

## **Masako and Muslam**

### **An Escort Story**

**October 2010**



Can you imagine living in hunger, constant pain, and fear of safety?

And this is only life he knows?

His eyes wide open with fear and he didn't move a muscle, like a small rabbit with a predator near by. I imagined this has been his instinct of survival in the war zone of Afghanistan where he was born.

What he has gone through in six years of his life is beyond my imagination.

His name is Muslam. He is much smaller than the average six year old. He has bladder issues with complications, but he brought no medical records with him, so I don't know what the extensive problems are. He was clearly in discomfort.

He was found by a captain of the US army while he was on patrol in March of this year. He took Muslam to an Afghani doctor and the doctor said, "I recognize this boy from three years ago" and that was the end of it. Uninterested and unconcerned, the Afghani doctor made the captain furious. He took Muslam to a team of German doctors who supervised the treatment. They did all they could, but his condition was beyond their capabilities.

The captain put Muslam's mother in charge of finding a doctor in the USA, and miraculously, she found one in NJ. Life is full of surprises; the captain also lives in NJ!



Muslam is a fortunate child as there are millions of children who need medical treatment in Afghanistan.

I was in Delhi, India for a couple of days before I met Amin Jan and Muslam on the 8th. I enjoyed the Taj Mahal and the city of Delhi. On the 8th, our plan was to meet at 6pm in front of Continental airlines ticket counter. They were due to arrive from Kabul around 4pm. The captain said he'd trust Amin Jan, who is Afghani, with his life. I understood what the captain meant by seeing Amin Jan's eyes. His brilliant mind, honesty and kindness all came through his eyes.

Unfortunately, India would not give him permission to enter the country even though he held a Five-Day stay visa. He had to turn around and return to Kabul the next day.

We were separated by a security strap while Amin Jan was handing Muslam over to me. They only allowed a few minutes for us to converse. I felt a sense of injustice because he is from Afghanistan, so they would not let him enter India even though he holds a visa. It made me angry thinking of the bureaucratic procedures and unfairness.

I arrived at Delhi airport by 3:30PM and had nothing else to do but to wait until 6pm. I sat myself at an uncomfortable chair and almost dozed off. I heard my name being paged. I scrambled to get my stuff together to go to the counter, and an agent with a print out of my picture in hand walked by. I asked her, "Are you looking for me?" She compared a piece of paper in her hand and my face, and said, "Yes!"



She escorted me to the counter, and there seemed to be some confusion, but they were obviously trying to help. She told me that the child and a man were here, but that they had to stay in the transit area. There were many security questions. Continental airline's agents and a security agent were so kind beyond their duties. The security agent was almost constantly with me, helping me going through security, immigrations, customs, and to meet Amin Jan and Muslam. They were clearly touched by what was going on.

Muslam was upset when Amin Jan had to leave. I learned quickly how to say "toilet" in Arabic. I will never forget my vision of myself holding hands with Muslam on top of the escalator and Amin Jan being taken to the transit area down below, waving good bye to each other. It was good bye and good luck without words.

I felt so connected with this man I just met for a few minutes as we have mutual concerns and goals.

Muslam cried a while, but he became calm. I took him to the toilet as he nodded to a question "tashnob". He was upset when I tried to set him on a western toilet. I was shocked to see his bladder. I can't imagine anyone has to live with this burden. I tried to get his training undies on, but he would not cooperate as I believe it was painful to be touched, but he was leaking everywhere. It is what it is, if he doesn't want to wear one, we will have to do without it.

He kept weeping and I thought it was because of being separated from Amin Jan. But again, I asked him "tashnob" and he nodded. I took him to an Indian style toilet. He stopped weeping after that.

I appreciated people's kindness every step of the way. One flight attendant, in particular, was so kind. He made sure that Muslam was comfortable. He even moved a passenger from her assigned seat so we could have 3 seats to ourselves. He told the passenger "please, this boy is having surgery in the USA. He needs to lie down." He brought plastic sheets, blankets and comforters from business class.

Muslam slept most of the way, but when he was awake, he stared without any movement. I thought maybe that is what he did when fighting was going on around him. How sad is that?

We arrived in Newark in NJ on time, 4:20am. Frank, the flight attendant ordered a wheelchair for Muslam which was a great help. I got a smile out of Muslam at the landing when he discovered the reading light..

On the jet bridge, I was surprised to see a uniformed police officer and photographer waiting for us. The officer introduced himself as a childhood friend of the army captain. The wheelchair attendant was also extremely helpful. Missy and Stephen, the foster family met us outside of the customs area. I wanted to change Muslam's karta as he was soaked. I explained to Missy about his condition while I was changing him. She was clearly concerned as reality seemed to be beyond her expectations. She told me that he will have a doctor's appointment on Tuesday, but she'd try to make it earlier. My mission was accomplished, and theirs just began.

Because he was born in an unstable country, this child couldn't receive the medical care he needed and lives in constant fear and hunger and can't even play as a child normally would. It's too sad that the world is the way it is. I have to believe that doing what we do, helping children in need, is one of the positive human actions which might possibly lead to world peace one day. Hopefully, these children will grow up and be kind to strangers one day. Maybe we are planting the seeds of humanity for the future?

I feel fortunate and appreciate the opportunity to participate in this wonderful circle of love.

Most sincerely,

Masako Doi  
American Airlines, JFK Flight Attendant