

The sun has not yet risen over the rocky hills outside the city of Peshawar, in Pakistan. Loudspeakers from the top of a **mosque** (mahsk), or **Muslim** house of worship, call out to the people, “God is great! It is better to pray than sleep! Come to prayers!”

Ten-year-old Garana rises from a mat on the dirt floor of her family’s house. She puts on her black robe and covers her head with an old shawl. Then she walks to the mosque to pray.

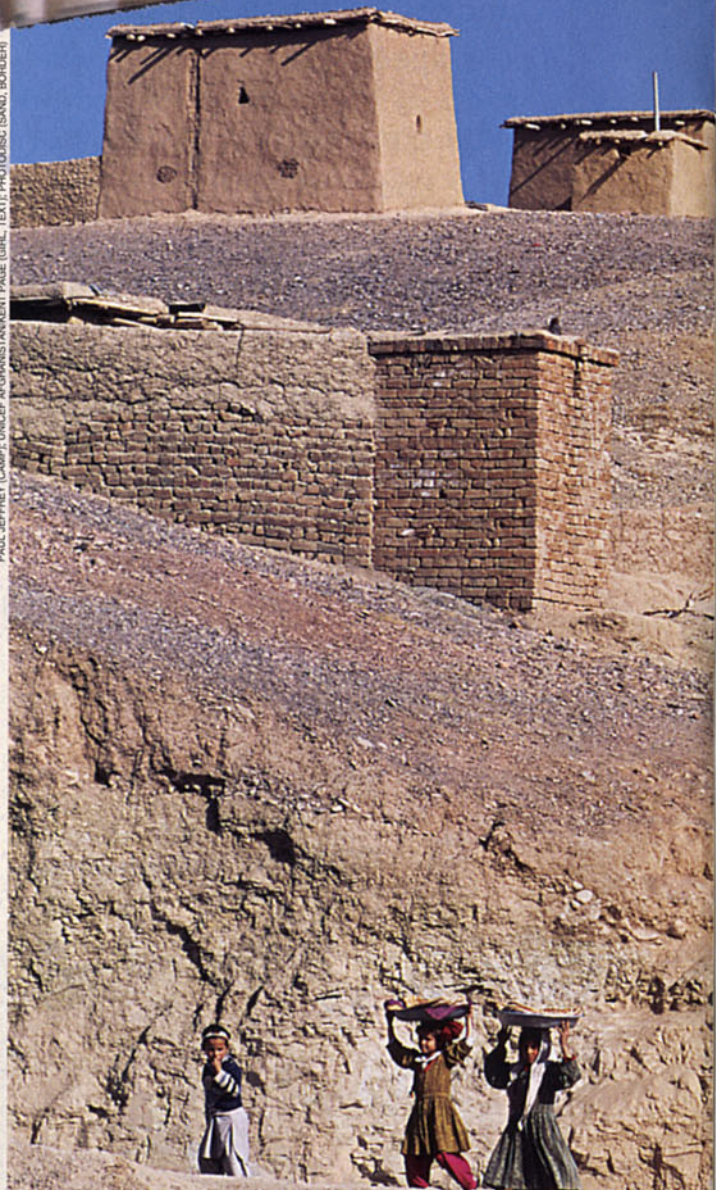
Garana and her family have lived in their one-room house for two years. It’s one of thousands of mud-brick homes in the Shamshatoo **Afghan** Refugee Camp. The camp holds about 50,000 Afghan **refugees**. They are people who have fled from war or **drought** in Afghanistan.

Garana works hard. Her father left the family several years ago. Her mother can’t see very well and can do little to help. Her older brother works all day weaving carpets. And her younger brother is too small to do many chores. So Garana does most of the household tasks. But her day is not all work. She has time for school, friends, and even a little mischief.

Home Away From Home. *Garana (top left) lives in this refugee camp in Pakistan. Her family fled from war-torn Afghanistan two years ago.*



PAUL JEFFREY (CAMP); UNICEF AFGHANISTAN/KENT PAGE (GIRL); TEXT: PHOTODISC (SAND, BORDER)



A day in the life of a
young Afghan refugee

Garana's Story

BY KENT PAGE





Weighty Experience. *Garana fetches water five or six times a day. She uses the full weight of her body to move the pump handle up and down.*



UNICEF AFGHANISTANKENT PAGE (BOTH)

Early Morning

After prayers, Garana begins her morning chores. She walks to the camp's water pump to fill two bottles. After bringing them home, she eats breakfast, which is usually hot tea and bread. Then she washes the dishes in the backyard, using cold pump water. Next she sweeps the floor of the one-room house.

Then it's time to walk to the bakery. There she leaves a small amount of flour. The bakers will use it to make a loaf of bread. Garana's family will eat that loaf for their next three meals.

Now it's time to walk to school.

Class Time

Children in the refugee camp go to school six days a week. Boys and girls attend separate classes. Garana is in first grade, although she is ten years old. That's because when she lived in Afghanistan, Garana and other girls were not allowed to go to school. She has a lot of catching up to do. Classes in Garana's school go only through the second grade for girls



Follow the Letters. *Garana and her teacher guide the class through the English alphabet.*

and the third grade for boys. Still, it's an important start.

Garana gets to school just before classes begin at 8:30. The concrete building has six classrooms. These rooms have no windows, but there is paint on the walls.

Daily Bread. *Every day Garana gives local bakers some flour. They use it to make bread for her family.*

Thirty-five girls are in Garana's class. The students sit on mats on the floor. They study mathematics, the Afghan languages of Pashto and Dari, and the English alphabet. There is also class time for singing and drawing. Garana enjoys school.

"My favorite subject is English," she says. "If you can speak languages, then you can understand what people are saying. It's easier to get things done."

Today Garana stands at the chalkboard with a ruler and leads the class through the English alphabet. She mixes up *b* and *d*. Otherwise, she recites the alphabet perfectly.

Lunch Break

Classes end before lunch. The students race out to the small dirt playground to play on the swings, the slide, and the merry-go-round. Garana usually visits with her friends. But soon it's time for more chores.

She heads to the bakery to pick up the bread. Then she walks along the mud streets to her house. After a quick hello to her mother, Garana goes to the pump to collect water. When she returns, she fills the teapot and puts it on the small fire. Garana sits on her mat on the floor and eats her lunch with her hands. Today her mother has prepared potatoes along with the bread and tea.

"Some days we have potatoes. Some days we have rice. And some days we have beans," Garana says. "Whatever we eat for lunch, we have again for dinner. Rice is my favorite food."



Afternoon and Evening

After lunch, Garana trudges back to the pump for water to wash the plates and cups. Then she sweeps the house, cleans the yard, and feeds her family's four chickens. Once in a while, when there is money, she goes to the local shop to buy food. After she finishes her chores, she does her homework.

Soon it's time for dinner. Because the houses in the refugee camp have no electricity, the family eats the evening meal before it gets dark. Then, if there is any daylight left, Garana plays with her best friend, Assia. Sometimes they get into a little trouble.

"Garana saw some of the older girls with jewelry in their noses," Assia explains. "She said that looked beautiful. She asked me to pierce her nose. So I took a long sewing needle, and I did it."

Garana's mother was not pleased. But she helped Garana put a string through the hole to keep it open. Garana hopes that someday she can replace the string with jewelry.

A Wish for Peace

Garana has a hard life in the refugee camp. But at least there is no fighting. "I would like to go back to Afghanistan," she says. "but not until there is peace everywhere. We are told at school that some parts of Afghanistan are safe. But there is still fighting in other parts."

Many others share Garana's wish. For more than 20 years, the nation has suffered from war and unrest. Now the Afghan people, with the help of countries around the world, are trying to make changes. They hope to bring peace to Afghanistan.

Wordwise

Afghan: person from Afghanistan

drought: long period of time without rain or snow

mosque: Muslim place of worship

Muslim: one who practices the religion of Islam

refugees: people forced to flee their homes, usually to another country

High Hopes. *Garana and friend Assia (pink shirt) dream of returning to the mountains of Afghanistan (below).*



Back to School

Education = Hope for Afghan Children

It was March 25, 2002. Crowds of boys and girls gathered throughout Afghanistan. Excited whispers filled the air. Many children had waited and waited for this moment. The first day of school was about to begin!

Were these children really that happy to start school? The answer is yes. Many Afghan children hadn't attended school in years. Girls weren't allowed to go. And staying home seemed safer for some boys.

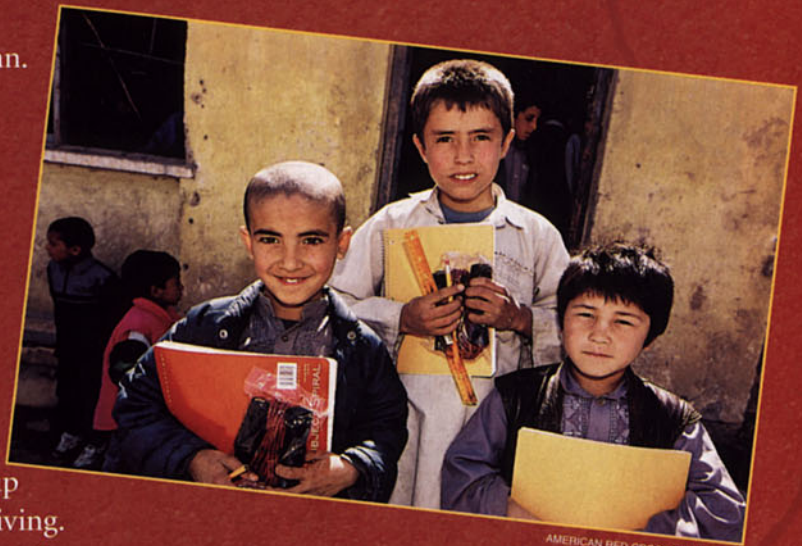
Many Afghan children were growing up without the skills they needed to earn a living. They faced lives of poverty. For them, school equals hope.

Class Acts

Unfortunately, years of fighting had destroyed or damaged 2,000 Afghan schools. The rest were in poor shape. And no one had money or materials to fix them.

So the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and American Red Cross pitched in. Working with Afghan leaders, they repaired broken windows and doors. They also bought new desks, chairs, chalkboards, and textbooks.

U.S. students helped too. They donated money that paid for chests full of school supplies. Afghan students got pencils, chalk, crayons, notebooks, rulers, jump ropes, and soccer balls.



Ready to Learn. Afghan students hold new school supplies donated by kids in the United States.

No Complaints From This Crowd

All this help was just a start. Afghan schools still don't have space for every student. Classrooms are cramped, and tents hold extra classes.

To ease crowding, most schools have two shifts. Half the children attend morning classes. Others go in the afternoon. But Afghan students aren't complaining. They're just glad to be back.

"I never stopped thinking about the day when I might go back to school," says Safi, a nine-year-old girl. "And then one day I heard on the radio that school would start again. I was so happy."

— Terrell Smith

WebLink



Help Afghan Students

Find out what you can do at www.nationalgeographic.com/ngexplorer/articles.