



Zoya's Story: An Afghan Woman's Struggle for Freedom

By John Follain, Rita Cristofari

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Kabul was always more beautiful in the snow. Even the piles of rotting rubbish in my street, the only source of food for the scrawny chickens and goats that our neighbors kept outside their mud houses, looked beautiful to me after the snow had covered them in white during the long night.

Though she is only twenty-three, Zoya has witnessed and endured more tragedy and terror than most people experience in a lifetime. Born in a land ravaged by war, she was robbed of her parents when they were murdered by Muslim fundamentalists. Devastated, she fled Kabul with her grandmother and started a new life in exile in Pakistan. She joined the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), an organization that challenged the crushing edicts of the Taliban government, and she took destiny into her own hands, joining a dangerous, clandestine war to save her nation.

Direct and unsentimental, Zoya vividly brings to life the realities of growing up in a Muslim culture, the terror of living in a perpetual war zone, the pain of losing those she has loved, the horrors of a woman's life under the Taliban, and the discovered healing and transformation that lead her on a path of resistance.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Now 23, Zoya was a child during the Russian invasion and a teen when the Taliban took power. The daughter of activists in Kabul, Zoya was raised by her grandmother after her parents disappeared. She now belongs to RAWA (see the review of *Veiled Courage*, above), a group her mother belonged to. Her reflections show the complex scars made by the tug of war between factional governments and tribal warlords, especially the effects of the Taliban. Many of Zoya's stories (e.g., women only permitted to leave their homes wearing a burqa and accompanied by a male; women often suffering and dying for want of a female physician) are covered in Latifa's *My Forbidden Face*. Zoya tells of a society where kite flying, bright colors and even women's laughter is forbidden, and enforcers are often armed with Russian military leftovers or crude stones. Yet the Afghans Zoya speaks of remain rebellious and hopeful. She writes, "When I... saw Kabul in the daylight, even the mountains beyond the city which had seemed so peaceful to me when I was a child looked sad. But... that I had seen them again... made me feel stronger." Assigned by RAWA to live and work in a refugee camp near the Afghan-Pakistani border, Zoya now also travels abroad to raise funds for her organization. Her narrative voice is quiet and clear, making her recollections of the breathtaking violence she has witnessed nail-bitingly vivid and her descriptions of her struggle candid and poignant.

From [Booklist](#)

After both her parents were killed by the predecessors of the Taliban, the Mujahideen, Zoya took up her mother's work in RAWA, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan and, with her grandmother, journeyed to Pakistan, where she could receive an education at a school run by RAWA. A few years later, Zoya returned to Afghanistan to help her people and get firsthand accounts of the horrors of the Taliban reign. Zoya herself witnessed public executions and amputations, but she also witnessed heartening displays of courage--women defying the Taliban by holding secret classes and shopping in the marketplace. Zoya remains skeptical about the future of Afghanistan after the Taliban, afraid that after the U.S. involvement ends, the Mujahideen will return to their old ways. A stirring memoir by an uncompromisingly brave woman.

Kristine Huntley

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Review

"A tale of struggle and suffering...from a courageous freedom fighter...Timely and sobering." (Kirkus Reviews)

Users Review

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Donna Jennings:

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