

This I Believe: The Widows of Iraq

The widows of Iraq want the violence to stop, but their voices are not part of the conversation.

I was only half-listening, fixing supper on a quiet Sunday night, so the reporter's words bypassed my brain, and went straight to my heart, birthplace of what I believe.

Looking up from chopping onions, I saw, in close-up, the face of a widowed mother of five. Bereft of promised pension following her policeman-husband's murder, she was nonetheless smiling. Her veil framed an old-before-her-time, gap-toothed face, but she was smiling, smiling because someone had asked what *she* wanted. She glowed with heartbreaking hope: "for my children to escape the violence, for my children to be happy." The tears which sprang to my eyes and dropped hopelessly onto the cutting board were not, I assure you, from the onions I was chopping.

I believe, as fiercely as I believe anything, that –no, I'm not going to say *if women ruled the world* but something far more subtle and powerful: if women's voices speaking the truths of our lives were fully heard and our stories valued, we'd all have a fighting chance in a planetary survival game looking grimmer and grimmer by the decade.

My father liked to repeat an old joke from the fifties, *I make all the important decisions around here. You know, the ones about the bomb, and the state of the economy, while my wife decides the small things, how we're going to spend the money I make, what we're going to eat, and where the kids will go to school.*

Even as a little girl I felt the irony under the irony because I heard the women in the kitchen, my mother and her good friends, Billy and Marge, Dot, Betty and Esther, and

indeed it was the women who decided and carried out what really mattered: food for wakes and weddings, casseroles for shut-ins and the grieving; whether a child's fever warranted a trip to the doctor, and who had a car to drive her there; what were chances of a lay-off, and whose garden had a surplus of tomatoes for canning.

I believe that if it mattered at all what women wanted, we'd have sunny schools and affordable health care instead of state-of-the-art sports facilities torn down and taken to the landfill before they're even paid for. We've have clean air and a safe food supply instead of the latest military gadgets. We'd have-- as the old labor anthem describes it-- what really matters: we'd have bread, and we've have roses too.

428 words

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