EXTRA Spartan Daily EXTRA

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20 YEARS LATER

After two decades, 9/11 continues to affect SJSU community

PHOTO COLLAGE BY NICK YBARRA; SOURCE: SEEKPNG.COM, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

"WE WILL NEVER FORGET" HAS BEEN THE U.S. CRY ON 9/11 FOR THE PAST 20 YEARS. THIS YEAR MARKS TWO DECADES SINCE THE U.S. INVADED AFGHANISTAN TO FIGHT THE WAR ON TERROR IN 2001. THE U.S. HAS BEEN AT WAR FOR THE MAJORITY OF MANY SAN JOSE STATE STUDENTS' LIVES AND ENDED WITH THE U.S.'S COMPLETE WITHDRAWAL OF ITS TROOPS BEFORE THIS ANNIVERSARY.

WHILE MANY UNFORGETTABLE TRAGEDIES HAVE HAPPENED THROUGHOUT THE 20-YEAR-LONG WAR, WE WISH TO HONOR OUR SJSU COMMUNITY MEMBERS WHO LOST THEIR LIVES ON 9/11. JASON DAHL, CAPTAIN OF UNITED AIRLINES FLIGHT 93, GAVE HIS LIFE FIGHTING OFF HIJACKERS WHO INTENDED TO FLY THE PLANE INTO THE U.S. CAPITOL BUILDING.

THE UNDENIABLE BRAVERY AND SACRIFICE BY DAHL, HIS FLIGHT CREW AND PASSENGERS FORCED HIJACKERS TO CRASH INTO A SOUTHWEST PENNSYLVANIA FIELD.

META MEREDAY, SJSU ALUMNUS, DUCKED UNDER A BARRICADE SEPARATING FIRST RESPONDERS AND THE PUBLIC AT GROUND ZERO IN NEW YORK CITY AND HEROICALLY HELPED VICTIMS WHO WOULD'VE BEEN LEFT BEHIND.

IN THIS EXTRA ISSUE OF THE SPARTAN DAILY, WE WANT TO PAY TRIBUTE TO THOSE WHO LOST THEIR LIVES ON 9/11 AND GIVE VOICE TO THOSE WHO'VE FACED DECADES OF DISCRIMATION, HATE CRIMES AND DISPLACEMENT. OUR GOAL IS TO INFORM THE SJSU COMMUNITY ON HOW THE 9/11 ATTACKS AND THE SUBSEQUENT WAR CHANGED THE COURSE OF U.S. HISTORY AND THE LIVES OF AFGHAN CITIZENS AND REFUGEES.

SJ marks 9/11 20th anniversary

Community members express discontent with turnout for parade, memorial

PHOTOS BY BRYANNA BARTLETT | SPARTAN DAILY

San Jose resident Ruth Salas looks down at her 6-year-old daughter Genesis Samarron while applauding Saturday morning.

By Bryanna Bartlett
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

San Jose State alumna Johannah Baccaglio said she was deeply saddened by the lack of community members at the San Jose Fire Department's (SJFD) 20th anniversary of 9/11 commemoration parade Saturday.

"On the 10th anniversary of 9/11, Downtown [San Jose] was filled with hundreds marching multiple blocks," Baccaglio, who graduated from SJSU in 2007 with a bachelor's degree in recreational management, said. "I hope it's because of [the coronavirus] pandemic . . . 'Never forget' seems to be fading."

About 150 community members marched alongside San Jose's first responders from South Market and West San Fernando Streets, stopping at Fire Station 1 to memorialize the lives lost in the 9/11 attacks.

Terrorists from Saudi Arabia and several other Arab nations flew airplanes into the original World Trade Center towers in New York City and the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001. A fourth plane crashed into a Pennsylvania field before it could reach the hijackers' intended destination.

The parade began around 10 a.m. and was available for those at home through livestream on Facebook and Zoom.

Two SJFD trucks hung a large U.S. flag over St. James and Mission Streets as first responders marched to music played by an orchestra.

"How appropriate that our first responders would bring us together on this day," said San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo after the parade. "One by one, slowly, we began to hear the stories [in the days that followed 9/11], stories of heroism, of courage, of faith, of resilience. It's those stories that slowly began to lift our spirits."

We all have a story to tell about where we were on that fateful day, Liccardo said.

Baccaglio was a senior in high school, sitting in her first period history class when the 9/11 attacks began.

"The principal had told us to turn off the TVs, that we had all seen enough but my history teacher said 'You know what, we're going to remember this day forever. We're not turning off the TVs. If you have a problem with that you can leave my class,' " Baccaglio said.

She said the class stayed together, as did the rest of the nation.

Baccaglio said she found the "last phone calls" from 9/11 victims, both on hijacked planes and in the twin towers of the original World Trade Center, heartbreaking.

"They knew they were going to die, they were saying goodbye . . . It began as a normal day. It's unfathomable," she said.

SJSU 2010 alumna Jennah Isaacs said she feels 9/11 is slowly being forgotten.

"No one talks about it anymore and over the years it only gets quieter. What's being taught in school and how much?" Isaacs said at the parade. "I understand other things going on in the world, why some young people might be turned off by the nation . . . like Black lives matter and [U.S.] crises . . . and I support that too, that's why I bring my girls out with me. But, today's about lives lost and especially the lives of the first responders."

SJSU's UPD Capt. Frank Belcastro was a New York Police Department Captain about to start his regular shift on the morning of 9/11.

When the two hijacked planes hit the twin towers of the original World Trade Center, Belcastro knew it was a terrorist attack and the "mission was clear—save lives," he told Tiffany Harbrecht, SJSU assistant director of editorial content and news in a Sept. 9 blog post.

"I remember that 9/11 started out as a beautiful day that became a nightmare," Belcastro said. "I will never forget the uncommon valor of the police officers and firefighters who ran into those towers to save others."

Downtown San Jose residents Joey Page (left) and Torey Page (right) watch San Jose firefighters march toward Fire Station 1 on South Mission and St. James streets with their 2-year-old daughter.

> "No one talks about it anymore and over the years it only gets quieter. What's being taught in school and how much?"
>
> **Jennah Isaacs**
> SJSU 2010 alumna

He said it's important to understand people are still dying from toxins released on 9/11.

"Officers, firefighters, other first responders, they're dying from cancer," Belcastro said in a phone interview. "Ash [and] debris filled the streets . . . harmful fiberglass was in the air and we were breathing it in . . . you name a chemical and it was in the air that day."

He said more than 200 NYPD officers have succumbed to cancers from those toxins and pollutants since 2001.

More than 241 NYPD police officers have died in the past 18 years, 10 times the amount of those killed in the 9/11 attacks, which was 23 officers, according to a Dec. 23, 2020 ABC News article.

Researchers have identified more than 60 types of cancer and about two dozen other conditions that are linked to ground zero exposures from 9/11, according to a Friday Scientific American article.

As of Friday, at least 4,627 first responders and survivors of the attacks enrolled in the World Trade Center Health Program have died, according to the same Scientific American article.

"You've had all these officers running into danger, into buildings that were collapsing while people were fleeing, they had no consideration of race,

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REMEMBRANCE

Continued from page 2

religion, politics . . . you're talking thousands and thousands of people," Belcastro said. "The first responders went in knowing the danger they faced and they lost their lives knowing that . . . they gave their lives to save people that were basically strangers to them."

Long-time San Jose resident Janice Stevens said everyone should find a personal way to memorialize these heroes.

"Parades and memorials like these are great for the community to feel that unification again, but I can't stress how important it is to obtain your own witness to these stories if you don't already have one," Stevens said after the parade, referring to today's Gen Z. "And I don't mean the basic facts. I mean the raw, resilient stories."

> The first responders went in knowing the danger they faced and they lost their lives knowing that . . . they gave their lives to save people that were basically strangers to them.
>
> **Frank Belcastro**
> UPD Captain

Baccaglio said while her teachers and the rest of the nation kept their TVs on during the 9/11 attacks, she now keeps the TV off because the news is too depressing.

"It's funny, I've never thought about it before . . . I kept the TV on that day and now I turn it off. That day united us and now I feel we are a just divided nation, still suffering," Baccaglio said.

She said she feels that people today are intolerant of differing opinions and this is a strenuous, polarized time.

Baccaglio said despite this sentiment, this day should forever be a day in which people take time to commemorate the lives that were lost and/or sacrificed.

"9/11 touches all of us in a different way," Baccaglio said. "I felt compelled to honor these first responders today, I had to memorialize my own feelings."

PHOTOS BY BRYANNA BARTLETT | SPARTAN DAILY

Follow Bryanna on Twitter @brybartlett

Top: Bradd Baccaglio, SJSU 2007 alumna Johannah Baccaglio's husband, smiles for a photo with his 3-year-old daughter. Middle: San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo poses with a child holding artwork dedicated to the nearly 3,000 who died on 9/11. Bottom: Members of the San Jose Fire Department march in the middle of Mission Street toward Station 1 Saturday morning.

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ABOUT

The Spartan Daily prides itself on being the San Jose State community's top news source. New issues are published every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday throughout the academic year and online content updated daily.

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EDITORIAL POLICY
Columns are the opinion of individual writers and not that of the Spartan Daily. Editorials reflect the majority opinion of the Editorial Board, which is made up of student editors.

Left: Safaa Nekrawesh smiles as she holds a sentimental photo of her parents on their wedding day in Germany at her home in Fremont Saturday. Below: Nekrawesh holds the only photograph her mother saved before fleeing Afghanistan. The photo features her mother, grandfather and cousin.

PHOTOS BY CHRISTINA CASILLAS | SPARTAN DAILY

SJSU Afghans open up about homeland

Student and faculty members dive deep into their lives away from war-stricken Afghanistan

By Amani Hamed
STAFF WRITER

Safaa Nekrawesh, a San Jose State political science junior, is an Afghan who has never seen Afghanistan.

Nekrawesh lives in an area of Fremont known as "Little Kabul" where she said she's surrounded by Afghan culture that's imported to California by Afghans like her parents, who came in the late 1970s.

Fremont is one of the largest Afghan communities in the U.S. and more than 66,000 Afghan people live in California, with most of them concentrated in the Bay Area, according to an Aug. 21 San Francisco Chronicle article.

She said her parents fled from Afghanistan as refugees in the '70s after a Soviet-backed communist coup began nearly 45 years of war and turmoil.

Afghan communists, supported by Soviet soldiers, killed Afghan President Muhammad Daoud Khan which led to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the torture and execution of hundreds of civilians in the 1978 coup, or better known as the Saur Revolution, according to an Oct. 2001 article from Human Rights Watch.

Human Rights Watch is a non governmental international organization that investigates human rights abuses globally, according to its website.

"As soon as I moved back to Fremont [from Yuba City], I just felt like I was part of this really beautiful community. I felt more open and honest about my culture," Nekrawesh said.

It has never been safe enough for her to accompany her parents back to their homeland, Nekrawesh said.

She said she credits her parents for creating a life of privilege in Little Kabul and shielding her from racism and Islamophobia they faced after the 9/11 attacks.

On Sept. 11, 2001, terrorists from Saudi Arabia and several other Arab nations flew airplanes into the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon, according to the FBI 9/11 Investigation webpage. A fourth plane crashed into a Pennsylvania field.

According to the same FBI webpage, 3,000 people, including Americans and international citizens, died from the attacks.

As difficult as post-9/11 Islamophobia was for Nekrawesh's parents, she said they feel fortunate. Life is much harder for Afghans trying to escape Afghanistan now than in the '70s.

Once Afghan refugees enter the U.S., they face bureaucratic difficulties, occupational problems and symptoms of post-traumatic stress, according to an Aug. 21 Los Angeles Times article.

Refugees, many of whom have advanced degrees or held senior occupations in Afghanistan, must pay back the U.S. government for the price of their airline tickets and have hardly any choices besides minimum-wage jobs because they need U.S. experience, according to the same Los Angeles Times article.

"Now, all of this politics and everything has just made it so much harder for immigrants to seek refuge," Nekrawesh said. "I feel like my parents have a lot of survivor's guilt because of that."

Nekrawesh said she feels survivor's guilt too and wants to use her privilege to help Afghans in Afghanistan the way her parents were helped when they came to the U.S.

Similarly to Nekrawesh's parents, journalism lecturer Halima Kazem-Stojanovic left Afghanistan as a toddler in the late '70s.

Kazem-Stojanovic came to America with her parents after her father, former economics dean of faculty at the University of Kabul, was released after nearly a year of imprisonment. She said he was imprisoned for being an intellectual and affiliated with the university.

"The war is just about my age," Kazem-Stojanovic said in a video interview.

Kazem-Stojanovic was born six months before the 1978 Soviet-backed coup.

She said the U.S. government armed and trained a small faction, which would later become the Taliban, to push Russia out of Afghanistan after the coup.

The Taliban is a fundamentalist faction that was founded in 1994 and came to power in 1996 but was removed from its position by the U.S. military in 2001, according to an Aug. 18 Wall Street Journal article.

Kazem-Stojanovic said Afghanistan was a geopolitically critical stronghold in the 1947-62 Cold War as it borders Pakistan, a former territory of the British empire before its 1947 partition from India.

Afghanistan became a country caught between U.S. and communist Soviet empires warring for political might and control of a rocky land between the Arab Peninsula and the former Persian empire, now Iran.

A country bursting with mineral wealth, opium fields and the potential for unlimited monetary gain through militarism, Afghanistan suddenly presented an opportunity to anyone who could control it, Kazem-Stojanovic said.

Kazem-Stojanovic returned to Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks, where she interviewed Taliban members at the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and trained other women journalists in the field.

She said she and other journalists raised concerns about the security of Afghanistan's border as early as 2004.

> Challenge yourself to learn something about Afghanistan. Learn something about Muslim beliefs and culture. Learn something about the diversity of those beliefs, the diversity of those peoples, the diversity of those places.
>
> **William Armaline**
> SJSU Human Rights Institute director and associate sociology professor

"I remember a group of us foreign correspondents in Afghanistan, when we heard that the U.S. was going to go into Iraq in 2004, we looked at each other in disbelief and said, 'Are you kidding me? There's so much work to be done. This is so fragile here in Afghanistan, it is not mission accomplished,' Kazem-Stojanovic said.

According to a 2001 Human Rights Watch report, the U.S. government indirectly but knowingly funded the Taliban by sending financial aid to Pakistan, where many Taliban operatives fled after the 2001 U.S. military invasion of Afghanistan.

Kazem-Stojanovic said it was only a matter of time before Afghanistan fell to the Taliban again because of its insecure border and a tenuous peace developing across the country's mountainous terrain.

"The past three decades of war and disorder have had a devastating impact on the Afghan people," stated members from the Afghan Civil Society Forum and Association for the Defense of Women's Rights in an Oxfam International report titled "The Cost of War."

According to its website, Oxfam International is an organization working to end global poverty.

"Millions have been killed, millions more have been forced to flee their homes and the country's infrastructure and forests have all but been destroyed," the November 2008 report authors said. "The social fabric of the country is fractured and state institutions are fragile and weak."

Pursuant to the Doha Agreement, a peace agreement signed between former President Donald Trump and the Taliban on Feb. 29, 2020, the U.S. military was to withdraw all military forces from Afghanistan within 14 months.

All U.S. military forces include its allies and Coalition partners including all non diplomatic civilian personnel, private security contractors, trainers, advisors and supporting services personnel, according to the Doha Agreement.

Kazem-Stojanovic said the U.S. military's hasty withdrawal has put her friends in a dangerous position and they're "deathly afraid."

Some of the journalists Kazem-Stojanovic trained are members of the Shia religion and Hazara ethnic minorities. The Taliban, acting as Sunni Muslims, says Shia aren't really Muslims and Hazara aren't really Afghans.

Hazara people suffered atrocities at the hands of the Taliban before 9/11 including the pogroms against them in Northern Afghanistan in 1996, according to the Minority Rights Group International Hazara Profile webpage.

In addition to the potential human rights abuses facing the Hazara and Shia minorities, many are concerned that women who were able to seek an education or political office within the last 20 years will again fall victim to the Taliban's ideology.

The Taliban's extremist interpretations of Sharia Law, Islamic jurisprudence, comes from a mixture of Deobandi and Wahabbi Islam, according to a Wednesday NPR article.

A Nov. 9, 2001 PBS Frontline article and interview states that Wahabbism relies on literal interpretations of the Quran, Islam's holy text. For example, though the interpretation of Islam is meant to be dynamic, as stated by Maher Hathout in his interview with PBS Frontline, Wahabbism allows people to be executed for witchcraft, according to a December 2011 BBC article.

"Women who do attempt to speak out or take on public roles that challenge ingrained gender stereotypes of what's acceptable for women to do or not, such as working as policewomen or news broadcasters, are often intimidated or killed," said a Pakistan-based aid worker with ECHO, the European Commission's humanitarian aid department, in a June 2011 Reuters article.

After regaining control of the country, the Taliban ordered Radio Television Afghanistan news anchor Khadija Amin and news presenter Shabnam Dawran to leave work and not return, according to an Aug. 20 the International Federation of Journalists article.

In the same article, Darwan said she was threatened by the Taliban when she tried to gain access to the building, though a male employee was allowed to return to work.

William Armaline, associate sociology professor and SJSU Human Rights Institute director, said the idea that the U.S. military intervened in Afghanistan in 2001 to protect human rights is a false pretext.

The SJSU Human Rights Institute is a research and policy institution that specializes in human rights research and coverage of human rights crises, and seeks to influence policy design, according to its website.

The institute plans to discuss the current Afghanistan crisis and the unsustainability of U.S. militarism in its upcoming 2022 lecture series.

The institute also shared links on its website to support Afghan people including fundraising efforts to help support displaced Afghan families and emergency aid for victims of Taliban attacks.

"The military industrial complex is not concerned with the rights of women, I can say that with all of my chest," Armaline said in a phone interview.

Armaline and Kazem-Stojanovic said the U.S. government's aim was never to create stability and peace in Afghanistan, but to gain revenue for private military contractors.

Private military contractors have made $100 billion in Afghanistan since 2007, according to a 2017 Business Insider report.

Business Insider is a U.S. media company that publishes financial news, according to its website.

Armaline said these contractors have received large amounts of the $2 trillion the U.S. government spent on Afghanistan's military occupation.

Armaline said U.S. culture must shift away from xenophobia and toward the skeptical judgement of government, media and intelligence agencies' intentions in order to stop militarism's cycle of profit.

"Challenge yourself to learn something about Afghanistan. Learn something about Muslim beliefs and culture. Learn something about the diversity of those beliefs, the diversity of those peoples, the diversity of those places," Armaline said. "Then maybe it wouldn't be so easy for all of these con artists to convince you that your tax dollars, your lives and kids, nephews and nieces, need to go die fighting."

Safaa Nekrawesh said she hopes Gen Z can raise awareness of Afghanistan's dire situation and assist those who are resisting the Taliban on the ground in Afghanistan through social media activism.

"If [the Afghanistan crisis] happened in the early 2000s or even the '90s, none of this would even be as big as it is right now," Nekrawesh said. "We have all of this evidence to just put out there."

Surrounded by Afghan culture in Fremont, Nekrawesh said she still hopes to be able to see Afghanistan one day.

"We need to keep advocating. We need to keep spreading awareness because nobody else is going to do it. And it's honestly all on us," Nekrawesh said. "It's all on the American people and this is our job in life right now. This is what we need to do for those who can't do it themselves."

Follow Amani on Twitter @Amani_Marie_

20 years since 9/11: Two decades of 'war on terror'

Sept. 11, 2001

Al-Qaida hijackers seized control of four U.S. passenger flights. Two planes crashed into the World Trade Center in New York City and one into the Pentagon in the District of Columbia.

2001

U.S. President George W. Bush pledges a "war against terrorism" and the U.S. intelligence and military focus on al-Qaida and Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. The U.S. military starts a bombing campaign against the Taliban and al-Qaida forces. The Taliban surrenders Kandahar, Afghanistan, and Taliban leader Mullah Omar flees. Bin Laden escapes. Al-Qaida leaders continue to hide out.

April 17, 2002

Bush calls for Afghanistan's reconstruction.

May 1, 2003

U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfield declares an end to major combat as Bush said the fighting in Iraq was "mission accomplished."

2009

U.S. President Barack Obama recommits to Afghanistan and sends 54,000 troops in addition to the 14,000 already in place.

May 1, 2011

Bin Laden is killed by U.S. forces in Abbottabad, Pakistan.

May 27, 2014

Obama announces a timetable for withdrawing most U.S. forces from Afghanistan by the end of 2016.

April 14, 2021

President Joe Biden decides on complete U.S. withdrawal by the 20th anniversary of 9/11.

Aug. 15, 2021

The Taliban surged back into power after U.S.-led forces collapsed its regime in what led to the U.S.'s longest war.

Aug. 30, 2021

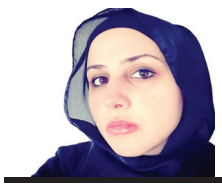
The U.S. completes its withdrawal from Afghanistan. The U.S. war in Afghanistan from 2001-21 cost about $2.26 trillion.

INFOGRAPHIC BY AARON CHEUNG; SOURCE TIMES MAGAZINE OF INDIA

ILLUSTRATION BY AUDREY TSENG

US Islamophobia rooted in 9/11 attacks

Subsequent prejudice stole my feelings of safety, self identity



Amani Hamed
STAFF WRITER

Before I donned the hijab on Aug. 16, 2001 at the age of 12, hardly any of my classmates knew a Muslim or knew that I was one.

No one knew what "Palestinian" meant. Everyone assumed that I, like many of my dark-haired and tan-skinned classmates, was Hispanic.

After Sept. 11, 2001, my hijab became the bull's-eye on my back.

I wasn't safe at home, school or in public.

Rabid Islamophobia robbed me of my last safe place I had as a 12-year-old navigating the many traumas of adolescence and terror: the library.

Kids who didn't know who Muslims were the week before 9/11 now not only knew I was one, but had been told by their parents and news media outlets that all Muslims were terrorists.

The next logical conclusion, then, was that I was a terrorist.

If kids couldn't pull off my hijab, they would try pulling down my pants or pulling up my shirt. Kids took condoms from the health office, unwrapped them and threw them at me.

The lubricant made it stick to my clothes. I was constantly afraid I had missed one and was walking around with it stuck to my sweater.

I was called a "terrorist," "towel-head" and "dumb fucking eye-raqi."

Several teachers were supportive of me, but at one point a substitute teacher asked the entire class if they believed our government should allow people to practice a terrorist religion in America.

None of the people who bullied me understood that I, a patriotic American kid, was grieving the loss of my 3,000 countrymen and was also being made to shoulder the blame. He looked right at me and glared. I stared back in defiance but went home and cried.

Going home felt like entering the den of a large predatory animal. My father had been verbally and psychologically abusive to my two younger brothers and me. He was also physically abusive to my mother for as long as I could remember.

The days when I wasn't afraid of him seemed few and far away like stars in a vast blackness that made up all the days when I was so nervous at home I couldn't eat.

I made myself as small as possible. I spent as much time buried in a book or looking as busy as I possibly could. I watched how I spoke so nothing I said could be construed as offensive or disrespectful.

The way I dressed, even while wearing a hijab, was scrutinized. Everything I did felt policed.

My father calculated his words to belittle us. He made sure we were present when he hit our mother, broke things he knew were precious, no one was allowed to have friends over and we were seldom able to leave the house.

The last place of refuge I could find was the library. Every weekly visit to the small Cambrian Branch Library made me feel like Roald Dahl's Matilda, with her love of books and appreciation for their magic.

Each book was its own escape hatch. I checked books out by the dozen. I built universes in my mind and spoke to characters in books like they were my imaginary friends.

It was peaceful in the library. No shouting or breaking of glass, no cacophony of kids jeering and harassing, just the quiet peace of thousands of books waiting to be chosen.

It was heaven.

One day, on our way home from the library, a truck with a car-dealership-sized U.S. flag streaming from the back tried to run us off the expressway. I was terrified. Accustomed to dealing with extreme tension, my mother kept her eyes forward and kept driving. The truck veered off at the next exit.

The last place of refuge I could find was the library. Every weekly visit to the small Cambrian Branch Library made me feel like Roald Dahl's Matilda, with her love of books and appreciation for their magic.

Road rage incidents became a weekly, if not daily occurrence. People shouted obscenities, flipped us off, jerked their steering wheels toward us as though preparing to crash into us. People drove up behind us, dangerously close to the back bumper, smirking. As they drove off they would yell "fucking Taliban!" or "get out of my country!"

While on the sidewalk outside a grocery store, a grown man spit at me and said, "go back where you came from!"

The following "library day," my mother, who doesn't wear a hijab, gave me an ultimatum: remove my hijab or stay home and miss the weekly trip to the place that had become my safe haven.

I had made a deep and personal commitment to wearing the hijab as an act of submission to God.

I couldn't just remove it. I wouldn't. It would mean that everyone who had terrorized me since 9/11 had won and taken something from me that was special and sacred.

At the time, I was told I was putting my family in danger. In wearing the hijab, I wore a target on my head. My mother and siblings appeared white, American and "normal" enough but I looked like, well, a Muslim.

In hindsight, I don't blame my mother for escaping to the library herself. She didn't understand the extent of my father's emotional abuse of me. My presence in the car had, in her mind, turned our weekly excursions to the library dangerous. She was trying to find somewhere to take a breather but couldn't while dodging white men in trucks trying to kill us.

But I didn't endanger us. I simply placed a piece of cloth on my head, practiced my religion and did what any American should feel comfortable doing without fear of persecution.

Angry white men who were told I was the enemy and decided to believe it endangered us. They terrorized my family and me with purpose and malice and on many occasions laughed when they saw how scared we were.

Hate crimes against Muslims or people who were confused for Muslims sharply rose after 9/11.

According to a Nov. 15, 2011 article by the Southern Poverty Law Center, the anniversary of 9/11 can bring Islamophobic rhetoric and bigotry bubbling to the surface.

The past four years of bigoted anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant rhetoric from former president Donald Trump continues to have an effect on Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Arabs and Southeast Asians.

Evelyn Alsultany, scholar of contemporary Arab and Muslim American cultural politics and popular culture, reflected on Trump tweeting out a doctored photo of Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer in a hijab and turban.

"It's not the first time Trump has promoted Islamophobia," Alsultany said in a Jan. 19, 2020 article from the University of Southern California Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences.

"With rhetoric like 'Islam hates us' and policies such as banning the entry of immigrants from Muslim-majority countries, Trump has reinforced the idea that Islam is a threat to the U.S.," Alsultany said in the same article.

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The new wave of Afghan refugees arriving in the U.S. deserve to be safe. They are fleeing everything they know. Many will arrive in the country with little knowledge of English, no assets and no jobs.

Many will be traumatized from what they have endured in Afghanistan, the long journey to safety and culture shock that comes with crossing an ocean. We can't change how safe they will feel at home while adjusting to life in America. Those of us who are not parents, students or faculty can't change how safe they will feel at school.

But we can make Afghan refugees feel welcome and safe in public.

Thousands of them will arrive even as hateful rhetoric surrounding Afghans and Muslims rises again, according to an Aug. 20 Washington Post article.

By challenging bigoted rhetoric, standing up to those who spout epithets and uphold stereotypes and by attending bystander intervention trainings such as those offered by the Council on American Islamic Relations, we can halt the spread of infectious misinformation, protect new members of our community from bullying and harassment and de-escalate hate crimes and aggressions in progress.

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