

t
truthout

truthout • editorial

 [Print This Story](#)

 [E-mail This Story](#)

 XML

d
donate

Surviving Bush's Beneficence

By Leslie Thatcher

truthout | Book Review

Thursday 21 September 2006

S
subscribe

i
issues

big picture



The unwavering ferocity of Ann Jones's regard from the dust jacket of her Afghan memoir, *Kabul in Winter: Life Without Peace in Afghanistan* promises intensity. She delivers. Both the unsparing substance and the stark style of her description of the dystopia the Bush administration has contributed to creating in Afghanistan reveal a powerful and piercing sensibility.

Jones is a journalist who went to Kabul to try in some small private measure to repair the damage of US-inflicted violence, not to report. As

e
environment

a New Yorker who lived through 9/11 and believed that "surely America was capable of some act more creative than bombing a small, defenseless, pre-destroyed country on the other side of the world," she came to atone. Yet Jones frequently seems to be as impatient, and as disappointed in her own efforts as she is in the wider endeavor termed "international aid."

m
multimedia

The strength of this tight little book is the somehow gorgeous precision Jones uses to describe all to which she directs her unflinching gaze: so that, even as she debunks the romantic and peels aside the superficial tropes readers have come to expect with respect to Afghanistan, one is rapt - surely, furious and frustrated and often despairing, but rapt by the harsh reality she discloses.

Kabul in Winter is divided into three sections:

C
contact

"**In the Streets**" focuses on the city's physical and historic reality and provides many telling details, some esoteric, that create an emotional and moral landscape as well. The section closes with Jones's driver turning to her

wordlessly, a face full of sorrow and disdain, and I knew that he saw me plainly for what I was: another American who would not take responsibility for what my country did to the world. I saw him too: another very old young Afghan man, standing alone, on ruined feet, in a wintry garden where who knows what might fall out of the sky.

?
about us

"**In the Prisons**" begins with the stories of the women who populate the women's prison in Kabul, the scene of one of the book's very few "success" stories. Jones argues with passion and the authority that comes of being a specialist on issues of women and violence that

the subjugation of women in Afghanistan is not a consequence of their being Afghan. It's not a consequence of their being Muslim. It's a consequence of their being women.

Her vivid depiction of the operative conditions of Afghan life force the unavoidable conclusion that the body of an Afghan woman today is in and of itself a prison.

"*In the Schools*" describes Jones's own work teaching high school English teachers. As her story progresses, it encompasses the incredible scam of American foreign aid. (A taste of this section is available in her article for SF Gate, "How US Dollars Disappear in Afghanistan: Quickly and Thoroughly.") While the Afghans Jones encounters are eager and willing to learn, the occupying bureaucrats are impervious to the surroundings they never get to know, as well as to learning from mistakes they may sometimes even acknowledge, but never feel responsible to put right.

In contrast to ineffective government-sponsored programs, Jones offers the story of businesswoman and Mountain View, California, city councilor Rosemary Stasek, who went from taking an interest in her Afghan-American constituents to visiting Kabul, to returning to raise money to renovate the women's prison, to supervising every step of that work: one of the very few projects Jones describes that produces results remotely in line with its objectives - the consequence of "paying attention."

Ann Jones spent three years paying attention in Afghanistan, and while her fine book was not the result she originally intended, it strips the rest of us bare of any excuses for not taking responsibility for what our country has done to Afghanistan, as it reveals the chasm between what the Bush administration promised and continues to describe as delivered and the reality on the Afghan ground.



*Translation: **t r u t h o u t** French language correspondent Leslie Thatcher.*

Jump to today's Truthout Features:

Today's Truthout Features 

(In accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107, this material is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving the included information for research and educational purposes. t r u t h o u t has no affiliation whatsoever with the originator of this article nor is t r u t h o u t endorsed or sponsored by the originator.)

"Go to Original" links are provided as a convenience to our readers and allow for verification of authenticity. However, as originating pages are often updated by their originating host sites, the versions posted on TO may not match the versions our readers view when clicking the "Go to Original" links.

 [Print This Story](#)  [E-mail This Story](#)

| [t r u t h o u t](#) | [issues](#) | [environment](#) | [labor](#) | [women](#) | [health](#) | [voter rights](#) | [multimedia](#) | [donate](#) | [contact](#) | [subscribe](#) | [about us](#)