many things I could say about this book. I

feel more enlightened to the struggles of women in Afghanistan and more of an understanding of the role of tradition and how we cannot just go in and make some quick laws and expect change. I actually felt some understanding of the men in the society which I would have never thought would happen. I highly recommend reading this.

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### **Katie B says**

I've read quite a few books on Afghan women and I can't say enough good things about this one. This book contains the inspiring stories of 28 Afghan women and 1 man who have gone on to do remarkable things through hard work and sheer determination. While some have lived their entire lives in the country, others were forced to flee to neighboring countries or the United States during the Russian and later Taliban occupations. But each person shares at least one thing in common and that is the strong desire for a brighter and better future for Afghanistan.

What I found unique about this book is that each person detailed their vision on how a better Afghanistan could be achieved. While most of their ideas revolved around how education was a must, some of their ideas were unexpected, especially to some of us in the Western world.

While some people might shy away from this book after seeing the Bush family connected to it, I think it would be a real shame. This isn't a political book. Their stories of struggles and triumphs are incredible and definitely eye-opening especially to those who may not know much about Afghanistan. The people interviewed for this book were honest and not afraid in a few cases to be critical of the United States and other foreign countries on their roles before and after 9/11. But the heart of this book isn't about placing blame, it is how against incredible odds, an "ordinary" person can do extraordinary things. Highly recommend this book, especially to women!

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### **Karen Roettger says**

What compelling stories from these Afghan women. Everyone should read these stories to better understand this country & its culture. I was especially moved that many of the women said that when family members leave for work or school each day they never take for granted that they will ever see each other again....the need for security is a top priority in their minds. Education for women is another priority. Another message that resonated through these stories was for our western society to listen to the needs of the people of Afghanistan. "We need your moral support to give us training, education & to stand behind us. If we are opening a school & we don't have pens, pencils & notebooks, don't send us jeans."

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### **Leslie says**

Couldn't put it down. Every woman in the free world needs to read this book.

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### **Susan Quenneville says**

An incredible look at the lives of 28 Afghan women and their daily struggles to live a peaceful, meaningful life in a war torn country heavily influenced by the degrading forces of the Taliban and the age old view that a woman is a possession, not a person. I highly recommend this book if you're looking for a deeper understanding of Afghan culture.

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### **Samantha says**

Heartbreaking but a good source of understanding the situation from those in it.

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### **Dionne says**

This was an amazing look into the lives of Afghan women. As I read this, I was so inspired at what they accomplished despite the challenges they faced. It's hard to comprehend getting death threats for teaching women how to drive, but that's just a snapshot of how hard life is for women in Afghanistan.

As I deal with the difficulties in my life, they pale in comparison to what these women face. As I read this book, I was not only able to see life from a different perspective, but was also inspired to pursue my own dreams.

I got to visit the George W. Bush Presidential Center last summer and was not disappointed. They are doing wonderful work in continuing to help those in Africa, wounded war veterans, and empowering women in the Middle East, as demonstrated by this book.

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### **Deborah says**

We Are Afghan Women is a poignant and moving collection of life stories of Afghan women, many of

whom have rapidly grown old beyond their years, compiled by The George W. Bush Institute. Pam Ward brings these women to life as their voices are heard loud and clear through her own. Unlike women in the United States who fought for women's rights, the fight for women's rights in Afghanistan has been long, and arduous, and full of terror, oppression and violence. Give ear and listen.

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### **Kristinn Wise says**

This was a good book it just seemed a bit redundant and repetitive. I would have liked to see more variety in experiences and heard a wider range of opinions. I only got 3/4 of the way through before i had to put it down because I felt i had read the same story over and over again.

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### **thewanderingjew says**

We Are Afghan Women: Voices of Hope, George W. Bush Institute, narrated by Pam Ward  
The introduction of the book was written by Laura Bush. The body of the book tells the story of Afghan women through a multitude of witnesses. Testimony is given about their lives in Afghanistan over several decades, beginning in the 1980's. It is the story of their survival. As rival factions competed for control, many were forced to run. They relocated to avoid death or rape. First the Russians came, than the Mujahideen, then the Taliban, then the United States. When the American soldiers were removed prematurely, Daesh (Isis in Afghanistan) and the Taliban began to take root once more. Their struggle is ongoing.

I found the stories each woman told to be a bit repetitive, since each pretty much described their lives during the same time periods. Still, they were very eye-opening about the life they were forced to lead. They labored to get an education which was made possible, ultimately by foreign countries, the United States and England, more often than not. The group of women selected, and the odd man, were exceptional in intellect and ambition. Many had families that supported their efforts, even though it went against the culture and the ruling factions. Those families seemed to be educated and more modern. Many of the women, once retrained and/or reeducated, often in hidden schools, wanted to give back to their country in some way, if they were able.

The women were retrained for work by organizations that provided them with free education and a safe space. Many worked for a rug company called ARZU that would hire and train them only if they sent their children to school. Although many professions were forbidden to women, they managed to learn some new ones and improve their skills in old ones. They learned beekeeping, (forbidden), rug weaving, needlework and other skills needed to survive. Sports instruction taught women self confidence and self esteem. Some women became professionals. Women needed some source of income to feel independent. Widows and divorced women were dependent on the kindness of others which was often non existent. They were looked down upon by their culture and their beliefs. Men ruled and women had few rights. Scholarships were arranged for those qualified and many who were top students were enabled to study abroad and to positively change their lives. Some became lawyers, politicians, teachers, entrepreneurs, and doctors. Many brought their new skills and ideas back to Afghanistan to try and rebuild the country. All faced opposition and physical danger to themselves and their families.

In some ways, I found the women to be overly optimistic about being able to bring change to a country where their lives were in danger simply for wanting to work, simply for assuming roles of responsibility. The Circle of the Chador was formed to empower the women in a country that did not value them, but some will be in danger if they step out of the comfort zone. Under the Taliban and Isis, their lives are controlled

completely by men. They live and die by the whim of these men, young and old. They can be sold or bartered as property. They do not have rights. The Russians, Mujahadeen, Taliban and Isis raped and murdered whomever they pleased, even men and children. They simply marched in and demanded food, women, homes. They took hostages. Many Afghans were ignorant and believed that the Taliban and Isis actually preached the true world of G-d, not this corrupted version they practice which is from the dark ages. It will be an uphill battle to empower the liberal men who support women's rights and strong women who demand them, in order to make the necessary changes in government and leadership.

Some of the women blamed the Russians for starting the aggression which destroyed the country and brought in so many ruling, warring factions. Some blamed the United States for coming in, calming things down, but then abandoning them in 2014 which allowed the Taliban and Isis to try and take root once again. Others mentioned the lack of help from the UN. However, ultimately, it is the American tax dollar, or taxpayer that is providing them with the opportunity to expand their horizons and bring back innovative ideas to their country and cities.

I found that the narrator enunciated almost too clearly and seemed to inappropriately stress certain words. Perhaps there should have been several readers who could alternate so the tone of voice would occasionally change. Perhaps, an American reader is simply not as in tune to the emotional connotations of the testimonies as a native Afghan would have been. Also, I could not always tell when the featured testimony changed from one to another because neither the narrator's tone nor expression changed from one to another, but continued in the same way for each story. I think it would have been better if Afghan women, with the appropriate accent, had narrated the book. The stories would have felt more authentic, more realistic, and the stress on certain words to emphasize feelings and events would have been more appropriate. After awhile, with the narrator droning on in the same tone for each person, it became difficult to concentrate and remain interested. The presentation seemed overly simplistic and even a bit too long. Sometimes it felt like it was an advertisement to support Afghan women, rather than a heartfelt presentation of their lives, experiences and ideas.

The presentations by the women provided a brief, but pretty thorough history of Afghanistan: regarding its poverty, education, ethnicity, language, climate, leaders, politics, women's rights or lack thereof, and the effect of war and aid or lack of aid, for them and their country and culture. Some spoke of the changes in their world because of the attack on 9/11 in America. Suddenly they were feared because of their religious background and culture. I thought that the idea that some women were still completely covered, not by choice, might indicate that the idea of change could be a bit naïve, although most returning Afghan women recognized it would be a long term endeavor to bring positive change to their country.

Innovative women in Afghanistan are working, starting businesses, attempting to help change Afghanistan, to bring it back, but they face hardship, danger, and family opposition. They need support from at home and abroad. Family often had a great influence on the decisions made. Those that did not live in backward ways, the more progressive Muslims, allowed and encouraged their family to grow and thrive, but many still do lack the ability to move on into the modern world. Overall, I found the presentations enlightening, poignant and sad. The suffering and hardship, the abuse of women, the lack of law and order, the demolition of homes, seemed so daunting, it is a wonder anyone would return. It will be a difficult march forward, but they have hope.

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## **Billye says**

I enjoyed this book and learned a lot about Afganistan.

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