

LEND YOUR VOICE TO “STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN GLOBALLY”

By Kari Rodems

At the tender age of eight, Bibi Aisha was promised in marriage, along with her baby sister, to settle a dispute between families in a Pash-tun practice called “Baad.” Pash-tunwali, the law of the Pashtuns of Afghanistan, deem this arrangement as a legitimate way to settle a dispute between rival families. When she turned sixteen, BiBi was handed over to the father and ten brothers of her soon to be husband, who was off fighting in Pakistan (all were said to be members of the Taliban in Oruzgan province).

For two years she was tortured and abused, and then fled seeking refuge with her female neighbors who promised to help her. Instead they tried to sell her to another man and were all eventually arrested and imprisoned. President Hamid Karzai pardoned Aisha after serving five months of her three year sentence; which unfortunately resulted in her father-in-law soon finding her and taking her back home. It was then that she finally met her husband. He took her to a Taliban court where it was ruled that her nose and ears were to be cut off for shaming her husband's family.

Though her husband carried out the unimaginable act and left her in the mountains of Oruzgan to die, Bibi Aisha survived.

Through the generous support of Women for Afghan Women based out of New York and now the

Grossman Burn Foundation, Bibi will soon be receiving the nurturing care she needs to begin her long road to recovery. As horrific as this story is, she is but one of many women globally, who have survived egregious acts of violence.

This year, the Grossman Burn Foundation, in collaboration with Westfield Malls and Angeleno Magazine, will launch their vocal petition / documentary “Stop Violence Against Women Globally.” The short film will be premiered at www.shortfilmplanet.com. The campaign was launched after the foundation, founded in 2007, started receiving a number of letters accompanied by horrific photos from women in various regions of the world who were literally burned or injured by someone in an effort to oppress, abuse, control and strip them of their rights and freedom.

One local victim of such an unconscionable and senseless assault is a young mother of two, Roberta Busby from Simi Valley, CA. In 2009, she was ruthlessly doused with gasoline and set on fire after leaving work late one evening. Busby spent more than five months in the Hospital recovering from multiple skin grafts and surgeries administered by the renowned Medical Team at the Grossman Burn Center, led by Dr. Peter Grossman. The Circle of Care Foundation, based in Sherman Oaks, California provided additional support for Busby and her family.

In a recent conversation Roberta shared that she has a hard time remembering much about that life

altering night, but is grateful for the care she received and for the simple pleasure of being able to hold her two girls close every day. She said, “I don't take life for granted. I have these beautiful kids and I know I survived this whole thing for them.” She hopes to be an inspiration to others who have suffered violent crimes and encourage them to “hold on through the long tough days towards recovery.” Roberta would very much like to thank Dr. Grossman, the wonderful nurses and the entire Burn Center Staff including, she says, the janitor and housekeeping woman whose uplifting words always came

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at the right time. She also says she was overwhelmed by the myriad of people who graciously sent cards and donations to comfort and support her in regaining a new sense of self and a measure of independence.

For 17-year-old Ni Na Phung, from Da Nang, Vietnam, her time at the Burn Center began after she too was drenched with gasoline and lit on fire; this time by an unwelcome suitor. She was initially rushed to Da Nang hospital with third degree burns over 75% of her body and was eventually brought to the U.S. by the Children's Burn Foundation based in Sherman Oaks, California.

Violence against women, often a direct result of gender inequality, unveils layers of historically complex issues relating to culturally reinforced gender norms and traditions. Socially embedded customs often foster an environment that permits perpetrators of violent acts against women and children to go unchallenged. In some cases these acts are not even considered violent, let alone a crime. In many parts of the world, social or legal recourse for women who are victims of violent acts simply does not exist. Increasingly violence against women has been documented as part and parcel of the fallout from armed conflicts in war torn regions. For instance, a 2009 study conducted by the World Health Organization found that at least 65% of the millions of people displaced by conflict are vulnerable women and girls who are daily are confronted with deprivation, unrelenting threats and physical assaults.

The vision behind the Grossman Burn Foundation's “Stop Violence Against Women Globally” campaign is to build an alliance with other organizations both locally and globally that focus on issues of violence against women. The foundation's Executive Director, Stacy Tilliss said “Whether it be rape in the Congo, genocidal acts carried out by militia targeting women and children in Somalia, violence in Darfur, oppression in Latin America or women and young teenagers that are victims of abuse here in the United States, this program was developed to raise awareness and educate the world on why these atrocities are not to be tolerated in any society. We must first start by creating a paradigm shift and, as in generations past, restore the respect and reverence for women as both wise and powerful.”

There is no time like the present to link arms and empower a new generation of women to realize their unique potential and place in the world today. You can lend your support to the “Stop Violence Against Woman Globally” campaign by visiting www.grossmanburnfoundation.org. When you do you will be joining a passionate chorus of a growing number of voices that include to date: *Program Ambassador and burn survivor; Roberta Busby, actresses and activist; Linda Gray, Brenda Strong, Della Reese, Susan*

Saint James, Ana Alicia Ortiz and Nicolette Sheridan, Secretary of Labor, Hon. Hilda L. Solis, television correspondent and women's activist; Lisa Ling, Author and social activist; Cheryl Saban, Playwright Eve Ensler, TV Producer and author Linda Ellerbee, Women's health expert, radio personality and NY Times Bestseller author; Dr. Christiane Northrup, Country music recording artist; Stephanie Quayle, author Ariane de Bonvoisin, fitness guru Sean Corne, Burn survivor from Kenya, Africa; Faith Wanjugo, Amrit Davaa World Health organization founder and Chair Dr. Natalie Nevins, California Women's Conference Executive Producer and journalist Alexandra Gleysteen, , psychologist and author; Mary Holmes, Advocate for abused women; Sweet Alice Harris, Facebook Market Development Executive Randi Zuckerberg, Grossman Burn Foundation Founder and Chair Rebecca Grossman and M2M-Mothers2Mothers organization founder and Executive Director Robin Smalley. World-renowned photographer and author Mary Ann Halpin and videographer Joe Croyle contributed to the making of this powerful documentary and the soundtrack is being produced and donated by a number of extraordinary recording artists.

Watch for the documentary to be released in the summer of 2010 at: www.shortfilmplanet.com and work to stop violence against women globally by joining the petition and spreading the word. **WM**

For more information or to get help, please call:

THE NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE at 1-800-799-7233

THE NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT HOTLINE AT 1-800-656-4673

THE NATIONAL TEEN DATING ABUSE HOTLINE AT 1-866-331-9474

Gender, Women and Health (GWH)
<http://www.who.int/gender/documents/MDGs&VAWSept05.pdf>

Violence and Injury Prevention (VIP)
http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/en/

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV):
<http://www.ncadv.org>

For more on the Bibi Aisha Story, visit:
<http://www.cnn.com/video/#/video/world/2010/03/17/iyw.afghan.bibi.aisha.cnn?ref=allsearch>

