

An eyewitness to intolerance

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By Scott Hibbard

In 2008-09, I patrolled and fought in eastern Afghanistan. Until I stared into the expressionless face of someone who was oppressed, it was difficult for me to comprehend that someone was not as free as I was. The blank stares and uneasy smiles were easy to come by in that country of extremes.

Operation Enduring Freedom is a counterinsurgency. It can be a double-edged sword – a helping hand or a trigger finger. The lesson we teach is equality for men and women.

The problem is that few Muslim men in that country believe that all should be treated equally under the law. Women and girls are just property, possessions to be dominated. In a land of nothing, a man could have something of his own.



It can take only a few missions to come face-to-face with the realities of a fundamentalist religion. I have seen women and girls beaten in front of me; the kicks and punches lifting them off the ground and rolling them into a ball. I could do nothing but curse at their abuser as they screamed. U.S. soldiers were not allowed to interfere with the Muslim culture.

A female state department representative walking through a town shopping area was splashed with hot oil because her face wasn't covered. She is left with scars on her face – a lifelong reminder of intolerance.

Where I patrolled, Afghan women couldn't drive, go in public or attend school. They lived a barren and sequestered life. They stand next to farm animals waiting for the men to get done shopping. If an Afghan husband takes his wife to an American health care provider, it is expected that the husband be thanked for having compassion and bringing the woman in for treatment.

Their day-to-day hell drives a higher suicide rate than the same group in the Western world. These are the realities of a male-dominated fundamentalist Muslim worldview. These men are not Taliban or foreign fighters. They were shop keepers, fathers and husbands.

In regard to a mosque near ground zero, we speak in terms of justice, fairness and civil rights. The fundamentalist Muslims require from us the rights they refuse to others. In this country, we are lectured to be tolerant. In Afghanistan, only men enter mosques and soldiers are called infidels while rocks are thrown at us. In Afghanistan, Americans pay to have mosques built. Here, we are insulted and regarded as bigots if we question.

Where are women's rights in the fundamentalist Muslim mind? When do they get to live without fear? When can they go to school? When can they worship side by side with men?

These are questions I would like answers to.

Islam must come to terms with itself before it preaches to us. It is not this country that needs a lesson in tolerance. We have been on a self-correcting course for more than 200 years. No people group has ever been as free as we are.

Note to readers – Scott Hibbard is a registered nurse and lives in Sterling with his wife, Nikki, and kids, Noah, Carson and Reagan.