Cover photo by MedEast/Yakop Matti, 2016 “Sunset over Seje Village, Iraq”

Most photos presented in this book are originals by the author. Others are used by permission, with the exception of Daesh photos, because royalties cannot be paid to a terrorist organization. Propaganda photos by Daesh of slaughtered and mutilated Yezidis were not used here out of respect for the fallen, and to avoid playing into their purposes of terrorizing people.

The names of victims still in captivity, and the names of their family members who were resettled in Seje village, were changed to protect the innocent. The names of Daesh fighters are given in their actual form in hopes they will be apprehended using this and other testimony.

Contents

Introduction

Violence by extremist Sunni Arab Muslims against Yezidis and Christians in Iraq has been ongoing for centuries. In recent years it grew worse and garnered world-wide attention under the black and white banner of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Their horrific violence resulted in a proclamation of "genocide" from world bodies and nations, including the U.S. The violence began before ISIS, however, and the ongoing violence should be seen in that larger context. The genocide began and was perpetuated by violent local people, regardless of the organizations or religions they adopted to garner notoriety. They were supported by misguided young men and women in many places who believed their propaganda concerning rebellion against a world order that had rejected them.

I lived through the genocide in northern Iraq for eight years as it grew from palpable inter-ethnic tensions with occasional violent incidents to genocide. The names worn by the perpetrators changed over time, from Ansar al-Sunna to MSC to ISI to ISIL to ISIS. The leaders were alternately Palestinian Jordanian, Saudi, Egyptian, and Iraqi. Most of the perpetrators, however, were dispossessed local Arab Sunni Muslims more interested in power and financial gain than religion, influenced and enabled by Muslim extremists from other countries to grab the wealth of others.

Over time, I watched as thugs in Mosul initially welcomed, but then were dominated by, international terrorists who were greedier, ruthless, and organized than they were. Their violence was no greater than that of the ancient Assyrians who once ruled Nineveh there. Nor was Sunni extremism more violent than Shia extremism in the modern context, or from Hindu or Christian extremism in the past. Ideological pretentions aside, there was a big grab for wealth and power underway by people who were willing to be extremely violent to get it. The genocide had little to do with religion, spirituality, or any effort to improve any aspect of humanity.

What started as common thuggery in Mosul, with religious and ethnic undertones, rapidly began to morph into the beginnings of a supra-national war of rejected and disposed people, chiefly Muslims, throughout the world against the more privileged west. Extremists targeted the west with high profile bombings. The west responded with travel restrictions against Muslims, and people from the Middle East in general. A feeling of isolation grew among Muslims, greater dispossession. Once a proud people, Muslims had become an underclass in the world, locked out of the benefits of living in the west, which were constantly displayed on their televisions, and they became further inflamed.

The style, ideology, and success of the rebellion began to attract disaffected Muslims throughout the world. Reporters followed young people from western countries rushing to become poster boys in televised graphic murders or the wives of ISIS fighters. The success of their ongoing recruitment abroad empowered Daesh to export their cause, and their violence, creating a world-wide phenomenon.

What made this genocide stand out is that it occurred in the modern era, with the facilitation of social media, at a time when civilization was thought to have risen above this level. Genocide grew in a vacuum of leadership regionally, nationally, and internationally with such speed that it caught many off guard.

Supra-national violence emerged on a large scale, rendering old models and tools that were developed to counter more conventional forms of violence obsolete.

In this book, I follow the larger genocide through the experience of a family of Faqier Yezidis from their remote village of Tel Azer in the Sinjar District, through the attack by ISIS, their retreat to Mount Sinjar, their escape to the Kurdistan Region, and their resettlement in the midst of continuing crisis. The story is true, and the people are real.

While serving minorities in Northern Iraq for the past decade, starting with my first trip to Northern Iraq in 2006, and in continuous residence there since 2008, I watched the genocide unfold. Many ethnic groups, were attacked, in many villages, but I came into closest contact initially with Faqier Yezidis from Tel Azer as many of them sought refuge in Seje Village, Iraq, an underserved area of temporary resettlement for 6,000 Yezidis and 500 Christians among a host population of 500 Christians. My perspective on their struggle was enriched by living among them for the longer term, and trying to help them.

I also share some testimonies of young women who were captured by ISIS and later returned to their families, and identify the lessons I have learned about providing aid to them, in hopes that our understanding of the situation and the appropriateness of the aid response will proceed to higher levels in months and years to come.

The purpose is to move the focus of the reader from a brief recent drama of Yezidis trapped on Sinjar Mountain and Christians fleeing their ancient Iraqi villages, to a broader view of the longer term homelessness, biting poverty, and crippling despair of those who fled the genocide and face a daily struggle even now to survive.

Their terrible ordeal and their ongoing despair is haunting. It is not something one can simply turn away from. The details of the story were gleaned from daily life, and from hundreds of interviews with people who lost their family members and friends, or who still have loved ones in captivity and are hoping for their safe return.

The general level of understanding in the world about Yezidis is low. Until recently very few had even heard of the Yezidis, and until now, many have never heard the word Faqier. Now that the magnitude of the violence has been recognized, the world has a steep learning curve before it will be able to effectively understand and aid these people.

What is happening to minorities in Iraq and Syria today requires careful study so that the violence can be actively countered in its present context before it expands further into the rest of the world. Meanwhile, there are lessons to be learned from those escaping the violence that paint the broader outlines of the genocide and prepare us to take a deeper and more quantitative look. Learning to effectively help these suffering people is a great challenge. It is very difficult work. Many credible international organizations and agencies have failed in it already. Learning how to prevent the genocide from spreading further in the rest of the world requires a closer examination its causes and mechanisms.

Chapter 1: A Separate Peace

Barakat Mahlo Khudeda, a young Yezidi man of 20, lay sleeping on a mat in the darkness on the flat roof of his father's simple mud brick house in the remote village of Tel Azer in Northern Iraq. It was Saturday, August 2, 2014. Beside him lay his young wife, Almas Khudeda Qassim, 18, her long brown hair draped along the lines of her young body and his, both fully clothed in loose full-length white cotton karasses that absorbed the moisture from their warm bodies. Their gentle breathing was the only evidence of life in that small corner of their completely darkened and silent village. The summer heat was still in the night air, though a slight breeze of cooler air from nearby Mount Sinjar playfully stroked the ends of his wavy brown hair and her long, wavy hair.

MedEast/Salaam Khalaf Sharaf

The rooftops of Tel Azer, Iraq, 2014.

Barakat and Almas had met at a wedding party three years before when he was seventeen and she was fifteen though their eyes had met before. During the long wedding dance, he saw her standing to the side with some other girls from his position nearby, standing with his two friends. Their eyes met briefly, before both looked away in shyness. Both felt from that moment that they were going to be close. He

didn't speak to her, and was afraid to tell her family of his interest in her. He later asked his friends about her and her family.

MedEast/Barakat Mahlo Khudeda

Barakat Mahlo Khudeda and his girlfriend Almas soon after they met in Tel Azer, Iraq, in 2010.

When the next public wedding brought them together again a week later, he overcame his fear, and approached her cautiously where she was standing with her friends. Almas' friends melted away in respect for his approach to her. He had practiced what he would say to her in advance, trying and rejecting a hundred possible approaches. In the end, he may have hit some of the broad points he had rehearsed, but not any long memorized passages.

MedEast/Murad Barakat Khalaf/Paul M. Kingery

A street wedding for Faqier Yezidis Murad Barakat Khalaf and Nofe Khalil Ibrahim in the Yezidi village of Tel Azer, Iraq, 2011.

Barakat spoke with his chin lowered and eyes up in his shyness. "Chahala," he said softly, a common Kurmanji Kurdish greeting. He didn't want to scare her away with something stronger or more personal.

"Sachava," She replied, which means literally "on my eyes" but is a warm response reserved for someone you admire.

"I'm Barakat."

"I'm Almas," she replied simply, but he already knew her name.

"How do you like the party?"

"I don't like parties very much, but I was bored in the house so I thought I'd come and see the people," she answered.

"Yes, I came for the same reason," he said, seeking common ground.

“If you were not here, I would have gone home,” she said, raising the conversation to a higher level.

“Oh,” he said, unable to conceal his surprise. It was the opening he needed to say some of the things he had rehearsed.

“I have seen you many times before, and have come into my heart….I like you more than any other girl I have seen in the village…If I don’t see you for two days I become sad at heart.”

“I like you too Barakat, and I was hoping you would come to speak to me,” she said plainly, giving him every encouragement but offering no memorized phrases of her own.

“I really like you, and you can ask about my family and they will tell you I’m not just saying this. I want you to remember me all the time,” he continued, displaying his credentials as if love was a mental, more than emotional, exercise.

“I know your family,” she assured him, and the little she knew was enough for her.

“I want us to live together and have a nice life,” he said awkwardly, plainly expressing his wish to marry her.

In any other place, this might seem bold and sudden, but that was their way. The custom was for the boy to express his desire to marry within the first several meetings with a girl in a public setting, and he was not violating any tradition to bring it up on the very first meeting. Awkwardness with girls was normal among fifteen-year-old boys who were kept separate from girls from about the age of ten. Decisions to marry were made on appearances, and modest investigations among friends and associates, rather than on relationships built over time by finding common ground and proven compatibility. He had to get this out, as it was burning him alive to hold it in.

“Yes, I agree,” she said, too shy to say more, her eyes falling to her feet until he could lighten the subject to the point that she could raise them again.

“I have a good family, and I want you to know that,” he said, further accentuating the practical matter of reputation, which was already not an issue for her. He was overselling himself by that point. She had already agreed.

Her eyes came up to his. “I know your family, but if you want, you can tell me more about them,” she offered, sensing that he needed to talk about it just to overcome his own sense of inferiority. He offered a few details about his family members, and she listened attentatively. She was glad to see the attention move from her to him, as it lessened her embarrassment.

“Everyone will tell you I am poor, and I can’t buy you a nice car, or a house, or a lot of gold, but I can buy some,” he revealed, feeling ashamed, but not wanting her to feel he was trying to win her on the cheap. “But I love you very much, and will always take good care of you.”

This last sentence was his most effective. Finally he was speaking about his emotions. That was what she wanted, though she had not required it.

“I don’t care about money or gold,” she demurred, showing that she had already fallen in love with him from a distance and trusted her instincts fully. It was not blind love. She had already sensed his gentle manner, his honesty, his conservative movements, and his easy but modest smile. Those were markers for other good traits that she knew she could trust. His words, money, or family were not of great concern to her by then. The matter would be proven in time, and this gave them the chance to explore a friendship over time.

The intensity of this first meeting was great, and the ten minutes seemed a hundred. They didn’t dare to talk longer, as it would have tipped others off to their mutual pledge too early, before they could savor the precious moment privately to themselves, sabotaging their chances for additional conversations before the pressure from friends entered the picture.

Barakat was beside himself with happiness at her acceptance. Almas felt a great comfort and release, as the pressures on her to marry were already great, with Yezidi girls being allowed to marry as young as ten, and many were marrying when they were thirteen or fourteen. Both Barakat and Almas were more sensible than most, and they would allow plenty of time for their relationship to build from their initial feelings to something more substantial that could sustain them through the years. Still, it had to be made clear that the interest was in marriage from the beginning, or all the conversations afterward would not have been acceptable. He told his best friend Emad, and she told her best friend Lozeena. Telling another person made it more real, more legitimate, and allowed them to share the burden of their excitement.

In the next three years they found many opportunities to meet at various wedding parties and festivals. He secretly bought a telephone for her so they could talk more often. She hid the phone so her family wouldn’t discover it. It was not formally accepted for girls to talk on phones to boys, but it was becoming common practice. They usually talked late at night, often for an hour or two. They always chose public venues for meetings arranged by telephone.

Sometimes they exchanged little gifts. First he gave her wildflowers taken from the fields and she gave him a simple string necklace, red and white threads interwoven, as was the custom for the Yezidi New Year on the first Wednesday in April. Their families didn’t know about the friendship for a year, after which time others began to see them together at parties and told their respective mothers. Both mothers were supportive, and considered a prospective marriage, although Barakat never told his father. Match-making was the business of mothers in the early stages, with fathers stepping in for the final agreements.

Paul M. Kingery

A Faqier Yezidi woman, Sanam, December 1, 2014.

Sometimes they would steal far enough away that privacy allowed them greater intimacy of thought and word, occasionally even a little Yezidi song or two.

Over two years they grew very close to one another, and set a date for the wedding. Barakat was not sure her father would agree for him to marry her, as he wanted him to marry his first cousin. Almas' father had similarly planned to give her to one of her cousins. Almas suggested that they could run away together, and their fathers would surely accept their bold decision. Her comment proved prophetic.

They told their mothers of their mutual pledge in confidence, but without telling their fathers. They would either elope, or approach their fathers, make an agreement between the families, and announce the wedding, but they didn't know which. Before they could decide, her grandfather suddenly died.

According to custom, they had to wait one year for the usual grieving period before they could marry, with monthly memorial lunches in her grandfather's honor. Waiting a third year was unnatural, and

difficult for them. The two years they had waited already were more than what prudence would dictate, but they could not show disrespect to his family by violating the grieving period.

They had a large lunch for mourners on each of five successive days in a big tent erected for the purpose on the street in front of their house. Everyone who knew Barakat's family came and paid their respects. The ritual was well established. Old and middle aged Faqier Yezidi men sat on floor cushions around the walls and in the middle facing both sides. Water was poured over their hands into a plastic basin by the younger men, Barakat and his brother Faisal among them, and towels were shared for drying them.

Large stainless steel platters of rice, couscous, with chicken and lamb on top, and large flat disks of homemade bread were brought. Salads were laid before them, with olives, onions, tomato, and cucumber and herbs. Meat juice was ladled over the rice and couscous to allow it to stick together when they pinched it with their fingers. Women remained out of sight, preparing the food and cleaning up afterward, sometimes stopping to cry together.

Paul M. Kingery

A Faqier Yezidi man from Tel Azer, Iraq, Barakat Shammo Qassim, attends a funeral luncheon with other men.

Paul M. Kingery

A Faqier Yezidi man, Qarro, November 29, 2014.

They ate quickly, and afterward rose to repeat the washing and drying of their hands. Then they smoked cigarettes, and a holy man came to speak for 30 minutes, wearing all black clothes and a black turban. This was repeated daily the first five days, then on a single day in each month for the next twelve months. Many of the same people would come each time, mostly older men.

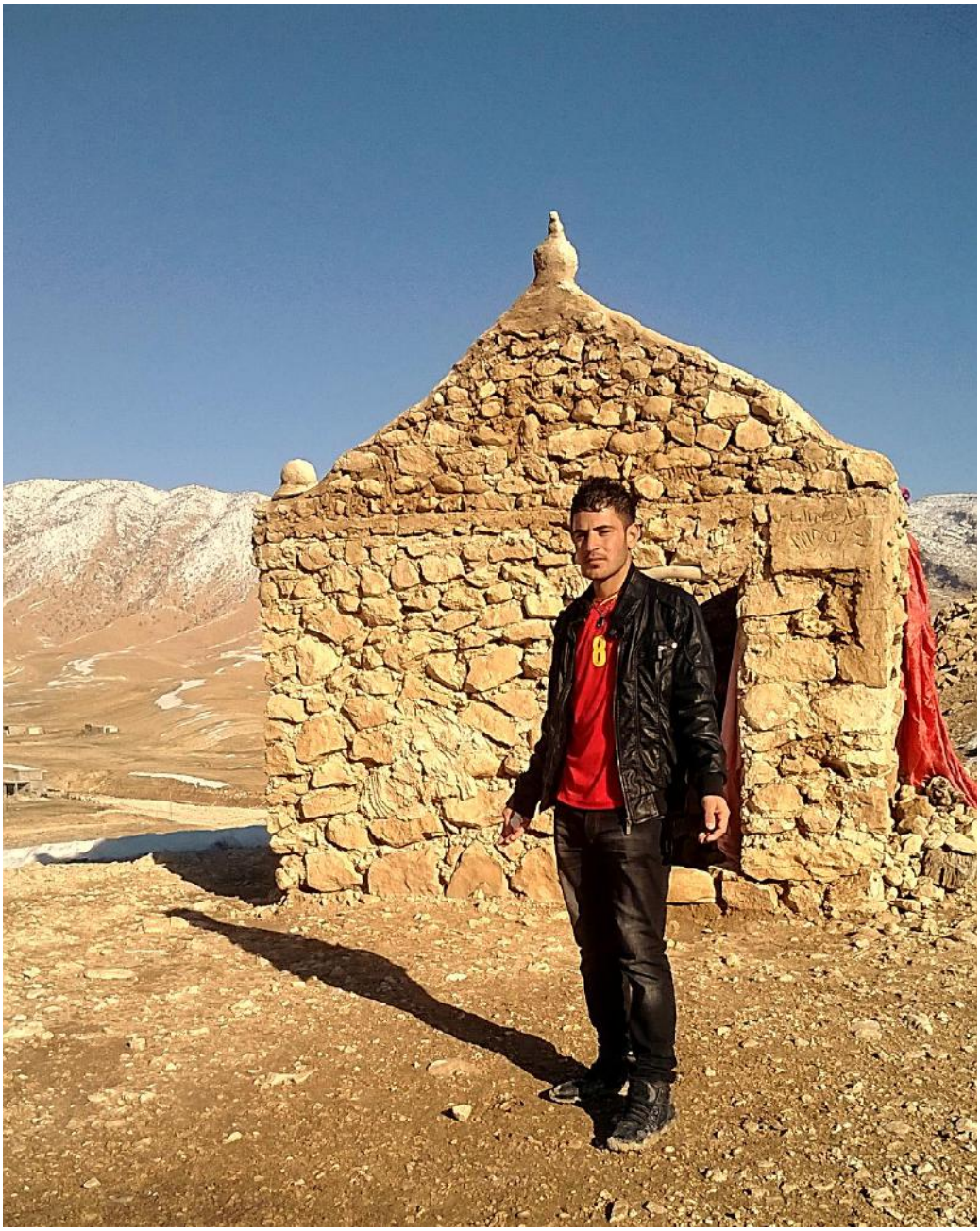
As the end of the third year of their relationship and the end of the grieving period approached, they arranged their escape. They could wait no longer. Just before sunset one crisp winter morning Barakat borrowed a car from his friend and drove with a racing heart to her neighbor's house where she waited, making small talk with her neighbor as if she was not on the cusp of the most dramatic moment in her young life. When he called her, she abruptly excused herself without explanation and flew into the waiting car.

MedEast/Salaam Khalaf

The Yezidi village of Tel Azer, Iraq prior to the invasion by Daesh, 2014.

“Is this real?” Barakat offered, feeling it was something too wonderful in the context of their difficult lives. “Yes, it is real,” she replied, her eyes meeting his, knowing she could gauge his own readiness better by looking into his eyes than by any words she might draw from him. By then she felt she knew his emotions better than he knew them himself.

They raced off in the snow, sliding back and forth on the road drunken with excitement. Their sanctuary was to be the tiny cut limestone Khuder Elias Temple, beneath its pitched roof in a lonely graveyard for small babies on the slopes of Mount Sinjar. It took them only 30 minutes to reach the Temple on a quiet road near the mountain.



MedEast/Almas Khalaf Qassim

Faqier Yezidi Barakat Mahlo Khudeda, age 20, on the day he eloped with Almas to Khuder Elias Temple, a graveyard for babies near Jedali, in Sinjar District, Iraq, December 15, 2013.

They were finally alone for the first time after three years of waiting. They walked together, arm in arm, into the little Temple. Their feet stopped there, but their hearts didn't. First they thanked God for bringing them together, with their eyes closed, their hands held gently. Their first kiss was a tender one, saved for that special moment. Barakat held her closely to affirm that there would never again be space between them. Almas melted in the embrace of his arms, and knew she was finally home. Nothing else mattered.

“I will always love you, Almas, always,” Barakat pledged with a mist in his eyes that he seldom allowed. “I will love you forever, Barakat,” Almas returned, meaning it from the depth of her soul. Neither of them knew in that separate peace the difficult road they would begin to travel together just weeks into their future, and how their mutual pledge would be tested.

After two hours, as the cold began to bite against their fingers and they moved to step two of their plan, traveling to his uncle’s house in Jedali a short distance away. They nervously met the shocked faces of his relatives as they entered, kissed all his relatives repeatedly, and sat down in the living room on floor mats. The happiness on the faces of the women in the house showed they already understood what was coming next. Almas sat a respectful distance away from Barakat. All eyes were on them, and the tea would have to wait for their announcement.

Paul M. Kingery

Faqier Yezidi man, Selo, November 27, 2014.

Paul M. Kingery

A Faqier Yezidi woman, Ghazal, November 26, 2014.

"We're going to marry," Barakat said softly, looking for agreement in her eyes, the first public test of her assent and theirs. She smiled shyly, first at him, then at his aunt, who was the most important person with her in the moment other than Barakat. "Al Hamdilah" his aunt proclaimed, her head tilted slightly sideways and her hands raised to thank God. Then the kissing began again, first his aunt with Almas, and his uncle with Barakat, then switching, before the older children were allowed into the celebratory welcome of Almas to their extended family.

All members of his uncle's family automatically launched into roles given them by their ancient culture. They were given food, drink, and a place to sleep, Barakat with the boys, and Almas with the girls until the four days of negotiation between the fathers was accomplished.

The prospective groom called his father to announce his engagement. The conversation was brief, respectful and to the point. His father had already heard the news. The neighbor lady whose house Almas had used as a getaway had excitedly told her mother, who was very upset that she didn't know where her daughter was. She had called Barakat's mother, to see if Barakat was also missing. Her father was displeased, because he wanted Almas to marry her cousin Elias, but did not oppose the move. Barakat's father did not hesitate to grant his approval, wishing Barakat and Almas a lifetime of great happiness and many children, even though he wanted Barakat to marry his first cousin, Watho. The strength of Barakat's bold action had left no room for discussion.

Barakat's family arranged to pay 3,500,000 Iraqi Dinars (US$2,931) to her family, and bought 75 grams of gold jewelry, worth 1,500,000 Iraqi Dinars (US$1,256), as part of her bride price. Her family would lose any benefit from her labor, and the gold was both an honor to her and financial security for her and their children in a land that often claims the lives of young husbands and fathers early. It was the same price

Islamic terrorists nearby charged for young Yezidi women of her age and beauty, and also the price of an exceptional horse

By the next day, the news of their engagement was all over Tel Azer and Jedali, and thirty of his friends and ten of her friends came to Jedali to his uncle's house to congratulate them. They all visited Khuder Elias Temple again and walked around the area for several hours. Each day more came to the house to express their congratulations personally, and to greet the couple. This continued for five days, until the wedding on December 20th, 2013.

Their honeymoon, which began with the announcement and extended through the wedding party and a short time afterward, was spent there in his uncle's house. Ali Khudeda Khalaf's house was as familiar to Barakat as his own house, as he was there often as the departure point for taking his uncle's sheep out to pasture on the mountain.

A private room was prepared for them to stay in, suddenly endowed with all manner of comforts borrowed from members of the family, exalted to new and higher purpose in those special days. The room was cleared of unneeded items, dusted, swept clean, organized, reorganized, and furnished with the newest sleeping mat, the best blanket, their finest linens, pillows usually reserved for guests, and other any other comforts the girls could find. The women and girls tended to these matters for the sake of Almas more than Barakat, whom they took for granted as a member of their family.

They had married within their own middle-lower caste, as culture required among the more than twenty Yezidi castes. They were of the Faqier caste of Yezidis. The very word Faqier means "poor" in the Arabic language. They could have married someone from the Mereed castes, but not someone from the higher Sheik or Peer castes. They spoke Kurmanji Kurdish, which was distinct from the Sorani Kurdish spoken in the south, and the Badini Kurdish spoken in the east in the Kurdistan Region. Their language was closer to that of the Syrian Kurds. Some of the older adults who had received modest schooling in the Arabic language were functional gulf Arabic speakers, a dialect very different from classical or Egyptian Arabic.

If a poorer male of their caste met a male member of the upper two castes on the street, Sheik or Peer, he would be expected to kiss his hand and give him at least 250 Iraqi dinars or more, about 20 cents in US currency, more if they had more money. There were few of these upper caste members in their village, which allowed daily life to flow more smoothly, and prevented an even heavier tax on their relatively lower social standing. Tel Azer was primarily composed of Faqier caste members, though lower castes were also present in fairly large numbers.

People of their caste were generally among the poorest of the Yezidis, with few exceptions, running small shops on the main road, or working for people of higher castes outside the village or for Arabs or Kurds. Their adult men were generally distinguishable from those of other castes by their long, full beards. Others, like Mereeds, were known for their large mustaches, though outside the rural villages mustaches were getting smaller or disappearing altogether by that time. Barakat, a young man, kept his beard, not yet full, rather neatly trimmed. Almas preferred it that way.

MedEast/Daud Suleiman Khalaf

A Faqier Yezidi girl plays in the flowers in a field on the slopes of Mount Sinjar, near Tel Azer, Iraq, March 20, 2014.

A wedding party was arranged for the streets of Jedali village on November 20, 2013. All their friends and family members came, and all the village of Jedali turned out, about 500 people in all. She was dressed in an all-white gown, with a flowing train that she would have to hold when she walked outside and a large lace bow at her waist on her right side. Her hair was braided as a crown on her head, making her face seem smaller and thinner, though it was heavily painted with makeup and her eyes were heavily outlined in black so that she little resembled her modest self. She wore a long, thin red sash loosely around her waist on her right side, and white lace sleeves, and carried a modest bouquet of white flowers. He wore a black suit, amethyst shirt, red tie, and new black shoes, which made him somewhat uncomfortable in their stiffness, and he had a little more gel in his hair than usual.

MedEast/Barakat Mahlo Khudeda

Faqier Yezidi Barakat Mahlo Khudeda and his bride Almas Khalaf Qassim marry on the streets of Jedali near Tel Azer, Iraq on December 20, 2013.

The dinner was a hallmark of efficiency. Folding tables rented from a local vendor were placed in straight rows and covered with rolled white plastic with a modest floral print. Young men busied themselves with preparing food, placing generous amounts on all the tables family style: lamb, chicken, rice, couscous, salads, and colas. The people were called and moved to take their positions among friends at the tables. There were few words spoken as all began to eat, fingers tearing bits of flatbread to use to pinch pieces of meat into a little sandwich, dripping meat juice upon couscous and rice heaped on large silver platters, pinching the damp carbohydrates with four fingers into little bite-sized balls and drawing them directly into their mouths. Bits of salad greens were taken, olives, pickles, and onion slices, and all was washed down with clear mountain water from the spring.

As soon as they finished, a mere ten minutes later, and stepped aside briefly to allow boys to pour water over their hands and dry them with small terry cloth towels, they returned to find small round glasses of brown tea on their tables. Each little glass had a band of gold color, a saucer under it, and a small spoon inside the tea, buried at the end in a half-inch of white sugar which they could stir into the tea as much or as little as they liked. The tea was piping hot, full to the brim, and overflowing into the saucer below. It was sipped hot, slowly, regularly, held between two fingers from the cooler rim. The sweet beverage, the

common liquor of their daily lives, melted and cleared the oils from the meat that had passed into their throats and settled warmly into their satisfied stomachs. After finishing the tea in the glass, they would sip what had spilled into the glass saucer. This was their desert, as there was no other.

When one left the table, another took his place, until all had their fill of the delicious food and tea, men with men, women with women. Boys cleaned up the abundance of left-overs to be distributed among their neighbors and friends. The tables were cleaned, folded, and set to the side. Boys used the occasion to strut around in their finest clothes, exploring the way the clothes moved against their clean bodies and growing muscles and propping up the longer strands of their short, heavily gelled hair on the crowns of their heads to maximum height. Girls swayed about in groups of two to four, in shimmering fabrics that flowed as they moved, capturing bits of sunlight on sequins and gold colored threads, their long hair draped over their shoulders. Older boys briefly met girls they fancied, small children ran about playing chase, and older men and women sought benches or small carpets in groups to talk as it pleased them.

Almas and Barakat were prominently featured, sitting on separate chairs, with several bouquets of flowers placed in front of them. Guests paraded by them, especially the middle-aged women and older girls, while men generally watched from a distance, with economy of movement and speech directed toward one another more than to the couple or their close family members. Music played loudly in the background and rose to fill the village and the mountain beyond with the celebration.

After dinner, the young adults and some of the middle-aged family members danced together upon the mountain for several hours until sunset, holding hands with their elbows bent, their feet stepping slowly sideways, knees bending and shoulders shaking in a complicated rhythmic sequence to centuries-old florid music belted out in solos by young men and boys that had been prerecorded and played by a DJ. The singing was accompanied by the stringed tambour, played horizontally with a pick against the steady beat of the sheepskin dulzerna. It grew somewhat louder as the pace of the music and the height of the dance stepping increased, reaching a crescendo at the late evening hour of eleven.

When the dance music grew loudest the people brought them necklaces, pins, earrings, and rings, all made of gold, and pressed money into the folds of their clothing to great applause. Almas was the center of attention of all the people dancing or looking on with joy. She stepped lightly in her beautiful dress, smiled brightly, and basked in the admiration she saw in Barakat's light brown eyes. These fond memories from a year before were still playing out in Almas' dreams as she lay sleeping on the roof in his arms in the early morning hours on August 2nd, 2014.

A single gunshot suddenly broke the silence and ended her dreams. Barakat knew the sound of a bullet discharged from a Russian Kalashnikov rifle. It was as familiar to him as the crow of his rooster at sunrise. Their four eyes opened instantly, mechanically, as if connected to the lever action of the rifle's trigger, and quickly met for reassurance. "Must have been a misfire from one of the men guarding the village," he offered quietly to calm her, seeing the fear in her face. Both knew that Islamic terrorists from ISIS were threatening to invade from their nearby stronghold of Mosul, a satellite of their headquarters in Raqqa, Syria. She said nothing, but nestled closer to him, finding safety in his arms as they closed tightly around her.

Her hand instinctively went to her abdomen, as if to calm her 3 month old fetus. Barakat's warm hand joined hers there, their fingers merging, palms both down upon the child, a family of three in the making, safe and secure for the moment in the darkness of night. Her head turned and pressed into his neck, her cheek upon his chest, comforted by the rhythm of its rise and fall until both fell asleep again in one another's arms.

"Arrrerrrrareeer," his pet rooster crowed from the corner of the concrete balcony surrounding the roof at first light, impossible king of his domain, stretching his head forward and upward yet balancing himself carefully with his strong legs so that he did not fall forward into the garden below. Barakat had raised him from a chick, and could easily distinguish his crowing from that of the roosters on the housetops of his neighbors, who quickly joined in with competing claims that they had created the Yezidi dawn. His eyes opened slowly this time, though her eyes did not, and he stroked her hair lightly to enjoy a tender moment. His thick eyelashes waved up and down over his light brown eyes several times, conflicted between his desire for sleep and his need to awaken to face the day's work.

He smelled the familiar aroma of the flatbread cooking on the clay walls of the family's garden oven below mixed with the smoke of the oak wood fire beneath it. His mother was already at work preparing breakfast. He rose gently on his rooster's cue, stealing a last tender glance at Almas's sleeping face before yielding to necessity and descending the stairs steadily. In the hallway, he grabbed some clean clothes from a wooden shelf, pulling on his pants under his karass, then shedding his karass, briefly revealing his toned upper body before doubly covering its glory with a homemade Yezidi undershirt and a cheap white t-shirt from the bazaar.

He walked directly into the kitchen. Reaching out to open the water tap, ignoring the black gecko in the window sill absorbing the morning sun, he started to fill the 40 liter water heater with clear mountain water from the tank on the roof. He reached down to open the gas cock and lit the burner under the heater. As the reservoir filled, and the water warmed, he went out into the garden to steal a piece of hot round flat bread from the basket his mother was filling for breakfast.

He sat down on a bench to watch his mother without saying a word. Kamal was 61, fleshy, with a tanned face and quick hands. Her eyes beneath her white cloth-draped head quickly glanced to capture an image of his handsome face, at which they softened approvingly before returning to the bread she was patting into large flat disks, draping on a convex upholstered wooden board to stretch the dough uniformly. Her eyes had been damaged seven years before in an Al Qaeda bomb blast that killed 336 Faqier Yezidis and wounded about 1,500 others in the center of their village while they were shopping in the bazaar. The surgeries on her eyes had not entirely restored her vision, but she knew the lines of his face.

Barakat watched her as he had a thousand times before, her hands reaching inside the circular opening atop the large clay pot oven to slap the bread against its hot walls, where it stuck and began to cook. Her son's face stayed in her mind's eye so that she barely noticed the bread in her hands. He was her eldest son, and she was very proud of him, his marriage, and the prospect of her first grandchild's birth in months to come.

Barakat returned to the kitchen to turn off the upper tap and gas cock feeding the water heater, and opened the tap below to allow a modest amount of the warm water to flow into a beige plastic wash basin. He turned it off, and carried the basin outside with a towel draped over his shoulder to wash his face and hands in the garden. His hands cupped the water and splashed it on his face. He turned the bar of green soap over in his hands twice and rubbed his face quickly in a pattern he had developed without thinking in his early childhood, carefully avoiding his eyes and mouth but for a brief pass over them. Then he splashed water repeatedly over his face and brown hair, rubbed all aspects of his round head and chiseled face gently with a small pink towel, threw the water from the basin into the garden with a seamless backhanded motion, and set the towel on the wall to dry in the morning sun.

His father, Mahlo Khudeda Qolo, 66, slight of build, wearing a white cotton robe and a white headdress, entered the garden with another basin of the warm water nearly touching the base of his full white beard. It was unusual for a man to survive to his age in Iraq. Most Yezidi men died earlier in their lives in wars, had heart attacks, succumbed to misdiagnosed and untreated illnesses, or died from accidents or botched surgeries. The sun shining through the grape arbor cast moving glimmers of punctuated light across his dark, lined face as he walked lightly on his bare feet. Barakat yielded the space to him for his morning ablution, and returned the basin and towel to the kitchen.

Paul M. Kingery

Faqier Yezidi Mahlo Khudeda Qolo, 66, from Tel Azer, Iraq, November 15, 2014.

Paul M. Kingery

Faisal Mahlo Khudeda and his brother Barakat Mahlo Khudeda, from Tel Azer, Iraq, March 13, 2015.

The father's washing ritual was like that of his son's, as if instructed by him carefully, though the opposite was more the case. The only difference was that his father didn't have to warm the water, a sign of the son's respect for him, and he didn't stop to steal a piece of bread, as he was less likely to get away with it, his wife granting him none of the special dispensations afforded to her eldest son, in whom her fondest dreams were placed in her particular stage of later midlife.

MedEast/Seno Hassan Ibrahim/Paul M. Kingery

Faqier Yezidi residents of Tel Azer, (left to right) Kucho Khalil Qassim, Murad Garis Ali, Barakat Zindin Hussein, Salaam Khalaf Sherif (boy standing), Khalaf Hussein Elias, Zindeen Hussein Elias (who died soon after in Tel Azer in the Daesh Invasion), Burro Sharaf Khuder (standing), and Ali Meesho Khalaf, in a Tel Azer, Iraq Garden, in 2014.

It was time for breakfast. Barakat called to his brother Faisal (17), unmarried sister Basse (21, her nickname shortened from Bassema), married sister Gule (24), brother-in-law Khero Khudeda Ibrahim (30), grandmother Shereen Rasho Ali (70), and wife Almas upstairs, and spread a nylon cloth on the floor in their large hallway. He brought cheese on plates, olives in bowls, and a pitcher of yoghurt milk and glasses. They all came down one by one, rubbing their eyes or straightening their hair and karasses, and all washed in the garden, his grandmother coming last into the living room. They dressed and entered to sit cross-legged on the floor around the cloth, each one in the position he or she had claimed a hundred times before, leaving no space for the Kamela, Almas, Shereen, and Gule who were busy in the kitchen.

His mother, Kamela, brought the basket of flatbread and handed it to Barakat. He set it down in the middle, and several hands reached to take a piece, fold it in half, and tear it into smaller pieces which they tossed about to the others. The cheese, yoghurt, milk, egg, cooked tomatoes, and olives were shared, the father first, and Barakat's brother-in-law Khero with him, then his unmarried brother Faisal and unmarried sister Basse. This was the order of all things in the family. It was unusual for his sister Gule and her husband to sleep in their home, as a married women usually lived with her husband's family, but they were visiting the night before and slept over, with plans to return later that day to their home.

MedEast/Masse Mahlo Khudeda

Barakat's Mother Kamela playing with her grandchild

There was no tradition of thanking God aloud, jointly, for the food, but each one might remember occasionally to express thanks in his or her heart to God while partaking of the food. There was usually little talk of any kind, just undivided attention on the business of eating the large disks of wheat flour bread with bits of cool, white cheese, sometimes dipped in sheep yoghurt, and washed down with small glasses of yoghurt milk or hot brown tea, poured from a large pitcher heated on the top of a silver kerosene burner. Prayers had been offered by Barakat's father on the rooftop to the power of God evident in the rising sun, as they would also be toward Lalish Temple in the afternoon, and toward the setting sun at the end of the day.

After they finished, all but his father participated in taking the dishes to be washed, taking the remaining food to the kitchen for the older women to partake of there, carefully picking up the nylon cloth so that bits of food did not fall on the clean floor, and washing the cloth in the remaining warm water in the garden. This all took less than five minutes, before the younger ones were off to fold up the sleeping mats, taken down from the roof, to store them inside the house in perfect symmetry on top of the tall

wardrobe, protected from the dusty wind gusts on the roof and the searing heat of the midday sun, and out of the way of the activities of daily life.

The house was furnished in a minimalist tradition though no such pretentious word was given for that common practical style. Long thin mats and pillows lined the living room at the base of the walls for sitting, a television sat on a small table in the corner, and a mirror tilted slightly against the wall by the front door, but there were few other furnishings. Even the kitchen was sparsely appointed, with only the necessary items used repeatedly for various tasks. Nothing was frivolous, emotional, or wasted. Their lives followed simple and practical but joyful routines.

Chapter 2: Threats to Peace

Barakat's work was tending his uncle's sheep near Jedali on the side of Mount Sinjar, now numbering about 300, penned for the night in a short enclosure adjacent to his uncle's garden. There was no food stored for the sheep. They would be herded outside the rim of the village on the mountain for pasture. As they followed him out of the enclosure past the neighboring houses and along the unpaved village streets he called to the sheep continuously, in historic whistles, caas, whoops, and tisks that all the people and sheep understood fully. They were the most abundant and recognizable sounds around Mount Sinjar, a hymn of daily life with its own unique cadence and tones.

The sheep well knew their daily routine, and needed little help. He just had to be there with them for subtle cues to their movements upon the mountain. Nature carried all the needed elements, oak trees to shade them, clean air, and abundant spring water to wash down the dry late summer grass. The birds that flew overhead or sang from treetops, and the eagles and sparrow hawks soaring on the updrafts near the mountain cliffs above, were ignored by the sheep but appreciated by Barakat.

He walked out a distance from the sheep up the hillside, his eye following the dusty rose-colored limestone rocks on the jagged crest of the mountain, following the line of its peaks and valleys accentuated by the shadows of the morning sun, an image painted on a canvas of limestone rock and dry grass. The crest ran for 35 miles over rough terrain.

At that early hour, one side of every rock, blade of dry grass, and green oak tree on the mountain captured the pinkish-yellow light, casting long shadows beyond its western edges. There was no dew to vaporize or sparkle on the dry grass, and no moisture lingering from scant rains in recent weeks. This was not the searing sunlight of midday that pierced the skin and sent one rushing to the shade, but the softer light of morning that brightened and warmed the skin for a few pleasant moments, giving pause to early morning routines.

Geoexpro

Sinjar Mountain in Northern Iraq

This mountain was the primary refuge of his Yezidi people. They had sought the caves for safety through the genocides wrought against them in past centuries. They drank year round from the cool water that flowed from its many springs. Their youths celebrated Yezidi holidays with picnics along its crystal streams, wearing bright colors as an antidote to its brown monotony in summer, or blending in with the bright red, purple, blue, pink, and yellow wildflowers on carpets of nibbled green grass in the spring.

The mountain was also a source of food for their bodies and souls. Old men with long white beards and flowing robes counseled them from the doors of its ornate limestone Temples. They picked delicious mushrooms and bright wildflowers from among its rocks in the spring, figs, olives, and pomegranates in the late summer, and favorite herbs in all seasons. Their sheep pastured on its sides and valleys, even along the rocky ridges, forming an endless grid of trails, fertilizing the soil as they were moved steadily across it by shepherds to prevent overgrazing.

The mountain was both mother and father to them. It had been the salvation of the Yezidi people through thousands of years of invasions. They counted 73 genocides against their people by Islamic extremists and other invaders over the past millennium and a half: Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes, Persians, Turks, Arabians, Syrians, Southern Iraqis and others. Their Temples were on the mountain, rather than in the village, in testimony to its greater safety, and they sought them out when they were invaded.

Smaller villages hugged tightly to the base of the mountain all around it, their original homes, with larger villages between four and nine kilometers from its base in all directions artificially created by Saddam Hussein to contain and control them. Living close to the mountain was an ancient security system that compromised the need for farming in the flat Mesopotamian fields near the Euphrates River against the need to be able to flee to the mountain whenever the next genocide occurred. Living further away, as they did now, was risky for them, and favored attackers, but their return to their original villages was a slow ongoing process after the fall of Hussein. Their location assured only the survival of the core of the Yezidi people at the expense of many individual lives with any attack.

Barakat's great-grandfather had sought refuge there, travelling alone as a young man, fleeing the Muslim Turkish genocide against the Armenian Christians and Yezidis in 1915. His entire family had been killed by the Turks, and he alone had escaped with his life. He had married into the local Yezidis in the Sinjar District and had become part of them. He had spent his days in Sinjar in peace, living to a ripe old age. Only now was the familiar specter of genocide against Yezidis returning to haunt his grandson Mahlo and great-grandson Barakat in the place where he had once found refuge.

Barakat turned to take in the view of the endless flat wheat fields in the Euphrates River Valley to the south. Far beyond them, he knew, was Baghdad, a city that occasionally struck out at them like the head of a venomous snake, but which also provided modest pensions to some elderly, widowed, orphaned, and disabled people and modest salaries to teachers, health workers, policemen, and soldiers. His family was historically from Jedali, at the base of the mountain, but Saddam Hussein had forced all the villagers into collectivized cities like Tel Azer to control them more efficiently and positioned armed soldiers around the outskirts of the city to limit their movements. Jedali had been safer, because the people could flee more

rapidly to the mountain. Living eleven kilometers away from the mountain exposed them to greater risk of invasion because many had no vehicle to use in their escape.

The short summer wheat, light brown in fully ripened head, waved effortlessly in the slight mountain breezes. This wheat, like him, was rooted in the ages-old Mesopotamian soil, unmoved. His body was made of this soil, nurtured by what it produced, and he believed that one day he would lie beneath it, becoming one again with the countless others there: Yezidis, Kurds, Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes, Persians, Israelis, Greeks, Mongols, Turks, Syrians, and others. Those under its soil had been born there, had sought out this land as a refuge, were forced onto it, or fell there in wars over power, glory, riches and ideology. The only question left for Barakat was when and how he would join them, in ripeness of age, in violent battle, by accident, or by disease, and how he would live his life with Almas before then.

It was a historic land. They believed Noah floated across it in his ark and his children established its first cities along the Euphrates and Tigris rivers: Nimrod, Erech, Addad, Calneh, Nineveh, Rsesn, Rehoboth-Ir, and Calah. Abraham (who lived from about 1813 to 1634 B.C.) travelled through it on his way from Ur, south of Babylon near the Persian Gulf, to Canaan.

József Molnár/Public Domain

Abraham travels from Ur of the Chaldees along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers to Canaan, Oil on Canvas, Painted in 1850, Hungarian National Gallery.

The Assyrians grew rich and developed the largest city in the middle-east there at nearby Nineveh (Mosul). Tens of thousands of Israelis from the northern ten tribes were brought there as captives over a twenty year period beginning in 740 B.C. by Tiglath-Pileser III (Pul), Shalmaneser V, Sargon II, and Sennacherib.

> And the king of Assyria did carry away Israel unto Assyria and put them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes: because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord their God, but transgressed his covenant, and all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded and would not hear them, nor do them (II Kings 18:11-12).

On the walls of the royal palace of Sargon in nearby Khorsabad this was written in cuneiform:

*In my first year of reign *** the people of Samaria *** to the number of 27,290 ... I carried away.*

The Hebrew prophet Jonah preached there about the eighth century B.C. His tomb in Mosul was blown up by ISIS on July 14, 2014. The Hebrew prophet Nahum preached there a century later before the city was destroyed in a meteorite shower. Nahum's tomb was still intact in the modern era in the nearby Christian village of Alkosh (Arabized from the original name El Kosh).

The tomb of the Hebrew Prophet Nahum in Alkosh, Iraq.

The Southern Kingdom of Israel was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar and its 20,000 captives travelled in the sorrow of defeat through the region on their way to exile in Babylon between 587 and 591 B.C., including Ezekiel, Ezra, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

James Tissot/Public Domain

The Flight of the Prisoners from Jerusalem to Babylon, c. 1896-1902, *Gouache on board, 8 15/16 x 11 5/8 in. (22.7 x 29.7 cm), Jewish Museum, New York, NY.*

Those returned to rebuild the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem passed back through the area beginning in 539 B.C.

In 331 B.C. Alexander the Great from Greece fought Darius the Mede from the Medo-Persian Empire on the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates river basin and associated plains, routing him. Artifacts from this period were sometimes found by Barakat's friends as they shepherded their flocks in the fields.

Barakat sat down among the sheep, taking a blade of grass into his teeth, and looked to the sun rising over the hills and mountains that he knew as home to the Kurds. He had been to their cities, Dohuk and Erbil, and to some of their villages in the mountains, Amediya, Ruwandez, and to Bekhal waterfall. It was not part of his world, and they were not his people. He was not a Kurd. He knew the Kurds to be moderate people, but they held to a religion that had been the bane of Yezidi existence for centuries: Islam, occasionally threatening them in extremist forms.

They called him a Kurd, particularly at voting time, and surely he shared ancient bloodlines with them, but religion and culture separated them almost completely, and cast him to the lower position as a minority, somewhat protected by them yet also quietly despised. The artificial attempts of the Kurds to assimilate the Yezidis into their own ethnic culture in the modern era was equally oppressive, if less violent, from what the Baathists of Saddam Hussein's regime had shortly before forced upon Yezidis, requiring them to register as Arabs. He was neither Arab nor Kurd, and just wanted both groups to leave him alone.

Both Kurds and Arabs continued to attempt to control the Yezidi people in Sinjar District. The Arabs claimed the Sinjar District to be under their control, but the Kurds, with their autonomous government in

the northern Region comprising Erbil, Suleimaniya, and Dohuk Provinces, actually controlled it with their Peshmerga forces, making it a contested area. As a result, some schools were teaching in Arabic, while others were teaching in Kurdish. Baghdad's central government paid the salaries of the teachers and administrators in the Arabic language schools, while Erbil's Kurdistan Regional Governorate paid the salaries in the Kurdish language schools. Land was registered in Baghdad rather than Erbil, as were births, marriages, and deaths, ration cards, and passports.

Barakat and his family lived in the small remote corner of the world that the bigotry of many Arabs and Kurds allowed him. Some of them called him a "devil worshipper." This false concept had arisen from too many similarities observed between the devil of Hebrew, Christian, and Muslim scriptures and their own chief angel. The Muslims had begun charging Yezidis with devil worship from the end of the sixteenth century. Barakat and Almas worshipped God, who has many names, the most common of which is the Arabic Rabulalamin (Arabic for "God of all") or Khodey (Kurmanji for "God who creates Himself").

His reverence for a beautiful "peacock" angel, Taus Melek (Melek means angel), as God's representative and ruler of the earth sounded like revering the devil to those who believe Satan was once a beautiful heavenly angel. Taus was made of fire, though he was not fire himself, and God made him a circle of light to wear around his neck, they believed. Barakat recognized Taus as the leader of the earth, which he administered through seven archangels beneath him: Anzazel, Dardael, Israfel, Michael, Israel, Gabriel, and Shimkael. Two of them, Gabriel and Michael, were known to Christians as archangels, powerful angel leaders. Michael and his angels fought Satan and his angels in an account in Christian scriptures, overcoming them.

Angels were thought to differ from the spirits within humans primarily in that they lived in the presence of God, untested by the difficulty of separation from Him, and with full knowledge of Him, rather than separated from Him and only modestly informed about Him on the earth, in the midst of a greater test. This view of angels differed little from that of Muslims, Jews, or Christians with two primary exceptions. First, the other traditions placed a fallen angel, Lucifer, in the position of leadership over fallen angels in the earth, with malevolent purposes, whereas Yezidis placed a redeemed Taus Melek over all archangels serving the people of the earth, with beneficent purposes. Second, angels were tested and proven faithful on the earth in human bodies through successive reincarnations before reaching heaven in the Yezidi tradition, while in other traditions angels had always lived in the presence and knowledge of God.

These seven angels and others were believed to periodically reincarnate "backward" into humans for the benefit of mankind. In recent years, in the Yezidi village of Bozan, Barakat was aware that many women began to behave erratically from time to time, flailing around their homes, which became filled with curious Yezidis holding mattresses up to prevent them from hurting themselves or others. They would then become calm, and speak "prophetically" accusing certain ones of not wearing their Yezidi undershirt, or other violations of their rules. Even an unborn child was thought to be a reincarnated angel. The fact that adopting this angel persona brought attention and money to the woman was not considered motivation enough for her to behave in such a manner. Occasionally one of these would be thought to have supernatural powers other than the ability to prophesy, such as being impervious to snake bite, having control over fire, or having other powers. They believed such people to be reincarnated angels.

They tended to deliver trivial messages, rebukes to people who violated simple Yezidi rules like not wearing their undershirts, or didn't go to the Temple, or behaved badly.

There was no facility for conversion from other religions to the Yezidi religion, because they believed Yezidis are repeatedly reincarnated only into faithful Yezidi adherents or animals, so ideology had never driven them to violence the way it drove extremist Muslims to conquer other cultures on their borders. If the spirit had been bad in the body, it would go to the fire for punishment, and could only be reincarnated as a donkey or a disabled person or someone with a large birthmark, rising to higher status only through improved living and subsequent reincarnation. If the spirit was good in life, it would be reincarnated into a healthy baby from faithful Yezidi parents or go to heaven.

Through successive reincarnations, Yezidis thought they could attain greater spiritual purity, and ultimately, divinity (which they believed Sheik Adi achieved in the twelfth century). They could not go to heaven unless they wore a white Yezidi undershirt and lived a pure life. But reincarnation had no practical spiritual significance to them, unless they were a reincarnated angel, as they had no former memory of their former lives in other bodies and no powers derived from being reincarnated from a non-angelic being. Any Yezidi who converted to another religion was rejected from the Yezidi culture, and could not be reincarnated upon death into a healthy Yezidi body.

A further similarity between the devil and Taus centered on the angel's rebellion. In Yezidi tradition, God told the angels to worship none but Him, so when he later made Adam, and told Taus to respect man, Taus rebelled as it seemed inconsistent with God's previous instruction. He complained that man was made of dirt, and not worthy of worship. God cast Taus into the fire because of this rebellion, where he spent 40,000 years weeping. His tears put out the flames of hell and demonstrated his repentance, so God restored him, praising him for having tried to worship God in good conscience despite his mistake.

This story was seen as similar to the mention in Christian scriptures of the rebellion by the devil and his angels against God, and the resulting war between those angels and the angels of Michael who were faithful to God. The difference, however, was that Taus was eventually praised by God, in Yezidi tradition, for trying to obey Him in good conscience though confused by seemingly conflicting requests. In other traditions, the devil remains opposed and rejected by God through to the end of human existence on earth.

The imposing stone relief of a big black snake on the wall at the entrance to two of their primary Temples, Sheik Adi Temple in Lalish in the Kurdistan Region, and Shekmand Temple near Jedali on Mount Sinjar, fed into the misconception of Yezidis as devil worshipers to those who believe Satan took the shape of a snake to tempt the first woman, Eve.

The snake was meant to symbolically guard the Temples from intruders the way lions guard shrines in Israel or eagles guard government buildings in the U.S. or gargoyles guard buildings of all types from the Europe of 150 years ago. Their presence did not imply worship of animals any more than their prayers toward the sun in mornings and evenings constituted sun worship. The ancient Sufi Muslim leader Sheik Adi who had come to the Yezidis in the twelfth century, changing both their beliefs and his, had a real

black snake that he left to guard the Temple in his absence, and the symbol was meant as an honor to that respected former leader. He died in 1162 and was buried in Lalish Temple.

Polygamy was allowed for men, without limits on the number or frequency of marriages per man. A woman could not marry multiple men, however. Their rules required a dowry to be paid to the bride's family, negotiated between the families. A man could steal an unmarried woman, flee to a relative's house, and retroactively gain consent to marry with payment of a bride price, and this would not be considered a stoning offense for the woman or a cause of banishment for the man. Rather it would be considered a sign of the man's strength. A poor man, or a non-relative, would often choose this route if he felt the woman's father would not allow the marriage. Close relatives within the Faqier caste, even first cousins, were preferred spouses generally.

Barakat had also been called "dirty" simply because he didn't bathe on Wednesdays as a ritual purification of his soul similar to fasting, commemorating the visitation to earth of the chief angel, Taus, on the first Wednesday of April each year, which they marked as their New Year's Day. The truth of this custom had been stretched through bigotry to say that he, and all Yezidis, rarely bathed. It was true that they ate over a cloth on the floor, with their hands, and they were very poor, so they couldn't always afford certain luxuries of cleanliness, but their homes were generally very clean, and the people generally bathed at least every three days, some every day except Wednesday.

Living so far from modern civilization in a somewhat reclusive culture, their standards of personal cleanliness were more closely matched to those of others in the region, and people who lived in the rural areas of the U.S., Europe, or other western countries 150 years before, prior to the days when the public widely embraced the germ theory of disease. The majority of people within every ethnic group in Iraq calls all other groups "dirty," which is an expression used more to define lines of intimate social acceptance and intermarriage than a careful assessment of physical cleanliness. If food was served on platters on the floor or carpet, and the bread was laid in the floor where people had just walked, near the platters, it might be lifted off the floor and placed directly on the food for consumption in some homes. Relative cleanliness varied widely between families of course, and those with more education were generally cleaner in handling food.

Barakat followed local Yezidi customs without knowing the reason for any of them. He didn't eat broccoli, lettuce or cabbage, didn't wear clothes that may have been worn by Muslims, didn't allow Muslims to sew the neckline of dresses worn by the women in his family, didn't wear V-neck tops, didn't wear the color blue, always wore two shirts, the undershirt made in his home, the outer shirt purchased from the markets. He dressed while standing up, and didn't urinate while standing, as expressions of respect for the name of God and his angels. He didn't kill swallows with their black wings and white breasts because they resembled their black-robed holy men.

On their New Year's Day, on Wednesday in the first week in April, every family was required to have meat, the wealthy, a lamb or an ox, the poor, a chicken or something else. They were to be cooked the evening before, and blessed at sunrise, then after eating the meat, small portions of the food were to be placed on tombs in the cemetery, where women would sing lamentations. This was followed with picnics in the

mountains by the people of every village. The girls gathered red flowers from the fields, tied them into bouquets, and after three days hung them on the doors as a sign that all people in the house were baptized Yezidis. The water for their baptisms and ritual washings after travelling distances was to contain sumac and oil. One room under Lalish Temple was filled with jars of oil brought by people for the rituals.

Some had told Barakat that Muslim invaders once put blue flags on the houses of Yezidis they had conquered, and this is why they didn't wear blue. Muslim extremists slitting the throats of their ancestors was given as a reason they didn't want Muslims making the necklines of their dresses. Others said it was a commemoration to the light God put around the neck of Taus. But these were not necessarily the reasons for these historic traditions.

Anti-Muslim sentiment was strong in Barakat, as in most Yezidis. He had been told that Mohammed had been enlightened by God, though the oppression Yezidis had experienced from Muslims continued to threaten their existence. Barakat believed the Kurds had broken off from Yezidis when they embraced Islam. The Muslims said the opposite, claiming that Yezidis broke off from Islam, so they were heretics worthy of death. The Muslims also counted Yezidis as "not people of the book," though Christians and Jews were given higher status by Mohammed so long as they did not threaten Muslims.

Yezidis believed Islam would be defeated when Jesus and the angel Taus returned to the earth, "very soon." Muslims and Yezidis kept distance between themselves, preferring to live in separate communities. Friendships did sometimes form between them, however, on a personal level, that overcame some of the bigotry. Normally the pleasantries did not extend beyond sharing tea or making simple business transactions.

The antipathy between the Yezidis and Muslims was historic. The 73 genocides the Yezidi people had counted through history began in the seventh century, and the claim of Muslims that Yezidis were devil worshippers began in the late sixteenth century. In the late 1970s, Saddam Hussein, ruler of Iraq, forced Yezidis from their rural villages into centralized villages he required them to build, Tel Azer, Guzarik, Sinjar City, and Jazeera, at the base of the southern slopes of Mount Sinjar. By collectivizing them, he gained more control over them, and made administration of their people easier for his Baathist regime. He did the same to the Kurds, collectivizing them into cities for greater control.

Yezidis began to flow back to Jedali and other small villages slowly after Saddam Hussein was removed by the joint efforts of American and Iraqi forces. With Shia Muslims sent in to control Mosul, Yezidis grew only slightly more comfortable going to and from Mosul for work, commerce, and education. The relative peace would not last long.

In October 2004, Ansar al-Sunna, a Sunni Muslim group in central Iraq opposed to the U.S. presence in Iraq and U.S. support for Israel released a video beheading of a Turkish truck driver on its website. The group was formed by Abu Musab Al-Zawakiri, a militant Palestinian Islamist from Jordan with an intense hatred of Israel. He had been raised in a poor mining town north of Amman and was a petty criminal as a youth. He had fought Russians in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

He returned home to Jordan and tried to overthrow the Jordanian government. Explosives were found in his home, and he was arrested, convicted, and imprisoned in 1998. He spread radical views against Jordan, Israel, and the U.S. in prison, and controlled other prisoners for his purposes. A general amnesty in Jordan saw his release in 1999. The next year, he was sought by the Jordanian government for trying to blow up the Radisson Hotel in Amman before New Year's Day 2000. He fled to Pakistan, but was deported to Afghanistan, where he affiliated with Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda, receiving $200,000 in startup funds from bin Laden, and started a training camp for targeting American soldiers with chemical weapons.

He was wounded by U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan, and sought medical treatment in Baghdad, then moved to Syria to begin training fighters to resist the Americans. On October 28, 2002 his group shot and killed Laurence Foley, Director of U.S.A.I.D. in Amman, Jordan. The Americans continued to seek his extradition from every country where he was seen, without avail.

Beheading was a stylized form of violence popularized by Zawakiri to produce terror. It was not common to Al Qaeda outside Iraq, which preferred impersonal bombings in densely populated areas, but was the unique signature of Zawakiri. He was self-declared the "Emir of the land of the two rivers" and cultivated a following of disaffected Sunni Muslims in Syrian and Iraq between Raqqa and Mosul. He boldly declared: "In the Name of Allah, I will not leave Iraq until victory or martyrdom!" It was the U.S. presence there as a target that attracted him, and their ongoing support for Israel. He preached the overthrow of the Jordanian government, Israel, and the U.S. government, which remained cornerstones of the plans of his followers. He affiliated with the Mujahedeen Sharia Council in Iraq, which also affiliated with bin Laden.

In September 2005, the Iraqi government's Shia forces attacked his militants in Tel Afar. As a result, Zawakiri declared war on Americans and Shias everywhere in Iraq. He sent out suicide bombers to American and Shia Iraqi military posts. In revenge, a United States Air Force F-16C jet dropped two 500-pound (230 kg) guided bombs on his safe house in Baqubah on June 7, 2006, killing Zawakiri, one or more of his wives, one of his sons, and some of his associates. But his style of killing and use of the internet in brief video segments of beheadings, particularly of westerners, was adopted by his followers and continued in the area between Mosul and Raqqa. Osama bin Laden bristled at his rapid growth in power, his independent decision-making, and the media attention he received, so the relations between them were strained.

His group adopted the historic hatred of Sunni Muslims toward Yezidis in the Iraq-Syria border area. They hated them for not being "people of the book" and for their stubborn refusal to "return" to Islam from their heretical beliefs. This sentiment was further inflamed over an incident on April 7, 2007. Du'a Khalil Aswad, was a 17-year-old Yezidi girl living in Bashika, in the Nineveh plains area between Mosul and Erbil. It was one of the few small towns in Iraq where Muslims, Christians and Yezidis lived together. She fell in love with a Sunni Muslim boy from her neighborhood.

The two stayed out talking after dark one evening in their neighborhood, and were seen by her father and uncle. Fearing for their lives, they sought refuge in the local police station, but the police handed them over to a local Yezidi Sheik. Phone calls were made, and her family members were pressed to move

against her, falsely claiming she had converted to Islam and run away with this boy. There was no evidence of a sexual relationship between them, or that they had tried to run away. They were only talking privately in the open air in their own neighborhood.

Her family was consulted by telephone, and the sheik convinced her she had been forgiven of the dishonor she had brought to them, and could return home to her family. The couple left the house, and parted ways, feeling the worst of the danger was passed. Du'a returned toward her home. On the way, a mob of her relatives and other Yezidis accosted her, insulted her, and dragged her into the town square and pushed her to the ground. They stripped her of her clothes to shame her and continued insulting her for having insulted their religion and her family by talking to a Muslim boy without a male family member present.

For thirty minutes they insulted and taunted her, while she pleaded for help from the ground, bloodied and bruised. Their frenzied behavior escalated when someone threw a stone at her, and others followed suit, as was common among Yezidis in such cases. They began to stone Du'a to death. The final blow was made using a piece of concrete block that was used to crush her skull. A video of the incident, taken on a cell phone, was posted to the internet, showing police standing by idly.

Her body was dragged through the streets by rope behind a car. They killed a dog and buried her with the dog to further shame her. Later her body was exhumed in an attempt to discern whether she had been a virgin. The information from the results were not circulated. Had she not been a virgin, the results certainly would have been circulated by the community as evidence in their favor as the international outcry grew and reporters descended on the town.

This violence by Yezidi men toward young Yezidi girls was as wrenching, horrific, and unjustified as any violence the Muslims had ever wrought against the Yezidis. It remained hidden to a large degree, tolerated by appointed government authorities in Yezidi communities. For a brief moment it shocked the world, then people forgot about it and went back to their lives, as if it was a single newsworthy event. It was not a single event. Hundreds of Yezidi girls and women were stoned to death in Iraq, or burned to death, or burned themselves to death in the years before. The evidence was available, in photos of hundreds of victims compiled into a thick album in the back room of one of the few Yezidi organizations in the Nineveh plains area.

Stoning deaths had been occurring in Tel Azer for centuries, but information about such events rarely reached the public outside the Sinjar area. When asked about such events, Yezidis said the girls who had been killed were bad for all the people. Boys were rarely the victims of stoning. The exclusive reason for stoning deaths was love interest between Yezidis girls or women and Muslims boys or men, and sometimes sexual activity outside of marriage. The women always claimed to be innocent, and their claims were never believed. They had no concept of rape.

In every case, the woman was stoned to death, banished, or made so miserable she burned herself to death. The man was sometimes killed, if he was Muslim, and other times merely banished, particularly if he was Yezidi. Sometimes the Yezidi man was banished by the family, and sometimes he was also banished from the Yezidi religion by regional religious leaders. These were the equivalent of lynchings,

lacking any court involvement or summary decision-making by anyone other than that of the families involved or local Yezidi police acting as judge, jury, and executioner usually in a mob murder. Even the muqtars were not usually involved. In the usual scenario, the father of the girl agreed that she was guilty, agreed with her stoning, and called for the banishment of the boy, under great pressure from the community who had considered any limited evidence and called for her immediate stoning.

In 2007, a man in his 60s saw a man in his later 20s wearing blue clothes and standing with a Yezidi girl of about 17 in his neighborhood in Tel Azer. He knew the young man was not Yezidi because he was wearing blue clothes. The older man called her father, who picked up his handgun, loaded it, and went with the older man to confront the couple. They asked his religion, and he said he was a Sunni Muslim. They asked why the couple had been talking there. They admitted they were going to run away and marry that day, because they loved each other. Her father, hearing his daughter say she loved the Muslim, pulled out his handgun and shot the man in his stomach. The man fell to the ground, screaming. The girl started crying and holding onto her boyfriend.

The police arrived five minutes later. The story was told to the Yezidi policemen. They agreed that the man deserved being shot. By then 50 or more men and boys, even small boys, gathered around, while the women on rooftops watching the scene. Then, with police approval, the father shouted "Hola Shekhadia" intoning the name of their famous Sufi teacher of the twelfth century, calling all Yezidis within earshot to attack and kill the couple. All the people started throwing rocks at the man and killed him. The police took his body away. The girl was taken home by her father. Three months later she poured kerosene on herself and burned herself to death in a storage room in their home.

In 2013, a young Yezidi woman of about 17 in Tel Azer fell in love with a Muslim boy from Sinjar city who came to work as a laborer framing the concrete roof for a new addition to her house. The boy came to the checkpoint in his car to wait for her. He was questioned at the checkpoint by volunteer Yezidi guards, and told them he was waiting for a girl to come to meet him so they could run away. They checked his ID and found he was a Muslim. They grabbed him, tied his hands behind his back, and called her family, telling them about the situation, and asking them to come to the checkpoint. The family of the girl arrived, and immediately started throwing rocks at his car, severely damaging it.

The police were called, and came to take the boy to jail. He was arraigned in court and released. The family returned home with their daughter. The father told his daughter he was going to kill her for dishonoring their family and their religion by trying to run away with a Muslim. Her mother took a softer stance, and helped her run away to Zakho. She settled there, and married a Yezidi boy from Zakho, remaining estranged from her family.

Burning suicides were also common due to the oppression of young women. In Sununi, a 27-year-old unmarried woman, the only daughter in the family of five boys, was living with her parents. Her father and brothers were getting drunk regularly and fighting with her. She often ran to her aunt's house next door crying, looking for an escape. She said she couldn't continue living there any longer, and didn't have a boyfriend to take her away. She told her aunt one day she would probably never see her again. The next day, inside her kitchen, she poured kerosene on herself and lit herself on fire, suffering horrible burns.

She was taken to an emergency hospital two hours away in Dohuk for treatment, but she died there three days later. The family buried her and had a funeral dinner in her honor. Her mother was devastated, and added the loss of her daughter to her own continued suffering.

The terrorists were angry that Du'a had been killed for loving a Muslim boy. It pushed a red button for them that people in the west might not understand. Their response was a carefully planned and coordinated massacre of Yezidis. On April 23rd, 2007 there were two reprisal attacks against the Yezidis, claimed by the Islamic State of Iraq. In Mosul, a bus filled with workers from a textile factory was pulled over on a lonely road. The attackers boarded the bus, and checked ID cards, which carry the religion designation in Iraq. Muslims and Christians were told to get off the bus. The attackers drove the bus with the 23 Yezidis on board to the eastern outskirts of Mosul, where all the hostages were forced to lie face down on the ground and shot dead. This exact style of killing was soon to resurface in attacks on Yezidis throughout the Sinjar District.

The same day a coordinated attack occurred in Teleskof. A car bomb detonated, killing the suicide bomber and 25 Yezidis and Assyrian Christians. The attack was claimed by Ansar Al-Sunna, Zawakiri's fighters. On August 14, 2007, Tel Azer and nearby Jazeera, two Yezidi villages, were bombed by large tractor trailers filled with explosives. In Tel Azer, 336 Yezidis were killed, and about 1,500 were wounded. In Jazeera up to 300 more were killed, and an unknown number were wounded. This group continued to grow in strength, training in Syria, and preoccupied itself with struggles for land in Syria against President Bashar al Asaad. Meanwhile, its interest in Mosul and other parts of Iraq continued.

On May 16, 2010, the leader of the Mujahedeen Sharia Council (MSC) was killed by U.S. forces at his safe house near Tikrit. The council then elected Abu Bakir al-Baghdadi as its new leader. His actual name was Ibrahim Awad Ibrahim, born near Samarra, Iraq near Baghdad in 1971. He had been detained by the U.S. but was considered a low-level fighter. In detention, he seemed to rise in prominence by networking with the other terrorists of the MSC. When bin Laden was killed by the U.S. on May 2, 2011, he vowed revenge. The fighters who had served Zawakiri joined forces with al Baghdadi, adding strength in the Mosul and Raqqa area, creating opportunities further north in Iraq and in Syria, and renaming their group Islamic State of Iraq (ISI).

On May 2, 2011, the leadership of al Qaeda passed to bin Ladin's second in command, Egyptian surgeon Ayman Mohammed Rabie al-Zawahiri. He should not be confused with al-Zawakiri, the Iraqi terrorist, who was already dead at this point. A conflict arose between al-Baghdadi and al-Zawahiri about the addition of fighters from Syria's al-Nusra Front into al-Qaeda, which resulted in the separation of ISI from al-Qaeda, with about 80% of the Syrian fighters aligning with al-Baghdadi and ISI. This strengthened ISI in Syria considerably, adding the new fighters to those inherited from Zawakiri.

ISI quickly began to use this influx of fighters to secure strongholds in the areas between Raqqa, Syria and Mosul, Iraq. On August 15, 2011, a wave of ISI suicide attacks beginning in Mosul resulted in 70 deaths. It was clear by then that Mosul was their target. Their successes there emboldened them. They were testing the defenses of Mosul, and found neither the Kurds nor the Arabs rose to its vigorous defense. They began developing plans for its overthrow.

On April 8, 2013, al Baghdadi announced that ISI had been reformed into Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which was then altered to Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Their increasing strength drew attention and funding from citizens in Saudi Arabia and Qater, and brought fighters from Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Egypt, and other predominantly Sunni Muslim countries.

The people of Iraq referred to ISIS using its equivalent Arabic acronym, which, when read as a word in Arabic, sounded like "Daesh." ISIS leaders threatened to cut out the tongue of anyone calling them "Daesh" because that word in Arabic meant something close to "stamp out" or "destroy." Since the term was coined as a word by their enemies, it conveyed a veiled threat to ISIS to stamp out their organization. That ISIS leaders took offense to their own chosen acronym when spoken as a word provided perverse pleasure to those targeted by the group. It was the only recognizable term for the group in Iraq.

The context was ripe for Daesh to reap huge temporary gains in the area at a low cost. Iraq remained deeply divided into two Muslim branches with long histories, over who was the rightful successor of Mohammed. Kurds and Arabs both leveled claims to the Nineveh Plains area which included Mosul, but the Arab presence there restricted Kurds from making any moves, and the Sunni religion of its residents made the Shia government's control there weak. Syria was weakened by opposition to the government and the interference of foreign nations that initiated bombing campaigns there. Daesh moved into the power vacuum and ruthlessly claimed lands that were the most vulnerable, making Raqqa their stronghold.

Mosul was particularly weak, and ripe for the taking. The U.S. government wanted democracy and majority rule to build peace and economic prosperity there. Their optimism that democracy would readily grow in Iraq despite deeply divided religious and geographical components was proven wrong. The U.S. was unified along Christian principles when democracy developed there, so it was easy for the U.S. to miss the geographic/ethnic/religious divisions within Iraq as threats to democratic development.

The U.S. used simple math to see that Shia Muslims were in a majority over Sunni Muslims in Iraq, then replaced Sunni Iraqi leaders in Baghdad with Shia leaders, who quickly moved to dominate Sunnis in Mosul. The Shia had become cruel tyrants to the Sunnis, and had become despised in Mosul. Unable to unseat their new Shia overlords alone, the leading Sunni men in Mosul allowed Daesh to enter in a bid to help them reclaim power over the city and the surrounding region. Then they joined Daesh as they entered to slaughter many and set others to flight.

A more fine-grained political calculus might have led the U.S. down a more fruitful path to democratic development in Iraq, but the U.S. remained poorly informed on the Iraqi situation. It's agents in Iraq lived and moved in little security bubbles according to rules that kept them from gaining a deeper understanding of the forces at play, and broader public sentiments. They met locals on their own turf, on their own terms, and were not good listeners. They hired people for their English skills rather than for their reasoning and reporting abilities.

On June 10, 2014, Daesh attacked Mosul and the nearby town of Tal Afar, parts of Kirkuk and Diyala Provinces, Tikrit and much of Nineveh Province in a sweeping victory. Rockets had fallen on Christian and Yezidi villages to frighten the people, after which Daesh operatives made telephone calls to Yezidi and

Christian leaders, ordering them to convert, pay a heavy tax, or evacuate. A mass exodus of Yezidis and Christians from Nineveh Province had followed, to large cities in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region: Dohuk, Erbil, and Suleimaniya. 1,700 Iraqi soldiers who had surrendered in the extremist Muslim attacks on moderate, chiefly Muslim, cities had been massacred.

Daesh was welcomed by the majority Sunni Muslims in Mosul and feared by the Shias who worked there as outsiders in a sea of Sunni discontent. When Daesh entered Mosul, the Shia overlords simply ran away for fear of retribution, while the smaller numbers of Sunnis in the Iraqi Army melted away in hopes Daesh would return power to Sunnis. Daesh went on to seize Fallujah, Al Qaim, Abu Ghraib, Ramadi and other cities and villages in Iraq that had once been "liberated" by U.S. forces.

With the conquered city of Tel Afar only an hour's drive from Barakat's home in Tel Azer, and with Mosul, a city of more than a million, growing into a center of operations for Daesh in Iraq just beyond, all the people in his village were vigilant. Muslim extremism had been taking an even harsher turn than ever before in Mosul, and they knew they would eventually become targets. Yet they clung to the hope they could escape to Mount Sinjar as they had always done in the past if they were invaded. They knew many would die if they were invaded but they could not afford to leave their villages, homes, and sources of income until the last moment of invasion. Their poverty gave them limited choices. Their separate peace in Tel Azer was threatened, and they knew it.

Barakat, like other Yezidis, had strong feelings against Muslims, but he had few ill feelings about Christians. He believed that the angel Yazda made Jesus in the Virgin Mary at the request of God. He had been taught that Jesus was the son of God, a prophet of God, and that Jesus was resurrected from the dead and will return in power to the earth one day. He believed that Taus prayed for Jesus when he was crucified, and soon after he was resurrected.

The affinity between Christians and Yezidis was historic, and Barakat sensed this, not knowing the specifics. Two apostles of Jesus, Thomas and Thaddeus, converted many of the Assyrians to Christianity in the first century A.D., changing their language to the Aramaic language that Jesus spoke, and exposing the neighboring Yezidis to that religion. From the fifth century, monasteries and churches were built throughout the region. Islam invaded the region in the seventh century, bringing a string of genocides against the Yezidis, who, along with Assyrian Christians, stubbornly refused to convert to Islam even when it meant their certain death. Christianity and Yezidism both began to decline from that time to the present in Northern Iraq.

Protestant Christianity never established itself in Northern Iraq, despite ongoing attempts, until recent decades. Missionaries who came to the region in the nineteenth century were either killed for helping Christians more than Kurds or returned to the West. Protestant American medical missionary Asahel Grant met the Baba Sheik (the hereditary spiritual leader of the Yezidis) of his day around 1840 near Mosul and was very well received with great hospitality. He noted that the Yezidis practiced baptism, made the sign of the cross, took off their shoes and kissed the threshold in any Christian church, and spoke of wine as the blood of Christ, holding a cup of wine with two hands in respect.

Yezidis defended both themselves and the Christians against the Ottomans in 1915-16, giving the Armenian Christians shelter on Mount Sinjar. During the nineteenth and early twentieth century ethnic cleansings of Yezidis, many Yazidis fled to Christian areas of Georgia and Armenia. In the second half of the twentieth century, many of Turkey's Yazidis emigrated to Germany, a predominantly Christian country.

Barakat was rather sanguine about the bigotry he, his family, and all Yezidi people knew to be palpable and controlling in their relations with outsiders. He knew there were practical limits on where he could live (he couldn't easily live with Muslims, but could live among Christians though he couldn't rent or buy a house in a Christian village), what work he could do (they would not buy his butchered sheep or goats or yoghurt, saying Yezidis were too dirty to handle food appropriately), or who could be his friends (Muslim Arabs, Muslim Kurds, and Christians alike would often refuse to make him their close friend).

As a teenager he had once briefly made some Kurdish friends in the city, who had assumed he was Kurdish, a notion of which he had experimentally determined not to disabuse them. Eventually the subject of conversation had come to their views on Yezidis, and he bristled strongly at his first view of their biting, unvarnished biases. From that point on, when he was asked by Muslims about his religion/ethnicity, he simply said "That is a private matter." He had learned from experience that if he didn't say that, even though it was somewhat rude, the Muslim driver would begin telling him how he actually had had one or two Yezidi friends in the past, before trying to convert him to Islam in the course of a short taxi ride.

The Christians were equally biased against Yezidis, but less likely to drive taxis and less likely to make an issue of religion. Indigenous Christians did not try to convert Muslims in Iraq as it was against the law and could result in their incarceration. A single incident could cut off the Muslim government's funding of their churches and communities whether in the period of Arab domination of Yezidis or in the more recent era of Kurdish domination. There was no law against converting Yezidis to Islam, Christianity, or other religions, but the leaders of the Yezidis could put pressure on any organization involved in such activities to have their residency cards revoked and their organizational license cancelled. They could also try a person or an organization in the court of public opinion, if not in a court of law, for proselytizing.

The Yezidis, however, were friendly with Christians who did not try to convert them, particularly if they could derive some natural benefit from them, and preferred to live with them than to live among Muslims. There was no sense among them that the Christians were trying to harm them, though they knew local Christians looked down upon them.

These thoughts about religion and conflicts with outsiders passed through Barakat's mind as he spent his days in the fields though he did not stay long with any particular thought in that setting. His interaction with outsiders was growing, as foreigners entered the area and as internet connections arrived and social media became widespread. Yezidis considered extensive contact with outsiders to be corrupting to their souls. Barakat thought about personal meetings with outsiders and new ideas he had seen on the internet. But his thoughts always strayed to Almas, of a little word she had said, or an expression on her face, and their common hopes and dreams.

Barakat rose to check the sheep, and called to them with the reassurance he knew they craved. They knew his voice, and would follow no other. He knew their moods, what moved them, what calmed them, their schedule, preferences, and habits. They were the meager savings of his family, their source of meat, milk, and yoghurt, wool for clothing and blankets, and hides to barter or sell in the market to get other needed items. His family trusted their wealth to him, and their children to his mother. Protection fell to his father, and cleaning to the girls. The boys took odd jobs outside the home to earn what they could, giving all their earned cash to the family. Each of them knew his place in this economy, and was faithful to it.

Barakat had hours every day to think about his life, present, past and future. They were essentially the same thoughts from the day before, and the day before that, with few changes. They were the thoughts of a thousand shepherds before him in the same field at the base of the same mountain. He was not much troubled by the outside world until it appeared in his village in some way that was threatening to his family.

Some shepherds used their idle days to hone their shooting skills, rock-throwing skills, or wood-carving skills, or carried along friends to add drama and counter-play. Barakat used the time to absorb the colored light cast by the rocks, grass, brush, and even the sheep, contemplate their colors, watch them change, and to relive past moments in his mind. In the past year, the moments with his new wife were filling his thoughts: her tender looks, the warmth of her body against his, and her words and expressions of every kind. He had found her as varied as the colors on the landscape before him. His body ached to be with her again by mid-afternoon.

The time to leave the fields in the later afternoon was chosen by the sheep, not by his own desires or inclinations, or even by the time or the position of the sun. The dominant ram influenced the timing more than he did, keenly sensing the mood of the ewes and younger, older, and smaller rams, which varied by the abundance of food in the fields. Barakat honored the role of the ram, and left him to do his work. But even with the decision made, and announced by the ram's own voice, Barakat was still needed to be herdsman, and to use his voice and position to guide the strays. The herd was small enough that he did not cultivate the assistance of a sheep dog, but this meant he had to be more active and more vocal in moving among the sheep. The grass was abundant, so the donkey that accompanied him on the journey, and hovered among the sheep during the day, was more a companion than a means of transportation, except in cases of emergency, or a way to carry a wounded or sick sheep home.

The sheep filed directly back into their home shelter and took a drink of water before bedding down for the evening. Barakat secured the door of the enclosure, entered the gate to his uncle's garden, said goodbye to those gathered in the garden, and headed home. He entered his own garden and greeted his brother Faisal and sister Basse. His eyes gauged their mood carefully as he moved through the garden toward the house, giving each one, in turn, a kiss on the cheek of equal affection and magnitude.

His siblings welcomed the scheduled rarity of Barakat's appearance from the fields as a relief from the directives of their parents and grandmother who checked them throughout mid-day. There were sometimes petty arguments between them all, but Barakat was the wise, gentle, arbitrator appearing

after all cases were pressed between opposing parties in his absence to settle matters of the day upon his return with a simple word or two. It was the sound of his words, spoken in the deep clear musical tones of young manhood, more than their meaning, that calmed and comforted them.

He moved through the family members in the garden as if parting great waters, bent on reaching the other side to the ready arms of Almas. There were few displays of affection between husband and wife under the watchfulness of the family, and intimate moments were stolen in their locked room beside a water-cooled fan in the late summer afternoon, rather than on the roof at night, where only small distances separated the two couples, the grandmother and his sister, and his brother, in respective corners of the roof. The house was too hot for sleeping on summer nights. Their intimate moments were more precious due to their limited frequency.

The afternoon's rest in their private shaded room was a blessed antidote to the searing heat of the fields for Barakat, and for Almas, a relief from the occasional perceived slight of her female in-laws. They relished their private time together. They separately disappeared into the room after she finished her chores and after he washed the dust of the fields from his face and hands. He entered first, and stretched out on a foam mat on the bare concrete floor, then she joined him there.

He held her tenderly, closely, for a while, then kissed her on her lean white cheek and forehead, then on her soft red lips. She responded to him in kind, following his lead. Then they held one another for more than an hour, first talking of the events of her day, her concerns about the future and the baby, their hopes of a home of their own one day, and their concerns about Daesh terrorists encroaching on the region, before falling asleep in one another's arms. The swamp cooler in the window blew damp, cooler air over them that they imagined felt like an ocean breeze.

Barakat and Almas lived in poverty for several reasons. Living near the mountain meant a rural life on poor lands left to a people shunted aside by the dominant cultures for their religious beliefs. Living close to the mountain had always been their way to survive genocide. The Yezidi caste system had placed them on the bottom tier of society. Rising above these intractable conditions in the short term to enjoy a better life would require leaving their village, their culture, their religion, and probably their country. Even if they were willing for that, they would find it nearly impossible to gather enough cash to escape, and even in a western country, as immigrants not knowing the language, they would find themselves in poverty, working low-skilled jobs at least in the beginning. Their sense of family responsibility, and Almas's pregnancy, prevented them even from seriously considering escape from Iraq though others often discussed it and told stories of those who had escaped.

Barakat and Almas carried this knowledge heavily as they thought of bringing a new child into the world. They were determined not to convert to the Muslim religion, no matter what the cost, a determination that had grown solid as a rock within their people over time.

Their short rest that afternoon left them comforted in one another's presence, yet troubled in heart at the prospects for their future. Barakat emerged first from their room in the evening to heat the water and wash for dinner, and Almas followed soon after, helping Barakat's married sister Gule, his mother Kamela, and his grandmother Shereen prepare the dinner. It would be a typical dinner of cucumber and

tomato salad without dressing, finely chopped cucumbers in yoghurt, large amounts of rice and burghul (couscous) with small amounts of boiled chicken and garbanzo beans on top, brown beans in a tomato base soup, fried rounds of eggplant, black olives, and boiled eggs. The family would eat together, the women with them, and there would be more conversation than there had been at breakfast.

That evening they would have a visitor for dinner, Barakat's cousin, Zere Khalaf Ismail, his next door neighbor. She was seventeen years old, a beautiful young woman with light brown eyes and light hair. She had married only three months before, just after Barakat and Almas had married, and had settled into the home of her husband's family, also cousins of Barakat. Her husband was away working in Erbil, and she was always free to visit relatives in his absence. She was as often in their home as she was in the home of her husband's family in those days when he was away.

As Zere entered the house, every eye turned to her. The girls and women dropped what they were doing to admire her beautiful new dress and to greet her with kisses, first on one cheek, then the other, each one in turn. With four women to kiss her in turn, this ritual took rather a long time, leaving the men to watch and smile appreciatively and keep silent until the women yielded Zere to them for a hug around the neck and an air-kiss or two. Everyone was happy, and they all immediately forgot his troubles.

She was the jewel of the family, a celebrity, loved by all. The older women remembered their wedding days when they saw her. Barakat's unmarried sister Basse wanted to be just like Zere, and was already hoping a certain boy would one day ask to marry her. Barakat and his brother Faisal had been her playmates, and remained playful with her, though from a respectful distance after age 10, and more so after her marriage.

Over dinner, they talked of their relatives, of people they knew who had gone to Europe, of the children's school activities, and of problems with the operation of their mud-brick house. At no point would the conversation turn to discussing the imminent danger Daesh posed to their lives. They didn't want to alarm Basse. The deeper subjects would be left for the evening after Basse was asleep, as soon as the sun fell below the horizon.

That evening, Barakat and his father discussed the threats many Yezidis had been receiving from Daesh. Khalaf Qassim, a man who lived in Bari village along the border with Syria, had received a warning from Daesh by text message the previous day on his cell phone:

> Where are you going to go? I swear to God I will cut you into pieces… We are coming for you, you pig, you enemy of God. Didn't I tell you yesterday to come and repent?

Barakat knew that messages had been sent to the muqtars in Tel Azer village as well, though he had not seen them. His father was concerned, but would not admit it to Barakat. Parental authority over children extended into their adult lives in their culture and in all the middle-east. The women also gathered to discuss the dangers they faced that evening. They had seen videos on the internet of Daesh taking Yezidi girls as sex slaves in Mosul. They all agreed that they would kill themselves before they would sleep with a terrorist, even with the sham of a forced marriage.

By the time the dishes were washed and the food put away Zere had returned to her husband's family's house, Barakat's father had said the evening prayers on the roof facing the sunset, the sun had already fallen, and the others were settled into their beds and slowly moving and talking less and falling asleep. Barakat joined his father on the rooftop looking to the West and the last glimmers of light across the Iraqi border with Syria.

"Father, do you have enough ammunition to carry with you tonight?" he asked.

His father would regularly take that duty required of one member of each family for ten day intervals on and off, leaving Barakat free to rest at night and herd the sheep during the day. Then his father would return in the morning and sleep through to the afternoon before going to work laying concrete blocks when there was work.

"The little I have would not last long if we were assaulted, but I will use it carefully," he replied.

"Should we ask Khudeda to buy some more when he goes to Dohuk next time?" Barakat asked.

"No," he answered, "we need to save our money to buy food."

Barakat left it at that, and a long pause came in their conversation as they both silently contemplated the likely situation of his father being stuck defending the village in a Daesh invasion and running out of ammunition.

They had no specific plan about how long he would stay on the front line after an attack, whether they would wait for him to flee to the mountain, and what they would carry. They relied heavily on help from the Kurdish Peshmerga soldiers, though only about 40 were stationed there, but the Kurds also had the same old weapons the Yezidis had, and lacked adequate ammunition to defend the village from a sustained attack. The village had no plan for evacuation. It would be every man, woman and child for himself or herself on a narrow road to the mountain passing near another village that might, itself, be under attack at the same time.

"Well, goodnight," Barakat finally said, and he walked across the roof to join his wife, who was laying out their bed. Barakat changed his clothes and laid down beside her. His father left soon after for his duty with the militia, but Barakat didn't hear him go. The night was quiet, as always, the national power and the neighborhood generator service were both off. The whole village was dark, and nearly all who were not guarding the village were in their beds or on their way to them. Barakat prayed what was in his heart, not a memorized prayer, then laid down and took Almas into his arms, her head upon his chest, his mind unsettled but tired of body, and he quickly fell off to sleep.

His father walked down the road in the darkness toward the checkpoint by the line of men standing guard over the village. He said "Choani, Bashi?" meaning "How are you, well?" in his native Kurmanji Kurdish to his several cousins and other friends as they drank morning tea at the base of a mound of dirt that had been dozed there in a long line to shield them from invaders. Dozens of Kurdish Peshmerga soldiers stayed closer to the checkpoint on the road. Most were from the northern portion of the autonomous

Kurdistan Region of Iraq, speaking Badini Kurdish and loyal to the KDP party, and a smaller number were from the south, speaking Sorani Kurdish, loyal to the PUK party.

Daesh

Abu Bakir AL Baghdadi calling for a holy war July 4, 2014.

They were talking about their Yezidi leaders, the most senior of which, Prince Tahseen, had already evacuated to Europe for medical care in his advanced age, and was trying to block his people from following him into Germany. They analyzed his motives for this action. He would be worried the people would likely lose their connection to their culture and religion, and that he and his son might see their hereditary rights to income and power weaken. They gently faulted him for leaving them without aid in the face of a looming invasion, then trying to block their escape to Europe. Another Yezidi leader they discussed irreverently was the liaison between the Kurdish government and their people, whom they ridiculed for dressing, acting, thinking, and talking more like a Badini Kurd than a Yezidi, for his personal financial benefit more than theirs.

They discussed with more respect their hereditary spiritual leader Baba Sheik, some of the local elders who were fully woven into the fabric of their village, and a young woman named Vian Dakhil, who had become a heroine to them as their only representative in the Iraqi Parliament. The discussants were practical men, facing realities that would not go away, receiving little help from their leaders, other than Vian, who was in Baghdad doing what she could to help them. Barakat's father joined in with a laugh now and then and offered a nod to their more truthful remarks, but avoided speaking carelessly about dignitaries.

One of the men, Ismail Shammo Qassim was 48 years old. Just 52 days before, he had had a brush with Daesh, while he was on military duty with the Northern Brigade of the Iraqi Border Police, in Sununi on the north side of Mount Sinjar. Daesh was approaching, though he didn't know it. Two hours before Daesh arrived, the representatives of Nouri al Maliki, President of Iraq, his superior officers in the Border Patrol, took away all the guns from his group of 20 Kurdish, Arabic, and Yezidi fighters. They did not leave their post in Sununi even though they had been disarmed. No reason was given for disarming them.

Two hours later, when Daesh arrived suddenly, and drove through without stopping, the policemen were still in the streets, with no time to escape and no arms to defend themselves. One of the trucks rammed him, and he fell down on the ground, injuring his back and head. All of the men were able to escape before Daesh could capture them. He shared his experience as evidence of the corruption of the

President, adding that man to the list of other leaders who had been ill spoken of by the group of practical fighting men who had families to feed and support with little help from their leaders.

These discussions played throughout the night, keeping the men mentally alert, sharing essential information out the relative strength of various leaders upon whom they relied, allowing them to shape and reshape their working paradigm about the world in which they lived. They were not a fearful people, but were interested in knowing what real threats were in play, so they would have some idea of how to counter them with their limited resources, mostly with their trusted Kalashnikov rifles.

Chapter 3: Invasion of Tel Azer

Day 1: Sunday, August 3, 2014

Barakat awoke to the sound of distant gunfire the middle of the night as he had done the night before. This was different. His eyes flew open and he leapt to his feet, distinguishing between the single shot the night before and this lower constant drone of distant warfare. It was 2:30 am. The sound, and his abrupt movements, startled Almas. Barakat looked out from the roof and saw the red lights of mortars being fired on the two cities on either side of Tel Azer, Jazeera to the west, and Gazarik to the east. Barakat tried to calm Almas, and his sister Basse, who was now at their side, telling them everything would be fine, they didn't have to worry.

The attack by Daesh would be 3-pronged, effectively pinning the people of Tel Azer against the mountain, where Daesh hoped to capture or kill them. Daesh approached Jazeera directly from Syria, entering from the west, with support from Daesh forces in Anbar Province seven hours' drive to the south and forces from Baaj, nearby to the southeast, with support from its Arab residents.

Jazeera was the easiest target for Daesh, remote and small, and winning it fortified the terrorists to move toward Tel Azer directly to the East. A similar attack was launched at the same time against Guzarik to the east of Tel Azer. Guzarik was attacked by Daesh forces from Mosul, supported by other fighters from Baaj and Anbar. Daesh fighters were assisted by Muslim Arabs from the surrounding villages bent on killing their Yezidi neighbors. The timing of this 3-pronged attack was closely coordinated to effect maximum human casualties specifically among Yezidis in this planned act of genocide.

Daesh

Daesh fighters with machine guns mounted on vehicles attack Guzarik in their standard beige army pickup trucks from Saudi Arabia mounted with machine guns an hour before attacking Tel Azer, August 3, 2014.

Barakat's father called him by cell phone from the front lines where he was positioned with the militia and Peshmerga soldiers.

"Daesh is coming from both sides of the village," he warned. "Gather the important things and go to the mountain quickly; I will meet you there" he instructed.

"Just a minute," Barakat said.

"Mother, he says we have to go to the mountain now and he will come later," Barakat offered, knowing she was not going to accept that.

“Nawallah!” Kamela cried, Basse rushing to her side. “We cannot leave without him!”

Almas had joined the two women close to Barakat’s side and now all three women were crying desperate tears. Almas thought of her mother and father, and longed to call them, but would have to wait for Barakat to yield the phone.

Her refusal, and the speed of the encroaching Daesh fighters, left no room for his father to argue with them on the telephone. He knew they would wait for him if they could. This meant he would have to evacuate his position sooner if it became clear that Daesh would breach the lines, or there would be no time to get his family to the mountain before they entered the village. It was a careful calculus he had to work out in the midst of battle, and any slight error in timing could mean the end of his life and theirs. At 66 years of age, Mahlo had to use his energy and time wisely.

As Barakat closed the phone, Kamela began tasking the girls with gathering the important things for the journey to the mountain. Going there before had always been for a picnic or a family reunion, but this would be something very different. The mountain was their friend so long as they rested in the arms of its gentle valleys of its lower reaches under fig, pomegranate, and olive trees by cool springs, but further up, the rocks were more forbidding, the water was less abundant, and food was scarce. That upper part of the mountain had been a friend to their ancestors, in that it had saved a remnant of their bloodline from annihilation, but reaching there, and remaining there for any length of time, would mean certain death for many, and perhaps for them, as it had for so many before.

Almas reached her mother on the phone. She and their other family members were already preparing to go to the mountain, and knowing that set Almas at ease. They wanted to take Almas too, but her responsibilities were with Barakat’s family now. They would travel separately and meet at Qandil, an abandoned settlement that Saddam Hussein had bombed in years past that was now used for keeping sheep. Her fate rested with that of Barakat’s family, even though it put her at greater risk. She wanted to be with Barakat no matter where that was, no matter what the cost.

The next five hours were tortuous for them all, knowing their father was fighting a strong force with limited ammunition. Barakat stationed himself on the roof, watching the red lights from hot bullets and mortar rounds growing closer to the side where his father was stationed, hearing the sounds of gunfire and mortars growing louder. He could also see the people scurrying around the neighborhood, preparing to leave, and men grabbing their rifles and running to join the fight. He could see families being separated in the chaos, as people ran for their lives, screaming, shouting orders to children, and crying. The mass exodus gradually changed shape from the chaotic swarm within the village into a single line of evacuation on the road toward Jedali and the mountain beyond, composed of people, sheep, goats, donkeys, sheepdogs, and every kind of vehicle.

An hour after he had talked to his father, growing more anxious, and unable to reach his father again by phone, Barakat called several of the other men fighting on the front line to assess the situation. They all felt they could hold Daesh back. By the second hour, when Barakat called again, they had become less sure of themselves.

There were about 200 Kurdish Peshmerga positioned to defend Tel Azer on the front line with rockets, rifles, and other weapons. The Yezidi militia were there with them, men of every age, who volunteered for ten days at a time. For a while, they fought bravely and held Daesh at bay, but their ammunition was running low. The Kurdish Peshmerga received an order by telephone from their superiors at about 5 AM telling them to evacuate to the safety of Dohuk. As they left, they promised the Yezidis they would send reinforcements stronger and better armed than them, so they should not leave their posts, but continue fighting. They left one big gun for the Yezidis, but took the others away with them. The Yezidi men continued to fight. It was a mistake that would mean the deaths of many.

One of the Yezidi fighters, Ismail Shammo, fighting some distance from the Kurds, called the Peshmerga on his cell phone to find out what was going on, and the Peshmerga had said don't worry, they were fighting Daesh. Later he found out that the Peshmerga had already fled but were apparently too ashamed to tell him. They could have reported their retreat orders to the muqtars, and may have, but the people didn't get the word.

Barakat called some of his cousins who were Yezidi Peshmerga soldiers stationed in Solaq Village, and found that the Kurdish Peshmerga had abandoned the fight there at about 5 am, and the Yezidi soldiers were now evacuating with their families, leaving no force to protect the village. He presumed the same was happening in Tel Azer, at about the same time.

Ibrahim Khudeda Baker, who was also fighting on the front line in Tel Azer, said:

> We called the Peshmerga to ask for help for our side of the line, and they said they would bring help in five minutes, but the help didn't come. We were fighting until our bullets finished, and no one came to resupply us or help us. We called Sarbast (General Sarbast Baiperi, who was over Peshmerga for all Sinjar District) but he said he had retreated to the Kurdistan Region checkpoint, and they didn't send any more Kurdish Peshmerga to help us. We asked him where he was, and he said he ran away.

Another Yezidi fighter, Suleiman Khalaf, also called the commander to see when reinforcements would come:

> We called Sarbast, from the Peshmerga, but he said he was in Dohuk. I told Sarbast, "Thanks so much for running away and leaving us!"

No Yezidi fighter interviewed could remember any Kurdish Peshmerga soldier in Tel Azer being either wounded or killed before their forces evacuated Tel Azer.

Christine van den Toorn, a reporter with The Daily Beast, was quoted as follows in the EKurd Daily Newspaper report of August 18, 2014:

> Despite the danger and fear of attack, locals consistently were discouraged from leaving Sinjar by local KDP and Kurdish government officials who reassured civilians that the Peshmerga would keep them safe.

A local KDP official, whom we'll call Amina because of potential security threats she may face, says that higher-ups in the party told representatives to keep people calm, and that if people in their areas of coverage left, their salaries would be cut.

Sarbast Baiperi, head of the KDP's Branch 17 in Sinjar, could be seen in KDP media and on Facebook posing with various weapons and claiming that "until the last drop of blood we will defend Sinjar."

But Sarbast Baiperi was one of the first to flee Sinjar, according to several sources. He rolled out of town the night before the attack had even started because he heard IS was on its way to the outlying villages of Seebaya and Tel Banat. And not only did he flee, but he fled in a single vehicle, telling no one but his guards. Late the next morning when townspeople fled in panic only minutes ahead of the advancing IS fighters, Baiperi was waiting at the Tirbka checkpoint north of the mountain near to the Syrian border.

Baiperi, unfortunately, was part of a greater trend. Firsthand accounts from Sinjar paint a picture of withdrawal without a fight and without warning the local population.

The first quiet retreat was in the southern villages, which bore the brunt of the initial attack. Late into the night of Saturday, August 2, IS first launched mortars into Seebaya and Tel Banat, close to the militant group's positions in Baadj district. In the early morning of August 3, Yazidi men, not Peshmerga, stood and fought thinking that the Kurdish forces would soon join in the battle. When they realized that wasn't going to happen, many tried to escape over the mountain. While it is difficult at this point to estimate how many were killed, locals say the number was around 200.

If the Yazidi men had known the Peshmerga would withdraw, they might have fled earlier as well. Alone, they were no match for the IS army.

North of the mountain, locals received no warning from Peshmerga or KDP and government officials regarding the attacks, said Amina, who worked for the party in that region. She heard about attacks from her aunt who lives south of the mountain and she called her sub-branch director. She was told to stay calm and that there was no withdrawal. But when she called Sarbast Baiperi's guards they said he had left the night before and they themselves were already gone, and they confirmed the troop withdrawal.

Others from northern villages had similar stories: foggy information about the nature of the attacks south of the mountain, unaware of Peshmerga withdrawal.

So it was as late as 10 a.m. on that Sunday, after fighting had been going on for hours south of the mountain, that people in towns north of the mountain like Sununy, Khana Sor and Dugre started to leave. Many were only minutes ahead of IS. Ahmed, a 70-year-old man from Khana Sor, says he heard the first gun shots behind him just as he left town — and running and driving alongside the fleeing civilians were the Peshmerga forces. As they drove down the one safe from north of the mountain toward Dohuk, under firm Kurdish control, the Peshmerga abandoned each checkpoint, joining the exodus.

Soon the twin columns of refugee civilians and Peshmerga came under sporadic fire, but the Kurdish government forces by then were neither positioned nor inclined to fight back. Amina's cousin was shot in the hand. Bullets and ricochets blasted through car windows and windshields.

There were Kurdish fighters who stood their ground, but they were from neighboring Syria, members of the so-called People's Protection Units of a militia, affiliated with the Turkish-Kurdish PKK, that goes by the initials YPG. The group is famous for its many women warriors, and they were much in evidence fighting back against IS forces during the flight from Sinjar.

The announcement of the evacuation orders of the Peshmerga soldiers was not communicated in an orderly and timely manner over a public warning system. Such a system had never been built in the village, dependent as it was on ancient traditions and technology. The people were lulled into the false hope that the Kurds were guarding them even long after the Kurds had abandoned the field to the safety of the Kurdistan Region.

Kurdistan Region's President Masoud Barzani announced on television that any Peshmerga responsible for the early evacuation of Sinjar District would be tried in a court of law. But no one was ever charged or brought to justice. The Yezidis are the ones who paid the total price of their silent withdrawal.

The Yezidi people felt deeply betrayed, misled by the Peshmerga about something vital to their survival. Some imagined afterward that a conspiracy had formed among Kurds, Americans, and Arabs with an express intent to annihilate Yezidis. Yet the Kurds were making an orderly and reasonable decision to evacuate in the face of an overwhelming force. Their superior officers were just facing the facts that no one had adequately supplied them with arms to adequately resist such a powerful force. Their failure lay in their misleading statements and failure to truthfully, rapidly, and widely inform the Yezidi people of the eminent danger, or in helping the Yezidis prepare in advance for evacuation during such an attack.

The Americans, far away, were struggling to get enough intelligence from the local scene and to jump through all the hoops in the complex U.S. political machinery before making a decision on how to approach the emergency. The Shia Muslim Arabs ruling Baghdad were preoccupied with their own problems, not very interested in collaborating with Kurds, and Yezidis were not their highest priority. There was no vast conspiracy against Yezidis except the sudden involvement of their supposedly moderate Sunni Muslim Arab local neighbors with Daesh, the baser of which were rising from their gardens to slit the throats of their neighbors and rape their daughters opportunistically.

The underlying problems were several, at the risk of oversimplifying: (1) the delay in foreign arms support directly to the Kurds, due to the unyielding interest of the U.S. in supporting federal Iraq against the Kurdistan Region's bid for independence, (2) the Arab Iraqi central government's failure to pass arms through to the Kurds for fears of strengthening their bid for independence, (3) the desire of Turkey to discourage Kurds in their restless eastern region from being inspired to seek independence from Turkey, and (4) the failure of all parties to recognize the Yezidi militia as a protective security force worthy of early and significant training, armament, and support against Daesh.

A stronger force of personnel and arms serving without the distraction of family members in their immediate area would have been more effective. All Yezidi fighters were inclined to protect the village at least as long as their lives and the lives of their families were not at ultimate risk, but before the job was done, some may have been willing to yield their positions to save themselves and their families. Their choice to fight for a while and leave when overwhelmed was a prudent choice for men who had families on the battlefield.

Certainly, many Yezidi fighters were heroic in their situation. Khalaf Suleiman Hokay and other Yezidi fighters were killed August 3rd, 2014 by Daesh while fighting on the front lines. Others, like Farhan Haji Khalaf (age 24) and Hammo Hamid Khalaf (35) made their way safely to the mountain with their families

then returned to fight the enemy. Farhan was killed in Tel Azer fighting Daesh and Hammo was captured in Tel Azer and never heard from again.

Another man, Ezdeen Ibrahim stayed behind in Solaq to fight, an hour away from Tel Azer, while his family escaped with relatives. His wife called him at one point, and one of his friends answered the phone. He told her that he was busy, and he would call her later. The next day her husband's brother came to tell her in person that her husband had been killed in the fighting. He had killed five Daesh soldiers. A sniper had shot him in the ear, which angered him so that he had stood up and had started shooting wildly without seeking cover, taking down several of the enemy. The sniper had then shot him between the eyes, and he had died instantly.

MedEast/Farhan Haji Khalaf

24-year-old Faqier Yezidi Farhan Haji Khalaf, who was shot and killed by Daesh while fighting them at Zorava, Iraq, on the north side of Mount Sinjar, 2014.

From the roof, still watching for his father, Barakat saw families running to them from Jazeera and Guzarik villages on either side of Tel Azer, with blood on their faces, warning them to leave. Their weak mud brick,

mud mortared houses had collapsed on top of them when shelled by Daesh, wounding many and killing some.

Meanwhile Barakat's mother Kamela, grandmother Shereen, and sister Basse gathered the most important things, taking photos out of albums so they would be lighter to carry, checking to see that all their IDs were together, taking their money from its hiding place, and choosing carefully what little food and water they would carry, and what vessels or bags they would use to carry it. They chose only the most essential clothes to carry with them. Two of Shereen's sons, Barakat's uncles, arrived to carry her in their car to the mountain, where Barakat's family arranged to meet them at Qandil. Barakat's family had no car or other vehicle to transport them, so they would have to walk all the way to the mountain. There was no room for them in the car Barakat's uncles had brought.

MedEast/Azad Murad/Paul M. Kingery

Yezidis Evacuating Tel Azer, through the outskirts of Jedali, Iraq in their private cars toward Mount Sinjar in the early morning of August 3, 2014.

Shereen was 70, and somewhat frail, so Barakat had to help her. He could see people in the village carrying their elderly and infirmed in wheelbarrows or on their backs, but he felt this would be too jarring for his elderly grandmother. Some were leaving their elderly and sick behind as they were unable to walk or weak enough that they chose to take their chances with the Peshmerga and militia. In Barakat's family, however, Shereen was given first priority for evacuation.

Abu Jan Khairi Aldomli

Faqier Yezidi man from Tel Azer carries his elderly grandmother on his back fleeing Daesh at Mount Sinjar, August 2014.

His father's friend called three hours later on the telephone to say that Daesh was entering Tel Azer. Barakat rushed to the other side of the house and saw Daesh invading in 50 trucks from two directions, trying to circle the people to prevent them from fleeing to Mount Sinjar. They were distinguishable by their all-black clothing, U.S. army and Saudi Arabian vehicles, and black flags with white Arabic words proclaiming they were the army of God.

As they approached, they were shooting every man they encountered, and every child who ran away, and capturing the women and children who didn't run away to put on a bus for sale as sex slaves or to hold for ransom. They had busses and excavation machines waiting behind their force for the swift processing and relocation of female slaves and their children and for the mass burials of men, older boys, and many of the elderly and disabled.

Barakat's family hid inside their house and bolted the door. It was 7:30 am when his father arrived from the front lines, covered in dirt, and called through the locked door. They opened the door to him together, and threw their arms around him. He had been spared.

"The front lines have been breached and I think most of the Kurds left before I did," he said.

“I ran out of bullets, and the others had little to spare,” he said, more to calm his own feelings of having abandoned the field than to calm theirs. Some of the local men are still fighting there but they won’t be able to hold out much longer.” A man of 66 did not need to excuse himself for having fought terrorists on the front line for a shorter time than younger men. He was an exceptional man, and held himself and his children to high standards.

They quickly distributed the items prepared for carrying. Shereen was picked up by two of her sons with their families, but there was no room for the others. Barakat and his parents carried clothes, food, and water, and his father carried his Kalashnikov in case he could get bullets somewhere. Within a few minutes, they were on their way walking as quickly as they could toward the mountain in a scene of ultimate terror, a mix of people and animals running in every direction on foot and in trying to load up and flee in vehicles.

In that moment, as they left their house, they were taking a big step deeper into poverty. The house they left behind was their own, though it was not much. They would have no means to get another. The loss of the sheep would leave them with no source of milk, meat and yoghurt or cash from the hides. There would be no bread oven, no household items for cooking, no beds and blankets for sleeping, and no extra clothes. Years would pass without them seeing their house and village again, if ever. They, and the people who had visited their home frequently would be psychologically traumatized. Many, including some they loved, would be killed, wounded, or captured and raped repeatedly by their captors in the name of an extremist form of Islam. It was a dark hour, the darkest most of them would ever know, though many dark days were yet ahead of them.

MedEast/Azad Murad/Paul M. Kingery

The last People Leaving Tel Azer, Iraq on foot toward Mount Sinjar, soon to be slaughtered, on the morning of August 3, 2014.

As Barakat walked away from his home, he thought they would return later, maybe even the same day, if the Kurds rallied to their defense. Many never left their homes for the same reason. It would prove to be a fatal mistake for most of those who stayed. Those who were able to leave did so, even if they were not sure it was necessary, just as a precaution. They should have been better informed.

Barakat saw a little neighbor girl, five years old, from a Sheik caste family, Shereen, alone and crying in the street, lost in the chaos of thousands of people fleeing for their lives. She was one of eight children in her family who had started for the mountain with their mother, without the help of their father. He was fighting on the front lines and had remained too long or had been wounded or killed. She had been separated from the rest of her family, frightened beyond imagination, too afraid to move in any direction, and was calling out for her mother in her tears.

Barakat picked her up in his arms, passing his load to others, and tried to comfort her. She asked him where her mother was, and he assured her that she was up ahead, walking toward the mountain, where they could meet her. When she calmed down, he let her walk beside him, holding his hand, and as she grew tired, he carried her again. They slowly made their way toward the mountain with their family and thousands of others. He would call her "little Shereen" because his grandmother had the same name.

They hoped their dear Zere had also been able to flee her in-laws' home even though her husband was not with her, but they had no time to check on her even though she lived next door. Her husband's family would make her decisions for her, and Barakat hoped they had made the right one, to leave quickly. He later found out that they had decided to stay and yield to the terrorists, thinking their rule would be no different from Saddam's. But he did not know, nor did they, what terrible result this would have.

A sea of humanity, more than 7,000 people, was by then moving toward the mountain. A cacophony of sounds arose from the village: the shooting of guns, yelling of Daesh fighters, screaming of women and children, crying of babies, honking of cars trying to merge with haste into a single line, noise of truck engines, explosions on and around houses, and the intense shouting of seven thousand people trying to bring order to their escape according to their personal and uncoordinated ideas about effective evacuation techniques, with absolutely no one listening.

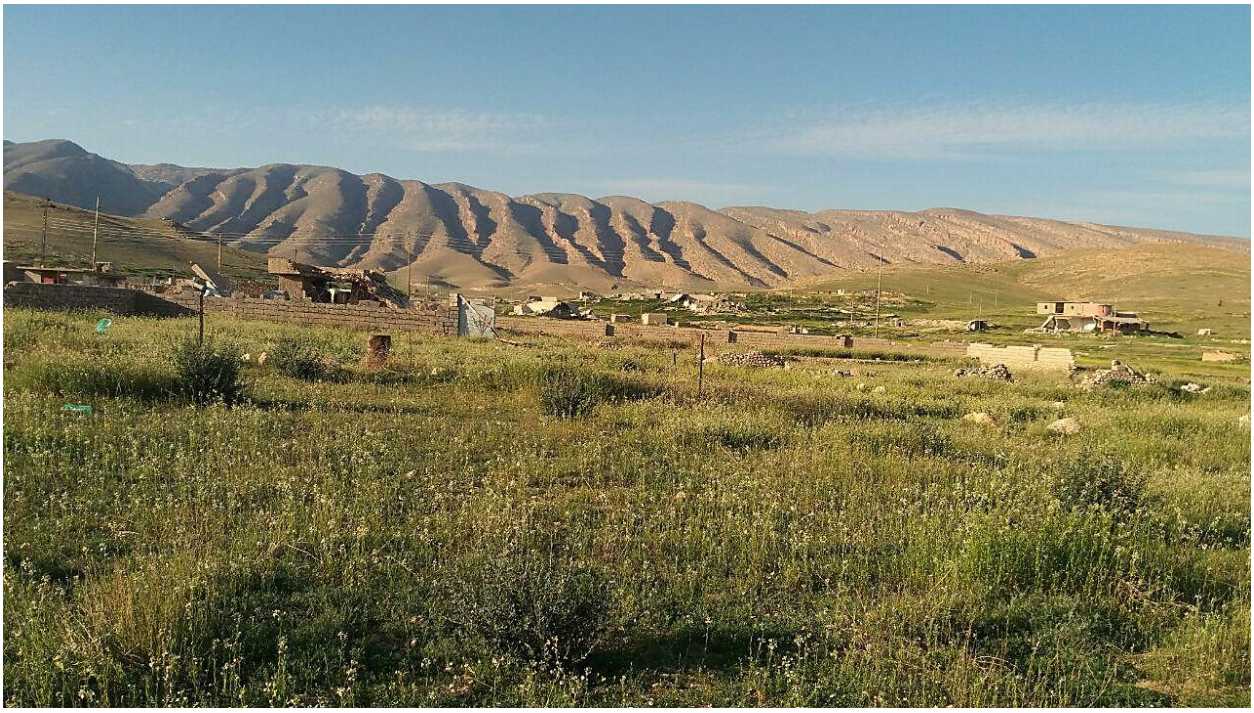
There was no rapid evacuation system in place. The road leading to the mountain was a single lane, and quickly jammed with traffic, leaving those at the end of the line more exposed to Daesh fighters near the mountain. Trying to avoid the endurance test on the mountain, which had been the salvation of the Yezidi people for thousands of years, proved to be a mistake. Murad Aedo and his family tried to make an end run in their car around the base of Mount Sinjar and into the Kurdistan Region, rather than leaving all behind and seeking refuge on Mount Sinjar without adequate food and water. All of them were captured. The parents were ransomed back at some point, but their two daughters, 13 and 11 years old, were captured and have not been seen since they were taken to Raqqa, Syria.

MedEast/Salaam Khalaf/Paul M. Kingery

Traffic Jam at the base of Sinjar Mountain near abandoned Qandil Village during evacuation from Tel Azer, Iraq on the morning of August 3, 2014.

The only order to the evacuation was the direction in which the people ran, as all hopes were on reaching the mountain. People were struggling under their burdens, carrying the elderly and sick on their backs and their small children in their arms, pushing the elderly and their possessions in wheelbarrows, walking, running, dragging, and crying, all at once. Few stopped to take rest, or take pictures or video clips on their cell phones. It was time to simply run.

They knew the terrain and the distances well enough to know it would be an odyssey for all of them, particularly for the older ones. Their journey would involve walking a total of 27 miles, and a climb of 3,155 feet to reach the top of Mount Sinjar then descending to the Syrian border. They would walk 11 miles to the base of the mountain. Their route would take them along the only road toward the mountain, 7.5 miles to Jedali, then 1 kilometer to Qandil to meet Almas' family.



MedEast/Kalish Aedo Khudeda

The fields around Jedali, at the base of Mount Sinjar, March 21, 2016.

As they moved toward Qandil on foot, Barakat's father took them further off the road a distance, thinking that would save them from Daesh if they attacked the line of people fleeing. Several Daesh fighters had already careened along the road through some of these farms near the village, killing and wounding many. Barakat found seven or eight men lying dead on the farmland just 10 meters off the road.

He met a frantic older woman who begged him to help her adult son who was lying injured under a tree nearby. Barakat left little Shereen with Kamela and went to the man. He had been shot in the thigh. His brothers and father had been shot dead, and his sisters had been taken away by Daesh, leaving him alone with his mother. She was beside herself in her grief as her last remaining family member lay wounded before her eyes, his blood draining slowly out upon the ground. Barakat tied a cloth around his leg and urged his mother to hold her hand on it to stem the bleeding. He flagged a passing pickup that was already overloaded, and managed to get the mother and her son safely on the back to flee to the mountain, not expecting the man to survive his extreme blood loss.

Barakat gathered little Shereen into his arms again and reassured her once more. His grandmother rose up to walk again, and they continued forward, seeing fewer victims of shooting as they moved nearer the mountain. As they tired, they dropped clothes and less critical items along the way. They had been walking for about two hours when the little girl recognized her mother up ahead. Her eyes had been completely devoted to that one purpose, and she knew her mother better than anyone. She cried out in

a desperate shrill voice, almost breaking Barakat's eardrums: "Mama, Mama, Mama!" Her mother stopped and turned, her tortured face transforming with tearful joy.

Little Shereen wiggled until Barakat set her down, then she ran to meet her mother, who moved more slowly in her utter disbelief, the reality of her daughter's salvation pressing slowly in upon the grief that had already overtaken her mind when she realized more than an hour earlier that her daughter was not with her fleeing brood. They ran to each other and embraced as if both had returned from the dead, the other children gathering around them and hugging the little girl too. Her mother thanked Barakat profusely, and the two families quickly resumed their journey together, side by side. They were now more a part of one another than they had ever been before as neighbors, being of separate castes, Sheik and Faqier, high and low in social standing.

Before them and behind them for a kilometer were the opposite ends of the long line of frightened, fleeing people facing death or worse. The tales of Daesh stealing Yezidi girls and raping them, hanging babies by the neck, and beheading men without mercy, had filled their lives for weeks, playing out on their smart phones and on a few computers many had shared. Now, what had happened to others was coming to touch them as well. They knew what they were up against. This was a genocide in the making, one more in a string of 73 that had come before. But this was their own genocide, and not merely a story told by old men about others who had suffered and died before them.

Their small children and elderly became exhausted at the same time their own arms were failing them, so they were little able to help them. More were stopping to rest with spent legs, pains in their chests, sores on their feet, and dryness in their mouths. Most families stopped with those weaker members who rested, resisting the urging of their elderly for their younger family members to go on without them.

The more fearful among them sometimes did not wait for their loved ones, and in very few cases, even small children, elderly, and disabled people who were too weak to walk. They simply left them to their fate. Sometimes others would gather them up and bring them forward, but other times they would die there where their mothers or children laid them. Later, safely reaching the mountain, the parents would contemplate their choice of saving the healthier young ones at the expense of the old or weak children, and grief would overtake them. They would pray that some stronger person would bring them forward, as Barakat had done with little Shereen and the wounded man with his distraught mother. In many cases, the weak were brought to them later, and the reunions were even more joyful because their choice had been so devastating.

When Almas caught sight of her mother and the rest of her family, she ran to meet her. It was about 11 AM by then. Their eyes were filled with the horror of what they had already seen of death and injury in the hours before. In that time, they rested from their long walk outside a shepherd's house on some big rocks, and were given water and bread. They stayed there together, watching closely from that higher elevation for signs of Daesh approaching in the distance, killing and capturing people along the road. They hoped Daesh would stop short of Jedali and Qandil, being pushed back by the Peshmerga, whom they still expected to return with reinforcements.

Almas' parents and their children separated from Barakat's family, feeling greater urgency to climb the mountain an hour before Barakat's father reached his decision to go in the same direction. The separation was difficult for Almas, seeing her parents moving forward without her, and for her mother, who wanted to travel with her, but the decisions were being made by the fathers. Almas and her mother hugged, kissed, cried, and promised to see each other again soon. But it would be days before they saw each other again, on top of the mountain. Meanwhile Almas and her mother kept in frequent touch on their cell phones.

After three hours, Barakat's father Mahlo could see Daesh was increasing their presence, and friends called to warn them to climb the mountain to escape. They decided they would go forward toward the mountain at that point, by way of the Shekhmand Temple. They dropped all the provisions they had carried from Tel Azer that they didn't absolutely need, thinking they would soon be climbing the mountain. First they walked 1.2 miles to the Temple, and stopped to rest.

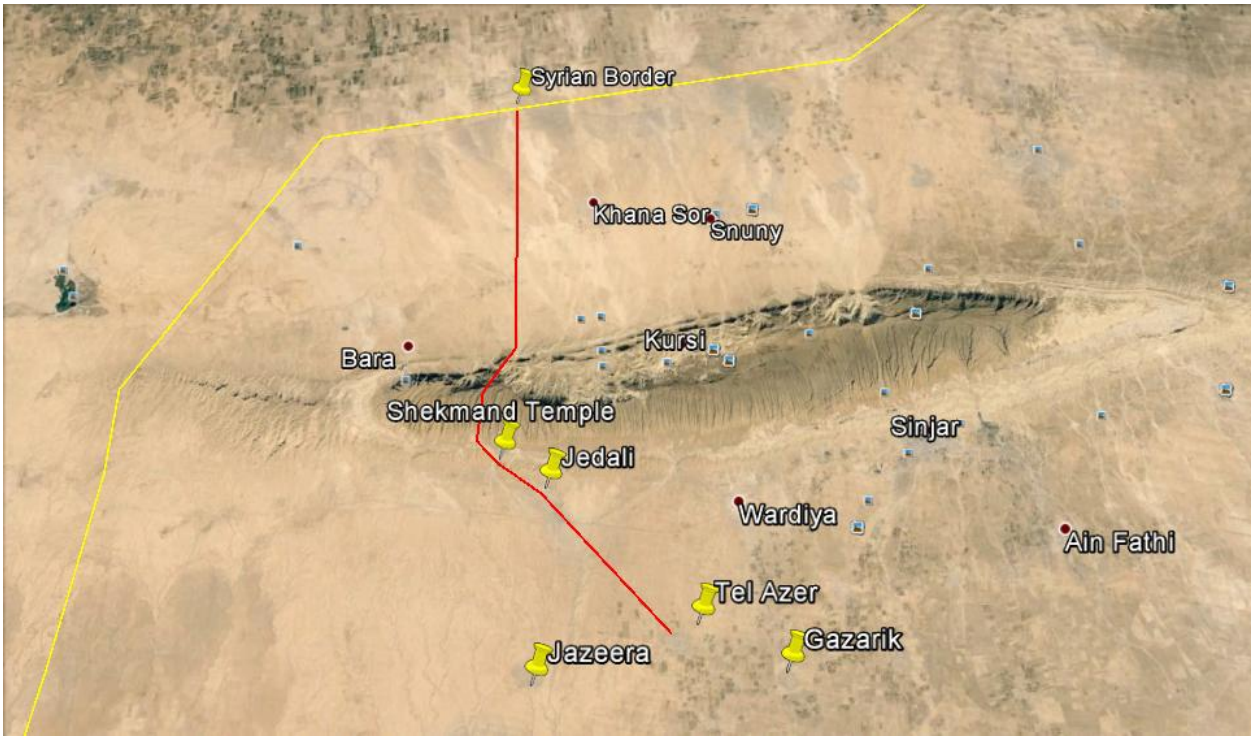
They entered the Temple and found it filled with people, particularly the elderly and people with disabilities, left there by their families as they went higher up on the mountain. These families had hoped that God would protect their loved ones in the Temple, that Yezidi fighters would defend it from the invaders, and that the Peshmerga would rescue them all, so they left those who could not climb the mountain there. It was thought to be better than leaving them behind in their homes in Tel Azer.

Many of the elderly who were brought there had come in cars with their families while poorer families like Barakat's had to walk at a slow pace with their elderly. Barakat's mother Kamela was not willing to leave her mother Shereen there in the Temple. Even though she was 70 years old, and somewhat heavy and weak, and had diabetes, as did his mother, both women would have to make the trip. Mahlo was not particularly ill, but all of them were exhausted from the eleven-hour walk from Tel Azer, and now were facing the steep climb up the mountain. It was almost too much for them to imagine.

Inside the Temple, they faced the sun, standing to pray, folding their hands in front of them, some of them with their eyes closed. Had it been night, they would have prayed toward the moon, or mid-day, they would have prayed toward Lalish Temple, seeing both celestial bodies and their most sacred Temple as representations of the God they worshipped. They asked the people about some of their friends and relatives, wondering if they had escaped the invasion in Tel Azer. There was some comfort, but also disappointment that some had lingered behind, feeling they would be safe in their homes.

Ismail Rasho Khudeda, 18, listened to them talking for a while, silently, his little brother in his arms and fourteen other frightened little fatherless brothers and sisters and cousins sitting close to him. Ismail's father and uncle had been blown up in the same Al Qaida truck bomb that had wounded Barakat's mother's eyes seven years before. Ismail was only twelve at the time of the explosion, the second child among 10 left fatherless in his family, another five children being left in his uncle's family. It had fallen upon Ismail to stay with them all at the mountain, along with the two younger widows, his mother and his aunt, and his grandmother, while another uncle attempted to drive back to Tel Azer, careful to evade Daesh while gathering more food to carry in his truck to their three families. This was a family that had

been suffering already for years, so they were almost numb to this new round of suffering. They couldn't speak. There were no words.



Google Earth/Paul M. Kingery

A map of the Sinjar District showing the escape route from Tel Azer over Mount Sinjar to the Iraqi-Syrian border.

Barakat's father looked through his binoculars to see that Daesh soldiers in 50 trucks were leaving Jazeera, ten of them heading toward them, and the remainder going toward Sinjar city. His father pulled him and the others off the road, and they ran behind some farms some distance from the road. They and all others nearer the back of the line were hiding in sheep pens, and crawling face down on the ground to avoid detection.

After they left the Temple, a truck approached from a distance with Daesh fighters dressed in black with big beards and no mustache, with black bandanas on their heads. There was a large gun mounted on top of the truck. The lone Daesh driver, having moved too far from the cover of his comrades in the village, was frightened by the large number of vehicles heading to the mountain, so he changed course and headed toward the village to join the other fighters. Upon seeing him, those who were fleeing quickened their pace.

The same scene was playing out in all villages around Sinjar Mountain as Daesh swept from Tel Azer around both sides of the Mountain toward Sununi. Calls were coming in to Barakat and his family from others telling horrific stories of murder and capture of loved ones. In Zorava, Salim Ziad Hussein, 51, and his wife Nasreen Kuto Ali, 48, and their 2 daughters, Shama (16) and Noora (32), and 4 boys, Barakat (20),

Ahmed (14), Azwan (12), and Reward (10) left for Mount Sinjar at 8 am (not their actual names). Daesh overtook them, cut off their escape, shot their oldest son Khudeda, because he shot at them with a Kalashnikov, and then captured the rest. They were put into vehicles and taken to Sinjar city, to a building that had been formerly used by the Kurdish government.

Once herded inside, Daesh separated the younger girls from the larger group, and took Shama with them to another location nearby. A U.S. airplane suddenly appeared overhead and dropped a bomb on the Daesh soldiers gathered there, injuring and killing some while many of the others ran away. Daesh had already taken Shama and the other young women away as their greatest prizes, and all the other people escaped to the mountain to Garbara, then to Jedali, and from there to Sinjar Mountain. Shama was then taken to Sununi, Iraq, on the north side of Mount Sinjar, then to Raqqa, Syria. Another captive who had seen her was ransomed and returned months later to report that she was still alive in Raqqa. No one has heard from her since.

Barakat's family finally reached the base of Mount Sinjar and started their ascent. Gaining elevation, they could see more clearly what was going on to the rear, where those who were the last to leave were struggling to catch up with them: those waiting for husbands and fathers to return from fighting, or for the Kurdish Peshmerga to come to their defense, or those with small children or sick and elderly, and disabled. Daesh advanced in increasing numbers, having wreaked their havoc and murder upon the villages of Jazeera, Guzarik, Tel Azer and Jedali in short order, with a preference for death over capture, except in the case of pretty young girls and women.

These had mostly been quick machine gun deaths, dispatched with cruel economy, not the slow and theatrical beheadings and hangings they had seen on videos. Others were killed by handguns in the hands of single fighters moving among the houses or along the roads. The Daesh fighters were time sensitive, feeling the need to kill those in the villages quickly so they would have enough time left to kill those fleeing to the mountain before they reached it and formed any defenses against them from higher elevations. They would seek to circle the mountain, cutting off escape, and then move in to complete the genocide.

Later, reports came that 250–300 men were killed in the village of Hardan, 200 between Adnaniya and Jazeera, 70–90 in Qiniyeh, and dozens more on the road out of al-Shimal. The number of Kurdish fighters who had left the district without warning was about 250.

A few Daesh fighters had been left to herd the surviving girls, women and young boys who had not run from them onto large buses they had brought in a calculated plan to rape, sell for rape, or train as fighters.

The spearhead of the Daesh attack upon those last poor souls approaching the mountain came suddenly and with strong force. Six vehicles, large armor-plated open-top vehicles with machine guns mounted on top of them, taken from Iraqi soldiers fleeing Mosul who had received them from the American army, or produced in Saudi Arabia, approached from Jedali. As they drew closer to the end of the line of evacuees, they shot people indiscriminately, men, women, children, elderly, and disabled. They fell where they were shot, dead or wounded, with no one to help the wounded or retrieve the bodies. Their families scattered, running ahead, dropping everything in their arms but their small babies and grandparents.

Another 25 or more vehicles with Daesh soldiers approached from the two sides, flanking the line of those trying to escape toward the mountain. Together, Daesh fighters fired upon the people from three sides. Barakat watched with horror as about 60 Yezidis of all ages, including many of the weakest, were slaughtered in a hail of bullets.

It was exactly what Daesh planned for all the Yezidi people. Their bodies would lay there on the plains near the mountain for a year and a half, unburied, until the area was reclaimed by the Kurdish Peshmerga, once they had been finally armed by the U.S. government whose choice to supply arms directly to the Kurds had been too late to help these people. Those who survived this massacre lunged forward as fast as they could.

Those in the back of the lines, and those left behind in their homes or on the road, were there for many reasons. Many had conflicting emotions, unwilling to let go of their sheep or markets, farms, or homes. Sardar Khalil Rasho, age 33, sent his family ahead to the mountain, staying behind to tend to some business. He didn't leave Tel Azer until 10 AM, and then had to walk as all the cars had left. He made it safely to the mountain and stopped to rest before going further up, but Daesh caught up with him and shot him dead.

Barakat Mahmoud Khuro, age 50, and his brother Murad Mahmoud Khuro, had delayed leaving their large vegetable farm outside Tel Azer as they had so much invested in the growing vegetables and didn't want to leave them behind until it was absolutely necessary. When they finally did leave, they were late, and both men and their entire families were slaughtered in a hail of machine gun fire at the back of the line of people fleeing to Mount Sinjar.

Murad Jurdo Hassan, age 45, had a big market full of goods in Tel Azer. He had two cars, so he sent one with his family to the mountain, and he stayed behind with the other. He was hoping the Peshmerga would return. After waiting too long, at about 10 am, he fled to the mountain in his car. He didn't make it all the way to the mountain before Daesh fighters overtook his car and shot him in the head. Two days later, the family, learning of his death through witnesses, retrieved and buried his body near Jedali for burial.

Many who had disabilities lost their lives in the invasion. The Daesh religious leaders had declared that all people with Downs Syndrome should be killed. This attitude toward those with disabilities was pervasive. They were deficient, to be slaughtered, as if their lameness was catching, or would be passed on to the next generation of children.

Hanif Khalil Khuder, an unmarried 19-year-old girl, had been lame from birth and her mother had died accidentally by electrocution earlier. Her family was poor and didn't have a car, so they had to walk to the mountain. Her family had no choice but to run ahead and leave her to proceed slowly on her own. She was dragging her legs on the ground, pulling herself forward with her hands, attempting the seven kilometer journey from Tel Azer to the mountain alone. Daesh caught up with her and, showing no pity, shot her dead, leaving her body on the road.

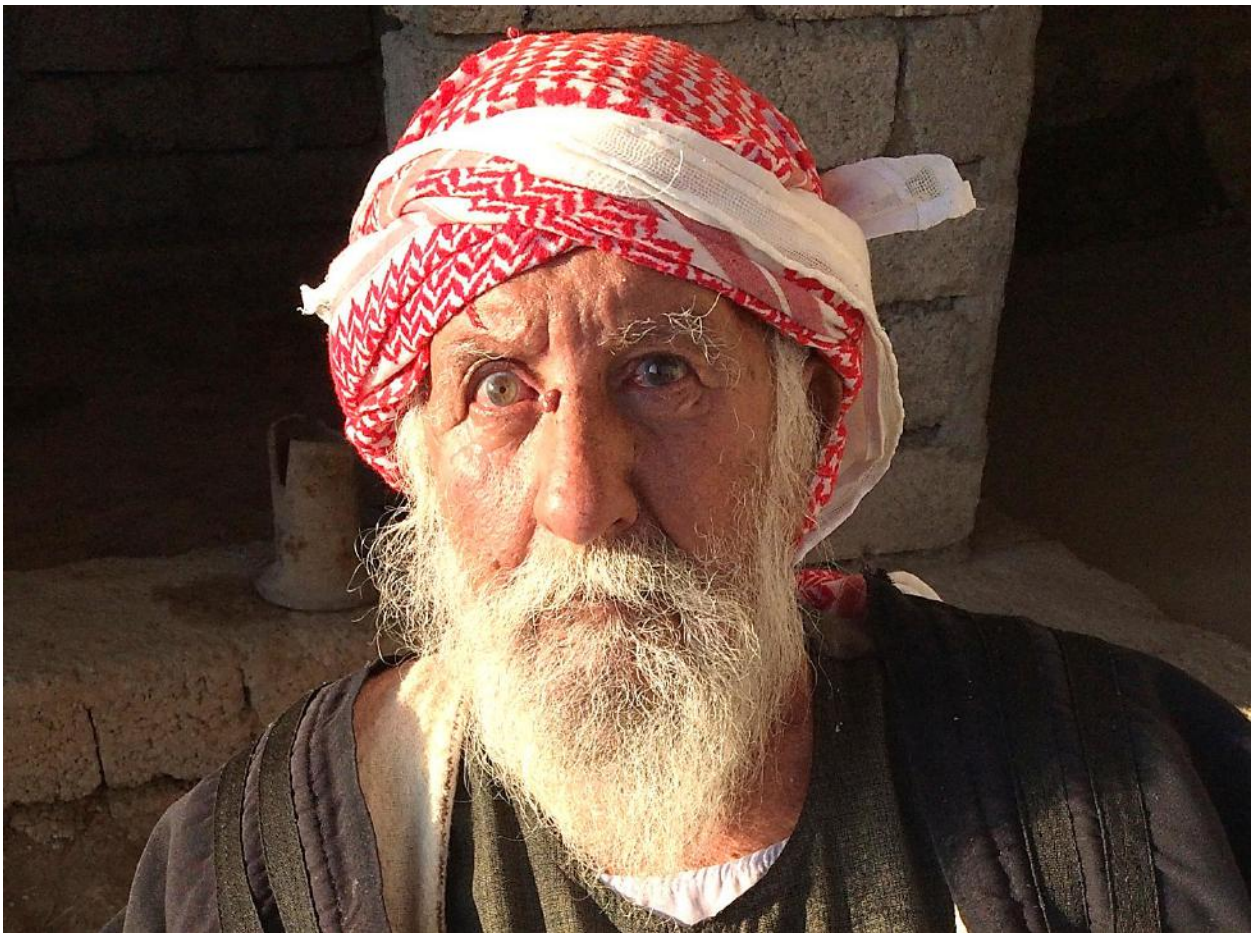
Barakat Hussein Khalaf, age 14, had a mental disability from the age of two. He was often seen in the village attacking children and animals with sticks of wood, and was known to be violent and uncontrollable. When the family fled to the mountain, he refused to get in the car, afraid of the car as he had seldom ridden in one. They had to leave him behind. An elderly neighbor woman who had not been able to travel to the mountain gave him bits of bread for several days, and Daesh fighters made sport of him, sometimes feeding him and mock-fighting with him. After five days, one of the Daesh fighters shot him dead. The elderly woman who had fed him called to report his death to the family. She was not able to retrieve his body, so it lay in the streets where he fell.

Khalaf Hassan Shammo, age 20, had been lame in one leg from birth. He and his family made the journey safely to the mountain in their car. His family continued going up the mountain on foot, but he chose to stay behind with their car, to protect it from Daesh, along with several of his friends who were also protecting their cars. After two days, knowing Daesh was in the area, his friends abandoned their cars and climbed up the mountain on foot. They offered to help him go with them up the mountain, but he refused and stayed with his car. After two more days, Daesh came to him and shot him dead. His friends had hidden a short distance up the mountain and heard the shots. They waited until Daesh left, then came down to retrieve and bury his body.

Sharrow Hussein Hassan (47), and his wife Wadhan Derwesh Hassan (69) were in Tel Azer when Daesh invaded. Wadhan was ill with palsy, unable to walk to the mountain, and they had no car. Their daughter, Kochar Sharrow Hussein, had just enough room for her own children in the car, and felt there was no mortal danger for their parents, as the Peshmerga were expected to protect them. The family never saw or heard from Sharrow and Wadhan again.

Murad Hameed Haider, age 67, had lost one leg to diabetes, and could not imagine climbing the mountain with crutches, so he stayed behind in Tel Azer when his family left for the mountain. Daesh found him there and tried to force him to convert to Islam. He refused and they shot him dead in his home. Some of the people who witnessed this were able to escape and told his family on the mountain.

Many of the elderly also lost their lives or were captured because they were unable for the journey to the mountain or too slow in walking there. Khuder Svouk Mahmoud, age 71, died on the road because he was walking so slowly and fell behind. Many more of the elderly did not attempt the journey to the mountain, feeling they were unable to make it.



Paul M. Kingery

An elderly Faqier Yezidi man, Khalaf, who fled Tel Azer, Iraq when Daesh invaded, and resettled in Seje Village, November 29, 2014.

Khonaf Murad Elias, age 100, was left behind by her family in her home because she couldn't walk. She was taken from her home by Daesh after one month, and held for seven months in Mosul before being released by ransom in a group of twenty. Azan Usman Bakker (70) and Haishan Hassan Kanqi (80) were both left behind by their families, and were seen being taken from their homes by Daesh. Many other elderly were killed by Daesh in Tel Azer after staying behind when their families fled to the mountain, but no one knew which of them may have survived, if any, as the village was still in the hands of Daesh.

Barakat Qassim Barakat (age 70) was unable to walk, so his two sons waited for the last minute when it was clear Daesh was in the village, then attempted to walk to the mountain. His son Ziad left him, carrying his mother Kamel Kalaf Murad (60) on his back, walking with his brother Khudeda (25). Daesh caught up with the three, killed the two boys, and captured Kamel, their mother. She was taken to Mosul. Meanwhile, some other Yezidis found Barakat in his house alone, and took Barakat with them in a car and escaped to the mountain. Kamel was ransomed back with a group of 300 other Yezidis about eight months

later. The two parents, though bereaved of their dead children, were reunited and sought refuge in the Kurdistan Region near Lake Mosul.

Kune Haji Barakat, age 70, was also unable to walk to the mountain and her family had no car so had to walk to the mountain, leaving her behind. Daesh captured her, and put her with Kamel and the other older women in Mosul. She was ransomed back to the Kurdistan Region with the group of 300 that included Kamel about eight months later and reunited with her family.

Paul M. Kingery

An elderly Faqier Yezidi woman, Kotafi, who fled Tel Azer, Iraq when Daesh invaded and resettled in Seje Village, November 30, 2014.

Defending women cost the lives of some men and those they protected. Khuro Khuder Suleiman, age 60, walking with his sister Kavani, 40, and others on the road to the mountain, were late to leave and were overtaken by Daesh on the road to the mountain near Jedali. Khuro was infuriated when he saw Daesh fighters fonding the breasts of Yezidi girls and so shot one of the Daesh fighters. Both he and his sister Kavani were then shot dead by Daesh, and their bodies left on the roadside.

Khalil Chato Khuro, age 55, and his brother Atto Chato Khuro, age 45, were also in this group of men infuriated by the Daesh fighters touching their female family members sexually, and also responded violently. There were about 30 walking in this family group. Atto's throat was slit by a Daesh soldier, and his brother Khalil was shot. The fighters took all their gold from them, which took several minutes. Then the men and boys with hair on their face were killed where they stood, the girls were taken, and the women above about 35 years old were left behind to continue walking toward the mountain.

Also with this group was Sammy Jindo Khuro, age 20, had been a close personal friend of Barakat since eighth grade. They were very poor, and had been late to leave Tel Azer. He was the only son in his parents, and had one sister. He had just been married for two months, and his wife was pregnant with their first child. He was forced to defend his teenage wife from the sexual advances of Daesh on the road near Jedali. Daesh shot him dead and took his wife to Mosul as a captive. His mother was left with the other women. His father, about 60 years old, was not with them and survived, and later reunited with his wife and married a second wife so he could try to have another son to replace Sammy. They were very poor, had no car, and had been late to leave Tel Azer.

Those with the least resources were less able to escape. Farman Khalaf Quto, age 25, and his young wife Nofe, already had ten children and Nofe was pregnant with a tenth child. It was common for Yezidis in that distant area to marry at thirteen years old, or as soon as they are sexually mature, and, not using birth control, they had a child every nine months to a year. Farman was on the front lines of Tel Azer fighting the Daesh invasion, while his wife waited in their home with their nine children. She didn't feel she could walk to the mountain without her husband, as she was in a state of advanced pregnancy and had so many small children and no car or relative to take them to safety. Farman stayed too long on the front lines, and could not get through Daesh fighters to his wife, so he evacuated to the mountain with other soldiers, hoping someone else had been able to help his family. There he was caught by Daesh, and held for an hour before making a phenomenal escape with his life.

Daesh came to their home in Tel Azer, and finding Nofe pregnant, left her there (Daesh fighters were not allowed to have sex with pregnant women). Sadly, all nine of her children were taken away from her by Daesh, and she was left alone. She managed to make her way to the mountain with help from others, so late in the day that it was very dangerous. There she found her husband, Farman, and the couple, their lives shattered, made it across the mountain in a terrible state, and eventually over the other side and into a camp near Zakho. From there, they managed, without help from anyone, to ransom back their 11-year-old daughter Sherivan, and their 9-year-old daughter Basse. The other seven daughters and one son remained in captivity, if they were still alive.

Daesh fighters continued their pogrom throughout the day, robbing all people of their gold, killing all the men they found who had hair on their faces (mostly aged 14 and up), killing the younger boys who ran away or refused to convert to Islam and to join them as Muslim child soldiers, and carrying away the women and girls to sell as sex slaves or to ransom back to their relatives.

Others who were late to leave for unknown reasons were killed or captured on the end of the line of fleeing people on the road near Jedali. These included Khalaf Suleiman Khoke, age 40, and his sons Farhan

(17), Khatan (15) and Sufian (13) all of whom were killed by Daesh in the hail of machine gun fire. Khery Sheik Khuder, age 50, Khalaf Gharib, age 34, and Khery Khalil Suleiman, 11, were also killed on the road to Jedali.

Those with larger families that could not fit in one car sometimes had to make two trips to take all members of their family to the mountain, which put them at risk. One woman, Shereen Suleiman Khudeda (not her actual name), unmarried, took her parents to the mountain on one trip, and returned to take her six younger sisters on a second trip between Tel Azer and the mountain. As she drew close to Tel Azer, she could see her sisters were already being taken captive by Daesh, so she had no choice but to return to her parents on the mountain. Her five sisters were all captured by Daesh, ages 8 to 23. Shereen made it over the mountain with her parents, and settled in Seje Village, where her father had a heart attack in his grief and died. A year and a half after she came to Seje, two of her sisters were ransomed back to their family, and went to Germany with their mother, while Shereen waited alone in Seje, Iraq trying to ransom back her other four sisters.

With the southern reaches of Sinjar Mountain secured, Daesh completed their sweep around both sides toward Sununi near the Syrian border in the north. They heard one man tell of how his Christian friends Yakop (15) and Evan Sabah (16), were with their family in Sununi as Daesh approached. Their Muslim neighbor, a middle aged woman, and her sister, came to their house and told them they didn't have to leave, and that as Muslims, they could speak to Daesh and save them, but their family needed to write some Koran verses on the wall of the house to protect themselves. She told Yakop's sisters and mother to remove all Christian symbols and put longer dresses on, and wear the hijab. Yacoub's family refused, and prepared to leave. Another Muslim man called shortly after, saying the same things about removing Christian symbols, but still they refused to comply and evacuated the area in a rush. They narrowly escaped bullets and rocket fire as they fled with the retreating Kurds.

MedEast/Noel Phillip Kingery

An Assyrian Christian family from Sununi, (left to right) Iraq, Yakop, Evan, Sabah, Faieza, and Enaz, who escaped Daesh under harrowing circumstances on the north side of Mount Sinjar.

Back on the south side of Mount Sinjar, Barakat and his family climbed up the base of the mountain, and into a valley that would provide some protection. The Yezidi men at the base of the mountain below them began to form a line to return fire to protect Shekhmand Temple and to protect the 300 or so who had gathered there. Seeing this resistance, the Daesh fighters scattered to attack those who had fled from the roads and were hiding in outbuildings on farms or crawling through the mud to avoid detection. They first moved through them to execute all men who fought against them. Then, as the women and children fled, they would return to gather as many as they could to take them away in trucks to Arab Muslim villages nearby for genocidal processing.

About 2 PM, three Daesh soldiers arrived in a single truck suddenly over the rim at the edge of the valley where they were briefly resting, so they had no time to run away. The truck had a big machine gun mounted on the top, and one fighter stayed in position by his gun while the other two went to talk to the families huddled there. This was the closest Barakat's family came to the Daesh fighters on their escape, and it was frightening to them all. The fighters all had big beards without mustaches, and wore blousy black clothes. The soldiers told them to come back to the village, that there was no danger, but they said they had run away because they were afraid of airplanes coming to bomb the village during the invasion. Eventually they agreed they would go back to the village, and the terrorists, seeming to trust this, left them quickly to go on in their campaign. As soon as the terrorists left, they continued on toward the mountain.

Barakat's grandmother Shereen was walking slowly, and they waited for her. Caught there with gunfire erupting nearby, she told Barakat and his father to leave her there and save themselves, thinking to sacrifice her life to save theirs. They refused, and took her toward the back of a small valley nearby to seek shelter, taking refuge there together. They could see Daesh shooting two kilometers away, in a pitched battle at the Temple, and two Iraqi helicopters engaging them with fire from the air. The people at the Temple were able to shoot the Daesh vehicles with rockets, destroying two of their trucks, and the helicopters destroyed another one, so the fourth vehicle sped away.

Some were caught by Daesh there. Khalid Naiv Maher, 35, tried to escape with his family of 4 daughters and 2 sons. He had also been caring for his two nephews Ahmed (15) and Mahlo (13) when Daesh invaded, and the three tried to fight Daesh (not their actual names). Daesh caught up with them as they fled, shot Khalid in the leg, and then captured him, along with Ahmed and Mahlo, but the rest of his family escaped to the mountain. Some ransomed sex slaves recounted later how they had been taken to Raqqa, Syria, the headquarters for Daesh, where they refused to let Khalid bathe, or get food and water, trying to force him to agree to train to fight with them. He wanted to escape to get to his family, who were by then safe in Dohuk. He had become so desperate and suicidal at one point though, they said, that he had grabbed a gun from a Daesh soldier and started shooting them, so they had shot and killed him.

MedEast/Fadhil Adil Juno/Paul M. Kingery

A fifteen-year-old Yezidi boy who was captured by Daesh while fleeing Tel Azer and forced into training as a Daesh terrorist in Mosul but tried to run away and was shot dead, August 2014.

Khalid's two nephews, Ahmed and Mahlo, had been held in Mosul, and pressed into training as Daesh soldiers (not their real names). Ahmed had tried to run away and was shot dead. The 14-year-old, Mahlo, was able to get to a cell phone after a year of Daesh training, and remembering his uncle's phone number, called him in a desperate plea for help. He told them where he was. He said he didn't remember his mother, and didn't want to talk to her. He remembered his father, and they gave him his father's number. After that, he continued to call his father every week or two, but never escaped captivity. He was deeply emotionally traumatized. The Yezidi children were being taught they should kill their mothers, so perhaps this had caused him to block her from his mind so he wouldn't have to think of killing her.

Sabri Khudeda Khalil heard that his brother-in-law was behind them making the same dangerous journey, and had been shot in the leg. Sabri borrowed a car and returned to the village through the marauding Daesh fighters in a heroic attempt to rescue the man. He didn't return in an hour and a half, and didn't answer his phone, so his son Haji Sabri Khudeda and his 19-year-old cousin took two Kalashnikov rifles from relatives waiting there and moved secretly between the farms to go back to the village to find him. About two kilometers before they reached the village, they saw a single Daesh vehicle in the village, and another nine vehicles chasing people who were fleeing to the mountain. Haji and his cousin hid to avoid being seen by Daesh soldiers who were approaching.

Two other boys nearby were also hiding, and one of them called out to the other that the Daesh fighters were gone so they should get out of the culvert. When they did, they were spotted by a Daesh fighter just 15 meters away. He moved toward them menacingly, shouting at them in Arabic, then pressed them to the ground with his rifle, and called for another soldier to cuff their hands with plastic ties. They were loaded on the back of a truck with other captives. As they drove out of the village, they saw hundreds of people, men, women, and children lying dead along the roads leading from the mountain to the village.

They were taken to the Arabic Muslim village of Baaj, 4 or 5 kilometers away and left under guard outside a house until the Daesh team leader arrived. The leader examined the situation, then told all the captives to go back to the mountain to convince their families to return to the village. They promised Daesh would help them if they returned their people to the village. This was a ploy to bring the people down from the

mountain so they would be easier to dispatch with genocidal efficiency: death by gunshot to men and older boys, rape for girls and young women, and brainwashing for young boys as they were turned into child soldiers. They drove them in one of their pickup trucks to Jadali village, and told him to walk up the mountain to find his family.

As they drove they saw ghastly scenes with many bodies strewn on the ground, they saw a gathering of Daesh vehicles and men surrounding a group of about 100 young men, hands tied behind their backs with plastic zip lock ties, many with their Yezidi under-shirts stripped from their bodies, some bloodied, lying face down in the dirt. They were fresh-faced and bearded, blond-headed and brown-haired, in track suits and brown, grey or black jeans, barefoot, lying perfectly still on the ground so as not to attract a bullet from a crazed fighter.

As they drove away they saw the men shot in the head in a sudden unified explosion of gunfire. The fighters captured the key moments on telephone cameras to boast of their achievement on internet postings.

They travelled on toward the mountain. The two men were unceremoniously dumped some distance from the mountain valley where their families were hiding, the ties on their hands cut open, and they walked to a tearful reunion with their family in the valley.

Haji's father told him that at the place where his brother-in-law had planned to meet him, there were hundreds of dead laying in the streets of Tel Azer. He had walked among the many bodies, looking for the face of his brother-in-law, until he couldn't look any more at the faces of so many he had known as friends and neighbors. He noticed that many of them were elderly. After the reunion, they rejoined their family in the valley, and were refreshed with water, eggs, and bread, a small reward for their bravery when there was so little food to share with so many people.

At the base of the mountain, Barakat, who had left his family briefly to get more water, met four women who had been their neighbors, their youngest children with them. They greeted him with kisses and tears, telling of the shooting deaths of their husbands, and how their seven daughters had been kidnapped by Daesh. The women asked about his family, and he told them they were safe nearby.

When Barakat returned from the Temple with Mahlo, Shereen, and the water to the valley where the family was hiding they also took along the widows and their young children, adding them to their growing band of escapees. The new widows cried and told the story of how their husbands were killed trying to protect them as they were hiding in one of the farms on the journey to the mountain. They had parked their cars there when they went to hide in the barns, so they had been easier to spot by Daesh fighters.

Their husbands had shot at Daesh fighters until they ran out of bullets, after which the terrorists killed the men, took their six older daughters captive, and let the widows and younger kids go. Daesh told them to tell the people in the mountain they were not safe there, that Daesh would find them there, so they should return to Tel Azer, but they were not foolish enough to believe this. His father welcomed the widows to stay under their protection, and to travel with them to safety. That night, only the small babies were able

to sleep, and the adults stayed up talking about their experiences and their plans to move further up the mountain to be safer.

Their hereditary secular Yezidi leader, Prince Tahseen Said, issued an appeal to the world for aid that day from his home in Germany:

> August 3, 2014
>
> Urgent distress call from the Prince of Yazidis
>
> I appeal to Mr. Massoud Barzani, President of Kurdistan Region, and Mr. Fuad Masum, President of the Federal Republic of Iraq, and the Iraqi Government, and the Iraqi Parliament, and the Parliament of the Kurdistan Region, and the Arab League, and Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, and Mr. Barack Obama President of the United States, and the European Union and international community in general, and organizations and relevant international bodies:
>
> I ask for aid and to lend a hand and help the people of Sinjar areas and its affiliates and villages and complexes which are home to the people of the Yazidi religion. I invite them to assume their humanitarian and nationalistic responsibilities towards them and help them in their plight and the difficult conditions in which they live today
>
> Citizens of this religion are peaceful people who acknowledge all principles and humanitarian values and respect all religions, and never had enmity against any of their countrymen, and in the near past they even had a major humanitarian stand with their fellow residence [residents-sic] of Mosul and Tal Afar, and today they desperately need their brethren's help.
>
> This humanitarian appeal I make on my behalf and on behalf of the people of this religion to come to their assistance and help the Yazidi people as soon as possible.
>
> Prince Tahseen Said
>
> Prince of the People of the Yazidi Religion in Iraq and the world

Transatlantic Academy

Prince Tahseen Said, hereditary secular leader of the Yezidi people, residing in Germany.

This man's son, who was slated to replace him upon his death in their hereditary line, was still in Shekhan working on the ground with local leaders to bring help to the people. The Yezidis also had a separate primary (also hereditary) religious leader, called the "Baba Sheikh." The man then in that role was Khurto Haji Ismail, based in Shekhan, Iraq near Lalish Temple.

Emrah Yorulmaz/Getty Images

The Yezidi spiritual leader Baba Sheikh in Dohuk, Iraq, 2014.

Day 2: Monday, August 4

The next day, Barakat's cousin hazarded a trip back into Tel Azer by pickup truck to bring food and supplies for the family. He had been able to sneak in carefully because Daesh soldiers had already killed all they wished to, and captured all they chose, and were busy carrying captives away. Only a few were left, and they were busy raiding the village of all valuables and ID cards and killing any they found hiding. The IDs would be used to make fake IDs for Daesh fighters in the future to send them to Europe and America to kill there.

Barakat and his family had stopped too soon, and too far down the mountain to assure their safety. Two days after they had arrived, the front line of the Daesh invasion caught up with them with a hundred Saudi Arabian pickups or more, 20 or 30 armor-plated American Humvees, bulldozers, excavators for digging mass graves, and ten tanks, many of them confiscated from Iraqi soldiers in their village and others. The Yezidis were approached from three sides, holding them against the mountain in the valley.

Senior Daesh leaders talked to their two muqtars (village sub-mayors) asking them to come back to Tel Azer and submit to their rule, to convert to Islam, falsely promising they would be spared. The muqtars

came back with the ultimatum, and seeing two Yezidi men who had been shot in the head lying in the way, a thousand Yezidis immediately ran up the rocks at that point, abandoning the roadway.

Some believed the false promises of Daesh to protect them if they returned to Tel Azer. Khudeda Jurdo, age 35, husband of Khalida, and his four siblings were caught on the mountain by Daesh. They were told that they would be safe if they returned to their home in Tel Azer. They believed the fighters, and returned to their home only to be captured and taken away. Jurdo Khalaf, age about 55, and his wife Bara (about 40), sons Shahab (25), Ali (16), Saied (17), Azad (14), and Nozad (8) and daughter (23) believed the false promises of Daesh and returned to their home in Tel Azer. All were all captured and taken away for processing.

Others were killed because their tiny villages or settlements were outside Tel Azer, closer to the mountain, and they felt they would be safe from the invasion. Vian (not her actual name), a fifteen-year-old girl from Zorava village, was captured by Daesh in her home with her entire family and eight other families, and all were taken to Sinjar City. Daesh had not searched them for cell phones, so they had been able to call out to relatives to pinpoint their locations in the vain hope that they would be rescued. Vian was taken to Raqqa, Syria then ransomed back for $200 and is living in Qadia camp, in Iraq, between Seje Village and the Turkish border. Farhan Haji Khalaf, 24, was killed by Daesh at Tel Azer.

Staying too close to the bottom of the mountain rather than going up high was an ineffective escape strategy. The family of Tamo Ravo Murad, with 30 people, was attacked in their home. They had two homes, one in Tel Azer and the other Kaserke, a small village in a valley at the base of Mount Sinjar. They all safely evacuated Tel Azer and went briefly to their house in Kaserke to rest, before going higher up on the mountain to be safer. They waited up on the mountain and had their lunch. They kept an eye on what was below, and didn't see any Daesh fighters, and longing for the comfort of home, returned to Kaserke. Soon after, Daesh fighters came suddenly upon them, blocking their escape. There was little they could do. Of the 30 family members, 28 were captured.

Kheria's husband Hadi was away fighting Daesh, and Zatoon's husband Haji hid behind a door before Daesh entered the house, avoiding capture. He had been afraid his presence there as one who had been fighting Daesh would get them all killed. All 28 others were captured by Daesh and never heard from again. Their relatives are still hoping that they will get a call from one of them, which would be a first step to ransoming any of them.

The family of Khalil (36) and his wife Kochar Rasho Hussein (28) and their 6 children had one home in Tel Azer and a retreat at the base of the mountain in Wardia village at the base of Mount Sinjar. They sought shelter from Daesh at their home in Wardia village, thinking Daesh would not reach there. They were overtaken in their home by Daesh, and all were taken into captivity. Their four year old son Hawas and two year old daughter Nadia and four other children were captured, and have not been heard from since.

Returning to Tel Azer to gather food was not a safe plan though. A group of five families made it safely from Kaberto Village just outside Tel Azer to the mountain. The oldest, and their leader, was 45, and the youngest was 20. The fathers of the five families decided to risk going back into the village to get food for

their families three hours later. They were all caught by Daesh and held captive, while their families made it safely over the mountain, after a traumatic journey without their husbands and fathers. A year later, one of their relatives was able to reach him by his telephone number. All five men were living together in Talafar, Turkomen city near Mosul, in captivity.

Many men were killed after they deposited their families on the mountain and returned to Tel Azer to take food for them in a second journey. Ibrahim Agab Khoke, age 24, was one of these. Another was Dilsher Khudeda Hadi, age 24. Khalaf Elias Bakker, age 45, had deposited his two wives Korte and Nofe and their children on the mountain and returned after three days to take food but was captured. Others who went with him for the same reason and who were also killed included Khalid Qassim Elias, Hazer Murad Elias, Bapir Sabri Elias, and Nawaf Hamat Saido.

Seeking refuge in or around Temples was another failed approach to escaping the genocide. The scene at Shekhmand Temple deteriorated suddenly. Suddenly Barakat saw three Daesh trucks filled with soldiers about two kilometers away, shooting with big guns mounted on top of their vehicles. They, and hundreds others, ran from the Temple. Others sought refuge inside and bolted the doors. An Iraqi army helicopter appeared overhead, and scared off the Daesh fighters, though it did not shoot at them. An hour and a half later, as they again approached the Temple, Daesh approached a second time with four trucks, shooting at people in front of the Temple who were resisting them with gunfire from a limited supply of guns. The bullets reached Barakat's feet.

Shamo Rasho Ali, age 40, was one of those killed defending Mount Sinjar from the mountain above Khuder Elias Temple in Jedali, the tiny Temple where Barakat and Almas had taken refuge when they eloped. Shamo had been imprisoned by Saddam Hussein, the former President of Iraq, for 15 years for supposedly revealing secrets to Syria, which he denied. After completing his sentence, he later reclaimed his position as an Iraqi soldier and had been fighting on the Iraqi-Syrian border. All the Iraqi soldiers had been told by their commanding officers to go home about the time Mosul was invaded. He had been staying with his brothers, as his parents were dead and he was not married.

He was firing on Daesh with the only big gun the Kurdish Peshmerga had left to the Yezidis of Tel Azer, from his high vantage point on the lower slopes of the mountain, and had killed five Daesh fighters. The gun had then jammed, so he had switched to shooting with a Kalashnikov rifle. His friends had left their fighting positions there to seek refuge on the mountain, and had encouraged him to go with them. He had refused, saying he would stay to fight Daesh. The Daesh fighters did not know his big gun had stopped working, and approached him silently from behind, shooting him in the back. Then they descended on him as he lay dying and shot him ten more times.

His brother was also there with his family on the mountain and saw him killed. Daesh left the scene soon after and his brother and his friends emerged from the mountain to reclaim his body. It was buried outside the tiny two by three meter Temple, the only adult person buried there in a cemetery for babies.

MedEast/Shamo Rasho Ali/Paul M. Kingery

A Faqier Yezidi man, Shamo Rasho Ali, who delivered his family safely from Tel Azer to Mount Sinjar and fought to defend the area around Khuder Elias Temple, where he was killed, August 3, 2014.

Barakat's family rushed further up the mountain to be a safe distance from Shekmand Temple. They looked back down the mountain toward Jedali, and saw smoke rising from the area around the Temple. One of the young men who watched from the mountain above the Temple called to tell Barakat what had happened. It was something too horrible to take in, and the witness could scarcely contain himself. He had returned to the Temple site after Daesh left, and was sitting there among the ruins next to the bodies of the dead elderly and disabled, completely stunned. Daesh had entered the Temple in the morning, carried the disabled elderly men and women who were seeking refuge there out into the courtyard, laid them down on the ground, stripped all their clothes off them to shame them, then shot them dead. To finish the act of shaming the Yezidi people, they planted TNT in the Temple, blew it up before moving on to the next scene of their rampage. This was a deliberate affront to all the Yezidi people, and it portended more disasters to come.

Barakat heard others tell that many other Yezidis from the north side of the mountain had also been attacked the same day and had taken refuge in Shefadeen Temple. Daesh solders came many times, but the Temple was heavily fortified by Yezidi men with their Kalashnikov rifles, and successfully defended. They had no food at the Temple, and a limited supply of water. Daesh cut the electricity to the Temple and the surrounding area, so they couldn't pump more water, and had to travel far to find ground water

and carry it to the Temple. Farhan Haji Khalaf and Tarik Derweesh Hassan, teenage boys, were shot dead by Daesh while returning from Shefadeen Temple to their homes to get food and water for their families. Hundreds of Yezidis died there near the Temple, mostly from lack of food and water, others from wounds sustained during their exodus to the mountain. The bodies of the dead were wrapped up in carpets while they lasted, then in sheets until they were gone, then in nothing but their clothes. They were buried under the ground or under rocks near the Temple.

As Barakat and his family started to climb the mountain above Jedali they passed the bodies of seventeen or more Yezidis that Daesh had shot, and didn't stop to see if they were dead or alive. There was nothing they could do for them, and their survival meant continuing rapidly up the mountain. Two of Shereen's sons, Barakat's uncles, joined them there, after calling ahead by telephone, to help their mother climb the mountain. As they were moving forward, Barakat saw a man in his fifties laying on the ground, dehydrated and lacking any water. Barakat didn't have any water to give to him, nor did anyone else. He heard from others arriving an hour later that he died shortly after Barakat left him. His body was covered with rocks nearby. They didn't stop climbing the mountain for an hour and a half, hoping to get out of range of the Daesh guns.

They stopped to rest near the top of the mountain. A man sitting there told Barakat that he had seen an elderly woman with white hair sitting alone in a wheelbarrow a short distance from them. She had been trying to get across the mountain, pushed up the mountain by a family member, an impossible journey. The rocks there had been too big to pass, so her helper had gone to get more people to help. Uncomfortable from the jarring trip, or despairing of life, he did not know which, she had shifted her weight in the wheelbarrow. Suddenly she had tipped over, and rolled down the mountain over the rocks 8 or 10 times, until she lay, presumably dead, sprawled out on the rock-strewn face of Mount Sinjar. No one stopped to see if she was alive or dead. The man had been too exhausted, too thirsty, too astonished at what he had seen, and in shock about his own difficulty. Barakat went over to check on her, and found her dead. He decided it would be better not to bury her, but with help from his brother Faisal, he laid her out on a level area in case her family members returned looking for her.

Yazda

A Yezidi man fleeing Daesh stops to rest from pushing his elderly mother in a wheelbarrow up Sinjar Mountain, August 2014.

Barakat and his family, the family of little Shereen, and the four widows and their children who had joined them and 150 others climbed the mountain together. It was blazing hot, above 52 degrees Celsius (126 degrees Fahrenheit) as they climbed the mountain face from around 12 noon to 6 PM. There was no path to follow, just a deep furrow in the slope of the mountain covered with loose stones and dried grass. The elderly and people with disabilities and medical problems were having great difficulty walking up the rocky slopes. The amount of energy required was simply greater than what they were able to muster.

The children were all crying, carrying burdens too great for them. Many sat down and were crying because there was no food or water. Some left their elderly behind, as they needed to rest, but they could not leave their children exposed there. Barakat's grandmother, Shereen, was being half carried by her two sons, little able to walk herself. That left her sons unable to carry loads for their own families, who were climbing with the group.

As they progressed up the mountain, more items they had carried were being dropped. The distances between those left behind and those climbing up grew larger. Barakat was walking close to two men who had been shot by Daesh on the way to the mountain, one man in the leg, another in the chest, and both were bleeding badly. Another man nearby had been hit by another Yezidi's car in the rush, his face scratched and his head cut and bleeding. They had no medical supplies to care for them properly.

On that single mountain slope, fifteen Yezidis had already died, and were buried on top of the ground with rocks. Their families had gone on in their journeys up the mountain. The graves were distinguishable by their size, so he was able to count three graves for children. Two graves were for women, with a single headstone. The men's graves had a larger stone at both the head and the foot, and he counted ten of these. Presumably some of them had been wounded in the fighting and succumbed to their wounds, explaining why more men had died than women, while others may have been elderly men. None of those in Barakat's group died on the way up the mountain.

As Barkat's family climbed the south rim of the mountain, little Shereen was no longer able to walk, so Barakat carried her and a water tank for the last portion of the journey. She lost one of her shoes along the way, so he set down the water he was carrying to pick up her shoes and help her. The water tank overturned, and the water was lost, as he had no cap for it. He was devastated, as he thought this was the only water his family would have to survive. Tears came to his eyes, but he fought them back, picked up little Shereen, and walked the rest of the way over the top.

Yazda

Yezidis feeling the Daesh Invasion seek shelter near a cave on Sinjar Mountain August 5, 2014.

They finally reached the top, (elevation 4,449 feet), and looked back at their home village of Tel Azer, now in flames, with dust circling, and Shekhmand Temple, also still burning. Almas moved closer to Barakat. He put his arm around her. Their eyes met but there were no words, only a common look of sadness, disappointment, and complete exhaustion. Her dreams, their dreams, were going up in smoke. Their pledge to each other earlier that same year would now be tested to the extreme. They all felt a great relief at having survived the climb but it could not assuage their grief at the deaths and captures of so many of their people and the loss of their homes and village. How other people whose family members had died on the slopes continued on, Almas could not imagine.

They remained there at the top of the mountain for two days, settling into a cleft in the rock on the Tel Azer side where there was some level land and room for all the group. They cleaned the small rocks from where they rested, and slept on a large flat rock outcrop. Friends and relatives were calling to tell them that the Peshmerga were probably going to come with American and Iraqi support, but they knew by then the Peshmerga had gone back to the Kurdistan Region and were not sending any reinforcements. They still held out hope that the Americans would come by air and drop U.S. soldiers on the ground near Tel Azer to clear it of the Daesh terrorists.

They had only bread, and rationed it for two days. They would search for spring water that same evening. There were more bodies on the ground around them of eight or more people who had died of thirst or heart attacks, some uncovered, others hastily buried under rocks, but they moved just far enough that they were out of their sight. Still, the smell of death was in the air from their bodies decomposing, and from sheep who had strayed there from their owners and died from lack of water. Their lips were parched and cracked from their day-long walk in the hot sun.

After finding some spring water a far distance away from the group, Barakat and Faisal returned to the peak nearby their resting place, to see what he could of the battle field. His father's brother, who was with them, returned down the mountain to Jedali that evening to get his sheep. Mahlo urged him not to go, but after depositing his family safely on the mountain, the rest of his attention was on his livelihood. Daesh seemed to be occupied with Tel Azer, and was not moving into Jedali after their first slaughter there. There was little discussion before he descended the same slope he had just struggled to climb.

Mahlo and Kamela suggested to the rest of the family that they pray. All of them gathered at the top rim of the mountain looking across their burning village toward the sunset. This was not the silent prayer like they had prayed in Shekhmand Temple the day before, in the hours before it was destroyed in the midst of a massacre. This was a loud prayer, screamed from the mountain, so that God would certainly hear. Their hands were raised up to the sky. Their faces painted by the evening light. Their voices echoed against the rock slopes of the mountain, and descended down the mountain toward the homes they had left.

His father started the prayer:

> Our great God who causes the sun to set on our people. You made our enemies, and let them destroy us again. Let this be the last time. Show us something other than our burning homes.

> Tell us something to give us a better life. Open our hearts to accept your love. Change the hearts of our enemies. Teach us all a better way so we can have a better life.

Kamela continued after him:

> God, everyone is against us, even you. At least help these small babies, and the unborn, or they will have nothing in this life. Their mothers have no milk to feed them. Their bodies are as dry as this mountaintop. This mountain is not a good place for our elders to die. You saved us from death today but we may die tomorrow. This is not living, this is dying. We want to live. You have helped other people but what help have you given us? We face death always here. Take us away from this place. We want a better life in a better place.

The prayer revived them somewhat, but also released a flood of emotions. They fell down crying on one another, weeping as they had never wept before.

MedEast/Salam Ali Khalaf

Carrying food up Mount Sinjar August 2014

None of them were able to sleep that night. They laid down, and were generally quiet, but for occasional whispered conversations. There were the sounds of dying sheep in the air, bleating for help that would not come, and cries of mothers whose small children were dying of dehydration. Anyone who looked at one of these mothers with her small baby would be emotionally crushed, unable to turn away, unable to stop the tears.

Abu Jan Khairi Aldomli

Yezidi children lay exhausted near their mothers after climbing the steep cliffs of Mount Sinjar fleeing Daesh, August 2014.

Chapter 4: Trapped on Sinjar Mountain

Day 3: Tuesday, August 5

Many people had lingered behind on the south slopes of the mountain, as Barakat's family did. Some wanted to be close enough to hazard the journey back to their homes to quickly gather food and race back to the mountain. Ali Jameel Khalaf, age 23, and Suleiman Ali Khalaf, age 22, waited on the mountain for three days before attempting to return to Tel Azer to get some food for their families, only to be shot and killed there, leaving their families to proceed over the mountain without them.

As many as 100,000 Yezidis or more had taken refuge on the mountain, and were weakening, and hundreds dying, from the ongoing attacks and from lack of food and water, trapped in 40-50 degree C (104-122 degrees F) mid-day heat for many days. They were wounded, sick, and grieving for the death, or worse, presumed death, of thousands of their relatives and neighbors, husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, parents, and children, mostly men and boys, and for the capture of a thousand of their women, girls, and children, with more being taken as the days passed.

MedEast/Salam Ali Khalaf

Carrying water up Mount Sinjar, August 5, 2014

MedEast/Salim Ali Khalaf

Hiding from the burning 120 degree F heat on top of Mount Sinjar, August 5, 2014

MedEast/Salim Ali Khalaf

Young men sheltering under a tree from the burning 120 degree F heat on top of Mount Sinjar, August 5, 2014

There was no way to bring aid to them over land. That day Iraqi helicopters dropped a small amount of food and water on the mountain, but Barakat's family did not reach it. Water was difficult to find on the mountain, and springs were more abundant on the south and north slopes than in the valley between the two ridges where people felt the most protected from shelling and were further away from Daesh as they attempted to circle the perimeter of the mountain.

Bodies lay out on the open ground in plain view. There was no material left to cover them other than the clothes they wore, and no one had the energy any longer to bury them. As a result, dogs, set loose from shepherding all over the mountain and in the villages below, were eating the corpses. One cave held 50 corpses in the middle of their debacle on the mountain and the stench of death was in all their nostrils.

That evening, the entire village of Wardia, which was just four kilometers from Jedali, decided late to evacuate toward Mount Sinjar. Daesh had already come into their village without shooting, and told them they would have to convert to Islam within three days. They listened to the false promises of Daesh to care for them, but didn't believe them, and were not willing to convert to Islam. They decided to go as a group, together, leaving at midnight, and as quietly as a group of 3,000 could move, trying to avoid detection from the few Daesh fighters who had remained nearby. Those with cars made it safely to the mountain, but others had to walk. They made their way under the cover of darkness in the cooler air of the night.

The noise of this large group, and the engines of the cars, betrayed them to Daesh fighters who were watching in the area, and fighters rose to chase them, shooting from their vehicles at them with machine guns. As many as 750 people were either captured or shot, and many lay dead or wounded, as the others ran for the mountain. They scrambled over the rocks in the darkness up the mountain's face, terrified, families separated, every man, woman and child for himself.

Barakat didn't see this from where he slept over the rim of the mountain, but as they neared the top, he could hear them talking. All of Barakat's group instantly rose to their feet, ready to run, certain this was the sound of Daesh coming for them. They gathered their things, and were nearly ready to run when a call came that these were people from Wardia climbing the mountain escaping Daesh.

All the men and women from their group ran to the rim of the mountain to help those reaching the top, offering the little water they had. The first people to arrive were the thinnest and strongest young men, most of them separated from their families. They stopped to rest, feeling they were among friends, and told their stories rapidly between gasps for air, their hearts racing from the rapid climb. Others joined them, young women and little boys, and more young men among them.

The most stoic among them was crying his eyes out, and struggling to breathe. Some were unable to answer the questions of those from Barakat's group, they were so out of breath. A steady stream of the living thousands came through that same valley and the one parallel to it. As the minutes and hours passed, the older and weaker arrived, and the young and mothers with babies. They were in even worse shape, their hearts broken, entirely spent of their every part, both body and soul.

Abu Jan Khairi Aldomli

A Yezidi family takes refuge in a cave on the slopes of Mount Sinjar while fleeing Daesh, August 2014.

There was no place for them all on the top of the mountain, so they spread out along the ridgeline, too tired to go further into the valley, feeling safe enough where they were. The cries grew louder in the night, the wailing of those who were separated from their families and who realized over time that their family members were not coming up the mountain. It was a scene of grief that captured souls so completely that they could not shake it-- so many, so completely exhausted, so entirely bereaved, at precisely the same hour. These were not solitary individuals experiencing loss with their many friends nearby to comfort them feeling waves of grief called out more loudly than they were felt. Each one was alone in his her grief, with no one to cry for them, as each one was occupied crying for herself.

They seemed hopeless at that moment, as if abandoned by the world, which surely knew their situation. All were unaware that officials in the Kurdistan Region of Northern Iraq were working with federal Iraqi officials to plan rescue missions to deliver aid, requesting assistance from the U.S., Britain, Turkey, and other countries. Any effort would have to be strong enough, and coordinated enough, that it did not place the aid workers or the trapped Yezidis in great danger. It took the Kurds as long to coordinate with the Baghdad government, in the midst of highly strained relations over oil revenues, as it did for the Baghdad government to coordinate with the British, American, and other concerned governments.

Bad weather on the mountain and the bureaucracy involved in re-tasking the helicopters to other operations delayed the first rescue efforts. Daesh used this delay to their advantage, killing and capturing as many Yezidis in the villages around Mount Sinjar as they could while their enemies slowly prepared their response. Meanwhile, the suffering of the people trapped on the mountain grew daily.

On that same day, videos and photographs of summary executions of Yezidis in Sinjar District and surrounding areas began to surface on social media. There were reports that dozens of women had been taken hostage and moved to the nearby town of Talafar, which had been under Daesh control since June. Samir Baba Sheikh, the son of the Yezidi spiritual leader Baba Sheikh, was frantically calling senior officials in the Kurdish government and foreign diplomats on Monday, seeking help.

Also that day, the sole Yezidi Member of the Iraqi Parliament, Vian Dakhil, originally from Sinjar City, made an impassioned plea before the Iraqi Parliament to save the remaining Yezidi people. She was tracking the unfolding crisis closely through her excellent contacts with her people in Sinjar District, and was fluent in the Kurmanji Kurdish language they spoke. She would shine in this role as champion of her people. She reported:

> Seventy children have already died of thirst and 30 elderly people have also died….Over the past 48 hours, 30,000 families have been besieged in the Sinjar Mountains, with no water and no food.

It was impossible to get an accurate count then, or later. After the speech, she departed from Baghdad to go to the distressed region, where she would be involved in the relief effort for the week to come, before she would be able to actually fly to the mountain herself in a helicopter mission, dropping aid to desperate souls on the ground.

The Telegraph/Holly Pickett

Vian Dakhil, Yezidi member of Iraqi Parliament, at her family home in Erbil, pleads for aid to stop the Genocide in Sinjar District, August 2014

Barakat made a small fire, and took turns with Faisal staying awake beside the fire to guard the family. Their lips were parched and dry and there was little water, even less now that they had shared with many among the thousands on the ridge.

Late that night, his uncle returned from Jedali over the ridge with his 150 sheep. First the family heard the sheep, their sound distinguishable from the plaintive cries of the few dying sheep bleating on the mountain that evening. The volume of the large herd increasing over several minutes. Barakat and Faisal ran to see if their uncle had arrived, their cousin with them hoping his father had survived his heroic journey. As exhausted as he was when he reached the top, the sheep scattering among the two thousand or more people resting there, his uncle rapidly told him the news of how he had narrowly evaded Daesh fighters to reach the safety of the mountain. He had circled widely around the area of Shekhmand Temple, avoiding Wardia and other settlements by a safe margin.

Abu Jan Khairi Aldomli

A Yezidi family settled in to rest under a shade tree on Mount Sinjar after fleeing Daesh, August 2014.

Reuters/Youssel Boudlal

A young Yezidi girl rests while fleeing from the Daesh invasion of Sinjar District, Iraq, August 2014.

Day 4: Wednesday, August 6

The lack of water and food on the ridge forced them to descend into the valley the next day, with all hope of returning home to Tel Azer completely gone. They didn't have any destination in mind, either for the short term or the long term. They just knew they couldn't go back and they had to move toward the valley. Families had descended before them, and other families would descend after them. They asked their friends near to them if they wanted to join them, and some did, while others wanted to rest more, and still hoped to return home. They started down at sunrise, after their morning prayers, many joining in with crying and singing for God's help.

Barakat asked his parents when they would be able to settle permanently someplace. "Soon," they said, though they really had no idea themselves. They just needed to convey confidence, even to Barakat, by then eighteen years old but still following his parents in the customary manner for boys in that remote part of the world. It would not be soon enough for Barakat.

Later that day, Barakat and Faisal found ten springs of water and fig trees growing on the mountain slopes near a small farm at Wadi Khuder. They filled their two twenty liter plastic tanks with water, and were given three additional tanks. Barakat also filled these three tanks, so they had plenty of water for days to come. Each person ate three or four unripened figs, just enough to prevent themselves from dying, but not so many that they would get sick to their stomachs.

Shereen was beginning to fail, unable to recover from her climb over the mountain. Like hundreds of other elderly Yezidis who attempted the impossible journey over the mountain, she was too weak to endure. Just after Barakat had left in search of food, she sat down, and became dizzy, so she lay down. There was no doctor to care for her. The heat was stifling.

Day 5: Thursday, August 7

His uncle, Ali Khudeda Kalo, had brought them four large pieces of bread from his daring trip to Jedali. This bread was rationed to last two days. Each day, the six people in their immediate family divided two pieces of bread equally, each eating only one small piece. They also captured a sheep. This was shared among the three families travelling together, though most had lost their appetites from the death and trauma they had seen or experienced. The sheep was roasted over the fire as there wasn't enough water, nor any pot, to boil it in the preferred manner. Reports of their relatives who arrived in the valley over that day reassured them that many of their loved ones had escaped, but the news was mixed about their friends.

The genocide was directed against the Yezidis and Christians alike in the area, though Christians were given more notice to leave their homes and villages, and had more means to do so. On that very day, roughly 100,000 Christians fled Mosul and the Nineveh plains after being given an ultimatum to convert to Islam, pay exorbitant taxes, or leave the area. Most were sure they would die if they were to remain any longer. Daesh invaded Qaraquosh that day, one of the few remaining Christian villages in the area, and Christians evacuated Hamdaniya and Al Quosh as well. Some went to the Christian village of Seje, others to the Christian district of Ankawa in Erbil or the Christian district of Gre Basse in Dohuk.

Six Christian families from Sununi, between Barakat and the Syrian border at the bottom of the mountain, had escaped by car, narrowly, with bullets and rockets nearly hitting them as they went. One Christian man, aged 99, didn't have a car, and stayed in his home with his daughter and grandson until the Kurdish PKK rescued them a few days later. Another 22 Christian families had escaped the Daesh invasion of Sinjar City. One other single Christian man waited in Sinjar, and was shot dead by Daesh in his home, while the other man sent his family ahead to safety but then went missing himself.

That same day, four days after the invasion, U.S. and Iraqi army helicopters started dropping water and food aid, some of the aid being supplied by Turkey to those stranded on the Mountain. The aid was life-saving for many. The helicopters were fired upon by Daesh, just two kilometers from the drop zone, and returned fire, but were not hit. Turkey's early role would be largely supplanted by the Iraqi, Kurdish, American, and British entry to the scene, as the will of Turkey to help Kurds, some of whom were making

terrorist attacks on Turkey in their bid for independence using the Kurdistan Region as their sanctuary, was limited.

The White House

President Barak Obama meets with his national security advisors in the White House about the Daesh invasion of Sinjar District on August 7, 2016.

President Barak Obama, in a speech to the media that day, referenced PM Vian's impassioned plea for help to the Yezidi people, and offered this commitment:

> Earlier this week, one Iraqi in the area cried to the world, "There is no one coming to help." Well, today America is coming to help.

He offered this further explanation:

> The world is confronted by many challenges. And while America has never been able to right every wrong, America has made the world a more secure and prosperous place. And our leadership is necessary to underwrite the global security and prosperity that our children and our grandchildren will depend upon. We do so by adhering to a set of core principles.

> We do whatever is necessary to protect our people. We support our allies when they're in danger. We lead coalitions of countries to uphold international norms. And we strive to stay true to the fundamental values -- the desire to live with basic freedom and dignity -- that is common to human beings wherever they are. That's why people all over the world look to the United States of America to lead. And that's why we do it.

It was a delayed response, a cap to many discussions which had gone on in the White House, Pentagon, and Congress over the previous days, as they had in other places around the world. By the time his announcement was made, President Obama had already given his directives, troops were moving into position, and international coordination was underway. The plan included humanitarian aid drops and targeted air strikes against Daesh. British aid would also be forthcoming. A small amount of water and food was dropped that day by the U.S. on Mount Sinjar. The relief effort was going to take many days.

White House

U.S. President Barak Obama announces plans to rescue Yezidis on Mount Sinjar, August 7, 2014.

Barakat and his brother walked out from the family looking for water. They saw the desperation of those who were less able to walk the long distances looking for water. One of their companions had seen a mother sitting in the shade of a large boulder cut her hands, allowing her children to drink her blood, because she had no water for them and they were dying. Barakat shuddered in disbelief, but to her, it must have seemed the only option left to her. They didn't see the family again, to know whether the children had survived, but they knew many were dying. He had also heard that day that a few women had thrown their children off the mountain, to spare them their final suffering, but he didn't know if this was true. There was a long tradition of Kurdish women throwing themselves off the mountain in times of desperation or violation, but throwing children off the mountain was something only a Yezidi mother in that desperate situation could understand or consider.

Barakat had been walking up to this point with strong shoes, but the many trips to carry water across the jagged rocks had doomed them, and that day they became so damaged he could no longer use them. He was drawing water from the spring that day when they finally failed in the press of the competing young men. The young men had also pulled on his outer shirt at the water springs, tearing it, so he had tied what was left of it around his feet in place of his shoes. He was left with his sleeveless homemade Yezidi-style undershirt, which had once been white, but was now streaked and smeared with brown dirt from the

mountain. The knees were blown out of his pants, and his knees were bruised. He was covered from head to toe with sweat and dirt. Almas worked as hard as he did, and he helped her wash her long hair and face that evening after showing her the way to the water.

His grandmother, Shereen, remained weak that day, and laid down the entire day, lacking the strength to sit up or talk much. Her daughter Kamela tended her closely, as did Basse and Almas. Barakat sat with her in the evening to encourage her.

Day 6: Friday, August 8

They divided the remaining two pieces of bread among the six people in their family the next morning. They were accustomed to having tea with their morning bread. Barakat, his sense of humor still intact, quipped that morning that the man who had tea to drink in the valley that morning would be the king. There was little food to glean from the land. It was too early for figs and grapes, too late for mushrooms, and too far away from pomegranates. The shepherds distributed sheep meat to some of the people. There were plenty of sheep running loose, but the people had no knives, dishes or tools for slaughtering them.

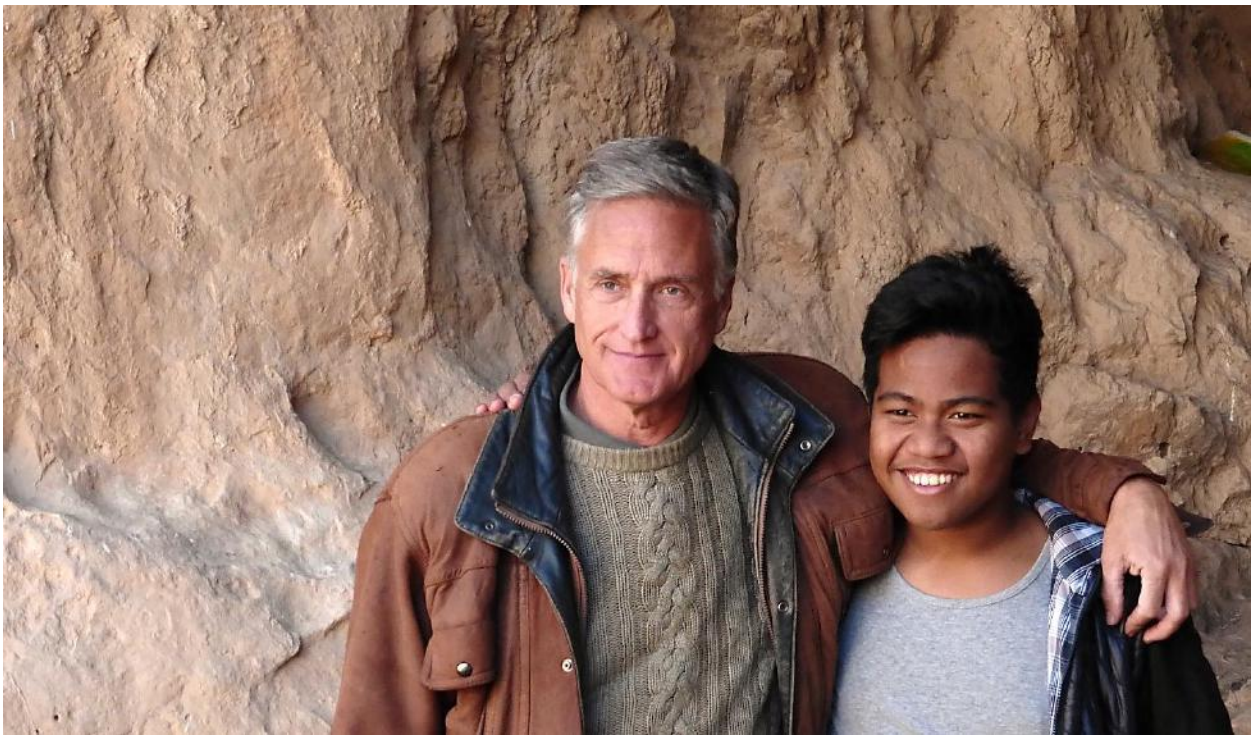
The next day the U.S. started bombing Daesh convoys in the Sinjar area as well as Daesh positions that threatened U.S. personnel at the consulate in Erbil. They used both drones and manned flights. This provided air cover for future aid drops by the U.S. and other nations, and supported the YPG on the ground in their attempts to clear a pathway to allow Yezidis to descend from the mountain to safety. Barakat and his family could hear the bombs in the distance. They noticed that none of the bombs was close enough to shake the ground.

Several Iraqi aid organizations were quick to respond to the displaced Yezidis and Christians as they entered the Kurdistan Region. That same day, aid was supplied by the private Kurdish Rwanga Organization, based in Erbil, and delivered by Kurdish Peshmerga soldiers in Iraqi army helicopters. The speed of this action was possible because the organization was under the actual direction of the Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani's son Idris, supported by other key staffers from the PM's office. It was licensed as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), but it had all the right government connections and funding. Rwanga evacuated a small group of twenty people off the mountain on the return trip. This flight was also fired upon by Daesh, making it a very risky and dangerous journey for all. Rwanga was also preparing Qadia Camp between Dohuk and Zakho to receive Yezidis fleeing the invasion. The soldiers on the helicopter returned fire.

This is where I entered the story. I had a career as a professor in the U.S. and had been previous Chairman of the Board of Rwanga Organization. I had recently split off from Rwanga to establish MedEast Organization and planned to use it to aid minorities fleeing Daesh. I had just moved from Erbil to Dohuk, in July 2014 where most of the displaced Yezidis would soon be arriving. I had been in Iraq with my two adopted sons from the Marshall Islands since 2008, Noel and Charlie, and had informally adopted a Yezidi son three years before, Azwan Azad Elias, from Bozan, with the permission of his parents, who wanted

him to have access to English language training and opportunities to improve his education and his life. My sons and I became connected to the Yezidi community in northern Iraq through Azwan. I was a former dean of the University of Hawaii in the U.S.

Azwan had assisted me and CNN Hero Brad Blauser with providing wheelchairs to Yezidi children in Bozan and other places, and had recently gone to the U.S. through the Iraqi Youth Leadership Exchange Program sponsored by the U.S. State Department.



Phillip Calhoun

Aid worker Dr. Paul Kingery and his son Charlie Phillip Kingery, above Seje Village, Iraq

When the invasion had occurred, while Azwan was still in the U.S., his Yezidi family had evacuated Bozan, briefly settling near the Turkish border in Zakho. When they were unable to escape into Turkey, as some lacked passports, they moved into a house I had secured for them in Seje Village near Dohuk. Azwan was unable to safely return to Iraq, so he requested asylum in the U.S., and settled in the Washington, D.C. area, where I had connections from my days there directing the Congressionally funded Hamilton Fish Institute on School and Community Violence at The George Washington University. Eventually Azwan moved to my home state of Oregon, settling in Portland, declaring asylum while on a trip from the U.S. State Department's Iraqi Youth Leadership Exchange Program.

In July of 2014, just a month before the invasion, I moved from Erbil to Dohuk to help set up American University Kurdistan, owned by Masrour Barzani, son of President Masoud Barzani. I then became Chair of the Academic Committee and supervisor of the faculty, and was in negotiations to become the

University's President when the invasion occurred and I left my post with the University to aid the people fleeing Daesh. I delivered a keynote speech at the opening of the University along with newly appointed Governor Farhad Atrushi Saleem, a former Member of the Iraqi Parliament, who had been my friend and travel companion for several days on his first trip to Kurdistan in 2006, and for whom I had arranged a doctoral scholarship at the University of Hawaii before Farhad decided to go into politics and remain in Iraq.

Azwan's uncles and I would soon prepare to help the Yezidis as they began to appear in the Dohuk area. I began searching for headquarters for the MedEast organization in Dohuk, with the goal of providing systematic ongoing aid to the Yezidis fleeing Daesh after they were rescued from the mountain. They expected that the military action would soon allow them to escape to safer zones nearby. These preparations would one day bring Barakat and I together, though we were still a distance of several hours and several days' time apart at that juncture.

British intelligence officers were in contact with Barakat's cousin on the mountain by telephone that same day. They spoke urgently through Kurdish-speaking interpreters imbedded with them:

> Where are you? How long can you survive? How much water do you have? Where are the IS fighters?

A plan was made by telephone for a night-time aid drop by airplane. Those who spoke with the officers on the ground agreed to position flashlights to mark the drop zone to facilitate their aid drops the next day.

Some daring Yezidis travelled down the pathway cleared on the north side of the mountain facing Syria when the U.S. bombing started, in the narrow window before Daesh focused their response to the bombing, and called back to say they had arrived in safe places. But few were ready to follow them immediately, knowing Daesh would fortify their response to the invasion. Many just felt too weak, too traumatized, and too distrustful of Muslim communities in the Kurdistan Region, so they didn't go. The Daesh response to the aerial traffic on the north side of Mount Sinjar was becoming more focused and powerful, making it more dangerous for anyone to fly the aid missions for a time. Flying in aid, while the U.S. was bombing Daesh, was very risky.

As the aid drops temporarily decreased, the food and water was inadequate to sustain those who remained. It was not reaching all people on the mountain, particularly on the south slopes facing Tel Azer who were least able to cross to the other side, including the elderly and people with disabilities. People were spread out for at least 35 kilometers across the length of Mount Sinjar, and for several kilometers across its width.

The United Nations meanwhile declared the humanitarian crisis faced by the Yezidis and other groups in the area to be on the highest level. This would pave the way for their broader role in the coming relief effort to those who escaped the Sinjar area, primarily through UNICEF and the UNHCR, assisting with the establishment of camps in the Dohuk area. They would provide only limited aid to Yezidis seeking refuge outside the camps, where they preferred to live, as this was not the UN's chief mandate.

Barakat's grandmother, Shereen, was still weak that day. Barakat was holding her hand and talking to her when she suddenly had a stroke. For a few minutes she revived, but couldn't talk. He called his mother, Kamela, who came quickly, and asked how she was feeling. Shereen responded, making sounds, but no one could understand her. Tears rolled down Shereen's face, then she simply slipped away into the quiet of death.

Abu Jan Khairi Aldomli

A Yezidi man nurses his exhausted elderly grandmother on Mount Sinjar after fleeing Daesh, August 2014.

Kamela was devastated, and buried her head in her mother's lap. She threw her hands in the air, and cried out in her grief. Barakat was doubly grieved for his grandmother's death and for his mother's sorrow. Others joined around, the women crying out with loud voices and holding their faces. After four hours of grieving, Kamela and her sister washed Shereen's body, and put her best white clothes on it. They called a woman from the Sheik caste, Sharrow, who was in the area, who arrived to pray and anoint Shereen's head with water.

They made a stretcher with two straight poles and a blanket to carry her, and put some of her keepsakes with her, her gold wedding ring on her finger, a gold necklace around her neck, covering her with the other portion of the blanket for the journey to the Temple. The funeral procession on foot was about four kilometers over rough terrain, and many men took turns carrying her body. The women followed the body, crying out in grief for the entire journey up over the north mountain ridge and down the north face

of the mountain, where they caught their first view of Syria and might have taken hope for their rescue if they had not been so overcome with grief.

When they arrived at Shevo Qassim Temple on the south side of the mountain, there were thousands of people taking refuge there near the spring, refreshing themselves with its water. They entered the Temple to pray, the people resting there making way for them. The elderly Sheik Tamri Qassim Khalaf officiated, in a short ceremony of fifteen minutes. The family killed a sheep and cooked it, then received rice and olives from some who were there, and distributed these to some of the people who were gathered around. They dug a hole in the ground of the cemetery a meter deep, and laid her to rest, covering her body with the dirt taken from the hole. They put a large rock by the head with her name written on it with black paint, and lined the perimeter of the grave with smaller rocks.

Kamela had diabetes, in addition to her near blindness, but didn't have medicine to regulate her blood sugar, so she was overcome by the journey and the funeral, and had to rest for several days under a tree on the dirt. Almas and Basse comforted her the best they could. They didn't sleep that night.

Day 7: Saturday, August 9

They called their relatives around the mountain, and about 50 arrived over the next hours to grieve with them. The custom was to make a shelter and provide food to all the visitors. They provided small amounts of food at midday, each family sharing some, in an attempt to approximate the usual custom. Kamela was deeply depressed. They sat still all the day, talking with their relatives.

On Saturday, the U.S. airplanes made their first high altitude aid drop over Sinjar Mountain. A single C17 Globemaster III cargo plane with crew from the 816th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron dropped 40 containment delivery systems weighing 800 pounds each, on wooden pallets filled with meals ready to eat. The aid was often severely damaged. The parachutes would be used for tents.

U.S. Air Force/Staff Sgt. Vernon Young Jr.

Straps secure water bundles aboard a C-17 Globemaster III before a humanitarian airdrop over Iraq on August 8, 2014.

The first British aid mission flew the same day. A British Royal Air Force Hercules cargo plane dropped 1,200 reusable water containers, providing 6,000 liters of water in total, and 240 solar lanterns that can also be used to recharge mobile phones. They also dropped and telephones that, when switched on, connected the people on the mountain directly with the aid officials. Few of the lanterns survived the fall, while the others were crushed.

Also that day, an Iraqi army helicopter pilot dropped aid in three daring day-time rescue missions on the mountain, using the code-name Fox 1. The pilot had called ahead to identify the best drop zone. Thousands of people were gathered where the helicopter arrived. The aid was dropped, despite the interference of countless desperate people rushing the helicopter, seeking to board it. The pilot had declared that their stop was limited to a brief window of five minutes, no more. John Irvine, Senior International Correspondent for ITV News, was aboard the flight and reported the events. Many Yezidis were able to climb aboard, beating out others who struggled against them. A mother and father literally threw their two little girls across a crowd clamoring to board the helicopter and into the arms of people already on board.

The pilot announced that the capacity was only fifteen people. Soon, 50 people were onboard, and the pilot could not lift off with the heavy load. At the pilot's insistence, five men were urged to exit before he felt it was safe to attempt a lift-off. Three young men were ejected, and a fourth was forced to leave. A middle-aged man stood and said farewell to his wife and children, then walked back down the ramp. All lives were at risk. As they lifted off, a young woman held with both hands onto the platform of the

helicopter, and was pulled up by aid workers. A man who was not able to board held tightly to the side of the helicopter as it lifted off, hoping to be pulled aboard, but he lost his grip before he could be pulled aboard and plunged to his death on the mountain below.

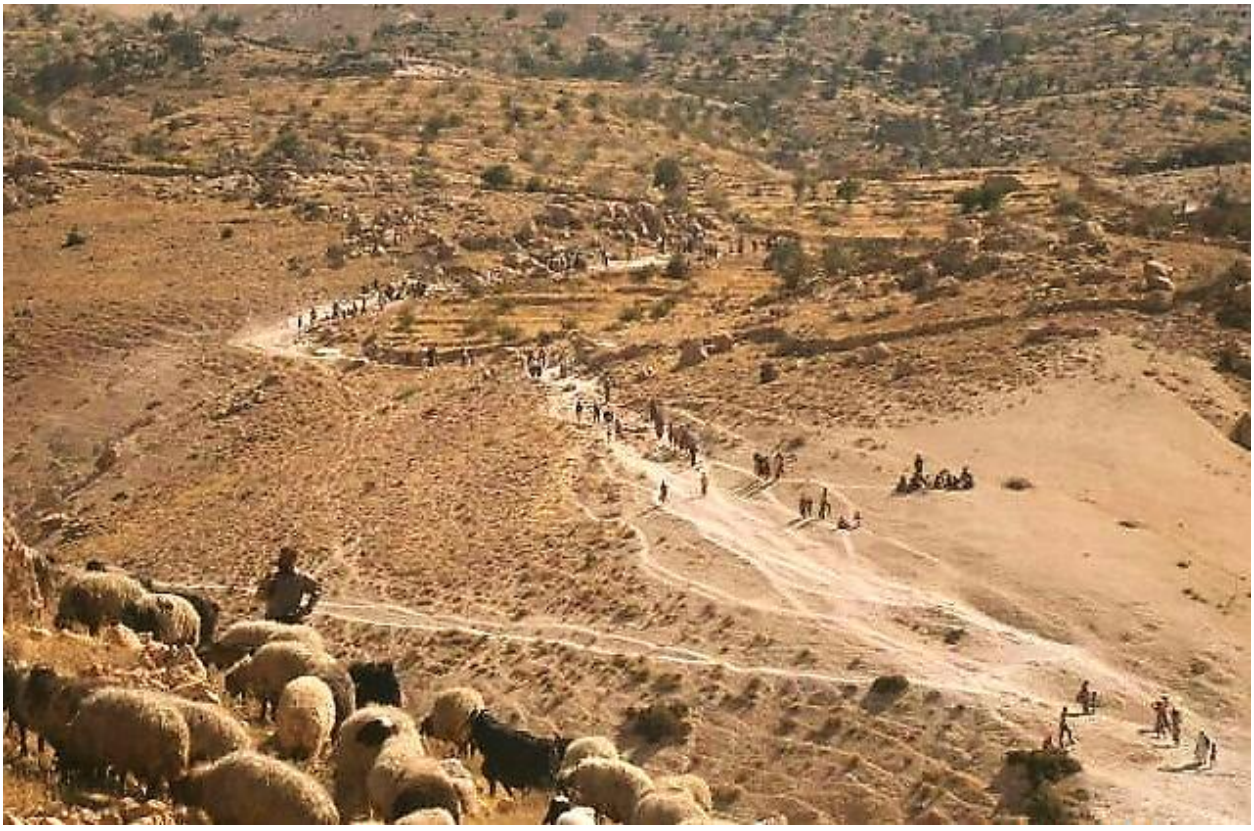
Although the way down the mountain and into Syria had been cleared, most people had waited until the seventh day when they heard that YPG trucks were available to carry people from the bottom of the mountain into Syria before leaving. Many did venture the journey down though. The pathway the Syrian Kurdish YPG soldiers had cut up the mountain had delivered a fatal thrust into the plans of Daesh to circle the mountain and kill all the people trapped there. But the success of Daesh in threatening the aid drops left the Yezidis with dwindling supplies of food and water, and facing dehydration again.

MedEast/Salam Ali Khalaf

Yezidi man leading his water donkey down Mount Sinjar August 9, 2014

MedEast/Ibrahim Murad Khuder

The Yezidis begin their walk down Mount Sinjar, August 9, 2014



MedEast/Salim Ali Khuder

The Yezidis and their sheep (the Salim Ali Khuder band) begin their walk down Mount Sinjar past Karsee Village August 9, 2014

Day 8: Sunday, August 10

On Sunday, the U.S. made their second high altitude aid drop over Sinjar Mountain. The first two American aid flights dropped off more than 36,000 meals and 7,000 gallons of drinking water. But the aid was dropped from high in the air, to avoid risk of gunfire and RPGs, and some of the water exploded upon impact despite the use of parachutes. Much of the food was salvaged for consumption, though scattered about on the ground and damaged. It was the safest course for aid drops, and provided some benefit, though it would hardly put a dent in the tremendous need.

The British Royal Air Force also made a second drop that day from two C130 cargo airplanes that provided 3,180 reusable water purification containers filled with clean water (15,900 liters of water in total), tents, tarps, and 816 solar lamps which can also be used to charge mobile phones. Again, most of these lamps were destroyed upon impact.

The water drop that day was the first that reached Barakat and his family. He was awakened from sleep at 4 AM when he heard two airplanes overhead. His brother Faisal had been standing guard over the family. Barakat and Faisal could make out two different airplanes overhead some distance apart, one from the U.S. and one from Britain. They saw the pallets of water falling in the dark sky.

Barakat ran to the pallets, with cloths wrapped around his feet, along with many others. The water was in wooden crates. He and more than 100 other people scrambled, competing to get to the water. Some had knives, which they used to cut the straps around the crates. Then they pulled the wood slats off. Some took as many as ten of the yellow plastic tanks of water, while others went away with none. Amid all the pushing and shoving, Barakat was able to get only two tanks of water, and took them away to his family.

Barakat deposited the water there, and all took a drink, after which he took the final drink for himself. The water was very hot, yet still refreshing, even life-saving. He then ran to another location where he had seen water dropped. This time he faced even stiffer combination to get the water in a mob of 500 people. He pushed his way through again, and managed to get one bottle in each hand, carrying them to his family as fast as he could run. Each had a drink from the second provision, and again, Barakat at the last.

Food was dropped along with the water, and Barakat tried his best to get some, but it landed further away from his location, so by the time he reached there, the food was gone. Those who were closest to the food took large amounts of food, and hoarded it with their family groups. He saw the people eating the food, freeze dried fish, biscuits, chocolate, macaroni, vegetables, and other food. Some also picked up medicine, but Barakat didn't find any.

He rested a short while before going out with Faisal on their daily search for food. They found little food on any of these trips. Sometimes they found bits of dried bread that had been brought by shepherds who were tending their sheep. Other times they found cucumbers and tomatoes from one of the seventeen family farms in the area. The families told him he was free to take any food from their fields, but the two

of them together never carried more than one or two kilos from any field, as there were so many other people needing to gather the vegetables.

He was more likely to find figs on trees farther away from the crowds, though the figs were not fully mature. Sometimes people would kill a sheep and share it with him. Some shepherds were distributing milk from their sheep and goats, but he was never able to get any. Kamela was having to live on bits of dried old bread and water, as she had no medicine to control her diabetes.

Day 9: Monday, August 11

In the early hours of Monday morning, under cover of darkness, the U.S. made their third high altitude aid drop over Sinjar Mountain. None of it was dropped close enough for Barakat to reach it. Fortunately, they had carefully preserved a portion of water he had taken from the previous aid drop.

Also that day, a joint Iraqi Air Force and Kurdish Peshmerga mission commanded by Iraqi General Ahmed Ithwany sent four army helicopters from Zakho, on the Turkish-Iraqi border, to drop aid and evacuate refugees from Mount Sinjar. A Kurdish officer steered them toward people who had not accessed the aid from the British and American aid drops in the previous days. They started dropping bags and boxes of water, flour, biscuits, dehydration salts, and shoes from as high as 100 feet in the air without parachutes as they approached, many of the plastic water bottles breaking as they fell and spilling their precious contents in the eyes of the thirsty people. People near the helicopter were more interested in being air-lifted off the mountain than taking the aid.

In the beginning, each helicopter touched down for five brief minutes on the mountain to deliver food, water, milk, and diapers, nearly causing a riot. Old men pushed themselves aboard as the aid was still being pushed out. Families pushed their small children into the arms of those on board the helicopter, and their dehydrated and weak bodies were briefly trapped in the press, before being pulled aboard to safety in the back of the cargo section. One of the aid workers began kicking and punching Yezidi men who were pressing aggressively to get aboard, pushing themselves over the little children, trapping some of them under their struggling bodies.

It was an ugly scene, showing the nearly complete depletion of humanity in some of these desperate men. About 25 refugees were taken on one helicopter, another 40 on three others. As they lifted off people of every age cried on their way to safety. Sometimes, to avoid riot, or because there were no flat landing areas near the people, they simply dropped the aid from the air and did not evacuate people from the mountain.

Contact with the world outside Sinjar Mountain was beginning to increase, signs that interest would grow and more substantial aid would soon come. They were neither forgotten nor unnoticed in their plight. Western journalists began riding along on these flights, including Jonathan Rugman, a foreign correspondent for UK Channel 4 News, and camera woman Philippa Collins, CNN journalist Ivan Watson, CNN Photojournalist Mark Phillips, and Jonathan Krohn of the Telegraph. These early flights also dropped

50 Kurdish Peshmerga soldiers on the top of the mountain to assist with crowd control and provide security from any attempts by Daesh to come up the mountain. Kurdish soldiers were also climbing the mountain to bring food aid on foot, but they could only carry small amounts with them on the long trek. An Iraqi army medical team also flew in with the others.

That same night, the second aid drop by the British Royal Air Force was conducted. The Hercules cargo plane flew at night to avoid the bullets and rockets of Daesh fighters in the area. The Yezidis placed the lights as instructed to show those on the flight where it was safe to make the drop without hurting people camped in the area. Some people didn't get the message, though, and left their lights on where they were sleeping. Seeing these lights of mothers changing their babies diapers, and people organizing their families, the pilots mistook them for the safe drop zone.

The unthinkable result, something that never made the news, was that the British planes dropped hundreds of one ton boxes directly on the people where they were sleeping or preparing to sleep. Barakat and others yelled "run" and everyone ran up the mountain away from the lights that had been ignorantly or carelessly left on where they had been sleeping. One 36-year-old woman named Leila and her three month old baby daughter from Barakat's group were killed by one of the heavy boxes of aid that night. They found out the next evening that 50 or more people, mostly women and children, were killed by the falling aid boxes some distance from them on the mountain. A more disastrous outcome of an aid effort could never be imagined.

The drop included more phones and GPS equipment to better organize future aid drops, but again, the equipment was mostly broken upon impact. By that night, the British and Americans had delivered 20,000 gallons of water, 85,000 ready to eat meals, and a thousand solar flashlights that could be used to provide light and to recharge mobile telephones, though few of the lights survived impact. Some of the water and food had survived impact from the high altitude drops.

U.S. President Barak Obama issued this encouraging statement the same day:

> Our aircraft remain positioned to strike any terrorist forces around the mountain who threaten the safety of these families. We're working with international partners to develop options to bring them to safety.

But working with international partners in this remote area proved too slow and too limited to address the need. People were starving and dying of thirst despite their efforts.

As they were returning with the water, Barakat and his brother Faisal found their cousin Yezdin there, whose wife Kochar had just succeeded in walking over the mountain nine months pregnant with twins. The family was camped only 100 meters from his family. She was exhausted from struggling to take care of her five children in her weakened condition, shepherding them over the mountain top. They visited for a while, then returned to his family.

CNN/Warzer Jaff

A Yezidi baby born on Mount Sinjar in August 2014.

That night, at around 9 pm, Kochar went into labor, and her husband came to call Kamela to help her deliver the babies. She gave birth to twin boys on the mountain at ten night. She was delighted at their live birth, but worried because she had no milk to nurse them because she was so dehydrated from her journey. Kamela was too old to wet nurse the babies, and there was no other help available. She tended the babies as best she could, tending Kochar too, and was equally delighted in their birth. She held the babies for a while, until they were asleep, and slept with them and Kochar there.

At about 2 AM, Kochar checked on the babies, and found both of them had died. Her grief was as great as her joy had been only four hours earlier. Her sorry deeply touched Kamela, who had shared in the joyful experience of their birth. Kochar had been so hopeful in the past weeks in Tel Azer, knowing she was carrying twins, and now she was doubly emptied, soulless.

Taboot Temple was just 700 meters away from the place where the twins had died, but the family did not go to the Temple for prayers, and did not have food to share with those who came to share in their grief, as was their custom. If they had died in Tel Azer, the babies would have been buried in the little cemetery at Khuder Elias Temple, where Barakat and Almas had stopped to enjoy their first minutes alone together on a snowy day the previous winter, full of hope for their future. Instead, Barakat and Yezdin dug graves and buried the babies where the family was resting. Barakat and Faisal stayed the night to help the family. The women in Barakat's family were crying a lot as the food was gone, they were doubly grieved over the loss of the twins, and their hunger grew.

After Daesh had conquered all the smaller cities to the west, they moved in greater concentrated strength upon Sinjar city and its 88,000 residents. The approach was again from three sides, forcing people to evacuate toward the mountain where they could be circled and later killed systematically. The Daesh fighters who had taken Jazeera, Guzarik, and Tel Azer and associated small villages moved toward Sinjar city from the west. Additional fighters from Mosul, the Daesh stronghold in Iraq, moved in from the East. Fighters from Baaj and other Sunni Arab villages south of Sinjar city added recruits from those villages and attacked from the south. The city was quickly overrun, in a fashion similar to what the residents of Tel Azer had experienced. The same systematic killing of men and boys with hair on their faces, elderly and disabled, and capture and removal of younger women and children was seen. Captives from other villages were brought in for processing, and the Shiite shrine there was blown up and its priests were executed.

Day 10: Tuesday, August 12

The next day, on Tuesday, August 12, Iraqi Air Force pilot, Major General Majid Ashour, who had flown the Mi-171E Russian-made transport helicopter to drop aid on previous days, returned for another aid drop. Vian Dakhil, the young Yezidi women who had become a member of the Iraqi Parliament and who had made impassioned pleas for aid to the Yezidis on the floor of the Parliament, flew along with her staff, aid workers, soldiers, and reporters from CNN and the New York Times. Westerners on the flight included New York Times Paris bureau chief and veteran war correspondent Alissa J. Rubin, 56, Moises Saman, a photographer with the Magnum photo agency on assignment for Time Magazine, and others. The New York Times reported that about 25 Yazidis, as well as five crew members, five Kurdish politicians and four western journalists, were aboard the helicopter. Alissa Rubin later explained what happened that day in her report for the New York Times:

> Adam Ferguson, our photographer, and I were waiting all day at the Kurdish military base for a helicopter to take us to Mount Sinjar.
>
> Gen. Majid came in from his first run up the mountain with a full load of Yazidi refugees, and a British TV journalist asked him: “Why are you taking such risks overloading your helicopter?” He just said: “I checked my numbers, I checked the weight, and it was possible to do it.”
>
> Also waiting with us was a Yazidi member of parliament, Vian Dakhil. She seemed very together, very organised (although she was inexplicably wearing high heels), and, of course, passionate about her people’s plight.
>
> When we finally got in the helicopter, it was 3.45pm, not a lot of daylight left. I had a seat on a load of bread, behind one of the door gunners. Otherwise, there were no seats, no seatbelts. The helicopter was full of bread, and probably bullets, too: bread for the Yazidis and bullets for the base of Kurdish *pesh merga* fighters on top of the mountain.
>
> The pilot really made a big impression. You know, the Yazidis feel so betrayed by the Arab neighbours they had lived among for so many years; they all turned on the Yazidis when the IS came. Many of the atrocities were carried out not by the militants but by their own neighbours.

Yet here was Gen. Majid, an Iraqi Arab himself, who was taking off from his own job — he was in charge of training for the Iraqi air force — to help these people. He told me it was the most important thing he had done in his life, the most significant thing he had done in his 35 years.

It was as if it gave his whole life meaning.

Gen. Majid was especially moved by all the Yazidi children.

The top priority was to get food up there. There were many places where there had been no airdrops of food at all, so these drops by the Kurdish authorities were really important.

When we were nearing the top of the mountain, people were gathered already. I remember one mother holding her son by the hand on one side, her daughter on the other, and they were trying to stay upright in the downdraft from the rotors so they could push forward to climb aboard. And they did make it on.

One older woman's face sticks in my mind; it was very rough and tremendously sad.

We were on the ground only about 10 minutes. The Yazidis were battered. Some older people were barefoot, legs swollen from walking; others were just totally dehydrated; and children sunburned. The kids — a lot of them — were crying, afraid and confused, and others were silent, just frightened.

When we landed, it was almost scary, with people thronging to get to us. All these people just wanting to get onto the helicopter and off this mountain. And I'm sure most of them had never seen a helicopter up close. One woman's legs were so swollen she had to be carried in a sling by several men.

So many climbed into the helicopter, coming up the rear loading ramp, the crew couldn't get the ramp closed. So they had to reopen it and make people get off.

When they tried to take off, they couldn't and had to set the helicopter back down.

Then there was this sad moment: they pulled this woman and her two children off the helicopter. They were crying. The mother was quite thin.

The pilot was just so moved by all this. He wanted to help all these people, especially the children.

Then Gen. Majid took off. But you could see he was going to use the downward slope of the mountain to aid in the take-off, until he could build up enough lift. The nose of the helicopter was pointing downhill as the flight started.

I felt the helicopter hit something; later, someone said it was a rock. I thought the pilot would right it, but then I saw the ground come up. I didn't know what would happen, but I knew it was bad.

Later, someone told me the co-pilot shut off the fuel when they lost control, which made us stall. Otherwise, it might have caught fire and exploded.

When we went down, I thought, all right, we're on a mountain, it'll slide a long way before it stops. Stuff fell on me; I didn't know if they were people or things. Then Dakhil landed on top of me.

Everyone was groaning. There were no screams, but everyone was groaning. Adam was great. He dragged me out of the helicopter, as I couldn't possibly walk. Adam wrapped his scarf around my head to stop the bleeding.

A *pesh merga* soldier took off his kaffiyeh and wrapped my arms together so that they wouldn't flap around. I thought it was really sweet at the time, but then I realised how sensible it was: He was immobilising my arms because both my wrists were broken.

Just before dark, a rescue helicopter came.

Several people picked me up and carried me aboard in a very inexpert fashion; that really hurt, unfortunately. I heard myself groan like everybody else. At that moment, it just hurt so much. But then I thought, that's good. At least I'm alive.

I bet a lot of them are not.

How is the pilot? Did he make it? He just wanted to help.

Nearly all were wounded, although none as seriously as Rubin, who was evacuated to Istanbul. Dakhil was also evacuated to Istanbul, with both legs and several ribs broken.

NY Times/Adam Ferguson

Yezidis stranded on Mount Sinjar await evacuation by Iraqi Army helicopters.

NY Times/Adam Ferguson

Displaced Iraqi Yazidi mothers grieve the death of their two children and injuries sustained by their other children in a helicopter crash they had boarded seeking to escape starvation on Mount Sinjar, Iraq, following the Daesh Invasion, August 12, 2014.

Iraqi pilot Majid Ashour (Majid Abdulsalam al-Tamimi) was killed on this heroic rescue flight. One Yezidi woman, and two Yezidi children, were also killed in the crash, and thirteen were injured.

It was a great tragedy that these Yezidis who had only moments before hoped this airlift would mean their rescue had then lost their lives, lost their children, or were wounded. The media coverage scarcely mentioned them, focusing on the Iraqi pilot and the Westerners who had been injured. Indigenous people die every day in wars, but their deaths are less reported, partly because access to information about the victims from the media are more accessible to them in the emergency situation given language barriers and time constraints.

The Council of Ministers in the Kurdistan Region expressed condolences to the family of helicopter pilot who died in the crash. The Council declared that he is to be considered a martyr in the Kurdistan Region, and a statue would be dedicated to him in a public place in Kurdistan to ensure the memory of his actions. The cause of the crash was listed merely as "technical error," as if it was the pilot's fault, not complicated

by the presence of the media or a politician where there could have been people better trained as rescue operators, not the fault of the many people climbing aboard, without adequate distribution of the weight, nor the fault of those who had driven them to this desperation.

Pentagon officials reported Tuesday night that the U.S. had sent an additional 130 Marines and Special Operations troops to Iraq to address the crisis created by Daesh in the broader region. One might have assumed that these trained people would be deployed to Mount Sinjar, but that was not the case. Most of them were placed far from Mount Sinjar in Erbil, near the U.S. Consulate to the Kurdistan Region, to protect the U.S. diplomatic mission there, the entrance to which was bombed by Daesh in a daring day-time raid.

As of that day, the U.S. had dropped 100,000 meals and 27,000 gallons of water. The Iraqis dropped 1 liter bottles of water, in the typical weak plastic bottles that water was sold in at the markets, shrink wrapped in plastic with many bottles per package, without parachutes. About 75% of the water was lost upon impact. Barakat was nearby the drop zone, and ran to the site, but so little was left, as it had already been taken by those nearest to where the water fell, so he didn't get any.

By the end of that day, the Kurdish government estimated that 35,000 people had escaped from Mount Sinjar and had reached the Dohuk Governorate in the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq, leaving an estimated 15,000 people or more still stranded on the mountain. This brought the total number of displaced Iraqis, including Yazidis, Christians, Shabbak, Kakai, Armenian and Turkman minorities, in the area between Dohuk and Zakho, on the Turkish border, to around 400,000. Another 225,000 Syrian refugees were living in that same area, having arrived over the months before the invasion of Sinjar, along with 75,000 Arabs from southern Iraq and Anbar Province, bringing the total number of internally displaced and refugees in the Northern Iraqi Kurdistan Region to about 700,000. Another half million were settling in other portions of southern Iraq. About 10,000 to 15,000 additional Iraqi Yezidis fleeing Sinjar had arrived in Syria, and were attempting to settle there.

Day 11: Wednesday, August 13

The next day, fewer than 20 U.S. Army Special Forces and USAID relief experts landed in Black Hawk helicopters on Mount Sinjar to assess the situation. The group landed early in the morning and left by 11 PM. They determined that the number of Yezidis who remained trapped on the mountain were now only a few thousand, and in relatively better condition than had been thought, before they flew back to the safety of nearby Erbil.

Their rosy assessment, which diminished U.S. interest in providing further aid, proved to be an underestimate of the problem. They made their assessment primarily from a limited drop zone area, while the people were spread out over a much larger area of about 175 square kilometers. A handful of British officers were also on the ground making assessments. The Yezidis were not allowed to approach those doing the assessment to counsel them on the Yezidis gathered in other parts of the mountain.

That night, two C-17 and two C-130 cargo planes dropped another 108 bundles of supplies, which included 7,608 gallons of water and 14,112 meals. This brought the total aid delivered by the U.S. to 35,000 gallons of drinking water and 114,000 meals. Had all of it survived impact and been distributed evenly, which it wasn't, it would not have given even one meal to each person over a week's time on the mountain.

Britain dropped another consignment of aid overnight Wednesday, the seventh in four nights, bringing the total water delivered by them to more than 48,000 liters. But a surveillance mission by Royal Air Force (RAF) Tornado jets overnight had reinforced the U.S. assessment of declining needs on the mountain, so at that point British aid drops were suspended. Again there was no food for Barakat's family to eat that day.

By the end of that day, the relief effort was finally in full swing. A 16-aircraft mission including US C-17s and C-130Hs, an Australian C-130J, and a British C-130J delivered supplies to mostly Yezidi civilians stranded on Mount Sinjar. Shelling of Daesh on the ground had weakened their abilities to fire at the aircraft, as their fighters had been pushed back away from the mountain. The Yezidi families had been trapped with their children and elderly on the mountain for 10 days with very little aid by that time. Many did not survive. Many were not able to receive even this large amount of aid, as they were too far away from the drop zones. Just as the aid was reaching levels that could feed everyone, it was prematurely suspended, leaving many Yezidis destitute.

Day 12: Thursday, August 14

Barakat, his father, and his brother took turns guarding the family at night. In the early hours of the next morning, Barakat heard the sound of an airplane, jumped up to gauge the drop location distance, and ran to the crates. The competition was even greater now, with as many as 300 fighting over each palette. Again, he took only two tanks of water, each holding about 4 liters, being happy with that, as they were large enough that more would have been difficult to carry, and he wanted others to get their share.

There were many people who had supplies of food they had brought from the villages on the north side of Mount Sinjar, particularly Sununi. Some were risking trips down to the villages to get food, hoping not to run into Daesh. There was a certain amount of hoarding on the mountain by some, but others were very willing to share. On Thursday, a family gave Barakat's family two pieces of bread, which they divided as usual.

Their suffering was helped very little by the announcement by President Obama that day that "We broke the ISIL siege of Mount Sinjar." Obama continued, "We do not expect there to be an additional operation to evacuate people off the mountain, and it's unlikely we'll need to continue humanitarian air drops on the mountain." Obama said airstrikes against militants would continue. Even if the siege was broken, the hunger of those still trapped there with little ability to make the arduous journey to safety was not.

Day 13: Friday, August 15

Barakat and Faisal looked every day for food and water, which usually kept them busy most of the day and took them three kilometers in both directions on alternate days on the mountain ridge from where his family was situated. Every day they walked past dead bodies, especially the elderly and small children, more as the days past. There was no food for any of them to eat again that day.

That night, Daesh had staged a massacre of an estimated 400 Yazidi men four kilometers from the village of Kocho and took about 1,000 women and children as prisoners. The details of that horrifying day became evident much later. The men and older boys were killed first, then the older women were buried alive, leaving the women and girls to be exported to Raqqa, Syria for ongoing rape and beatings, and the smaller boys to be taken away from their mothers and brainwashed to become Daesh fighters.

Day 14: Saturday, August 16

Barakat's family moved about two kilometers from their resting place on the twelfth day of their ordeal to be nearer the farm that Barakat had found to be the most reliable water source. They settled down under some trees there near the farmhouse. The Yezidi family of the home was still living there, and had taken in some other people on their land. He didn't know them, but they were kind to his family. They gave Kamela two pieces of hot fresh bread and eight small pomegranates. The family had a hand-driven crank generator they used to pump water out of the well. They were not reliant on electricity, because they were too far from the electric supply lines. This independence from the power grid proved to be a lifesaver for about 100 people.

Day 15: Sunday, August 17

Still resting at the farm the next day, they spoke by telephone with people who had made their way safely down the mountain and into the Kurdistan Region. They carefully assessed the length of the journey, their ability to carry water and food for the difficult trip, the best time to go, and where they would ultimately settle if they made it safely down. There were still too many unknowns to make a firm plan. They worked out some of the broader outlines of their plan, and agreed that they would leave in the middle of the night so as to avoid the hot summer sun and the need for more water.

The four widows and their children, and little Shereen and her family, agreed to continue travelling with them as a group. Hundreds of others were making the same assessments, using the same limited information, making plans to escape in the early hours of the next morning. No one was able to sleep that night, facing the dangers of the journey and making preparations to leave in the night.

MedEast/Selo Naiv Ismail

Remnants of bedding carried up Mount Sinjar by Yezidis fleeing Daesh invasion, placed in a small cave for sleeping, and abandoned after the siege because Syrian Kurds told them to bring nothing into Syria, March 13, 2016.

MedEast/Salim Ali Khuder

Going down Mount Sinjar toward the Syrian border August 15, 2014

Day 16: Monday, August 18

After fifteen days on the mountain, on August 18th, about 600 people walked down the mountain together, thinking there would be strength in numbers if they faced the enemy. Barakat's family went with them. They walked for five hours, from 4 to 9 AM, successfully avoiding the summer heat, further dehydration, and fatigue. It was not so much easier going down the mountain than it had been to go up from Tel Azer, because their ability to move was diminished, they were severely sleep deprived, psychologically traumatized, their shoes were worn out, and their feet were damaged from walking barefoot or with shirts wrapped around them. Barakat's mother was suffering the most, due to her diabetes and her limited food intake. They had been told to carry nothing down the mountain with them. They left everything behind.

The journey down was more difficult than the journey up had been, given their weakened state, their profound grief, their concern about the possibility of walking into another massacre by Daesh terrorists. Even if they survived the journey, the danger and undesirability of seeking refuge in a Sunni Muslim controlled area, even among the moderate Kurds, whose failed efforts to protect them were still fresh in their memory.

Kamela was hardly able to walk by then, and supported on both sides by Barakat and Faisal. Almas and Besse could not support her weight, they were so weak themselves, and still carrying the little water they had for the journey. Mahlo's 66 years were revealing themselves in joint pain and severe exhaustion, and he was still lugging along his faithful Kalashnikov rifle and the few bullets he had been able to gather from other men, in case they encountered Daesh on the journey down.

Abu Jan Khairi Aldomli

Yezidi people escaping the siege on Mount Sinjar, walking toward Syria, August 2014.

The group was a sad sight, utterly shaken in every way, mentally, physically, and emotionally. Their shoes were destroyed, and the bits of scrap cloth taking their place were also failing by then. Their hair was matted with dust and dirt from the mountain, sticking out in all directions, defying gravity. Their hands were rough from picking up rocks, climbing over rocks, taking water from rocky springs, moving rocks to lie down, and throwing rocks at dogs to keep them away. Their eyes were half-mast with exhaustion, and they no longer tried to cover them to protect them from the intense sunlight, as that would require lifting their tired arms. Their faces, necks, and hands were brown and dehydrated, fingernails long and filled with brown dirt. Every crack, crevice, and fold in their skin was brown with dirt.

Little Shereen was still being carried more than she was walking, though her own family supported her now that Barakat was aiding his mother. The widows and their children were barely able to make their own way down the rocky slopes. They each struggled alone over the rocks, the distances between them growing over time as the weaker ones lagged, and those with a little strength moved forward with such

economy of movement that they did not turn their heads back to see who was behind or how far back they had lagged.

At long last they reached the place where they could see tire tracks that indicated where the trucks had been coming, near a farm house, and signs of trash that had been carried down the mountain and deposited haphazardly from those who had survived the walk. Those objects were of shapes and colors and covered with words that immediately identified them as foreign in that remote edge of Sinjar Mountain.

As they waited for the trucks, they found some stored water in a concrete tank on the farm to wash their faces, but it was too dirty to drink. They had a small amount of spring water with them in tanks they had saved from the airplane drops to drink. Then they sat down and waited for several hours in the shade of the farmhouse, every inch of shade filled with bone-weary children, elderly, and sick ones, and the men braving their final hours of over-exposure to the mid-day summer sun.

The trucks never arrived, the drinking water ran out, and they were all becoming seriously dehydrated in the intense heat. Eventually the people in their group gave up waiting, feeling their lives were threatened by dehydration, so they threw away their guns and last remaining items they had carried and walked en masse to the base of Mount Sinjar and into the plains toward Syria.

Reuters/Rodi Said

Displaced Yezidis ride a donkey from Mount Sinjar, Iraq, toward the Syrian border, August 2014.

Reuters/Rodi Said

Displaced Yezidis walking from Mount Sinjar, Iraq, towards the Syrian border with sheep and goats lost from their owners after the invasion by Daesh, August 2014.

Reuters/Rodi Said

Yezidi children make their way from Sinjar Mountain, Iraq, towards the Syrian border following the Daesh Invasion, August 2014.

Chapter 5: Escape from Sinjar

As Barakat's family and their large band of people drew nearer to the Syrian border, they were dusty, dirty, tired, thirsty, hungry and severely traumatized. They had walked about three kilometers from the farm to the border. At about 3 PM, they saw a cloud of dust rising from the road in the distance toward them. The women and children became frightened, worried that it might mean Daesh was approaching them. Some were soon able to make out the bright yellow and green colors of YPG flag of the Syrian Kurdish forces showing through the dusk, and calmed the women and children, reassuring them that help was approaching rather than massacre. Had it been Daesh, they would have had no fight left in them. They were fully depleted in every way that depletion could be measured.

As the dust cloud drew closer, they could make out some big trucks, several busses, and small cars driven by Syrian volunteers who had received free benzene from the YPG to use in their cars. Barakat and Faisal helped the women climb onto the very last truck, all women and children, including the four widows who had travelled over the mountain with them, and little Shereen's family. But their women were suffering from the tightly packed conditions. Mahlo told Faisal and Barakat to pull all of their family off the truck, so Kamela, Basse, and Almas were the only females left there waiting to be rescued as the truck pulled away. The men around them rebuked his father for letting his wife and daughters stay behind. But Mahlo wouldn't allow them to suffer more, and insisted on waiting for the next truck.

A few hours later, another truck arrived, with more space for them to move freely, so they boarded it slowly and with some difficulty, given their weakened condition, and settled into positions along its sides. Kamela was virtually lifted aboard by her sons, her strength entirely gone from her limbs. Nearly all those aboard were men, save Kamela, Basse and Almas. No one cared at that point who was sitting next to them, nor spoke to his neighbor on the journey. Were he to speak of his suffering, who would be able to hear with his own fresh memories of suffering still ringing in his ears. Barakat's family, still intact as a group though diminished by the death of Shereen, stayed together, still caring, but needed no words between them to explain their devastation over the monumental ordeal they had all shared.

They travelled the dusty road away from Mount Sinjar, watching it grow smaller, less imposing, as they progressed. Their memory of suffering there was the only portion of the experience that did not diminish with the passing of distance and time. Kamela began to weep, quietly, her tears forming mud beneath her eyes, etching whiter channels with darkened brown edges down her face to the lines deepened by dehydration. Almas and Basse comforted her.

They were safely evacuated across the border into Syria to the YPG military station, and were taken into the YPG office that provided water and food for all, and medical exams for the injured. Kamela was examined and treated, and gained some relief from the weakness caused by her low blood sugar. Volunteers were there to assist, their compassion ushered forward by the thousands who had come before this group, fully displayed in the open view of volunteers and news cameras. These scenes would become the stuff of music videos lamenting the suffering of the "Kurdish" people, sung in Badini Kurdish, by Kurdish singers rather than Yezidis, used by Kurds as propaganda in their common bid for aid and independence from Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. It was as if the Kurds were the ones suffering, not Yezidis, and

it ignored the duplicity of the Kurdish Peshmerga in abandoning the Yezidis to Daesh without notice or reinforcements. The plight of Yezidis, their Kurmanji language, and their dim future, would not be featured in these videos.

Barakat charged his cell phone, and received a call from the widows and their children whom they had sent ahead to Dohuk in the Kurdistan Region, inviting them to join them there. The care they had given the widows and Shereen's family in their travails had been remembered, and would now be a help to them. She was no longer "little Shereen" as Barakat's grandmother had become one with the mountain, along with so many others. She was simply Shereen now. This mutual care between the widows and Barakat's family was an astounding trophy of humanity at its greatest, shining at the finish line of the first relay in a remarkable endurance test.

Reuters/Rodi Said

Yezidis climbing onto trucks to evacuate from Mount Sinjar, Iraq, to the Syrian border after the Daesh Invasion, August 2014.

More big trucks that carried them from Syria across the border near Fishkabur, through the foothills of the Qandil Mountains, and along the fertile Tigris River valley to Shendokah School in Dohuk. Barakat's family was reunited there with the widows and their children, and with little Shereen and her family. Their sorrow was overcome by their joy at seeing their friends who had guided them safely over the mountain. Barakat's family was situated in one of the concrete basketball courtyards with no cover over them, having come later than others who had occupied all the classrooms.

That evening, after dark, two young Yezidi men from the Elias Khalaf family in Bozan, Salim and Farhad, and I entered the gate of the Nawroz School in Dohuk carrying bags of fresh flatbread and bottled water. There was no electricity in the school that evening, and the families were settled into classrooms, hallways and courtyards in the darkness.

MedEast/Farhad Elias Khalaf

Yezidis receive bread and water from MedEast the night they arrived from Sinjar Mountain to Nawroz School in Dohuk, Iraq, August 16, 2014.

We stopped just inside the gate, and were immediately surrounded by gaunt-faced starving Yezidi men who had just come from temporary aid stations in Syria, or directly from the mountain. There was no mad dash for the food and water. Instead, a disciplined conversation was struck up between the Yezidis that entered with the food and those anxious to receive it.

Within hours of arriving in the school, the Yezidis had organized themselves into groups according to family size, to assure equitable and rapid distribution of any aid that arrived. This was the first aid that had reached them, and it was not enough. The food was divided according to the organized plan of the people in the school, and was quickly distributed in equal amounts. There would just be a little for each person to stave off their hunger that evening. We stayed for an hour, listening to the people tell about their plight.

Their gaunt faces, now washed and repaired, still showed the signs of their ordeal in the dark brown of their faces and the deep cracks in their lips. As young men alternately pressed their faces into the dim

light of the telephone flashlights, they seemed almost as ghosts, surreal, without emotion, no muscle tensing to form expressions as that would require too much energy. Their eyes were fully open now, searching for food for themselves and their families with the same intensity that had been in their eyes on top of Mount Sinjar, but now with ordered behavior and shock in the midst of new surroundings they had feared would not be entirely supportive.

That there was no food waiting for them upon arrival at the school had heightened their concerns that they were in hostile Muslim territory. Their loved ones had been herded into schools by Sunni Muslim Daesh fighters in Sinjar District villages. "How would being herded into schools by Sunni Muslim Kurds in Dohuk be different," they wondered.

MedEast/Salim Elias Khalaf

Yezidis rescued from Mount Sinjar overflow from the classrooms into a courtyard in Nawroz School, Dohuk, Iraq, August 23, 2014.

The next day, before dark, when his work ended, the Elias brothers and I took more bread and water to the hungry and depleted displaced Yezidis in the school, and went deeper inside the school compound and building to sit with the people and hear their stories. We split up and walked throughout the building,

greeting people, shaking hands, listening to stories and pleas for help. I made small talk in the little Kurmanji Kurdish that I knew.

MedEast/Farhad Elias Khalaf

A Yezidi woman, Dalal, showing a photo of her son who was murdered by Daesh while fleeing Tel Azer to Sinjar Mountain, after she arrived for sanctuary at Nawroz School, Dohuk, Iraq, August 2014.

Dalal's words were wrenching:

> I am from Tel Azer. I am in the school with my father, one brother, and a friend. My sister's son, only 12 years old, and two of my cousins, Barakat and Qassim, were captured by Daesh, as we heard from friends who saw them captured. We were in a big group in two cars leaving for the mountain. Daesh chased us shooting with machine guns. We got away, but the car with my mother and others was hit with machine gun fire, and stopped. My 14-year-old son Sabhan and my mother were killed. We kept going toward the mountain. We want everyone to see us and hear our voice and help us. We don't know what happened to our family members.

A man who spoke some English invited me to meet his family, the women keeping their distance, as was the custom between Iraqi women and unrelated male visitors. Another 30 boys and children gathered around me in a circle as they sat down on a carpet. They had no tea to offer me, as had been their custom, but they offered me a seat on their carpet. I felt honored by them, moved by their stories of suffering and survival, and tried to engage them as much as I could, and to play with the children to set them at ease.

MedEast/Farhad Elias Khalaf

Yezidis rescued from Mount Sinjar gather around American aid worker Dr. Paul Kingery in Nawroz School in Dohuk, Iraq, August 23, 2013.

For the next several days, the three men brought bread and bottled water in larger quantities, as well as soccer balls, water coolers, and other types of aid, financed partly by the Cross Team in the U.S. through two of my fellow American University staffers, Jordan and Debra Greaser, whom I had recruited to Dohuk from Erbil. Slowly others began bringing aid, mostly well-meaning individuals, Kurds and Yezidis, sometimes so little that rather than distribute it injudiciously, the intended recipients just abandoned it in a corner of the school. After two days, the government began bringing bags of rice, beans, oil, tea, sugar, salt, and other needed items in sufficient quantities for all. They provided no protein, as it was too costly, and the government was struggling with financing. There were others telling their stories too, all gripping accounts of tragedy and loss. Here are some of their stories:

Suleiman Ibrahim Khudeda

> I'm Suleiman Ibrahim Khudeda from Tel Azer. We ran away and went to the mountain for ten days but nobody helped us and we didn't get anything from the airplanes. There were many children and some of them died because we didn't have any water. They killed my mother and my brother and took my cousins captive. I was with all these kids for 10 days as we walked across the mountain to the Syrian border, then trucks took us into Syria and to Dohuk. We have been in Dohuk for seven days. We only have soup for breakfast and lunch here. We sleep out in the open without privacy, so we need help to get a better place. We are asking for help to go to Europe because we will die if we stay here. This is the summer holiday, so when the students return, we will not be able to stay in this school, they will tell us to leave. We need someone to give us a place to live in Europe or in Kurdistan. It's so hot here, and it is difficult for the children to live

here. Most of the kids are sick and have to go to the hospital. We are asking for people to listen to my voice. We have been in the hot sun in Sinjar Mountain for ten days and here we are hot too. We need somebody to feel for us.

MedEast/Salim Elias Khalaf

Faqier Yezidi Suleiman Ibrahim Khudeda from Tel Azer, taking refuge and pleading for help in Nawroz School, Dohuk, Iraq, August 23, 2013.

Ibrahim Khudeda Baker

We started fighting in Tel Azer at 3 AM. We called to ask for help, and they said they would bring help in five minutes, but the help didn't come. We were fighting until our bullets finished, and no one came to resupply us or help us. We called Sarbast but he said he was gone to the Kurdistan checkpoint, and they didn't send any more Kurdish Peshmerga to help us. We asked him where he was, and he said he ran away. I had one car, and some came without cars. They killed my son and wife. They captured my nephew. We went to the mountain, but it was hard to stay there, so we came to the Kurdistan Region. We give thanks to the Peshmerga and the YPG because they helped us. We thank the people from Dohuk because they sent two cars to bring my family to the school. Now we are in a better situation, but there are a lot of people who need help, so they can't help so many very quickly. Many people are not able to live under this difficult situation so they will kill themselves. No one can help so many people all at once. There were more people

in the Sinjar District than in all Dohuk city. We can't do anything because we don't have any money so we pray to God for help.

MedEast/Salim Elias Khalaf

Faqier Yezidi Ibrahim Khudeda Bakker from Tel Azer, taking refuge in Nawroz School, recounting their fight against Daesh, in Dohuk, Iraq, August 23, 2013.

Choke Haji Michi

We heard about Daesh one month before the invasion when they sent a message telling us that they would come to Tel Azer. We didn't want to leave, so we prepared to fight, and we fought them. We were fighting to give the women and children time to escape to the mountain. We went to the mountain after our bullets were finished. I saw the babies and the children dying from lack of food. There were only small pieces of bread to eat. We had some of our people fighting against Daesh on the mountain.

MedEast/Salim Elias Khalaf

Faqier Yezidi Choke Haji Michi from Tel Azer, taking refuge in Nawroz School, recounting how Daesh warned the village a month in advance, at Nawroz School, in Dohuk, Iraq, August 23, 2013.

Suleiman Khalaf

The airplanes sent solar phone chargers, but nearly all of them broke when they hit the ground, so only about four of them were working. There were about 200 bodies of Yezidi fighters, Kurdish Peshmerga and Daesh fighters who were killed in Tel Azer. I feel sorry for these people's families because the bodies were just left there and there was no way to get them back. I saw a lot of people who were killed in their houses, or killed walking toward the mountains by Daesh machine guns and rockets. I was fighting until the families left for the mountain, then we joined them. We called Sarbast, from the Peshmerga, but he said he was in Dohuk. I told Sarbast, "Thanks so much for running away and leaving us!" We stayed on the mountain for seven days. I left the mountain three days ago. I am asking if anyone is going to help the Yezidis with their big problem. This is the 74th genocide against Yezidis. Why are they always killing us? This is a Muslim country, and they do what Mohammed did. They kill a lot of Yezidis because they refuse to change their religion to Islam. They don't like us and we don't like them.

MedEast/Salim Elias Khalaf

Faqier Yezidi Suleiman Khalaf from Tel Azer, taking refuge in Nawroz School, recounting how Daesh warned the village a month in advance of the invasion, at Nawroz School, in Dohuk, Iraq, August 23, 2013.

Our group of three visitors left the school together, discussing what we had heard and seen, making plans about returning to help more systematically. Back at my office, I shared this experience with American colleagues Jordan and Debra Greaser, who immediately began raising funds for aid through the Cross Team and their other friends back home in Pennsylvania and Ohio. This group of young Yezidi men, Salim, Farhad, Azad, Jordan, Debra, and I formed the nucleus of a coordinated relief effort called the "Yezidi Rescue Project," under my organization MedEast, with the initial effort to be led by Salim Elias Khalaf. This short-term project would soon lead to larger MedEast efforts that would bring more significant and systematic aid to the displaced in the near term. I had worked with Salim previously to aid farmers in Nineveh Province, and to build peace between Yezidi, Christian, Muslim, and other minority Iraqi youths. Now we would address this need together too.

Chapter 6: Finding Refuge

Barakat and his family left the school and moved to Seje village. The little village was exclusively Chaldean Christian, with a Church offering Catholic services, and a school offering primary school in their native Chaldean language. The village had only about 500 residents prior to the invasion but soon swelled to more than 7,000. A single well provided water to a single water tank that flowed only to the 100 or so finished houses on a rotating basis throughout the day when national power was available, but not to the 240 unfinished houses. A second well had no tank or lines.

MedEast/Yakop Matti

Seje Village and the Tigris River valley from the mountains behind at the beginning of spring, April 1, 2016.

Many of the Chaldean Christian owners of the finished houses had fled to Europe already, since the time Daesh invaded Mosul. Nearly 500 Christians from Nineveh Province, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syrian Orthodox, Syriac, and Armenian Christians, poured in to occupy the abandoned homes. The unfinished houses were filled with 6,000 Yezidis in just a two-week period after they came down from the mountain, most of them from the Faqier caste, the majority being former residents of Tel Azer. Camps were built for Christians on the edge of the village and a few kilometers to the north in an isolated area, with prefabricated plastic walled and steel-framed cabins for Chaldean Christians, and tents for Assyrian Christians (reflecting the bias of the Chaldean Catholic funders of the camp).

Seje was originally a small wheat farming settlement at the base of the mountains in the Semel District of Dohuk Province in the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq. It received two large influxes of residents, first from the Christian village of Mar Yakko (Saint Jacob) on the mountain above in August 1988 when Saddam Hussein's forces flattened the village and monastery, and then the internally displaced Yezidis from Tel Azer and the other villages in the Sinjar District and Christians from villages in the Nineveh Province in August 2014.

It was an ancient village. In 485 C.E. a group of Orthodox monks came to live in the natural caves high up on the mountain above modern Seje Village at the top of three valleys on a small plateau fed by a large stream of clean water flowing from a cave. The site was beautiful, safe, secluded, and well nourished by the spring. The caves were small and shallow, but provided needed protection from occasional winter rains and winds. The monks established the village and church there over a 200 year period. They spoke the Assyrian language in the form that had derived from the Aramaic language of Jesus' apostles Thomas and Thaddeus.

A monastery was then built over roughly a five-year period in the late seventh century under the leadership of Esho, an Iraqi monk. Upon his Esho's death, he was buried in the House of Martyrs at the Church of the Monastery. Yakko, who had left Kirkuk to minister in Dohuk's Nohadra area, took his place. There were 300 monks living at the monastery at the time Yakko took over the leadership. Yakko remained there until his death at the age of 90, and was buried there near the grave of Esho. He was replaced upon his death by Anbashlemon. The records do not show the succession of leaders for the two centuries afterward, but the line of leadership is known after that point.

In 979, the village was attacked and captured by the Abbasids, but not destroyed. Shortly after, the Kurds from Amedi destroyed the church and monastery and the monks were scattered to other places. Then in 987, the monks returned to the location under the leadership of Yohanna bin Nazook, who became bishop and then patriarch from 1013 to 1032, and the church was rebuilt.

The church in Iraq split in 1552 into Chaldean (Catholic) and Assyrian factions. The monastery affiliated with the Assyrian faction. From 1032 to 1743 the monastery was relatively safe. Then, in 1743, the Persians under Nader Shah destroyed the monasteries throughout the region, including Mar Yakko's Assyrian monastery.

In 1803, the Catholic monk Yousef Cambanilli, came to Mar Yakko to build a Dominican monastery and spread Catholicism in Mar Yakko and in several other villages in the area. In 1847, Catholic priest Augustine Marki built a school and dormitory there to serve the students from remote villages in the area. Around 1858, a plague dessimated the population of Mar Yakko.

In World War I, the area fell under the control of the Ottomans, and was often robbed and portions were destroyed. After the war, in 1922 the Catholic Dominicans returned to rebuild the monastery, school and dormitory. In 1961, the Catholic Dominicans left Mar Yakko again because of security problems in the north.

The Chaldean Christian villagers continued on there for another 27 years without monks. In August 1988, Saddam Hussein's Iraqi army attacked the village on the ground and by air. The local villagers who remember this spoke of an ongoing siege in which they carved additional caves into the mountains to avoid the bombs, which can still be seen there. A network of caves was also carved into the face of the village cliffs to the south, and their villagers used them to shoot what they claim were 3,000 of Saddam's troops as they attempted to ascend the cliffs. Iraqi forces then heavily bombed all that was left of the village, every building, barely leaving one stone upon another. Only the caves, spring, and foundations of the monastery, church, chapel, and houses remained. After that, all remaining residents moved away, many of them to Seje village at the base of the mountain nearby. The former residents of the village return there 20 days after Easter every year for a memorial.

Paul M. Kingery

Caves in the ancient Christian village of Mar Yakko (Saint Joseph), Iraq where Christians lived for 1,400 years before they were bombed by Sadaam Hussein and moved down the mountain to Seje Village.

The large number of unfinished houses in Seje in the modern period resulted from a government program that had offered 30 year interest-free loans to any family who had a half-finished house. It was a program intended to support poor families, primarily Kurds, who did not own a home but were making progress in

building a home. The policy had failed to assure that no one would benefit from more than one such loan. The Chaldean Christians had been quick to notice this loophole, and if they owned one finished house and could afford to finish one additional house, instead they built several half-finished skeletons, hoping to cash in on the poverty relief program and pay back the interest-free money with rents, which were very high at the time in relation to building costs.

When Daesh invaded, the government program was stopped. The owners couldn't afford to finish their homes, and wouldn't invest more money in Iraq where Islamic extremism was threatening them. The homes were not finished to a level that would allow the owners to charge rent. The Muqtars Sabri and Kareem made no efforts to prevent the skeletons from being occupied, and once the displaced Yezidis were there, the government could not justify expelling them, partly through widespread Kurdish compassion for their suffering and partly, perhaps, for fear of a backlash against their political party in the coming elections. It was illegal for Yezidis to rent or own property in the village, but the law did not address squatting, and so the village soon filled with Yezidis outnumbering Christians six to one and the nature of the village changed entirely.

Barkat's family arrived in Seje village on August 23, 2014 and went directly to the unfinished house where his father's brother was living with other families. The house held one family per room, with eight families, about 40 people in all. The house had no doors or windows, the walls were not plastered, and the floors were just dirt. There was no plumbing or electricity or running water. It was just made of concrete blocks with a poured flat concrete ceiling, like 239 others in the village.

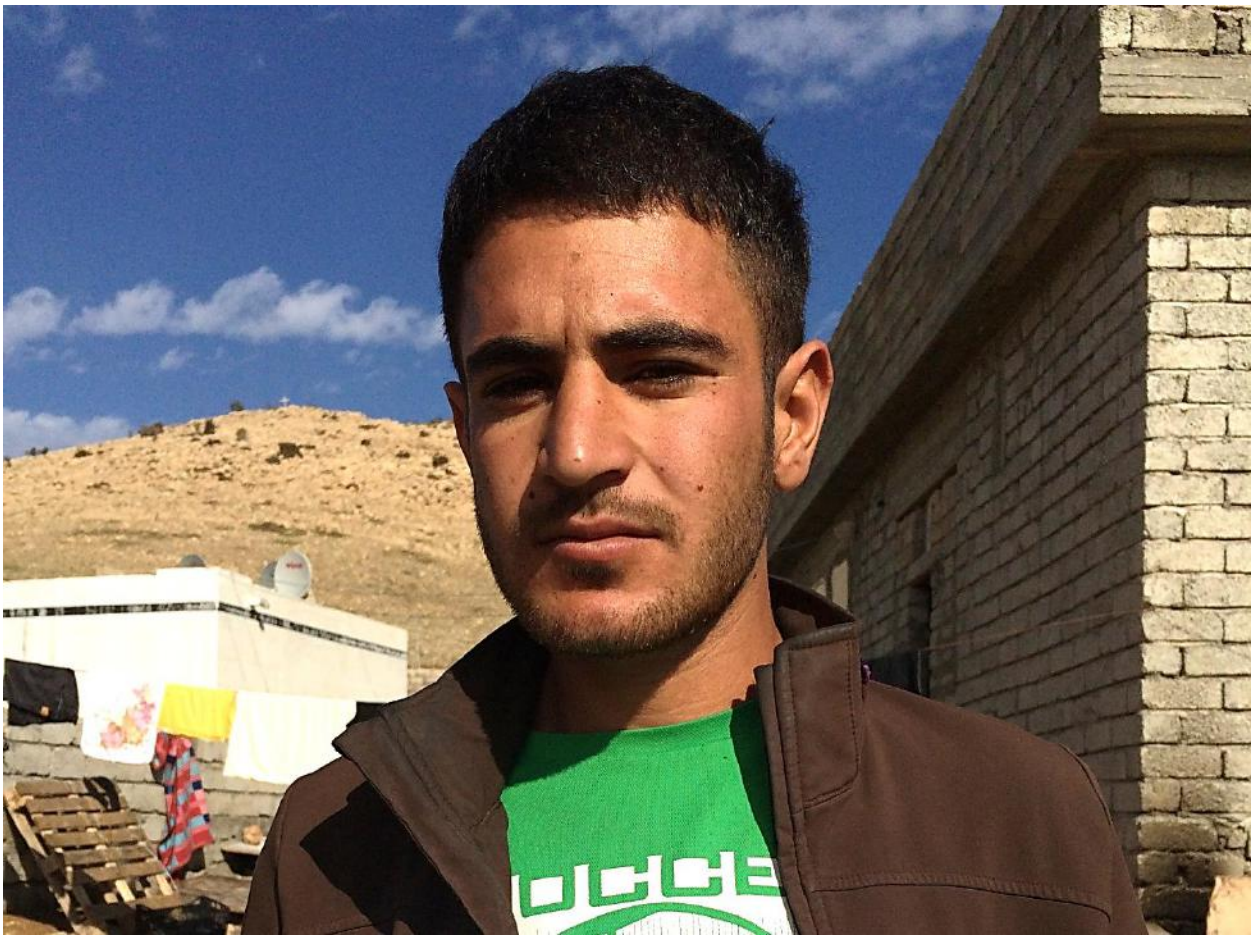
There was only one windowless room available in the house for his family of six, and they had to put a blanket up to block the view of people entering and leaving the house through one end of the room where the front door opening of the house was located. Barakat, Almas, Kamal, Mahlo, Faisal, and Basse all slept and lived in the one partial room. His sister Gule and her husband lived next door in another unfinished house with his family.

Paul M. Kingery

The skeleton block home in which displaced Faqier Yezidi Barakat Mahlo and his family and several other families from Tel Azer were temporarily resettled, in Seje Village, March 17, 2016.

In Barakat's first days there, his family had no water tank, septic tank, or toilet. They all had to use the open fields nearby to relieve themselves, ravines that filled with water in the spring, or a roofless skeleton house nearby that provided privacy. Water was carried from the homes of Christians in small plastic jugs. A few Christian families took pity on these refugees and helped them with a little food and some unused water tanks. Many Yezidis helped themselves to water tanks from unfinished houses to take them to the house they had preferred, and with all tanks looking alike, there was no way for the Christian owners to recover their tanks.

The August sun beat upon the houses, and the blocks retained the heat in the night, so they had to sleep on the roofs. There were wild dogs in the area, so they couldn't sleep downstairs for fear the children would be dragged away and eaten by the dogs in the night. They had no mats for sleeping at first, but slept on the hard concrete roofs with clothes folded under their heads. There was no kitchen, no washing machine, no electricity, no water piping, and no place to take a shower. They took some blocks from the meter high fence around a neighbor's land to make a shower enclosure outside their house. I gave them a water tank to get them started.



Paul M. Kingery

Displaced Faqier Yezidi Barakat Mahlo Khudeda, 18, from Tel Azer, after relocation to Seje Village, Iraq, November 15, 2014.

They had very little money with them and no source of income. The little cash that had been carried over the mountain with them was spent on the cheapest basic dry food, simple cleaning materials like soaps, mops, and pans, and cooking tools, pots, and dishes. In time, Barakat went to work in Dohuk laying the light blocks to separate rooms in a concrete high-rise apartment building. He worked nine hours a day, six hours per week, and had to provide his own transportation. Fortunately, he was able to catch a free ride with his friend who was working there. He worked there one month, but wasn't paid until four months later.

The desperately poor dispossessed residents of these unfinished houses spent their free days on the shaded sides of their houses, talking of their experiences, of people who were still in Daesh captivity, meeting people in neighboring houses from Tel Azer and other villages. The older boys played card games, the older girls busied themselves with the work of the family, and the small children played with marbles or rocks from the hillsides. Young men carried water, old men discussed recent events in the context of previous life experiences, and women tended their large families as best they could. The women were

fully occupied cooking and cleaning for their large families, washing dishes and clothes by hand, cooking without a kitchen, and conserving water.

Paul M. Kingery

Barakat's neighbor, displaced Faqier Yezidi Hassan Ibrahim Khalaf and his granddaughter from Tel Azer after the Daesh Invasion of Sinjar District, Seje Village, Iraq, March 9, 2016

The Yezidi women found red clay in the hillsides to make clay pot ovens, and insulated the ovens with rocks or blocks taken from abandoned short walls around vacant lots Christians had placed to identify their properties. Kamela, Almas, and Basse made their own bread oven, and gathered the wood from the hillsides for cooking the bread. Barakat helped getting the wood. They mortared each oven with mud and grass. The first ovens to be installed served entire neighborhoods. Women waited in line to use the ovens. Over time, more ovens were built, reducing the demand on the first ones, and the waiting time for using them. The ovens were fired up usually at sunrise and sunset, and the wood used to heat them would not be wasted. Eventually they bought an electric bread oven, with a domed galvanized steel top, to cook the large round flatbread.

Barakat, Faisal, Amas, and Basse scoured the hillsides for wood, mindful of the law preventing the cutting of any living tree. They found a certain amount of small dead wood on the mountains above the village, walking every inch of their rocky slopes and into their valleys. They would emerge from the valleys with huge bundles of brush wood on their heads and backs, outsized for their small, weak, undernourished frames.

When the brush was gone, they dug the stumps and roots of the trees that had been cut down by Kurds years before while dealing with former president Sadaam Hussein's dictatorship. When these were gone, Basse searched the village every morning for cardboard, plastic, and paper that could be used to cook the bread, even though the fumes posed a risk to human health. Occasionally families would violate the law, cutting green wood and bringing it home, especially those who lived nearest the valleys so they could reach their homes with the green wood unnoticed.

Paul M. Kingery

Barakat's neighbors, a displaced and fatherless Faqier Yezidi family led by 14-year-old Ziad Qawal Khudeda from Tel Azer, Iraq 18 months after resettlement in Seje Village, Iraq, March 12, 2016.

The babies suffered from lack of milk, with their mothers too malnourished and dehydrated to wet nurse them. Powdered milk was available in the market, but not provided in the aid packages from the government. Instead they were fed a weanling gruel made from wheat flour and water. The babies were not impressed with this substitution. The older children and adults suffered from a complete lack of

protein for several months. Some had vehicles, even nice pickup trucks, but could not part with them even in exchange for food, as they would not then be able to afford taxi fares to get to the cities to do any work, buy any food, or move their family about to meet their general needs.

Most of the Yezidis in Seje had been without any fruit or vegetables for a month and a half when Jordan and Debra secured funding that was large enough for me to allocate for a distribution for the entire village. I wouldn't distribute to a portion of the village and leave the others unserved. I set out on my own early on a Friday morning at the nearby wholesale fruit and vegetable bazaar. I found the smaller potatoes, tomatoes, and onions were cheaper, so I bought them, along with carrots. I negotiated prices with wholesalers, rented a truck and driver for delivery, and bags for combining the different vegetables into a single mixed bag weighing eight kilos.

I did not weigh or bag the vegetables in advance, had no census of the families to go on, or to prevent some double-dipping or others being missed, and had no volunteers to organize the distribution or bag the vegetables. I just showed up in the center of the village with a single large flat-bed truck filled to the top of the sideboards, built a barricade with the bags of produce against a block wall, invited Yezidi volunteers inside the barricade, and started sorting, weighing, and distributing immediately. Up to that point there had been no fresh food aid distributed in the village, so there was no expectation of such, and word travelled slowly from house to house, allowing a steady and calm distribution. Still, for me, it was like jumping into the deep end of a swimming pool without knowing fully how to swim. I sensed the great urgency of the vegetable distribution and wouldn't let any impediment prevent it.

The desperation of the people was visible on their faces and in their actions. To their credit, the intended recipients were quite disciplined and honorable about helping and waiting in a sort of line to get aid at first, until the press grew stronger and morphed into a circle around the "fort" I had built. This was what he had expected to happen.

I personally bagged vegetables with the volunteers, positioning myself in the middle, and moved men out of the fort who encroached upon it in search of an advantage over others waiting there. The people knew immediately that this was an American man making the distribution, and most had never encountered such a person before in person, so they were a little shy at first, and this worked to my advantage.

Barakat came to the distribution, and managed to leave with a single bag of vegetables for his family, as did a thousand other families, but I had no opportunity to talk with anyone about what was happening. Up to then, the only Americans they had known had been the invisible pilots of the airplanes dropping bombs on their enemies, or the people they saw on television.

Paul M. Kingery

A displaced Faqier Yezidi man, Haji, in Seje Village, Iraq after fleeing the Daesh Invasion, November 26, 2014.

I found the needs in Seje compelling. While other organizations were working with the UN in constructing camps, this unofficial and unplanned "Seje Camp" was not receiving any significant aid. The UN policy favored camps over villages and cities involving host communities. I rented several houses in the village, one for Jordan and Debra Greaser, one for Azad Elias and his brothers and their families, one for volunteers to come to help, and an unfinished home for myself, so that my three sons, Noel, Charlie, and a new one, Solomon, a refugee from Syria, could live a little more like the Yezidis we were serving, and use it for a base camp for building efforts. Two of these houses were next door to Barakat and his family.

Still working day jobs, our little team of relief workers, including Jordan and Debra sometimes, would show up in the evening hours with bread and water, then with bread-making machines with gas tanks, then baby milk powder, clothes, shoes, soaps, and hygiene products. We were still distributing after dark, house to house, getting to know families. There was no rush on their aid, because people did not have any expectation of getting something from them, and it was clear they were visiting specific houses.

We started in the most remote portion of the village, where we noticed fewer cars, and where people had come most recently, taking the least desirable houses that were left. There were only dirt tracks through the area, and one had to negotiate a ravine to get there, which was tricky in the rain.

Paul M. Kingery

A displaced Faqier Yezidi woman, Adool, from Tel Azer living in Seje Village, after the Daesh Invasion of Sinjar District, November 27, 2014.

Our organization, MedEast, was an Iraqi non-governmental organization (NGO). Other organizations newly entering the area heard of MedEast's work and participated with them, donating aid that they could distribute. Jordan and Debra continued bring small amounts of aid from their friends in the U.S., associated with Christian churches. Nearly all the aid that came through the group was from Christian organizations in the U.S. and Europe.

Paul M. Kingery

A displaced Faqier Yezidi boy who attended the MedEast/ZOA clothes distribution in Seje Village, Iraq on February 27, 2015.

Paul M. Kingery

A displaced Faqier Yezidi boy from Tel Azer in Seje Village, March 17, 2016.

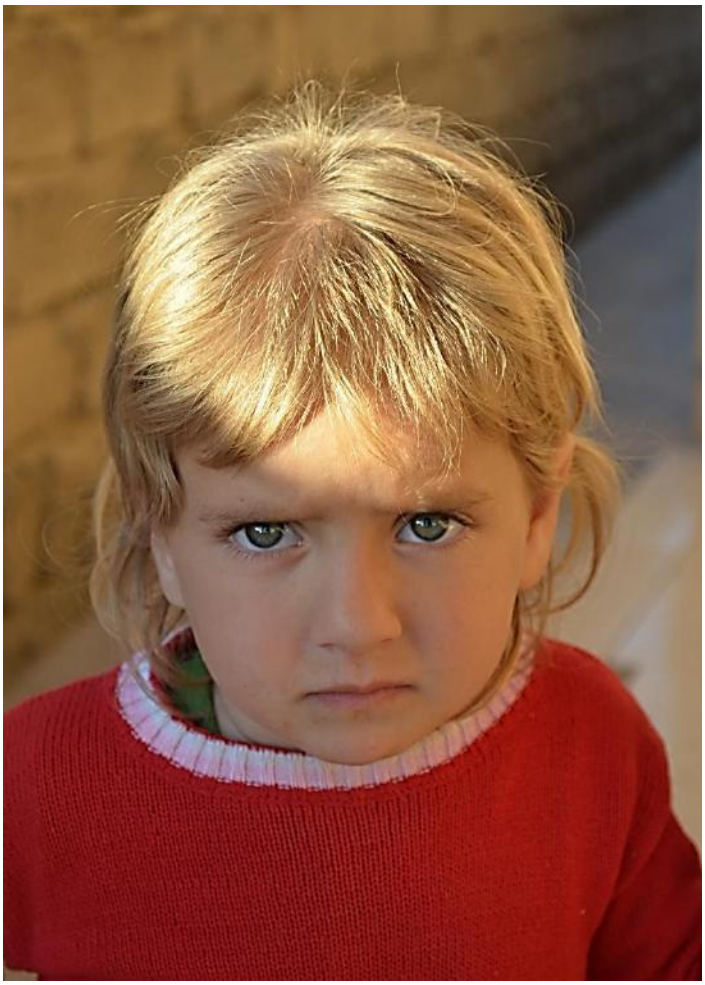
I secured a large aid package from ZOA in the Netherlands, a Christian NGO, which funded the septic tanks, toilets, winterization of houses, and other aid. Samaritan's Purse was then persuaded to install a water line to one strip of the unfinished houses. A wealthy Russian Yezidi donated clothes. Voice of the Martyrs (VOM) in the US delivered substantial funding for vegetable distribution. Operation Mercy gave money for health care and vegetables.

Paul M. Kingery

Displaced Faqier Yezidi children from Tel Azer in Seje Village, Iraq, on March 17, 2016.

MedEast's skeleton block house at the top of the village on the side of the mountain became the factory for building portable toilets, a staging area for materials used to build concrete septic tanks, a woodshop for building pine doors, a storage place for water tanks to be delivered in the village, and a meeting place for other people involved in aid efforts.

Eventually, Barakat saw the MedEast operations base growing up on the hill above his skeleton house, and had talked with other boys employed there, so he ventured up to see if he could get involved. He was rather shy, so bolder youths had beat him to the punch, but he would come and sit on the fringe, and talk to his friends, and hope to be noticed. Eventually he was given some piece work at the encouragement of some of his friends, and he did well, so he was given more work from time to time. The first salary money he received was like a glass of water to a family emerging from the desert. He would have worked without money to help his own people, as would most of the other paid Yezidi workers, but he was grateful for the help that would sustain his family.



Paul M. Kingery

A displaced Faqier Yezidi girl from Tel Azer in Seje Village, Iraq, March 9, 2016

Paul M. Kingery

A displaced Faqier Yezidi boy from Tel Azer living in Seje Village, Iraq after the Daesh Invasion of Sinjar District, March 8, 2016

By November, Barakat and his family were concerned about facing the winter in the unfinished house. The weather is often very cold and snowy in Seje, and they knew it would be a problem. The builders had not put mortar in the vertical spaces between the blocks, so air moved through them readily. Barakat, and all others in the village, used what little money they had to buy cement powder, and took sand and dirt from the hills to make mortar to daub with their fingers into the cracks between the blocks. They put some pieces of wood between some of the upper blocks to hang clothes on, and mortared them in for strength. They did the best they could to drape carpets or blankets over doorways, but it would not be enough.

On November 13th, 2014, after a 2-day offensive, Sinjar city was liberated from Daesh by a combined group of 7,500 fighters composed of Peshmerga from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Yezidi volunteers mostly from Sinjar District, and PKK and People's Protection Units from Syria. The town was surrounded on three sides, pressing the ISIS fighters to flee into the desert to the south where coalition air strikes bombed them. The city was heavily damaged by the initial bombardment by Daesh when they took the city and subsequent bombardment by coalition forces to rout them. Daesh fighters had gone door to door looking for valuables, smashing most of the windows and doors to make the houses less inhabitable,

knowing they would not be able to keep the city long-term. A major clean-up operation would be required to make the city inhabitable again.

Daesh continued shelling the city from a distance for months afterward, using chemical and conventional bombs. The city was nearly empty of the 88,000 original residents, as all had evacuated, or had been killed or captured and removed. Only 30 families had returned after four months, and a small clinic there would periodically have to treat them for respiratory damage resulting from the chemical bombs.

Several mass graves were found, some with men, others with older women. By the end of November, 6 shallow mass graves had been found but not excavated, one with an estimated 70 older women, another with perhaps more than 120 victims, rigged with explosives. They found a network of tunnels Daesh had dug through solid rock under the city for storing explosives and avoiding aerial bombardment, with sleeping quarters, electrical lines, and sandbags. They also found boxes of U.S.-made ammunition, bomb-making tools, medicines and copies of the Quran stashed on shelves there. This provided former residents of Tel Azer with a picture of what they might expect if they were to ever return to their home town. By January of 2016, evidence of 35 mass graves had been found and 19 had been confirmed in the Sinjar District.

A second vegetable distribution was made in Seje with greater organization inside one of the few remaining empty skeleton houses two weeks after the first. I invited expats living in Dohuk to assist. By then he had met several Assyrian Christian boys who had escaped from Sinjar Mountain area who had expressed willingness to help as well, Yakop and Evan, two teenage brothers, and their cousins. They joined my sons and I in a day of bagging vegetables in a room donated by a German man there, and the second day prepared to distribute with the aid of the internationals from Dohuk.

Paul M. Kingery

Produce prepared for MedEast/VOM distribution to Yezidis displaced in Seje Village, Iraq, after the Daesh Invasion of Sinjar District, August, 2014.

Paul M. Kingery

A fatherless displaced Faqier Yezidi boy, Sammy Qawal Khudeda, from Tel Azer volunteering during a MedEast/VOM Vegetable Distribution, Seje Village, Iraq, after the Daesh Invasion of Sinjar District, August 2015.

The distribution was difficult. People surrounded the house from every side, and pressed through the windows to get vegetables rather than waiting in several lines that were formed. The international volunteers were soon feeling afraid at the press against them. They were giving out new shoes at the same time, which the people sorely needed, so the urgency was even greater. At one point in the distribution, the two muqtars showed up.

Muqtar Sabri Yako Yousef was over that side of the village, was appraised of the distribution in advance. The other muqtar of the village showed up with a brigade of older men in red headdresses demanding a separate line for Christians, who considered the Yezidis dirty, and didn't want to wait with them in long lines. I refused, and Muqtar Kareem pressed his case repeatedly in loud voice. Eventually Muqtar Sabri entered the scene and carted him off, allowing me to prevent bias from entering the scene. Over time Muqtar Kareem came around, and did not interfere with further distributions or work in Seje Village by MedEast.

Both Muqtars preferred to use their group of eight Yezidi former muqtars from Tel Azer for distributions, but MedEast insisted on conducting their own accurate census, eliminating any false claimants to residence in Seje, and systematically crowding out any possibility of favoritism or uneven distribution.

MedEast wanted to favor widows and orphans rather than former Yezidi muqtars and their closest relatives, allies and friends.

After this, a warehouse was secured with a rolling steel door to control access to a single distribution point. Meanwhile, we made a complete census of every person in the village in an attempt to assure, as much as fluid situations on the ground allowed, that every family received exactly their fair portion of the distribution. Widows and fatherless children received additional aid, when donations were specific and too small to serve the entire village. Otherwise, Christian and Yezidi refugees, and sometimes the poorer long-term Seje residents, received equivalent portions of aid. We made a map of the structures we numbered.

One of the international people who had assisted in the second vegetable distribution, Greg, returned to Pennsylvania in the U.S. and told some ex-Amish and ex-Mennonite people about the need in Seje. This group's leaders, Ramon Stoltzfus and Merle Weaver had a shared goal of reaching out to the middle-east, so Ramon came to explore the opportunities to send volunteers from their group. They were organized in the US under the name Plain Compassion Crisis Response (PCCR).

Soon after, the first teams of American volunteers arrived, young men and women, and the men began helping MedEast put plastic and pine wood framing on all the open windows and doorways in preparation from winter with funding from ZOA. They also helped with food distributions on weekends. They became an enduring part of the relief effort, eventually dividing into two groups, one to help with teaching with MedEast, the other going to Sinjar city when it was reclaimed to clean burned houses and install glass in PVC frames where it had been broken by Daesh terrorists under their own new Iraqi NGO.

Paul M. Kingery

Displaced Faqier Yezidi boys in Seje Village, Iraq, after the Daesh invasion of Sinjar District, March 8, 2016

The ex-Amish PCCR leaders in Pennsylvania attended a presentation by a Chinese missionary, called Brother Yuun, who had been persecuted, beaten, imprisoned and tortured for 30 years by the Chinese authorities for his Christian faith. Mr. Yung and those who travelled with him made a great impression on the PCCR leadership. The PCCR team, in return, shared the news of their work in Seje village, Iraq with those supporting the Chinese ministry.

The result of this exchange was that Eugene Bach, of China Care International (CCI), who was personally based in Hong Kong, flew to Iraq and met with me in Seje, examining operations there. He was encouraged by what he saw as an opening for the Chinese. Soon after, he sent young Chinese men to join the MedEast operations in Seje as volunteers. They experimented with fish-farming, raising chickens, and growing vegetables, while also helping to build portable toilets, sanding wood paneling for the walls of the school, and making friends in the village. They would stay for ten months before being forced out by the Kurdish government for having Iraqi visas rather than Kurdistan Region, Iraq visas. They were not allowed to address this issue from inside Iraq, and would be required to remain outside of Iraq for six months.

Paul M. Kingery

Displaced Faqier Yezidi boy Jameel Khuro Hassan from Tel Azer in Seje Village, Iraq, on March 17, 2016.

Before the winter set in, PCCR youths working with MedEast as volunteers and other MedEast staff formed from the Tel Azer Yezidis in the village built wood frames and plastic window enclosures throughout the 240 unfinished houses with funding from ZOA from the Netherlands. All people in the village who had fled the invasion were provided with eight to ten kilo bags of vegetables on many weekends by MedEast with funding from Voice of the Martyrs (VOM). They also received clothes, shoes, soaps, health visits, and other benefits.

Sinjari workers and American PCCR volunteer staff built each home that was lacking sanitary facilities a permanent concrete septic tank, and a toilet cabin, with funding from ZOA. The team also made a front door for each house to keep the rain out, and a bathroom door to allow privacy. Contracts were signed between MedEast and the Christian owners of the skeleton houses allowing the Yezidis to stay in the houses for at least three months in exchange for the permanent septic tanks.

Barakat and Almas had their second wedding anniversary on November 20, 2015. There was no party, no special food, and there were no gifts. There was only a quiet intimate moment shared between Barakat and Almas, remembering, looking through the few of their wedding photos that had survived the journey. The memory card with most of their photos had been lost on the mountain. They were safe now, and

were making a start on their family, and he had his income from construction work for a Turkish firm in Dohuk to support the family.

No one died from the cold that winter, fortunately, though all the Yezidis were very uncomfortable. MedEast distributed kerosene heaters and kerosene funded by ZOA in the early part of the winter. Then the government gave 100 liters of kerosene to each family. When that fuel ran out, MedEast and ZOA continued with the kerosene distributions to pull them through the winter. PCCR teams grew increasingly able to take on the management of these kerosene and vegetable distributions, leaving us to begin to focus on education and safe housing and livelihood programs for young girls and women escaping sexual slavery.

Almas was soon nearing her mid-February due date for the birth of their first child, and was growing increasingly uncomfortable in moving around. Barakat aided her, and sheltered her with love. They had no private space in the home, as all the family slept in a single room. The intimacy they had enjoyed in their first months of marriage was now entirely gone.

Both of them were afraid Almas would lose their baby due to the ordeal she had endured on the mountain. She remained well, if undernourished, throughout the pregnancy and had several prenatal examinations with various doctors in Dohuk and Semel. Each time she was examined by a different doctor. The couple didn't have any preference for a boy or a girl, and didn't have a sonogram or amniocentesis. There was a prevailing sentiment among Yezidis that they should not know the gender of the baby before it is born, or whether the baby would be healthy or not. The baby would be cared for in the same way in any case. It was in the hands of God. When her time drew near, she had no way to shop for items for the baby, and no baby shower.

Barakat was at work in Dohuk carrying light blocks on a construction site when her time came to deliver. Mahlo, Kamela, and Basse took her to the hospital in a car belonging to some of their neighbors. No one informed Barakat she was on her way to the hospital. There is a Yezidi tradition that if the father doesn't know of the birth, the first one who tells him will receive a gift from him. She made it safely to the hospital, and she was rushed to the maternity section for delivery. She delivered naturally at midnight February 10, 2015, a beautiful baby girl, whom she named "Vean," meaning "lovely." Basse called to tell him the happy news and won the gift, a warm new blanket. Almas and Vean returned home just four hours later.

Barakat didn't see Almas or Vean for 15 days, as his Turkish employer would not allow him to leave the worksite. Had he left, he would have been required to pay the salaries of the three workers under him to recompense his employer for their lost work time and his. He talked with Almas on his father's phone every day to see how she was doing, and to listen to the sound of his baby on the telephone. When he came home, he brought two boxes of candy for the children, to celebrate the birth, following their tradition. He was shy about meeting his father, as he assumed his father would fault him for being absent from his daughter's birth.

When he entered the single room where his family lived, His father and mother congratulated him and he kissed them, each in turn, before he reached Almas and Vean. Almas was still laying down, recovering from the birth. A surreal feeling came over him as he kissed his wife, slowly picked up Vean in her little

tiger-striped blanket, and thanked God for the health of both his wife and his daughter. He was very frightened about holding Vean, feeling he might hurt her, she seemed so fragile and precious. It was like nothing he had ever experienced before. Her birth hardly seemed real, or possible. Vean was awake, and cooed at her young father, trying to focus on his face. Barakat smiled from ear to ear, momentarily losing his usual restraint on emotions.

It was still cold outside and inside, and a kerosene heater warmed the entire house, shared by six families, with cold air blowing in the cracks in the plastic-draped windows and the blanket-draped doorways. They had to keep both mother and child covered at all times.

MedEast/Selo Naiv Ismail

Suham Naiv Ismail (left) and Dinya Naiv Ismail picking fresh karang for dinner in a field outside Seje Village on March 14, 2016.

MedEast/Asia Khudeda Ibrahim

Almas Khalaf Qassim, in a spring field in Seje Village

Barakat Mahlo Khudeda

Displaced Faqier Yezidi family Barakat Mahlo Khudeda, his wife Almas Khalaf Qassim, and their daughter Vean from Tel Azer at Lalish, Iraq, August, 2015

The family was joyful over her birth. The spring would be very short, and summer would come soon. Her chances of survival were high, so long as they protected her from the cold, which they were careful to do. The proud parents spent every possible minute with her. She brought hope to the family for a new beginning, though their prospects were still bleak. He was home for only two days, and returned to work on the third day in Dohuk. After that he would visit them on Fridays every week.

Paul M. Kingery

Displaced Faqier Yezidis Barakat Mahlo Khudeda and his daughter Vean in Seje Village, Iraq, after the Daesh invasion of Tel Azer, March 8, 2016.

As the spring came, wildflowers opened up on carpets of sheep-nibbled dark green grass, and around every rock on the mountainside above Seje and in the wheat fields between Seje and the Tigris River. Families emerged from their winter lodgings to pick delicious round mushrooms on the hillsides, to gather tender herbs, and to enjoy the bright warm days. Barakat used some scrap rebar to make a swinging bed for Vean, which she really loved.

Their house was near the mountain, and they climbed its slopes enjoying the beautiful spring weather and searching for mushrooms. They would have found many more mushrooms if they had been on Mount Sinjar. The mushrooms were cleaned, cut in half, and grilled on shiskabob sticks over a wood fire. They were a delicious treat, shared in small pieces among all the family members. They would fetch $22 per kilo in the local markets. They lamented that the mushrooms on Mount Sinjar were more plentiful, especially since few people remained living on the mountain to pick them.

This was their favorite time of year, and their festivals and holidays were mostly celebrated with picnics on the mountains and feasts in their homes. MedEast, with support from VOM was careful to give fresh fruit and vegetables to all 1,114 Yezidi and 500 Christian families as often as possible on the day before

such feasts, and on many other weekends. The Christians were often moving into the village from Nineveh, then on to Europe, while the Yezidis were very stable there.

The Brazilian Football Club from Erbil, in which my sons had played for the previous two years, brought physicians and nurses from Brazil to Seje to do medical triage. MedEast quickly built partitions in its warehouse to allow four examination rooms and a waiting room. 600 patients from the village were seen over a four-day period. Later, Operation Mercy brought medical aid to those with emergency situations through MedEast. They were not able to help with chronic conditions, like kidney dialysis, but managed to cover the costs of surgery for a young boy who had a four inch hernia protruding from his abdomen.

The boy was ashamed when we first asked to take a photo of his stomach in the presence of his father, all the children having laughed at him for the oddity of the protrusion for months before. He felt too shy to leave his home even to go out and play with the other children. Once healed from the surgery, performed in Erbil through the Jordan Medical Center, he was delighted at the result, and his confidence quickly gained strength. A month later, International Medical Corps (IMC) established a small temporary clinic in the village, and took over most of the medical work.

That spring, residents of Bozan and Al Quosh returned to their villages, along with many refugees from further out in Nineveh Province. Other Christian villages in Nineveh province, and the Yezidi villages of Tel Azer, Guzarik, Jazeera and others, remained in the control of Daesh. Azwan's family moved back from Seje to their home in Bozan, though the women in their family were still nervous about being so close to Daesh, just 40 minutes' drive by car.

International aid organizations began to enter the scene in greater numbers and to attempt to coordinate with the Kurdish government, but the government aid coordinator told the foreign organizations not to help Seje, as Christians (referring to the Catholic Chaldeans) were helping Yezidis will all their needs. This was a statement of profound ignorance, entirely lacking in compassion. The official who made that statement in a coordination meeting of aid organization personnel, when challenged by me, could not even recognize the names of Yezidi villages in the area. Chaldean Christians were getting aid in Seje, but rarely shared it with Yezidis. Instead the Chaldeans shared with Christians almost exclusively. This disparity also played out in the Christian village of Al Quosh, to the profound neglect of sister Yezidi village Bozan, and the majority Yezidi population in the District. It was months before this Kurdish official was replaced in his role, and his deafening bias against Yezidis was removed.

The Barzani Foundation, attached to President Masoud Barzani, began delivering dried food to the Yezidis, like rice and beans, which was a great relief. This was handled through Muqtar Sabri, and problems arose over some families getting no food, and Christians from other villages in the region coming to pretend they were Seje residents to take the food that was intended for the Seje villagers. For this reason, MedEast did not rely upon the Muqtar's list of residents, but insisted on visiting each family in their home to enroll people for MedEast aid. The corruption in that system was never corrected, so many of the poorest families, such as the fatherless Ismail Rasho family with three widows and ten children, who were not expected to object strongly to being denied food aid, were rebuffed when they came to the food distributions at the Muqtar's house.

Paul M. Kingery

Displaced Faqier Yezidi boy Ziad Ezdeen Naiv, 14, from Tel Azer and a spring kid, in Seje Village March 17, 2016.

In time, an increasing number of international aid organizations entered the scene, though they were more often dominated by the government, and the biggest operator, UNICEF. Their work was selfless and inspired, and lifesaving in all respects. It was not sustainable, however. Many aid organizations carried blind technological optimism, having worked in other countries with aid efforts before, underestimating the unique setting of Iraq. Many hired local workers who spoke a little English, who were already doing relief work, and funded small local NGOs, none of whom were capable of meeting international standards of accountability or record keeping. Many of them were corrupt.

The result was that they worked quickly, and spent money quickly, but when audited, many failed the audits and scaled back or withdrew, saying the Iraqi people were too dishonest, and too incapable of record keeping to allow them to work there. It was their lack of experience in the local scene, and the

short attention span of the people contributing to the effort abroad, that contributed most to their demise. Iraq was resistant to international standards of aid distribution.

MedEast also struggled with the lack of fidelity of Yezidi staff members to the international standards of record keeping that had been established as the bedrock of their work. Accountability and transparency, lack of corruption, and complete honesty in dealings were demanded and vigorously defended, but constantly challenged. The best people were hired, ones known for their honesty, but even these failed in their technical ability and focus on financial and other record keeping and had to be replaced by American-trained licensed accountants and finance managers, leaving Yezidis to do the construction and distribution work and to conduct the census of the village. Even college educated accountants could not function using a simple Excel spreadsheet. Lawyers were unable to communicate well, or keep appointments, and attempted to gouge organizations in their pricing.

The Kurdish Regional Governorate first requested, then began to demand, that funding for relief be entrusted to its hands, allowing it to handle distributions. Most organizations adamantly refused, including MedEast. The UN partially placated the KRG with their funding mechanisms, and when systematic corruption entered the scene, they also were not able to satisfy auditors, and their operations were reduced significantly in northern Iraq.

MedEast maintained strict separation from government in all activities, and struggled with the increasing burden of Kurdish bureaucracy over licensing and visa renewals meant to secure bits of funding for corrupt middle-level officials. The NGO law that established perpetual licensure for local NGOs was eroded by policy declarations that restricted foreign visa renewals for foreign NGO staff and volunteers, creating a de-facto, if not legal, requirement for annual renewal of NGO licenses at least in Erbil. The bureaucratic burden if this renewal would choke remaining local NGOs with foreign workers and threaten their continuation in the region, and many volunteers would be sent home as a result.

Despite much good work being done by the U.N. in establishing the camps, which was enduring, and much aid being provided, the sustained portion of the aid effort slowly declined after the first year. Part of the problem was that the interest of the international community in the refugees stranded on the mountain had waned once they were thought to be safely housed in refugee camps. There was a clear failure of the international community to realize the inability of the predominantly Muslim Kurds and Iraqis in general, if not a lack of will, to help the Yezidis in any thorough manner that would meet their basic needs over the longer duration.

Paul M. Kingery

Displaced Faqier Yezidi widow from Tel Azer receives a traditional dress made by Yezidi girls working for MedEast in Seje Village, Iraq, after the Daesh invasion of Sinjar District, August 2015.

Barakat worked with MedEast full-time for a while, and then part-time after the septic tanks, toilets, and doors were completed. In this manner, some twenty Yezidi families were spared the deeper poverty that settled into the Yezidi families in Seje village toward the end of their first year there. I watched with sadness as the faces of some of the poorer people, whom he now knew by name and proportions, began to thin, cheekbones beginning to protrude.

Orphans would visit him saying they had no food, and we would help them individually when we could. Widows sometimes made specific appeals, and received emergency food aid above what others received. People in the village expected an open-ended aid program with deep pockets, but what money MedEast received was often pigeon-holed into very specific parameters made by the earliest international funders. Widows and orphans were given special needs distributions.

The food aid was simply not enough to go around, and with supplies of government aid and aid from NGOs declining, MedEast would have to stretch out the remaining funds for vegetables to prevent starvation. Those organizations providing aid typically wanted the money spent by certain fiscal deadlines convenient to their own book-keeping, but I was sometimes able to soften those deadlines in the interests of better meeting the needs of the people over the longer term, filling gaps in aid from other organizations that

came and went. U.S. organization Voice of the Martyrs (VOM), and China Care International (CCI) proved the most responsive funders to the ongoing needs of the people for aid, and the most willing to soften deadlines. CCI made the longest term commitments, and were the most supportive in all respects, least bureaucratic, and easiest to work with.

Paul M. Kingery

The upper portion of Seje Village, Iraq showing skeleton block houses filled with Yezidi families from the Sinjar district, March 17, 2016.

On August 4, 2015, the European Parliament unanimously recognized the Daesh slaughter of religious minorities, including Christians and Yazidis, as genocide. They beat the U.S. government to that decision by a full seven months. Meanwhile, aid remained at low levels, and volunteerism was nearly strangled by KRG manipulations of law and policy toward NGOs, whom the constantly sought to coopt and micromanage.

Just a few days after, a young Yezidi wife with a newborn baby, living in a skeleton house in Seje Village, poured kerosene on her body in one of the unfinished houses, and set herself on fire. The woman was suffering post-partum depression, post-traumatic stress syndrome and minor problems with her young husband. She was severely burned. Her husband's family took her to the emergency hospital in Dohuk. She died seven days later, leaving little Dawood behind in the care of his grandmother.

Barakat and I visited her husband's home together, and provided powdered milk, clothes, and other needed items to the child, through a gift from a Christian woman from Ankawa District of Erbil who had visited the village with him earlier. Her suicide caused many other young women in her neighborhood to contemplate suicide themselves, but after several days, the women seemed to be dissuaded from such extreme capitulation. A young middle-aged man also tried twice to burn himself to death in his family home in Seje, but each time his family had been able to stop his action before he was ignited.

Paul M. Kingery

Infant Faqier Yezidi boy Dawood (David) born in Seje Village, after his mother committed suicide in February 2016 following the Daesh invasion of Sinjar District and resettlement in Seje Village, Iraq.

We remained cautious about the mental health situation in the village, and began to recruit western female psychologists with trauma training to assist through China Care International (CCI) with help from their Director, Eugene Bach, noted author and aid worker internationally. In the short term, one psychologist visited to assess the situation, in one of the monthly visits by CCI, and others began to make arrangements to come for the longer term.

I was also aware of the Yezidi practice of stoning young women to death, and spoke of this openly in Seje Village on occasion, forcing the issue to the fore as a preventive measure. I called the practice "dishonor killing," as it was dishonorable for a family to kill a young woman without trial, and to punish the woman

more than the man. The stonings were carried out in the streets, and the news was widely shared with the community. Officially, the incidents were reported to police as suicides to prevent incarceration of the perpetrators. In fact, in no case was any perpetrator ever put in jail for such a crime, as far as witnesses knew.

This tolerance of murder concerned me, so I was anxious that violence did not rear its ugly head in Seje if such could be prevented. I vigorously worked to prevent fighting and to report every case of violence from the first days to send a message that it would not be tolerated in the village. The people from Tel Azer would have to abide by some new rules to live at peace in a Christian community. After a year and a half, no such incidents occurred. Vicious rumors circulated about various Christian people among the Yezidis, and were widely believed in short order, but did not progress to violence.

This role as concerned citizen and peace builder was one of the most difficult roles I had to play, and Barakat was often with me in taking action. MedEast workers were trained to carry messages to the broader community. An adult neighbor of Barakat's once beat a small boy, his own nephew, in the street outside the MedEast schoolyard. My response was to rebuke the perpetrator publicly in front of his family with a voice loud enough that all neighbors could hear, telling him that beating a child would not be tolerated, and if it happened again, he would be taken to the police.

In another case, a mentally retarded boy of 15 sought refuge with me because his father had beaten him badly over something that occurred at their family dinner. The perpetrator was reported to Muqtar Sabri, who wrote a report, interviewing the man in his home, telling him that he would be jailed if there was another such incident. Severe beatings seemed to disappear after those two incidents were handled swiftly.

In another case, a Christian man beat a fatherless Yezidi boy of 19, Ismail Rasho Khudeda, who was caring for his mother, grandmother, and 9 fatherless siblings at Shekhmand Temple when Barakat stopped to pray there in his escape up Mount Sinjar. His crime was not paying the remaining $50 for a lamb he had bought from him on credit for $100. Ismail received cut marks on his face, neck, and shoulder. He came to me for help, and I took him to Muqtar Sabri to file a report, leaving it to the Muqtar to handle the matter, to warn the man against such actions. The boy was instructed to take photos of his cuts, to use in evidence if another incident occurred. The muqtar took no action against the Christian man with police, though he may have warned him. When a Yezidi boy punched a young clerk, Melek, in a small family market in the village, the perpetrator was immediately incarcerated. This sent the wrong message to the community, and from then on, I resolved to personally refer to the police any case of Christian violence against Yezidis, bypassing the muqtars.

The means of handling Yezidi-on-Yezidi violence was somewhat different. A group of four MedEast workers was leaving my home late one evening near Barakat's house, probably too late at night, and talking too loudly to suit a Yezidi man whose home they had passed on the road. The man shined a laser light into the eyes of one of the workers, age sixteen, from the roof where he was sleeping. The boy called out, asking why he was doing that. The man quickly emerged from his home and started yelling at the

boy, slapping him repeatedly about the face and shoulders with both hands. The other boys with him counseled him in English just to walk away and let me handle it the next day, which is what he did.

A few more steps down the way, however, two more men came out of the house with pieces of wood as clubs to threaten them, and a man in his 30s started slapping the same boy his family member had slapped previously. The boys still did not retaliate, as I had repeatedly reinforced my no-violence position to the workers. The boy who was injured had a speech impediment, and scars on the back of his head from years of abuse from village boys in Tel Azer. He was known to be quick to be violent, but he had completely abandoned his former violence out of respect for what he had learned over time.

I sought help from an older Christian man in the neighborhood, Toma Mansour, called Abu Jack (father of Jack), who owned several of the houses there and had been the head of the dominant political party in the district at one point in his life. Abu Jack visited the perpetrators and their family and sternly warned them that they would be forced to leave the village if this occurred again. This threat had real teeth, as a word from Abu Jack would cause the Christian owner of the unfinished house sheltering the perpetrators to expel them without notice. The family promised not to hurt the workers again. They were from one of the lowest castes of Yezidis, and were clearly suffering themselves, but their vicious behavior against other Yezidis could not be tolerated, or it would likely increase.

This opened up a third avenue to quietly encourage order in the village. I could report cases to Muqtar Sabri to show him respect, and to urge him to prepare a report that could be used with police on any repeated offense, I could call upon powerful village leaders to threaten people with eviction, and I could go directly to the police. It was a supplement to our constant more general efforts to counsel Yezidis in the village not to cut the trees on the hillsides, not to throw trash in the streets, particularly around Christian homes, not to make noises around homes in the night, not to fight, and not to steal.

When MedEast was victimized by theft, and petty theft was common in the beginning of our work, we would banish the guilty party from the MedEast compound and services permanently, and report the incident to Muqtar Sabri, who would prepare a report for his own records. One case involved Barakat's neighbor, who had been working for MedEast. Barakat confirmed that the man had also stolen one of his precious few chickens.

We asked Muqtar Sabri not to expel families from the village if their son was caught stealing, but to sharply reprimand the culprit and sternly warn the family. Most of the petty theft that was seen in the compound in earlier days disappeared over time with training, increasing locks on tool rooms, moving valuable materials to the roof, installing yard lights, and limiting the number of workers at MedEast to a select group of twenty or so of the best performers who were the most trustworthy. The attempt was made to balance prevention and education with punitive measures, in the context of respect for the abject poverty of the people served.

On Christmas day, December 25, 2015, Barakat, the Chinese boys sent over by CCI, several of the other Yezidi workers on the MedEast team, and I climbed the mountain behind the base operations camp to a Neanderthal cave high on the ridge for a cookout. This was to be a sort of goodbye celebration for the

Chinese boys, only one of which spoke English, but all of which had grown close to Barakat and the entire team over their ten months in the village.

They had worked quietly, selflessly, and without incident, without pay or compensation of any kind, merely to serve the Yezidi people. They greatly enjoyed their stay, and had very mixed feelings about returning to China. Because they were with the Christian group that had not compromised with the Chinese government, they were not allowed to speak to their families by phone or internet over their 10 month stay, as a safety precaution.

Two of them had sweethearts back at home, whom they sorely missed and hoped to marry. A fifth man had just arrived from China, with one of their leaders, bringing their group to six, just before all of them were forced to leave the Kurdistan Region over technicalities on their visas. Such problems were growing steadily over that time to affect Indian, Bangladeshi, and even American workers as the Kurdish government moved to require annual relicensure of NGOs after having provided perpetual licenses in the beginning, and without informing the NGOs of the policy change, began denying their visa applications. This caused gaps in MedEast's ability to maintain foreign volunteership on the ground, and reduced aid to Seje Village in the early portion of 2016.

Another impediment arose when the Turkish Banks corresponding banks began to refuse to work with Iraqi banks that competed with their local branches. The banks received money from funders, then sent it back without notifying either the sender or MedEast, the recipient. New methods would have to be found for funds transfer.

Chapter 7: Back to School

As soon as the Yezidi and Christian refugees were settled in Seje Village, I began teaching English in the open air to children out among their houses and later in the courtyard and tents in front of the MedEast compound. The focus was on ABCs, and learning some simple songs in English. This established a relationship between MedEast and the children, and showed parents a picture of what the teaching was like, and how much the children enjoyed it. This would prepare them to accept the foreigners teaching their children. Yezidis were very cautious about their children spending too much time with foreign people, as their religious leaders had specifically discouraged it.

Paul M. Kingery

Displaced Faqier Yezidi children from Tel Azer singing with Dr. Paul Kingery after their resettlement in Seje Village, August 2015.

Meanwhile, negotiations for renting a school building were ongoing. Eventually the decision was to build classrooms at the MedEast compound. While plans for building were undertaken, Lois Freezin, a volunteer from the PCCR group in Pennsylvania decided to begin offering classes in the MedEast's rented warehouse using PCCR volunteers as teachers. The project involved making benches and enrolling students first, then operating the classes with volunteers from PCCR. Lois was very successful in this effort and soon the school was serving more than 100 students. Her brother, a corn farmer with an equally big heart and powerful but humble presence, Joe Freezin, was also volunteering in Seje Village. When they left to plant new corn in Pennsylvania, Daniel Miller, who had come from Virginia for a long term volunteer position, took on the role of supervisor of the classes through MedEast.

The plan was to ramp up in the course of the year to 300 students, through funding from China Care International (CCI), but Daniel quickly took it up to 420 students, as the need was so great and the children pressed so hard to enter the program. We secured the use of the local Assyrian Language Elementary

School for the summer, but would have to have other buildings prepared for the fall. The program was a great success, attributed to Daniel's tireless efforts and the dedication of the young PCCR ex-Amish and ex-Mennonite Christian volunteers. They covered all their own expenses.

Despite many challenges, soon children in the village were speaking in passable English to the MedEast and PCCR staff and volunteers as they walked about visiting families. Even the little children were calling "hello" from rooftops and yards when they could make out any American walking near their homes. The number of Yezidi workers with MedEast was restricted to about twenty who had proven to be the best workers, and they were given ID badges. This made other youths jealous, and caused more false accusations against both these privileged workers and Medeast, but these proved surmountable.

Reuters/Ari Jalal

Dr. Paul M. Kingery, American professor and Director of MedEast teaching English to displaced Yezidi girls in Seje Village, Iraq, September 3, 2015.

We supplemented the program with several English and computing classes for older youths and adults in the MedEast compound. The older students came for six different levels in the evenings, three days a week. Christians from the village were quicker to register for these classes, as many were bound for Europe or America. All classes were mixed, in an attempt to bridge the gaps between Yezidis and Christians in the village. Christian women and girls participated as much as men, but fewer Yezidi girls attended. They were better reached by sending female PCCR teachers into their homes. Yezidi girls

wouldn't sit in a class with boys of their own age or older, whether the boys were Yezidi or Christian, unless they had done so before as university students. Arabic translation was provided in the classes, as the Christians spoke Assyrian and Arabic, while the Yezidis were usually able to speak some Arabic, though their primary language was Kurmanji Kurdish.

MedEast/Ziad Ezdeen

Yezidi and Christian students learn English and Computing in MedEast's Activity Center, using a mahogany paneled room and mahogany tables made by boys in the woodshop vocational training program.

Meanwhile, unable to serve the entire community with all required subjects, we urged the government to start a school, through personal visits to education officials, and in media interviews highlighting the lack of schooling in Seje. The government told us we would need to distinguish between Yezidi students who had been studying in Kurmanje Kurdish and those who had been studying in Arabic. We were informed that the Kurdish school would be the responsibility of the Kurdish Regional government, while the Arabic school would be the responsibility of the Baghdad central government through their representative in Dohuk. We agreed to do a complete breakdown of the names of all children in the village.

I was aided in this large undertaking by Yezidi volunteer Khalid Khudeda, an enterprising and good-hearted high school student. When it was completed, the census was provided to Kurdish and Arabic education officials, Kurds in Dohuk and Arabs from Baghdad with offices in Dohuk. Although both sets of officials

had asked us to do the census, when it was presented, the response of both was that they had no money for schools in Seje. We also highlighted this need to UNICEF, and put out appeals in the media to the great need for education in Seje, as students were facing a second year without even the low quality of schooling available to most other students in the area.

UNICEF responded with sending school books, then temporary buildings, and belatedly, bathrooms, with my promptings among my UN friends. Electricity and water supply for the school were left to bankrupt local government, by UN policy, and never supplied. So every classroom had a UN-funded air conditioner, but there was no electricity to run any of them.

Paul M. Kingery

The temporary public school in Seje Village Iraq, serving a small portion of students with Kurdish or Arabic language instruction, March 17, 2016.

The start of the first school year, under the capable headmastership of a Yezidi man from Tel Azer who was resettled in Seje, Adil Juno Hassan, was a celebrated event even though it was late in the season. The children were given bright blue book bags, though Yezidis don't like blue, and some of the books they would need, but there were not enough books for all. The students studying in Kurdish attended in the mornings, and those studying in Arabic attended in the afternoons. Local teachers were hired, sometimes only with a high school education and no training in educational methods, and they were not paid their

salaries for many months. I trained several of their teachers in the evenings to support them in improving their English language skills.

The split between Kurdish and Arabic language classes in the morning and afternoon wreaked havoc with the scheduling of MedEast English language courses for children, disrupting the flow. Class size diminished as the children gave preference to their regular school subjects. English was sidelined by many. Some continued however, and with great progress. The program for adults grew rapidly however, as the outreach to children moved into homes and out of classrooms mostly. The English program would surge again in the summer months, and during the month-long spring holiday.

Meanwhile the PCCR youths continued teaching English in their dormitory and in homes, reaching about 150 girls and women. I continued teaching in the MedEast compound where the first classroom had already been completed, reaching another 100 students. When USAID left Iraq, their banking project, which I had initiated with USAID Senior Economist Eleanor Bachrach, donated their furniture and computers to MedEast to use in the education program. This allowed the startup of computing classes for Yezidi youths.

Chapter 8: Bringing Home the Captives

Accurate counts of murders and kidnappings by Daesh were hard to come by. The Kurdish Prime Minister's office issued their figures on March 10, 2016. That office indicated that 4,029 Yezidi women and girls had been abducted, but only 1,429 had come home, leaving 2,600 who are still in captivity or who died in captivity. They counted 3,403 Yezidi men who had been captured, and 971 who had come home, leaving 2,432 men who are still in captivity or who died in captivity. Those who returned home came by escape, ransom, or rescue. Of 550,000 Yezidis living in Nineveh before the invasion, 400,000 were reported as displaced, most of them to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's north.

Seven children whose families were settled in Seje village remained in captivity with Daesh, five girls and two boys. Four women and girls were ransomed and returned, and two left to Germany. Three sisters were being held from a single family, with two of their sisters already ransomed and sent to Germany. Another woman whose husband was murdered by Daesh had two sons and a daughter still in Raqqa, Syria with Daesh. Two of the three families with children still captive were working either with private or government efforts to ransom back their children. Meanwhile, all the families needed special supports, both financial and psychological, to keep them afloat while they struggled with their terrible ordeals. Any significant financial support to these families, even if earmarked for basic needs for the family members in Seje, was likely to be shifted by the family to ransom payment, and would be seen that way by local residents and officials.

Paul M. Kingery

A Displaced Faqier Yezidi woman, Seree, who fled the Daesh invasion of Tel Azer, later resettled in Seje Village, November 27, 2014.

Paying Ransoms

Most ransoms were paid by family members, although the Kurdish government had a policy of repayment of such ransoms, with some limitations and with proof of payment with their involvement. In some cases, the Kurdish government quietly paid the ransoms themselves, which is not unusual for governments in this era, but had been eschewed in the West in previous decades. The prices for ransom started at around $200, but climbed to as high as $1,300 by early 2016, with some outliers such as a beautiful 11 year-old-girl who was reportedly sold for $2,000. Some families paid ransoms without the involvement of the Kurdish government, and some organizations claimed to have ransomed people without involving the government.

Many of the Yezidi girls were given to Daesh fighters first, warehoused, or left with caretaker Sunni Muslim families in Mosul, then sold to other men for cash. The buyers were almost always wealthy older Arab Sunni Muslim men from the local areas occupied by Daesh. The girls were often sold and resold repeatedly while in captivity, their "ownership" being passed from one older man to another. In each transfer, there is the humiliating and sickening experience of being looked over by several men or many men, usually in Mosul, Iraq, or Raqqa, Syria, with gawkers appraising the woman or girl with their eyes, touching her, running their hands over her body in a way that violated her further. Often the smaller children of a woman were sold with her, and occasionally subjected to pedophilic violations of their bodies and rapes.

Self-righteous Muslim men often prayed before or after raping the girl or woman, and sometimes explained how they were saving her soul by making her Muslim through sex rather than her willing conversion. The fighters would tell them it was their right to "marry" (rape) them as spoils of their involvement in the war. The older men would make the women or girls false promises about houses, money, and care for their children, then sell them off when they grew tired of them.

Because the rapists routinely forced the use of contraceptives on the young Yezidi girls and women, few were impregnated, around five percent. In cases of pregnancy, abortions were sometimes forced, or the woman would be violently hit in the abdomen in an attempt to cause spontaneous abortion. Very few gave birth to the children of terrorists, whether before or after they came home. Their long-term attitude toward the children of terrorists as members of the family remained to be seen, and the attitude of their neighbors and communities toward the children, though muted by shock and disbelief at first, was likely to emerge later in a multitude of negative ways.

Paul M. Kingery

A young Faqier Yezidi woman, Bassee, who fled the Daesh Invasion of Tel Azer, Iraq, resettled in Seje Village, November 27, 2014.

The idea of paying terrorists to ransom girls remained highly controversial. The act was considered by many western governments as funding terrorism, which could land their citizens in jail and destroy their lives, or at least get them searched every time they went into an airport. This was hypocrisy in that those same governments routinely paid huge ransoms to bring home their soldiers, spies, and other people of interest, whether in direct cash, reduction of sanctions against the governments, or other forms of aid passed from one government to another. In many cases the ransom payments failed the test of plausible deniability by the western governments. But the governments frowned on any participation by their citizens in such ransom schemes, though no prosecutions of such cases became evident.

In rare cases, concerned moderate Muslims would buy girls and set them free, helping them return to their families. In rare cases, moderate Muslims of modest means took pity on the girls and women victimized by Daesh fighters and rich Arab men when the victims showed up at their houses seeking help during an escape, and these families sent the victims on to safety and to their families at mortal risk to themselves and their families and without compensation. In a very few cases, the girls were bought by Muslims and sent to freedom without mistreatment. The vast majority of cases, however, involved Arab Muslim families selling the girls and women for profit, though sometimes acting sympathetic to the victim and pretending they were saving them.

There were also reports of Muslim-owned houses that were used by the smugglers as a sort of false "freedom train" through which the victims would pass on their way to safety, but the usual case was that these people received payment from the smugglers for their services. The smugglers certainly made a lucrative human trafficking business of this situation, and the "safe houses" they used routinely were really just smuggling hideouts and holding cells, not houses of people risking their lives without benefit to save the victims.

We refused involvement of any kind in payment of ransoms to human traffickers or "agents" of the families of victims or of the Daesh fighters. Having been trained in the medical field, I lived by the code of "first do no harm." We would not be directly or indirectly involved in any financial payments to terrorists or their agents that could further finance murder, kidnapping, and other terrorist acts of Daesh or other organizations. There was also risk of the escapees being caught and killed, or one member of a family in captivity being executed for the escape of another member of the same family. Some westerners who were rushing in to pay ransoms faulted the more cautious approach in dealing with people as "lacking courage." The counter for this was that this was no work for Westerners, and should be left to the Yezidi people and the Kurdistan Regional Governorate and the Syrian Kurdish YPG to handle entirely.

Paul M. Kingery

A young Faqier Yezidi woman, Zainab, who fled the Daesh invasion of Tel Azer, Iraq, resettled in Seje Village, November 26, 2014.

The Kurdish government insisted that westerners paying ransoms for captives of Daesh do so through their authority and with their involvement. They could and did sometimes use their power to stop any Western person from travel or work in the Kurdistan Region if their involvement in ransoming people was discovered. The involvement of westerners in paying ransoms to free Yezidi girls was a flawed approach, for the risks it posed to the women and children themselves, for the risks it posed to funders who might face prosecution from the U.S. for funding terrorism, or unwanted scrutiny from U.S. and other federal authorities at least.

The government had a right to require this control, as it involved relations with terrorists across international borders, and through security checkpoints meant to preserve the safety of the Kurdistan Region. The area remained constantly under threat from reprisals from Daesh for their successful ground

offensives against the group, resulting in the loss of lands they had temporarily captured, including Mosul dam and Sinjar City. Daesh operatives were captured in Erbil, and had successfully bombed the entrance to the U.S. Consulate in the Ankawa District of Erbil. Explosives were found in a local Syrian refugee camp near Dohuk in March, 2016.

One downside of the government's refunds to families that paid ransoms to bring home captives was that the Bureau attached to the Prime Minister's office processed ransomed people, then television stations and local NGOs were able to find them easily through their contacts. The victimized women were then hounded by media, who showed up at their door-less homes and simply entered and started filming without permission. In some cases the women's families refused the interviews. There was concern that the interviews might be seen by Daesh fighters, who would take revenge on their children still in captivity, or other members of their family.

Paul M. Kingery

A young Faqier Yezidi girl, Hadida, who fled the Daesh invasion of Tel Azer, Iraq and resettled in Seje Village, December 1, 2014.

Safe Houses

There were legitimate organizations creating and operating critically needed safe houses for the women and girls escaping Daesh, usually in the Dohuk and Erbil area. One of the first safe houses was operated by a young Kurdish man in Erbil, whose NGO had been delivering aid by Iraqi army helicopter to Yezidis trapped on Mount Sinjar. He had collaborated with Jordan, Debra, and I from the earliest days of the relief effort in Seje, donating diapers and other aid left over from his work in Kanqe Camp nearby, also serving months later briefly as MedEast's official liaison with the Kurdish government. He was closely connected with the Kurdish government. Unfortunately, while the Director was out of the country and some foreign people working with the victims began making disparaging remarks about the Yezidi religion in an attempt to convert them to Christianity, the government shut down that safe house.

Before it was closed, women in the safe house would stay only for a couple of weeks, then travel with their families on free airplane tickets to Germany, under a project financed by the German government to resettle them and, in the case of younger children, their mothers as well. But other family members were left behind, and Yezidi mothers in Germany would be very far from their remaining daughters trying to break free from Daesh. The girls in captivity had often remembered phone numbers of their mothers or family members, and were occasionally in touch with them, assuring them they were still alive, though living with constant rape, beatings, slavery, and other forms of abuse.

MedEast and China Care International (CCI) also collaborated on a plan for the establishment of a safe house in Seje Village, with a new building on their compound started in the spring of 2016. They sent a team to see the safe house operated in Erbil before making their plans. In the design of the MedEast safe house, the lower floor was for sewing and craft-making activities in which the Yezidi girls and women would be trained by expats to produce income for themselves. The upper floor was housing for the girls and women participating in the training program. The serene setting would be conducive to healing for the participants, separated above the village, with mountains on either side, with an undisturbed two kilometer long gorge behind for refuge and contemplation. Many would go into the gorge for quiet meditation.

House mothers, expat women of middle age, were always to be onsite to help the girls and women, and western-trained female psychologists with credentials in counseling trauma victims present from time to time to assist them with recovery. For several months before the building was started, the sewing program was underway, providing training to displaced Yezidi girls in Seje, making dresses for widows and orphan girls, earning salaries for the Yezidi dress-makers that supported them in completing high school in the Kanqi Village high school. Dresses and crafts, like hand bags, were also sent to the U.S. for marketing through the PCCR volunteers going back home. Ramonda Samawi, of Lebanese descent, with training in tailoring in Riyad and Paris, led the MedEast sewing program in the beginning, then returned later at intervals to provide ongoing support. The wife and one daughter of Adil Juno, the public school headmaster, were Ramonda's primary aides.

Next door to the safe house, a woodshop was built for training young Yezidi men in woodworking, mostly making mahogany tables, chairs, beds, and wood paneling. Beside these a small activity center was built, offering classes in English to local Yezidi and Christian people who had fled from the Daesh invasion, and

a computer and internet laboratory. A portion of the building was also used as a headquarters for MedEast Organization, and as their base of operations in the Kurdistan Region.

Another facility in Erbil's Ankawa District was used by MedEast for Language and Computing training on a cost-recovery basis, with occasional support from the U.S. State Department in programs to help Christians who were internally displaced by the Daesh invasion. I also delivered training programs in the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad for youth seeking job skills and resume writing skills, conducted research for USAID, wrote official USAID reports on business enterprise, and managed USAID demonstration and training projects in agriculture, banking, business management, primary health care, and access to justice through Iraqi NGOs, with some of these activities preceding the Daesh invasion.

The Ransomed Ones

From time to time, young women and girls returning from Daesh slavery came to settle in Seje. Those who came through the Kurdish Bureau were more likely to be hounded by the media, so I did not interview them personally if it was clear they had been raped. Sometimes I was able to interview a family member and keep the discussion to issues other than rape. After they were safely in Germany, I was also sometimes able to visit their mothers to see if they wanted to tell their stories, and some did while others had grown tired of telling the story to people who promised help but never delivered it. These I didn't bother further though I continued to offer aid to the families of the victims as to all displaced people living in Seje village.

Some women and children were returned to their families without involvement of the Kurdish Bureau, and I was able to interview the adults soon after they arrived. I promised, and almost immediately delivered, considerable help, whether they wanted to tell their story or not. The few stories gleaned from this effort proved highly instructive, giving a clear picture of the horrors they had endured, how transactions were made for their sale and their release, and identifying others who were still in captivity and their locations.

Some of their stories are presented below. The names, as they say, have been changed to protect the innocent.

Noora

Kherry Khudeda Ibrahim, age 50, was an electrician in Tel Azer. He and his wife were poor, and didn't have a car. Three of their daughters were married, and escaped to the mountain with their husbands' families. Kherry made the mistake of walking in the wrong direction with his family, along the road toward Syria, and was caught between Jazeera and Sinjar Mountain. They walked directly into Daesh fighters. He was killed, along with his sons, aged 22 and 23.

His son told his pregnant wife Noora that he knew he was going to die, but that he wanted his eighteen month old son and their unborn child to live, so she should protect him. They said a quiet goodbye before he taken to the side with his brother and five other young men. Kherry was shot first, then the six younger men were lined up on the ground face down parallel to one another and shot dead in order, one by one, by a Daesh fighter with a handgun. A video of their killing was posted by Daesh on the internet. The young men all laid silently as they awaited their deaths.

Kherry's wife, her daughter-in-law Noora and Noora's young son were taken captive to Mosul, and held for a month and a half separately. Noora had her house key with her, and used it to open the screws of the wooden door in the room where she was kept, grabbed up her little boy and fled the building. She stopped a safe distance away and sought help from a moderate Sunni Muslim family. They helped her escape to her family in Sharia Camp in the Kurdistan Region, without demanding money. Her family gave them money anyway, as a reward, and they accepted it. Amsha and Moaed stayed briefly in Sharia camp with her parents, then they travelled to Germany. Honaf was ransomed back to her family separately.

Zena

I interviewed Zena's mother to gain a brief version of her story after she had left the area. Zena was 16 years old when Daesh came to Tel Azer. She was already married. When Daesh attacked Tel Azer, she was sleeping on the roof with the family of her husband, who was 20. He and his father were fighting on the front line to defend the village. They waited for the men to come back to the house before evacuating to the mountain, but as Daesh entered the village, about 8 or 9 am, they had to leave on foot for the mountain because they didn't have a car. The men made their way to the mountain separately in vehicles, but were unable to stop for their families on the other side of the village, and could not call them by telephone to coordinate their escape. Zena's mother-in-law and two sisters-in-law ran ahead, and found a tractor and trailer with room to climb aboard. Zena was delayed somewhat as she was carrying more of the food.

The Daesh fighters caught up with her near the end of the line of the people fleeing Tel Azer late on foot toward Mount Sinjar. They captured Zena, and put her and two other girls into their vehicle. While this was happening, and before her family up ahead a distance could be also captured, a heroic Yezidi man shot a Daesh fighter, commandeered his vehicle, and drove through the fighters to rescue them. He took Zena's two sisters-in-law and her mother-in-law, driving as fast as he could toward the mountain, then stopped some distance away from the bottom of the mountain, and told them to run up the mountain. He also left the car there, and ran away on foot up the mountain with them.

Daesh took the girls to Baaj a Sunni Muslim Arabic city, and slowly accumulated more girls over the next several days. They blindfolded the girls, loaded them in the vehicles, and covered the windows so they couldn't see where they were going. They were taken into Mosul city, which was the local stronghold for Daesh in Iraq, then the fighters separated the older women and women with small children from the younger women and girls of nine or ten years up to their early twenties who were more valuable to them and more desired.

The young women and older girls they took to Hamam Ali, a place for washing, and left them there under guard. They were told they would be taken for sex, and if they refused, they would beat them. Some of the girls escaped and gathered on the street planning to effect a suicide pact, but Daesh saw them and took them, distributing them to the houses of the Muslim Arabs living in Mosul as war booty, allowing them to keep them to use as they wished or to sell them, sometimes returning to reclaim them later for sex.

Zena stayed with a family that had been long-term Mosul residents. They were physically abusive to her, treating her as a slave girl, making her clean the house and cook the food. They threatened to beat her to death, kill her friends, and take her to Syria where she would be injured if she didn't comply with their wishes. After twenty days, she tried to electrocute herself, but the family intervened, fearing Daesh would harm them for not keeping her alive. They told her she couldn't commit suicide in their house, and fearing that she would try to do so again, the woman of the house took her to a Daesh security office, and dropped her off. Zena was there for fifteen days waiting there with many girls. The U.S. forces bombed the warehouse where she was kept, and she ran away in the ensuing chaos, seeking shelter in a house nearby.

The Arab Sunni Muslim family where she sought shelter pretended to be supportive, and said they would help rescue her, then took her phone number and photo and sold her to another family in Mosul for $2,000. This second Arab Muslim family knew of the Kurdistan Region's Bureau for ransoming Yezidis back to Kurdistan, and contacted them. The Bureau agreed to pay a ransom of $4,000 for Zena to the Mosul family. The family in Mosul then called Zena's brother in Seje village, and said they would help her escape to Kurdistan through the Bureau. The Mosul family gave Zena's phone number and photo to the Bureau through social media.

The details of Zena's rape, if it occurred, were not discussed between her mother and I, as neighbors were there listening to her tell the story. There were no physical walls or doors on their vacuous skeleton market-style building that might have allowed them to talk privately, and men and women who are not related would not be able to talk without a male family member of the woman present anyway. Her husband was away at the time.

Meanwhile, in Mosul, the son of the Arab Muslim neighbor of the family holding Zena revealed to Daesh fighters that his neighbors were trying to sell her to the Kurdish Bureau. The son of the family trying to help her then shot and injured this neighbor boy for his indiscretion. Daesh didn't come to punish the family right away, so they continued with their plan to sell Zena, despite the fact that the risks to them were growing. For a profit of $2,000 on their original investment of $2,000 they risked the lives of all their family members to sell her for $4,000.

They dressed Zena in Muslim clothes and a hijab, and drove her with their family, as if she was one of them, leaving Daesh territory into the Kurdish controlled areas through the Daesh checkpoint near Kirkuk. The Kurdish Bureau representatives met them, paid the ransom, and took Zena with them. It was November 2014. She had been with Daesh for 2.5 months.

The Kurdish Bureau took her to Lalish Temple in the Kurdistan Region. She performed ritual washings there, then was brought directly to her family in Seje. The Yezidi religious leaders had pronounced that

Yezidi victims of sexual slavery would be purified by this ritual washing, and could be taken back into their families and accepted into marriages with Yezidi men. In her case, it was not known if rape had occurred, but she was washed according to custom.

The family did not know exactly when she would arrive, so when she came, it was a great surprise and all the family cried and hugged her. Her husband was in Qadia camp between Seje and the Turkish border. He came to meet her where she was with her family. He thought he had lost her, and was overwhelmed with her presence in his arms again. Her pain found its only cure in his arms, but the treatment would be long-term. The couple stayed in Seje for a month, before going to live in the caravan in Qadia Camp with his family.

She continued to have mental problems and was aided by some people attached to the Kurdish Bureau, being taken to mental health experts in Erbil once. The downside was that someone involved in her release gave her name and location to his television station and other NGOs. As a result, many news organizations and NGO staff came to interview her or her family. For the first month after she arrived, several television crews came to interview her, and she and her family granted the interviews graciously. All said they wanted to help her but no one did, other than to take her to the doctor with another escapee on this one occasion.

She was offered a free airline ticket to Germany, and resettlement in Germany, but the German government wouldn't pay for the husband to go with her, so she refused in the short term. She continued to live with her husband in Qadia Camp between Seje and the Turkish border with Iraq. They continued to try to get money for her husband and his mother to go to Germany with her, at which time she could use the free ticket to Germany.

Zara

I interviewed Zara's brother on March 16, 2016. Zara (16) was with her husband Khudeda (21), and pregnant with their child, when Daesh came to Tel Azer. They didn't have a car, so they started to walk to Mount Sinjar on the road. They were very late to leave, at around 8 or 9 am, long after Daesh had attacked the village. The Peshmerga had convinced them they would protect them from Daesh, so they did not leave until they were disabused of this notion by the presence of Daesh among the houses in Tel Azer. They had passed Jedali on the road to Mount Sinjar when Daesh caught them at the end of the line of people fleeing on foot. When they saw the first Daesh truck arriving, Khudeda's uncle fired on it with his Kalashnikov rifle. His rifle jammed after firing off a few rounds.

Daesh fighters overtook them, shooting two people with the machine gun mounted on the top of their vehicle before they stopped to capture Zara, her husband, and his family. Daesh captured Khudeda's father and his elderly mother, along with Zara, Khudeda, Khudeda's four brothers, and a young cousin who had been orphaned. Khalaf's mother and her two younger boys were on the mountain visiting relatives so were not captured. Daesh took the eight men and boys in one direction, to Tal Afar, and Zara and Khudeda's grandmother were taken another direction to Gazarik.

The men and boys were taken to a school in Tal Afar, where they were separated. The five young boys were taken away to another place. Zara and her husband's grandmother were taken to Gazarik and separated into two holding areas in different locations, one for young women, and the other for older women. Daesh showed Zara a video to identify her husband so she could live with him, because she was pregnant, and Daesh fighters were not allowed to have sex with pregnant women.

Seeing her husband in the video of men captured by Daesh who were being held in Tal Afar and being forced to pray, she identified him and he was reunited with her. They were given a house in Tal Afar. Khudeda asked Daesh to return his Father and brothers and grandmother to him. Daesh responded that they knew where his younger brothers were, but not where his father and older brothers were. His father and older two brothers were never seen again. His four small brothers and young cousin were returned to Khudeda and Zara. His grandmother was also returned to them in their house.

Khudeda and his oldest brother were taken by Daesh to work cleaning the streets. The others stayed at home. About six months later, Daesh came to their house and took the two men to jail in Tal Afar. They took Zara to a different place, and small boys to religious training. Khudeda's grandmother was taken with older women again.

Zara was taken to the city of Hit in Anbar Province after Daesh conquered the middle portion of Iraq. A Daesh fighter hit her hard in the abdomen to try to make her miscarry her baby, but the baby survived. He could have received more money for her if she was not pregnant.

The Arab Muslim mayor of Hit bought Zara from Daesh for $1,000 because she was very beautiful. He said he would marry her after her child was born. This mayor also bought two other girls who were not pregnant, and raped them both. One, had a little girl, and the other had a little boy. The mayor didn't rape Zara or hurt the small children, but Zara was given house work to do.

A Daesh officer living near the mayor's house let Zara use his telephone from time to time allowing her to try to reach her family. His motives were unclear. Zara used Facebook on his telephone to contact Khudeda's relative, and told him her location, so he could tell her family. The relative called a man in Bozan village with connections to the Kurdish government, who was the uncle of one of the other two captured girls. This relative then contacted another man in Kurdistan to find Zara's father. This man, in turn, called Zara's father, who had sought refuge in a skeleton building in Dohuk. The man from Bozan gave $600 to Zara's father, which he added to the $400 he had managed to save, to reach $1,000 as a ransom price for Zara. Separate financial arrangements were made by the families of the other two girls to pay their ransoms.

One of the other two girls held with Zara knew a local human trafficker in Hit who helped the three girls and the two little children to escape from the mayor's house to meet some Iraqi soldiers outside Daesh territory toward Baghdad. The soldiers took the three girls and their two children to Vian Dakhil, the Yezidi Member of the Iraqi Parliament, in Baghdad. Vian took them to Erbil, where she had a house. The man from Bozan then sent a car to Erbil to bring the three girls and the two children to Avro City to an apartment. The group of five then went to meet Zara's family in Dohuk.

Zara's family was overjoyed to see her. One of the other young women and her daughter left with the man from Bozan to rejoin her family in Sharia Village outside Dohuk. The other young woman and her little boy were met there by her husband, who took her to his home. A month later, he sent his wife to Germany by airplane and kept their little boy with him in hopes they could join her later.

Zara was rushed to Azadi hospital a month later to give birth to a little girl, whom she named Besse. Zara was also offered a trip to Germany, but she had to wait to get an ID for her little girl. Because she didn't have a food ration card with her, the Kurdish government refused to make an ID for her. The Kurdish government also refused to give Zara a ration card because her husband was still in captivity with Daesh. She waited with her father and their family, hoping to go to Germany.

Nofe

Nofe returned from sexual slavery with Daesh to her family on March 6, 2016, coming straight to Seje village. She had spoken to no one other than her family when I interviewed her three days after she arrived. He had made an appointment for the afternoon in advance, taking Ramonda, a middle-aged woman who spoke Arabic and who was heading up MedEast's sewing project for Yezidi girls, and a teenage Yezidi girl who spoke Arabic and Kurmanji as translators. Ramonda and the teenage translator entered first to make the introduction, then called me inside.

I expressed his profound sorrow for her ordeal, and made a commitment to help her as best I could in the days and months to come. She was crying when he entered the room, but able to contain herself and told her story clearly while I was there. Her father was there for about half the conversation, and her mother, sister, and older nieces stayed throughout the first interview.

At first Nofe said she had suffered unspeakable things, being sold repeatedly from one Daesh fighter to another and then another. I restarted the conversation simply, photographing the IDs of Nofe, her two sons, and her mother to enroll them in the MedEast aid project, as was the custom, as they were all recent arrivals to the village. The family did not have the IDs of Nofe's husband or daughter.

It was a large family. Her father, mother, their married son and his family, divorced daughter, and son were living in Hatemi Village in Sinjar District, 8 kilometers from Sinjar city, when Daesh invaded. Their son's wife, his three young daughters and their two young sons were with them. They had all moved to Seje January 15, 2016.

Nofe was their oldest daughter, by then in her 30s. She had lived with her husband, their 12 and 13-year-old sons and 12-year-old daughter about eight kilometers away from Hatemi in Kocho Village. The younger boy and girl were twins.

Nofe and her husband were in the garden of their one story house with their three children when Daesh came around noon of August 15th, a full twelve days after Daesh had swept through the region and Yezidis and Christians had evacuated en masse. This was the only village in Sinjar District from which the residents didn't attempt to evacuate to Mount Sinjar. Their Muqtar had counseled them that living under Daesh

would be little different than living under Saddam Hussein, so they remained in their houses waiting to see what would happen.

She was preparing lunch, and they were just getting ready to eat. They heard the sounds of gunfire and loud shouting coming from the direction of the village school. They had already heard from relatives and friends about the Daesh invasion of other villages in their area. They knew from the shouting voices that it was Daesh that had entered the school, though they didn't go outside to see what was going on. They found out later that the men guarding the village, both Kurdish Peshmerga and their own men, had abandoned the field when they were overwhelmed due to their limited numbers, limited firepower, and old weaponry.

Shortly after Daesh entered the village, the muqtar, Ahmed Jasso, spoke over a loudspeaker to the entire village, telling them Daesh had surrounded the village, and Abu Hamza (his actual name) had demanded that they convert to Islam within 3 days or face death. Abu Hamza (which means father of Hamza) was also known by his first name of Ameer. He was a local Sunni Muslim Arab from Kairowan Village, an Arabic Muslim village nearby. Daesh fighters came to the door of their house in three cars demanding that they turn over their Kalashnikov rifle and ammunition. Her husband complied, and they left without a further word.

The second day, the Muqtar's voice came over the loudspeaker from the school again demanding that they convert to Islam or die. All the families discussed this in their homes, and all were defiant that they would rather die than convert to Islam. They were trapped in their house for three days, too afraid to go outside. They didn't have food or water. They were drinking their tears, she said.

On the third day, Abu Hamza prompted Muqtar Ahmed Jasso to call over the loudspeaker telling people to bring all their belongings and come to the school, saying that Daesh was going to take them safely to the mountain. Reluctantly, more than 2,000 villagers, a number that could not be confirmed accurately, slowly emerged from their houses in their family groups, driving their cars to the school, which assured that Daesh would have access to their cars and keys at the same time. As the families walked into the school, Daesh fighters came to collect all their money, valuables, and IDs. Then they split the families into two groups. Women and children were taken to one side of the courtyard, and men and boys with hair on their face were taken to the other side.

They said over the loudspeaker that they were taking the men to the mountain. They put the men into trucks and carried them some distance away in trucks. A gully was located near the school, and the men were forced into it. They were required to give up any gold or valuables on their persons. Again Daesh told the Yezidi men to convert to Islam or they would be shot, but they refused. A Saudi man shot the muqtar dead for delivering the defiant message of their refusal to convert. Nofe knew this because he bragged about it on his return to the captives. Then, on command of Abu Hamza and this Saudi man, the men and boys had all been shot dead.

They had been gone from the school for about two hours when suddenly the women heard shooting in the distance. The shooting continued for about an hour, the shots becoming less frequent as the minutes passed. The men fell dead or wounded upon each other. Some were still moving, so the fighters moved

among the bodies shooting any still moving. Then they collected the remaining IDs and hidden valuables from their bodies. Another hour later, the Daesh fighters returned to the school. The women asked what they had done to their men, and fighters told them they had killed them because they refused to convert to Islam. The women were all wailing by that time, their children frightened beyond imagination and crying inconsolably. The Daesh fighters were completely indifferent to them.

Shortly after they returned, the fighters were heard bragging that the 19-year-old daughter of the Muqtar had been given as a prize to one of the Daesh fighters. Another fighter had fought him for the girl, and murdered him to claim her as his prize, then their boss had arrived and taken the girl for himself. Daesh knew the women were hiding their IDs, and said they would cut off their hands and feet if they didn't give them over. Nofe didn't believe this threat, so she hid the family IDs in her clothes. Her 12 year old daughter had hid her ID in her own clothes.

They took all the women and children in trucks to Solaq, an Arab Muslim village, arriving at about 2 pm. Nofe was still with her three children. All the captives were put into a big building, which they said was for Masoud Barzani, the President of the Kurdistan Region. The Saudi man then removed the picture of the President and broke it in front of the captives, and stamped on it with his feet, which was his way of showing the greatest disrespect. They left them with many guards.

They returned late in the evening to take the boys away. Her older son was taken away, but her younger son was left behind. They said they would teach the older boys the Islamic religion, but everyone knew their purpose was to brainwash them to make them child soldiers fighting for Daesh, as this pattern was well established from recent events in Raqqa and Mosul. Nofe fought the Daesh operatives, holding her older son tightly, but they hit her with their rifle and she was unable to overpower them. She begged him not to take her son, and he was crying hysterically. She wept bitterly as he was taken away from her side, and was inconsolable. All the other women and children were crying too, and all the boys who were being taken away.

The Daesh fighters returned a second time, to take the young girls for sale as sex slaves. Nofe had been hiding her twelve-year-old daughter behind her in hopes they would not take her. She was successful in hiding her and avoided her being taken with the other young girls who were being put in trucks. The three spent the night together without food and water grieving for the loss of their son and brother, one of the twins.

The Daesh fighters returned early the next morning and moved among the women appraising them. They asked them if they wanted to convert to Islam, and they all said yes, they would convert. Then they separated the older women, including Nofe's elderly mother-in-law, from the younger women and youngest children. They told the old women they needed fresh air, and took them outside. As her mother-in-law moved to leave, Nofe was unable to say goodbye because they were taken quickly, and everyone was crying. She was still grieving for the loss of her son.

The older women were ushered out of the building by Daesh fighters. Some of the younger women were able to see what happened to the older women. They were loaded into the same trucks that had carried the men away, and driven to a nearby field. There Daesh fighters dug a large trench in the dirt with a big

excavator. They huddled the elderly women into the trench, pushing those who resisted. They did not give them another opportunity to convert to Islam, or waste bullets on them. They were old enough to know that death was coming to them soon.

The operator of the excavator simply fired up the machine, picked up large buckets full of Iraqi soil, and dropped it on top of them, burying them alive. Some would have died from the crush of the weight upon their bodies, some bodies falling upon other bodies. Others would have struggled under the soil, unable to move, unable to breathe, until the life slowly ebbed out of their bodies due to suffocation. The young women watched this with horror on their faces, their hands over their mouths, afraid to cry out. Nofe was still too grieved about the loss of her son to watch. She couldn't stop crying, and could hardly bear the news the other women were telling her about the massacre of the older women, including her mother-in-law.

Soon after they finished killing the older women, the Daesh fighters returned. They loaded all of the remaining captives into four big trucks and took them to Talafar. Nofe was still hiding her daughter in her clothes. They were taken off the trucks and ushered into a school building in Talafar. Daesh had not been able to handle the boys they had taken, as the boys would not comply with any request, and were crying inconsolably for their mothers, believing they had been killed. Daesh fighters first tried to calm them by allowing them to speak to their mothers on the phones Daesh provided. Nofe spoke to her older son who had been taken from her, and he said he was okay, but that he had only received one meal that day.

This action of letting the boys talk to their mothers by telephone did not solve the problem of the boys crying, even though now they knew their mothers, if not their fathers, were still alive. They brought the boys back the next day, as they could not be consoled until they had seen their mothers alive again. The boys were allowed to stay with their mothers for the remaining nine days. They stayed twenty days in the school.

After an hour of recording the first portion of Nofe's story, I wanted to let her rest, so I dismissed myself and made an appointment for the next afternoon for the three of them to return. She asked for help getting her children back as her highest priority, saying plainly that she would kill herself if they were not returned to her. After I left, and the two women who had come with him hugged her and expressed their sympathy again. As I stood waiting outside, some female relatives arrived and entered, and I could hear her breaking down and sobbing again. Her tears were for her children more than herself.

Raymonda, and the young female Yezidi translator, and I continued the next day with Nofe. As they began, a Yezidi man and woman entered the room. I knew the man to be a Yezidi resettled in Seje village, serving as a sort of unofficial sub-muqtar, but in this case he was bringing a women whose five sisters had been taken from Tel Azer by Daesh, Fani. She wanted to ask Nofe if she had seen her sisters. As Nofe answered negatively, both women began to cry. I excused myself to give them privacy, and reentered a few minutes later, though Raymonda and the young Yezidi translator remained in the room with the women.

This woman, Fani, had evacuated during the later hours of the invasion of Tel Azer, taking her parents to the mountain before returning in their small car for her five sisters. As she reentered Tel Azer, she found that Daesh fighters had already captured her sisters and were putting them into busses. There was

nothing she could do but return to her parents on the mountain before she too was captured, leaving no one to care for her elderly parents. Fani and her parents made it over Mount Sinjar to safety and took refuge in Seje village. Then her father had a heart attack and died some months after while waiting for his daughters to return.

Two of her sisters, aged 8 and 21, had been ransomed back with the help of two Yezidi men, thought to be local NGO staffers, who were then refunded by the Kurdish Bureau. They were returned to Fani and her mother. Then the television station and organizations had been tipped off and started coming to interview her, but she had refused, thinking it would harm her remaining four sisters in captivity. Fani was left alone, and hardened by the lack of assistance from the people interviewing her. She was working with the people who had brought back two of her sisters.

I had heard of these girls and had made repeated offers through the mother of the Yezidi translator to make them free new dresses for their trip to Germany, but they had not fully understood, and were gone to Germany with their mother before a third attempt could be made to explain the offer. The mother was given free airfare to accompany the girls because one was only eight years old.

In an odd twist of events then, suddenly Fani offered to bring the television crews to interview Nofe, knowing her children might be hurt by this. It was clear by then that she was working with one of the NGOs, and they were pushing her to get Nofe to accept a television interview against her wishes. Noora flatly declined, and the woman and her quasi sub-muqtar friend left with her. The power to the lights went out about this time, and the kerosene lantern that was brought in caused a great deal of smoke to enter the room, which bothered Raymonda. She asked if we could relocate to one of the empty unfinished rooms in the front of the house, and they agreed.

After we were resettled in the other room, no other people came and went during the discussion, which was preferred as the discussion was moving to more intimate personal matters. Nofe continued her story.

The Daesh fighters entered on the twentieth day and told the captives they were going to send each family into the house of an Arab Muslim family there in Solaq. They said they would bring their husbands to meet them once they were placed in the Muslim homes. Nofe and her three children stayed there for four months, along with several other Yezidi families, forced to learn Muslim prayers. Of course the husbands never came, and they knew they had already been killed. They were told to read the Koran, and friction arose when they informed them that they could not read Arabic and so could not understand the Koran. They knew that Daesh was coming into the homes to take away the girls and women for sex at will. Nofe cooked and cleaned in the home for those four months. Her children were not given work to do, and stayed in a separate room while she worked. She did not report any sexual victimization in this period.

Daesh soldiers were visiting the women there every day, and taking the youngest girls and most beautiful women to be married and kept in other houses. After four months, Daesh operatives came to the house and told all of them to get into big trucks parked outside, with others in them already, covered with plastic. They didn't tell them where they were taking them, but by the time they arrived, they knew they were in

Mosul, in a big hall. Nofe huddled together with her three children, not knowing what would happen next. They stayed for twenty days in that hall being given food and water once a day.

In their last days there, many men had been milling about them choosing which families they wanted to buy. The families were sold as individual lots, rather than being separated and sold individually. After twenty days, they told them they would take them to a farm in the countryside to live as a family. They were called by family name and loaded into three large trucks covered with plastic and taken to Raqqa, Syria. The journey took the entire day, from the morning until late night, and they were given no food or water on the journey.

In Raqqa, they were taken to a farmhouse near a forest, and separated according to the buyer who held their names. It turned out to be just another weigh station for selling them to others or providing them to Daesh fighters. The four room farm house held fifteen people in each room. They stayed there for about fifteen days or more, receiving one meal a day. They were required to clean the house throughout that time. Nearly every day, the younger and more beautiful women were being taken by Daesh soldiers at will, sold by their traffickers to older Arab Sunni Muslim men.

An Arab Sheik, a Daesh leader, came to the farm home after fifteen days. He was responsible for the sale of the women and girls. Nofe came to know two of the other captors there by name, Abu Fuad and Khatab (their actual names), two of the Daesh fighters who had brought them their daily food, and who were responsible for the boys.

That day, Abu Fuad and Khatab took Nofe's boys away from her, with all the other boys, to be put in training camps for Islamic extremist brainwashing and training as Daesh child soldiers. Nofe fought them as they pulled her sons away, crying and pleading, but to no avail. The boys screamed, all of them did, but the men fought them and bullied them along to the trucks waiting outside, and they drove off. She never saw her sons again.

For days afterward, Nofe and her young daughter were completely grief stricken, and unable to do anything. Noora knew their time to be taken away would come soon. She, and probably her daughter, would be forced into sexual slavery. She begged the Daesh soldiers to sell her to a civilian Muslim rather than to a Daesh soldier, hoping that would get her free, but they said only Daesh fighters were taking them, as a reward for their bravery in fighting the Yezidis.

Nofe broke down again at that point in the discussion, and I suggested that she rest for the day. Her mother entered and brought food, and invited us to eat, insisted really. I excused myself so the women could comfort Nofe in my absence.

I visited Fani, the woman whose five sisters had been captured, the next afternoon, finding her living in a stark concrete block room that had been closed off from the house in which it once served as a bedroom, with a window opening broken crudely in the wall below a window opening to make a door opening. A blanket was draped over the opening. She had lived alone in the room since her father had died recently of a heart attack in his grief, her mother had flown with two of her sisters to Germany, and her other three sisters remained in captivity with Daesh.

There were two young men sitting in the room, and I inquired briefly about their connection to her. They were described as her Yezidi friends, one from a village on the north of Mount Sinjar near the Syrian border, the other from a village just 30 minutes from Seje village in Nineveh Province. They demurred at the questioning, busying themselves on their sophisticated portable electronic devices, but Fani revealed that they had been the ones who put up the money to ransom her two sisters. It was not clear whether they were the human traffickers themselves, or working with an NGO that was quietly ransoming girls.

Fani was visibly uncomfortable about my visit in the presence of these men, though his meeting with her was scheduled in advance. It was odd that men who were not related to her were alone with her in her house, which would be considered a stoning offense among the Yezidi people, though an elderly neighbor woman had been sitting there with them when we had arrived with his translator and the same quasi sub-muqtar who had attended Nofe's house with her the day before entered for a time as well, his connection to her also remaining unclear.

No attempt was made to record her family story in detail, and she complained that she didn't remember much and that all the people who had interviewed her before had made promises to help but then did nothing for her and her family. I explained that he was unlike the others, in that I had lived in Seje Village from the beginning of the crisis, and had brought aid to the village in the time since they had arrived. I offered her a room in the new safe house and a job sewing dresses if she wanted it, and she rather dismissively said she would think about it. I said I would enroll her in the vegetable distribution since her room was now separate from the house to which it was attached.

The meeting left me with an uncomfortable feeling, that this woman had too many young Yezidi men circling around her, and that some of them were involved in the ransom payments, if not also the human trafficking, that was used to repatriate girls. I asked Raymonda to look her up again, and try to befriend her, to get a better feel for what was happening in her life, and to invite her to work on the sewing project. She opted instead to start English classes with Ramonda, favoring that over sewing classes or English classes with Christian and Yezidi girls and women her own age.

Immediately afterward, at 4 PM on March 12th, we returned as scheduled to Nofe, and were greeted warmly, the women with kisses from Nofe and her sisters in her father's rented unfinished concrete block home. I started by asking her to describe for the record the man who had raped her daughter, encouraging her to go slowly, taking as much time as she needed, hoping that he could be identified and later brought to justice. She said she could recognize his face if she saw a picture, as it was burned into her mind.

She had never seen the man before. He was not one who regularly came among them. Yet she learned his name. His name was Abu Annas (father of Annas) Almagharabi (his actual name, which is a Morrocan name). He was in his middle 40s, she estimated, and of medium height and thin build with a long black beard, no mustache, and curly black hair. He spoke Iraqi Arabic. He was the one who gave the salaries to the other Daesh workers, including guards, cooks, and those distributing the food. He had very poor vision and wore glasses with clear rims. He usually wore black Afghani dress, loose pants with a top that dropped to the thighs, and spoke Arabic. Another day he wore a long black Moroccan robe. He sometimes wore

a military uniform typically worn by Daesh soldiers. There was nothing distinctive about his voice or his manner.

Abu Annas entered alone, saying nothing, and took Nofe with her daughter to another house in a place called Dhawar Anyim, a marketplace in the middle of Raqqa. He drove a big black car, perhaps a Jeep, she said. He told them they would be married, and they said they didn't want that. He replied that it wasn't up to them as they were servants to them.

Abu Annas took them both into the house. He gave some medication he had brought from the pharmacy to a disabled man who was there in a wheelchair, missing both legs. His name was Abu Waleed Almugarabi (his actual name). Abbas told Nofe that she had to marry Abu Waleed and take care of him. He was about 30 years old, and had been injured by American shelling. They wanted her to clean him up, as he was covered with his own urine and feces. She refused but Abu Annas beat her and forced her. As she began to clean him, she vomited. She started laughing aloud at herself, finding her situation absolutely ridiculous. She was insane for a moment. Her young daughter was still with her, and Abbu Abbas forced her daughter to take some white pills and sit down on the floor nearby. There were no other people in the house.

Abu Annas, with Abu Waleed watching, immediately began to tie the hands and legs of her young daughter. Both Nofe and her daughter fought him, begging him not to rape her. Nofe pleaded with him, clawing and scratching him. In retaliation, he beat both Nofe and her daughter with a rifle until they were black and blue all over their bodies and left them laying bruised and bleeding on the floor. Then he raped her twelve year old daughter in front of her mother on the floor.

Immediately after raping her daughter, while she was still lying on the floor unconscious, Abu Annas prayed in the Muslim tradition toward the east, rising and bowing to the floor repeatedly with great piety. Then he untied the limp hands and feet of the little girl. Her mother went immediately to her and held her closely, crying from the depths of her soul. After an hour, her daughter regained consciousness and complained to her mother of great pain. She was still under the influence of the drugs she had been forced to take, and not entirely coherent.

Her daughter couldn't move for three days after the rape. Abu Annas came and told Nofe that she had to marry him. He told her that if she refused, he would sell her to another person. The pills made her very compliant with his wishes. Her daughter was not required to take the pills after the first time.

After watching her daughter be raped, Nofe was then raped by the legless man, Abu Waleed, under the control, facilitation and watchful eyes of Abu Annas. She did not want to talk about the incident and was not asked to do so.

Nofe and her daughter spent the night alone together, the men in the other room. The next day, and the next, and the next, for four months, both Nofe and her daughter were raped every day by the two men. Then they were separated and sold to other men. She couldn't bear to talk about being separated from her daughter. After that, Nofe didn't see her daughter again, but was resold from man to man in a series of horrific and ongoing rapes. She felt as if she was missing a part of herself.

At this point in Nofe's story, she was growing tired, pained by recalling the details of her ordeal, and some family members had entered, so it was time to stop again. I excused myself, telling her that no person should have to endure such things, and that she needed to look to God for strength, and be strong for her children, and that I would try to help her as much as he could.

She asked how telling this story would help her and her children. I explained that I would prepare portions of her story to share with people who could help her, and would discuss it with her, but that I would change the names, and she should not allow television crews in to interview her. She and her family agreed they would not even let the media inside the doorway, though there was no physical door in the doorway to keep them out.

Raymonda and the young Yezidi translator remained behind to comfort her further, and to see if she wanted to set a time to continue another day. She declined to go further, as it was growing too painful for her. She would be offered housing in the new safe house, given financial help, professional counseling, and a chance to participate in sewing dresses if she wished, through the MedEast training program.

I returned a few days later March 19th, with help for Nofe. I was warmly received by her and her family, and given a place to sit in the living room. Nofe looked better. She was calm, even smiling. To my surprise, Fani and one of her two mysterious friends were there. Her friend spoke fluent English, and was working with a portable electronic device, sitting next to Nofe. Both Fani and Nofe had their phones in their hands. I placed a basket of fruit next to Nofe and slipped some rolled up money into her hands so the others wouldn't see. Then I sat down and took pleasure in the little child on the floor with his grandfather.

All were silent. Her mother rose to go the kitchen to get some tea for him, but I dismissed himself, thanking her, saying I realized I was interrupting their meeting. It seemed Nofe was now working with people to reclaim her three children, and Fani was working with the same ones to ransom her four sisters still in captivity. It was inevitable. I would not become involved, nor make any speeches about my views. Her father saw me out to the street, as was the custom.

Raymonda visited her the next day, and found her in a puddle of her own tears in a corner of the room, so deeply depressed that she could not speak. Raymonda stayed for 15 minutes, just holding her in her arms to comfort her, then excused herself and left her to grieve alone. She invited Nofe to visit her in her rented home a block away, and to see the dress-making project.

Dr. Paul searched on the internet and found the news story in which one of the other victims of Abu Annas, a young Yezidi woman, had killed him near Mosul before September 8, 2015.

Shama

I interviewed Aishan Ali Shamoo on March 25, 2016. She had lost her husband to a brain disorder sixteen years before. When Daesh came, Aishan went with her married sons in their truck to escape the Daesh invasion of Tel Azer around nine PM. Her four married daughters left with their husbands. Her unmarried daughter Shama, fourteen, left with her neighbors in their car, before her mother left, as there was no

room in the other car. Both cars drove separately toward Jedali and bypassed Shekhmand Temple to reach the mountain sooner.

Shama was captured about a kilometer before she reached Jedali. The men and older boys were shot dead on the road where they encountered Daesh, and all the girls and young women were captured.

Four months after Shama went missing, she was able to reach her mother by telephone. Shock took hold of her mother when she heard her daughter's voice. Shama asked her mother if her brothers had survived, and where they were living. She said she was in Mosul, with other Yezidi girls. She said Daesh had not married her to any fighters by that time. She seemed emotionally numb. She said little more and her mother hardly knew what to say, other than that she loved her more than life itself, and would trade places with her if she could.

Her mother didn't know anything more about Shama until six months later, when another captured girl, Alia, who was ransomed, returned from Syria and Shama's mother visited her. When they were moved from one location to another, the two girls were separated. For 25 days Alia slept beside Shama in Mosul in captivity, and they shared their experiences before they were separated. No one has heard anything more about Shama since February 2015.

The Lost Ones

Jelan

In camps all around the Seje Village area, many former residents of Tel Azer struggled with the loss of their husbands, fathers, and sons who had been murdered by Daesh. Bargess Naiv Qassim and his brothers were all captured in their home in Tel Azer. They had decided to stay there, rather than flee to the mountain. Daesh entered their house and tried to touch one of their girls sexually. One of her male family members pulled up his Kalashnikov rifle to shoot at Daesh in her defense, and the machine gunner on top of their vehicle mowed down the whole group of men with a spray of bullets. One of the little boys said, "I hid under blankets and heard shooting; I came out and saw everyone—my uncles, father—dead." Only one adult male in his family survived. Three of the wives of the men in their family were captured by Daesh and two were later ransomed back to their families.

Jelan Burgess Naiv (her real name), age 19, was also captured and taken away. Placed in a house with Daesh fighters, she was held as a sex slave with other Yezidi girls. She was told to go to clean herself and prepare for marriage (rape). She entered the bathroom and cut her wrists. When the Daesh fighters saw her blood flowing out from under the bathroom door, they forced open the door. She was already dead. They buried her nearby. One of the other Yezidi girls held with her reported her death to her family.

A group of Yezidi men who were not related to Jelan met clandestinely after her death was reported, and swore a blood oath to seek revenge. They formed a secret Yezidi fighting group that would disappear from view, and seek to kill Daesh fighters separately from any Muslim group, the Kurdish Peshmerga or the Syrian YPG. They called their group of fighters "Jelan," in her honor.

Yuri Kozyrev

A Yazidi family holds photos of family members killed by ISIS as they tried to flee the town of Tel Azer, Iraq, March 2016. The names of the victims shown in the larger photos were, from left to right, Jelan, Bargess, Barakat, Raizan, Qassim, Barzan, and Jameel.

About the same time, another group of about 300 Yezidi women fighters, calling themselves the "Sun Ladies," formed a fighting group aligned with the Kurdish Peshmerga. They had one distinct advantage over the men fighting beside them. The Daesh fighters believed that if they were killed by a woman, they would not go to heaven. This caused them to flee sometimes, rather than engage, with a woman fighter. Another 200 or more young Yezidi women joined the Syrian Kurdish YPG forces to fight against Daesh.

Zere

The saddest news of all reached Barakat's family in Seje by telephone from a girl who had been captured and taken to Mosul, who had hid her cell phone in her clothes. She secretly called Barakat's mother's sister, who, in her unfathomable grief, recounted in turn to Barakat's mother how her daughter Zere (her

real name), Barakat's cousin, childhood playmate, and neighbor, who had visited them the evening before the invasion, had been captured by Daesh in Tel Azer. This much she already knew.

Adnan Jameel Chato/Paul M. Kingery

Zere Khuder Ismail, and her husband, Adnan Jameel Chato, in Tel Azer, Iraq, July 2014, before her suicide and post-mortem mutilation by Daesh.

Her husband's family had decided not to flee Tel Azer, thinking that Daesh rule was going to be little different than Saddam Hussein and his regime, which they had survived. Her husband's father and mother and his brothers who had hair on their face were killed on the spot, the girls in their family were taken as slaves with Zere, and the small boys were taken to be trained as soldiers.

Zere and hundreds of other Yezidi girls from Tel Azer had been taken to Talafar and to the police station in Sinjar city, and then to Mosul. Zere had been singled out for her greater beauty, and kept with other captured girls and women in a house belonging to one of the Daesh leaders. The soldiers had fought over Zere, arguing over which of them would rape her. The leader had told her to go to the bathroom to wash and prepare for her "marriage" to one of the soldiers, while he decided which of them he would give her to. The term "marriage" was always used by the Daesh terrorists in place of "rape" or "sexual slavery" despite the fact that the sexual relations would be forced, the victims drugged and sometimes bound hand and foot, often beaten, and held hostage and sold from one man to another repeatedly for ongoing sexual victimization of the cruelest type by the foulest men imaginable on the planet.

Zere had pretended to calmly obey, walking around the corner into the hallway. She knew this was the point of no return, the moment she would face the situation that she and Barakat's mother, sister, and

his wife had considered, when she would be forced into sexual slavery. She had made her decision long before about how to handle this, and was waiting for the final moment, and her last opportunity to escape the situation through the only route opened to her: death. She had quickly searched around in the hallway and found a rope, climbed the stairs, tied one end of the rope around her graceful neck and the other to the railing, and jumped off the stairs, breaking her neck.

Zere was one of several hundred Yezidi girls who chose this same escape, all other forms of escape being denied them. In their culture, they could expect to be rejected by their families and communities, who blamed the female more than the male in sexual indiscretions, and routinely stoned young women to death for having sex, or even being intimate, with someone who was not a Yezidi, and to whom she was not married, while the man was more often merely banished.

They had no concept of rape in their culture that would count the man as the perpetrator and the woman as innocent. The woman was considered evil for "allowing" the man to rape her, and worthy of death. Violent rapes of the type seen in other cultures were not seen in their culture, and men did not often pressure women for sex against their will, so there was always a presumption that sex was consensual. They had reason to expect harsh treatment. The honor of the family rested on the purity of their young women, rather than on the character and achievements of the men, as it did in nearly all middle-eastern ethnic groups. These girls did not know yet that the Yezidi community would change in response to the Daesh rapes, and accepted the girls and women back into their families.

Discovered only a few moments later, hanging by the neck in the stairwell, the life already gone from her body, all the Daesh fighters in the house had converged in a circle around her. Some had cried the kind of tears a rapist cries when deprived of his next victim. They had carried her out of the house to a clinic to be seen by a doctor, hoping he could revive her, but he had pronounced her dead. They had cried once more at this news, and carried her body away.

Then their anger had begun to rise up in them. One of them had cut her throat with a knife, photographed her face and her damaged neck, then they had carried her body outside to bury her ritualistically in the garden, with great lamentation. Afterward, they had sent the photo to her family through her Facebook account.

The family was grieved beyond imagination. Almas, Kamela, Basse, and Gule all huddled together uttering wrenching cries, throwing their hands up into the air and back down again, tears streaming down all their faces. Other women, hearing them in nearby houses, came to join them, and hearing what happened, also began to wail. The men were gathering on the sides around the women, discussing what had happened. The scene was not one Barakat could endure. He walked away from the family into the fields near the mountain to grieve in private. He controlled himself, and his thoughts, even after he was away, as long as he could, until his memories of Zere overtook him, and he fell to the ground sobbing quietly, his hands hiding his face and filling with his tears.

Zere's horrible death would leave a mark on him, changing him forever. He would measure all other grief from that moment forward against the sorrow he felt that day. Carrying that grief with him, for he would never overcome it, would deepen him, and prepare him to take on the difficult task of caring for his family

through the years ahead. With her death, a piece of each of them died. Their hearts were as empty as their stomachs. They had little will to move, to seek food, or to do anything for the rest of the day and for several days afterward. Thousands of Yezidis would come to know this same kind of profound grief and utter devastation. This portion of their experience would be hidden from cameras, from televisions around the world. No one would ever capture it so as to be moved by their deepest moments of suffering.

Chapter 9: Prospects for Liberating Tel Azer

The taking and retaking of cities usually means the complete flight of their populations, and nearly total destruction of the buildings and infrastructure. Sinjar city was an example of this. Daesh had shelled Sinjar even before they took the city, destroying many buildings and killing and wounding many of the people. The village evacuated to Sinjar Mountain en masse, like other Yezidis in villages throughout the Sinjar District.

The remaining Yezidis in Sinjar city were either killed or carried away to Mosul or to Raqqa. When the Peshmerga from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Yezidi volunteers from Iraq, and PKK and People's Protection Units from Syria retook the city from Daesh, they too shelled the city and used their new American weaponry to drive out Daesh, causing further damage to the buildings and infrastructure. There were virtually none of the former 88,000 Yezidis there to liberate.

By the time they entered the city to remove the remaining bombs and booby traps, there was little left of a once-thriving Yezidi city. The damage to buildings, mainly homes and markets, from shelling throughout the broader environs of Sinjar city and inside the city itself was extensive. The U.N. conducted an assessment after the invasion, identifying 2,383 buildings that had been bombed. They estimated that 810 buildings were destroyed, 685 severely damaged, 519 moderately damaged, and 369 possibly damaged. Four months later, only 30 Yezidi families had moved back into the city even though the mines had been removed, and they were being shelled periodically with chemical bombs by Daesh from their positions several kilometers away.

MedEast/Salim Ali Khuder

Ruined areas of Sinjar City in March 28, 2016.

Within days after Sinjar City was liberated, Yezidis began to launch revenge attacks to destroy even more houses, those of the Sunni Muslims who had lived there, who were all presumed to have collaborated with Daesh in the invasion. Daesh had marked the houses of Muslims, or instructed families to mark their own houses, apparently to protect them from Daesh fighters marauding in the village. Ironically, these marks helped the Yezidis identify the houses of Muslims, which they ransacked, pillaged and destroyed to the extent allowed by the Kurdish Peshmerga and other forces. The Yezidis also burned and destroyed the Mosques in Sinjar, which had been an ethnically mixed city. The local Sunni Muslims and Yezidis had once lived together in relative peace, but the complicity of the local Muslims in the genocide against the Yezidis had hardened attitudes against their return to the city.

Paul M. Kingery

Yezidi Peshmerga soldier Jalal Elias Naiv, who joined the fight to reclaim his village of Tel Azer, Iraq, February 15, 2015.

In the spring of 2016, a joint operation to liberate villages in the Sinjar District, and Iraq's second largest city, Mosul, was underway. It was a cooperation of US, Kurdish, and Iraqi forces, with some broader coalition support from other western nations. This raised hopes of releasing Yezidi captives, but also the risk of them being killed. The Yezidi people, and others around the world, waited and watched. Progress

was seen in retaking small villages between Mosul and the Syrian border, cutting off the supply route to, and escape route from, Mosul. The strategy was to circle the city of Mosul to isolate Daesh fighters there before moving in to take the city.

The exodus of Daesh from Mosul to Syria was already underway in March 2016, in anticipation of the planned invasion. The only route out of Mosul was due west into Syria then on to Raqqa. This was the supply line linking Mosul and Raqqa, the twin strongholds of Daesh. Rumors were circulated that Daesh was capitalizing on the desire of its residents to flee before the window to escape closed and the shelling began, charging $500 per person for the right to leave Mosul into Syria.

If this evacuation of a city with about one million people remaining was too slow, if the Kurds closed off the city too quickly, Yezidis were likely to be trapped there among increasingly desperate Daesh fighters. The outcome could be the liberation of Yezidis, or the death of more Yezidis, depending on several factors. There were few Christian families left inside Mosul then, and they were also at risk.

The Syrian Kurdish YPG began to close in on the Daesh stronghold of Raqqa on March 15 with Russian air support. They blew up all bridges from Iraq that provided access from Iraq, as well as Daesh oil tankers and oil refineries, and established positions within one kilometer of Raqqa. They dropped thousands of papers from the air telling Daesh to yield to unconditional surrender or face annihilation. In the process, they immediately liberated 30 Yezidi girls and women, whom they brought back to their base on the northern slopes of Mount Sinjar in the last week of March. A few days later, YPG liberated another group of six Yezidi girls and women from the northern side of Mosul, killing many of their captors.

On March 24, 2016, the Iraqi government and American and other allies launched “Operation Conquest” to retake Mosul from Daesh. The Iraqi army depended heavily on the same majority-Shiite-Muslim militias known as Popular Mobilization Units, or PMUs, whose heavy-handed oppression of Sunni Muslim residents of Mosul in recent years since the U.S. invasion of Iraq had led to the residents’ acceptance of Daesh as an alternative.

The Kurds, loosely coordinating with the Iraqi army in the operation, placed Yezidi fighters on the front lines of most of their battles from the start of the operation. Daesh, in opposition to the Iraqi and Kurdish forces, placed many of the Yezidi men and Yezidi child soldiers they had captured on the front lines of their battles. This assured that the coming battles on the front lines would pit Yezidi fighters against their own children and other relatives on the battlefield, leading to further decimation of the Yezidi people.

The Iraqi army started in Makmour, to the south of Mosul, where the Americans had set up a firebase on the ground, signaling a policy change from the Obama administration that had eschewed “boots on the ground” operations for U.S. soldiers. In the days following the start of the operation, several villages within range of the firebase were decisively cleared of Daesh fighters, who realized they were heavily outgunned. The Iraqi army in the south also killed many Daesh fighters, and displayed their bodies on the internet using the some of the same psychological warfare tactics that Daesh had used to great effect.

Paul M. Kingery

A young Faqier Yezidi man, Wadi, from Tel Azer, Iraq, who resettled in Seje Village, February 15, 2015.

Meanwhile, the Kurds strengthened their positions around Sinjar City to the West of Mosul, and on the eastern side of the Tigris that flows through Mosul, with American arms. The Syrian Kurdish YPG, who had cleared a pathway in August 2014 on the north of Mosul and to the West for Sinjaris to escape the siege on Mount Sinjar, were closing in on the north side of Mosul in the early days of the operation to liberate the city. They were not able to close the northern reaches of Mosul entirely in the first days of the operation. Materials, supplies, cash, and Daesh fighters still moved freely along their primary corridor between Mosul and Raqqa, Syria. Daesh was requiring a fee of $500 per person for any residents of Mosul who wanted to follow that corridor into Syria. Even so, access from Mosul to Raqqa was becoming difficult for Daesh due to the Syrian YPG and Russian presence between Mosul and Raqqa.

The Yezidi community had every reason to fear, and every reason to hope. They feared that their family members trapped in Mosul would be spirited out to Raqqa by Daesh, taking them even farther away, before the westerly escape route was closed, or worse, that their people would be massacred by Daesh rather than allowing them to be freed. They also feared that their captives in Mosul, the men and children

forced into service for Daesh, brainwashed in their "training programs," would be forced to face off against the Yezidi Peshmerga and other forces trying to rescue them, and Yezidis would kill each other.

Few worried about the ultimate fate of hundreds of thousands of Sunni Muslim Arab citizens in Mosul, who had yielded to or even welcomed Daesh and collaborated with them or joined them. The Shia soldiers in the Iraqi Army PMUs wanted revenge on Mosul Sunnis for pushing the Shia out of Mosul and letting Daesh in. Few of the Sunni Muslim Iraqi Army soldiers of southern Iraq who were in the Iraqi were entering the fray to save their own ethnic group. The Kurds had such antipathy for Arabs of all kinds that they preferred to see them diminished so that the historic Kurdish nature of Mosul (prior to Saddam Hussein's Arabization policies) could be regained. The Kurds were not about to let fleeing Arabs from Mosul enter, seek sanctuary, or settle in the Kurdistan Region. Their escape would have to be to Baaj and other Arab villages to the south of Mosul. Daesh would try to push them into its held territories in Anbar Province or Syria.

There were probably no more than ten Christian families left in Mosul by that time, as nearly all had made an exodus, and some who were captured by Daesh there and in other villages in the broader area had been freed. The fate of the remaining Christians also stood in the balance.

The Syrian Kurdish YPG closed in on villages southwest of Mount Sinjar in late March, reclaiming three villages that had been taken by Daesh on August 3, 2014. This forced the supply lines for Daesh linking Mosul, Iraq to Raqqa, Syria to move further south. The Kurdish Peshmerga still held Sinjar City to the east. This gave the Kurds control of two sides of Tel Azer, both east and west. They vowed to move next to reclaim Tel Azer.

In the last days of March, 2016, the former Tel Azer residents then living in Seje, and their relatives and friends in camps all over the region, waited anxiously to hear if Tel Azer was being liberated. The excitement was building. If it opened up, would they go back? Many said "no." It was just too dangerous in that part of the world, and their pain was too fresh. Most likely those who had better houses on Tel Azer would send someone to investigate the status of their home, and a few courageous souls who were in worse temporary situations would return to their homes if they were intact.

Aid would slowly flow into the area in small amounts, giving them some relief if they chose to live there, but likely electric and water services would not be operational and it would remain a war zone as long as the battle for Mosul was underway. Slowly the village would be able to recover, and some of the elderly would return to live out their remaining days in their homes despite risks that would remain. Young people would be more likely to look for other opportunities in the world. Some would find them. But would this subject them to Genocide number 75? Many things would have to be done to prevent this.

The few who thought they might return to Tel Azer were clear that they would never trust the Kurdish Peshmerga to guard them again, and if they did return home, it would mean building up the defenses of the village with Yezidi fighters and a significant amount of firepower that they would control by themselves. Their Temples on the mountain that were destroyed would be rebuilt, and pilgrimages to them would resume, at some point, with great caution. Warning systems would be installed using modern

technology, and evacuation routes would be prepared and clearly marked. More and newer weapons would be bought and stored, and more would learn how to use them.

Paul M. Kingery

A young Faqier Yezidi man, Shevan, who fled the Daesh invasion of Tel Azer, Iraq and resettled in Seje Village, February 15, 2015.

Chapter 10: Assessing the Needs

MedEast completed their second annual survey of Seje Village and two associated small Christian refugee camps in early 2016 over a two-month period, in January and February. The results were used to assess the needs of the residents and to enable targeted distributions of milk, baby clothes, wheelchairs, and feminine items, as well as to plan age-specific educational programming. The full name, birth year, gender, and special needs of each person were listed within their family group by house number. A unique number was painted on the front of each unfinished house, or on the road in front of each finished house. The house numbers were mapped according to location using a smart-phone application that linked to GPS. Copies of the map and the database were prepared for workers to use in aiding the residents of the village.

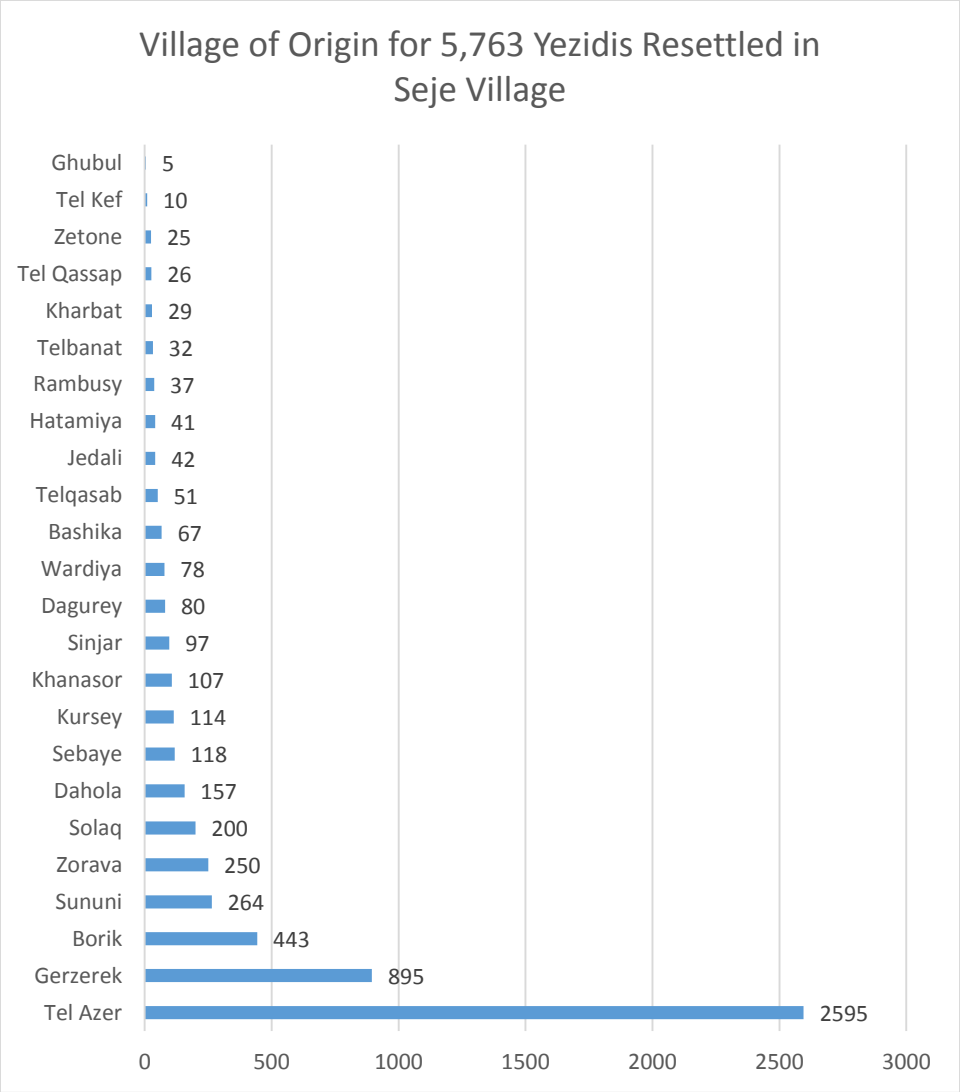
A team of two people collected data house to house to assure accurate reporting. One was an English-speaking American-trained Finance Manager, certified in Public Accounting in the U.S., a former accountant at Microsoft Corporation. The other was a Faqier Yezidi translator who spoke native Kurmanji Kurdish and English. Both were MedEast volunteers. Two other translators also helped from time to time to assure continuity and speed of completion.

The collection of data was voluntary. Nearly all people welcomed the process and provided information as requested, receiving a number on their house. Those who were wealthier and more established long-term residents occasionally opted out politely, or in three cases refused, as they were clear by then that they would not receive any aid. The refusers included one of the two muqtars, an older Christian man who operated a small market in the center of the older portion of the village.

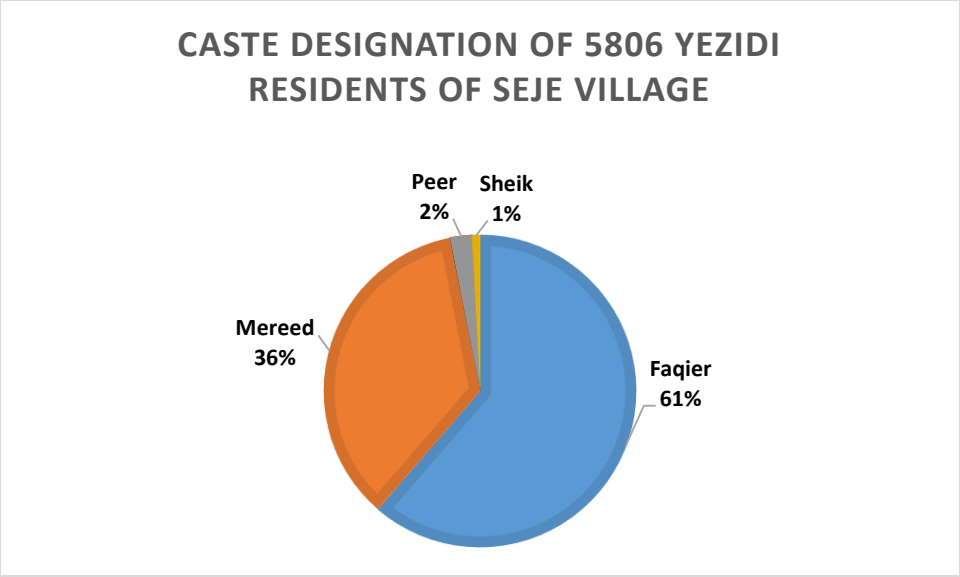
The other muqtar, Sabri, was always supportive in this and other projects, even though he derived no personal benefit from his support for MedEast. He was, himself, more interested in the wellbeing of the Christian refugees, and to a lesser extent, also the Yezidis who were now the source of many of his added responsibilities and difficulties. The once-bucolic village was now bustling, polluted with trash, which the government had stopped collecting, and was experiencing water shortages, power outages from pirated connections to the electrical grid, and a number of dramas such as fights, suicides, occasional theft by boys and young men, and a trouble-making expat or two. These he always handled deftly, calming hostilities of all kinds, and making prudent decisions, though often in favor of the Christians over the Yezidis. His salary had been paid by the Kurdish government at least until they fell as much as six months behind in salary payments by March 2016. He lived alone, his wife and children having relocated to Australia.

There were 6,982 residents counted, of which 1,139 (16.3%) were Christians and 5,843 (83.7%) were Yezidis.

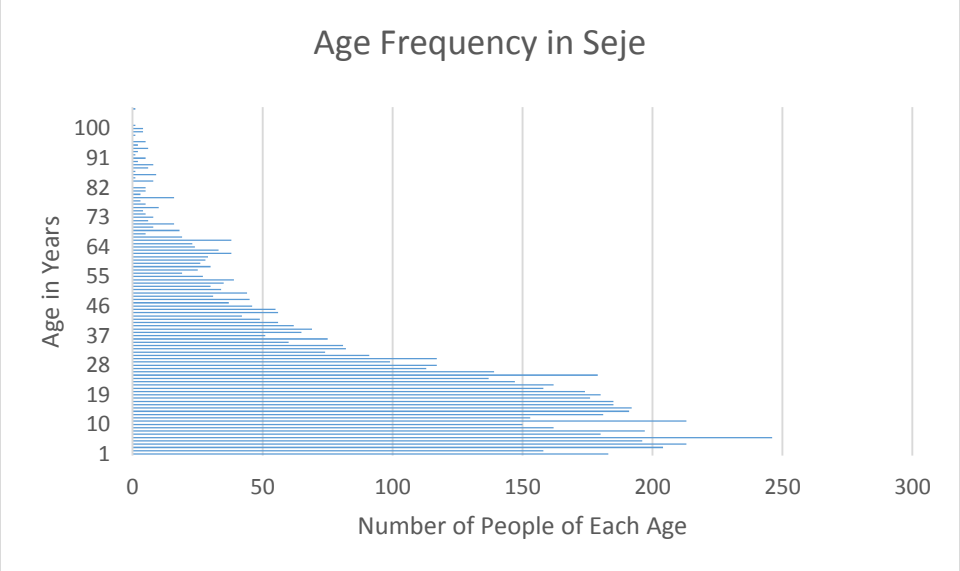
Of 5,763 Yezidis reporting their village of origin, 45.0% were from Tel Azer, 15.5% were from Gerzerek, 7.7% were from Borik, and the remainder were from Bashiqa (1.2%) or one of 20 other villages surrounding Mount Sinjar, as seen in the following chart:



The caste designations of Yezidi members of the community, and their frequency, are as follows:

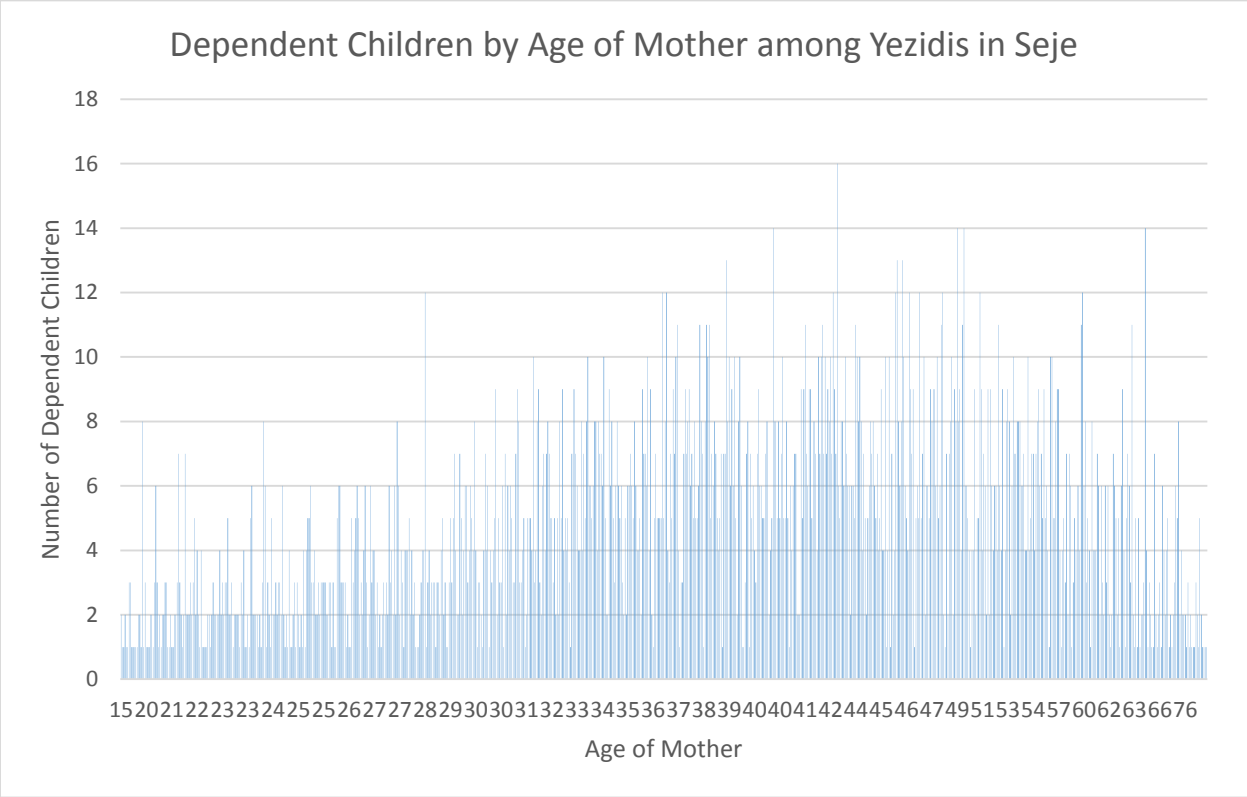


The age frequency for Christians and Yezidis in Seje is listed in the following chart:



If all the people had been living to a ripe old age over the years, the figure above would appear more like a blue rectangle than a concave triangle. In the case of Seje village, the age distribution was extremely skewed, even compared to villages in other developing countries. This skewness in age data reflected the massive number of premature deaths, a few captures of youths and children during the ongoing genocide, the low quality of health care in the rural villages from which the people fled and in the region where they are living now, a small amount of migration out of Iraq at the middle to younger ages, and possibly some preference among older family members to live in official refugee camps.

The divet (seen in shorter blue bars) at the age of ten to twelve years in the otherwise sigmoidal distribution in the figure above reflects fewer births in Tel Azer in the period immediately following the explosion of two large semi-trailer trucks full of explosives in the downtown Bazaar of Tel Azer. Those bombs killed an estimated 336 people and wounded about 1,500 others in a population of about 6,000 or more. The majority of Yezidi residents of Seje village were from Tel Azer. Within a few years after the bomb blast, the birth rate revived. A similar shortage of two-year-olds reflects the reduced births and reduced survivals of infants during the genocide and the escape over Mount Sinjar from Tel Azer beginning August 3rd, 2014. For two weeks they were trapped on Sinjar Mountain. Then they were housed temporarily in schools and parks and under bridges. When the people arrived in Seje, husbands and wives had no privacy, living in single rooms with all their children. All this public exposure lowered the birth rates during that period, though within a year it had rebounded.



A total of 975 Yezidi couples were assessed for number of dependent children who were living with them. In cases where the mother had died, the number of years since her birth was used. Many married women had not given birth, either because they had recently married or they, or their spouses, were infertile (74/975 or 7.6 percent of women). The average Yezidi mother between the ages of 15 and 65 had 4.9 children living with her in the sample of 772 mothers. This does not reflect all births for each mother, particularly at the upper ages when the older children begin to marry and leave the home. Many mothers had more than 8 children living with them, 12.3 percent (95 of 772), and many of these had even more children who had already left the home. The number of children living with each mother increased steadily up to a maternal age of 40, and began to decline by age 50. Most children were not in school, and many did not have food to eat some days in many weeks.

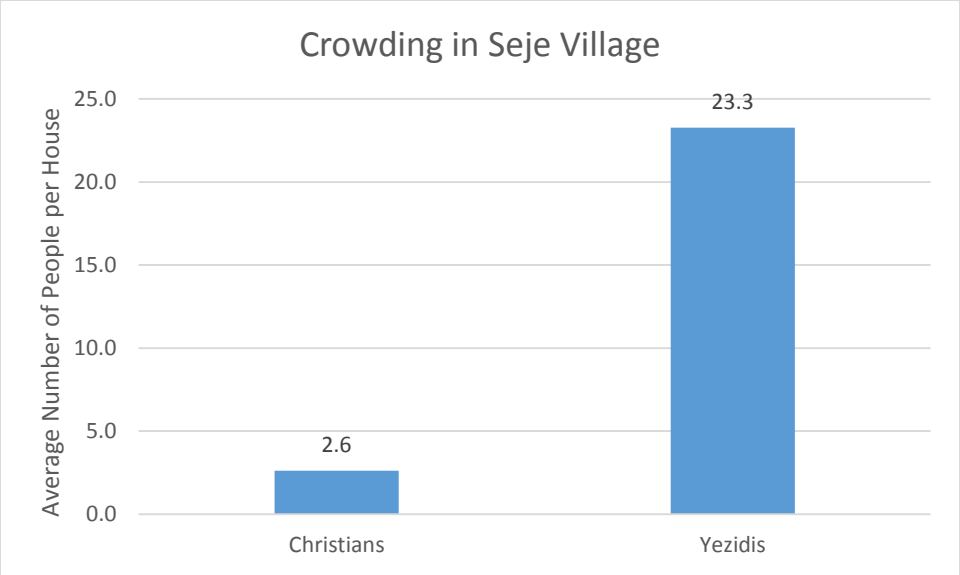
The high birthrate of Yezidis, and the large number of children of marriage age, posed a problem for Seje village. The amount of aid given per family was usually constant despite family size, so larger families had less help from organizations. Government programs attempted to allocate according to family size. Young couples searched for tents for their new families, as other forms of housing were unavailable. Over the next few years, if the Yezidis remained in Seje, they would face overcrowding in the unfinished homes they occupied. Twenty families were living in tents by the end of March, 2016, which were soaked in the rain and subject to damage from wind gusts, while new trailers provided for Christians only remained empty in the two camps associated with Seje village. Some of these tents were provided by MedEast, while others were part of larger camp construction projects or were purchased by families from those who had received them from the U.N. or other charities for $100 to $150 each.

The average age for Christians in Seje at the beginning of 2016 was 32.0 years, while the average age for Yezidis was 21.6 years. Christians generally had much smaller families than Yezidis in the modern era. While there were some intact Christian families in Seje, often longer term residents, the Christians in Seje were often the remnants of families, the younger members of which had already gone abroad. The elderly were less able to leave, and sometimes less willing. Sometimes older children remained behind to care for them. The Yezidis saw a smaller number of their younger people going abroad, as they were generally poorer than the Christians. A very few ransomed captives, young women and girls, were given free trips to Germany, but no more than three were in this category plus the mother of a ransomed eight year old. There were 108 widows among the Yezidis and 40 among the Christians living in Seje village.

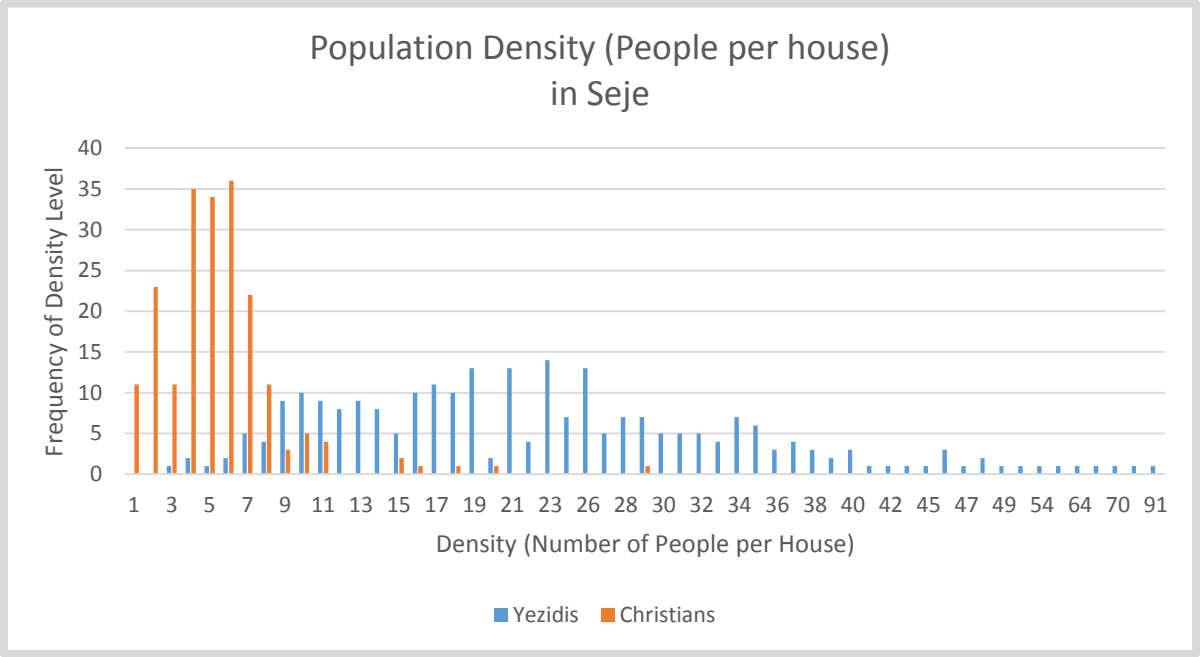
The presence of a fair number of elderly, including 26 Yezidis above the age of 92 (no Christians were found in that group), is evidence that the usual Yezidi lifestyle, simple and agrarian, can support longevity. The fact that most do not live to advanced ages leaves considerable room for improvement in the factors that cause premature death, chiefly war and genocide, poor medical care, and outward migration or capture.

Birth rates were very high in the recent calendar year, even though polygamy was rare among the Yezidis. Only eight Yezidi men in the village had two wives, and one had three wives. Families tended to be very large as birth control was rarely practiced, though not for religious reasons. Births usually occurred at home, which could lead to many poor outcomes and death of the mother and infant in some cases, so a midwife was needed for the village.

While Christians lived in finished houses or prefabricated cabins with an average of 2.6 people per house, Yezidis lived exclusively in unfinished houses lacking doors, windows, plumbing, electricity, plaster, and tiling with an average of 23.3 people per house. This extremely high crowding of Yezidis within unfinished houses was a tremendous burden to them socially, physically, mentally, and emotionally. Several finished houses and prefabricated cabins prepared for Christians exclusively remained empty despite the severe crowding of Yezidis in their dwellings.



In January 2016 Christian houses usually had between 1 and 9 people per house, with a normal distribution, while Yezidis had from 3 to 91 people per house, with a flatter distribution. Unfinished houses had four to five rooms, so fitting as many as 91 people into so few rooms, without doors between rooms, created abysmal living conditions.



The 45 most common names recorded for 2887 Yezidi males and 2955 Yezidi females are listed separately in rank order below:

Male Names		Female Names	
Saoud	62	Vian	61
Khalaf	59	Laila	60
Ali	57	Sevy	53
Hussien	49	Sherin	47
Khalid	44	Ghazale	45
Haji	41	Basima	42
Khuder	41	Khatoon	39
Ziad	41	Hadia	36
Elias	40	Aliah	32
Hassen	36	Ameera	28
Barakat	35	Delvin	28
Aedo	32	Aveen	26
Khudeda	31	Nadia	25
Qassim	30	Rania	25
Naiv	29	Hanifa	23
Adel	26	Dalia	21
Kherro	26	Mayan	21
Murad	26	Asia	20
Salim	26	Goze	19
Suleiman	26	Gule	19
Bassam	24	Khalida	19
Ibrahim	24	Halima	18
Khalil	24	Zina	18
Ahmed	23	Kamila	17
Haider	22	Na'am	17
Hadi	21	Navin	17
Jalal	20	Salwa	17
Jamil	20	Wadha	17
Kamal	20	Samera	16
Nazar	20	Amshe	15
Dakhil	19	Hana'a	15
Ameer	18	Jamilla	15
Amin	18	Khokhe	15
Khere	18	Bahar	13
Muhssen	18	Fahima	13
Fesal	17	Sana'a	13
Mahir	17	Almas	12
Saad	17	Amina	12
Zidan	17	Elife	12
Dawood	16	Khoula	11
Jamal	16	Noura	11

Shammo	16	Ahlam	10
Farhad	14	Aishan	10
Hamid	14	Ayishan	10
Ismail	14	Jihan	10

All the displaced residents were suffering psychological traumas though some were suffering more than others. There was one suicide, and several others attempted suicide, some repeatedly. There was a need for a psychologist in the village, and for periodic visits by psychiatrists with training in war-time trauma and recovery from sexual victimization.

Nutritional deficiencies stemmed from lack of vitamins. Fresh fruit and vegetables were locally available but unaffordable, and distributions were needed at least once a week for the entire village at a cost of $6,000 per distribution. Baby milk powder was needed for 250 babies whose mothers were dehydrated and unable to breast feed. Protein was almost entirely lacking from the diet of most, so beans were needed in large quantities and live chickens were needed as a regular supply to the village though most could not afford to pay for them. Frozen foods were not well accepted.

One water line was run through a portion of the village by Samaritan's Purse Organization with planning assistance from MedEast. About 75 of the homes still lacked access to clean water after that line was installed. The solution could be running a pipe from the village well, or a tractor and tank trailer to deliver water to them. The village has one water tank, and needs another to support its second deep limestone well.

There were many people with special needs in the village who were not adequately cared for. 38 people needed wheelchairs though some were provided by ZOA and VOM through MedEast. Eight people were blind, and some of these cases may have been correctable through surgery. Many had untreated asthma, back problems, stomach ailments, diabetes, hearing problems, heart ailments, high blood pressure, kidney problems, or lung problems. Four had untreated mental disabilities and lacked proper caregiving.

The government school established for Yezidis served only about twenty percent of the needs, and the classrooms were in tents without electrical power. A permanent school was needed. Moving all the students to Kurmanji education would have been more likely to assure their full participation in education, though English language instruction needed to be strengthened as well. Currently morning classes are taught in Kurmanji and afternoon classes are taught in Arabic. The governmental schooling was consistently low-quality, so private NGO-sponsored classes would be preferred for English especially, but also for the sciences. Preschool was entirely absent.

Unemployment was 95% in the village, though a range of skills was present. Vocational programs were needed to train youths. The three programs initiated by MedEast were sewing, woodworking, and agriculture. These could be greatly expanded with an interest in developing stable income production for the workers, and eventually economic independence. The agricultural project centered on fish farming, raising chickens and birds, and growing vegetables and mushrooms. Seven fish ponds were excavated, but needed concrete spillways and liners. Larger chicken houses were needed that could withstand

attacks by wild dogs and foxes. Woodworking centered on making high end mahogany tables, bed frames, shelving, and tongue-in-groove wall paneling for wealthy patrons in Dohuk and Erbil, where no solid wood furniture was available in the market. Sewing centered on making traditional dresses for Yezidi women, particularly widows, and for colorful dresses for orphan girls, as funders sometimes were willing to pay for the associated costs. Support for labor was needed for all three projects until they reached self-sustainability.

Addressing the broader unemployment issue for men with various skills, usually trades, required developing a cooperative that certified and guaranteed the quality of work, and developed brand recognition. The competition for such an entity would remain steep, and government corruption at mid-levels would likely continue to mean that low quality workmanship from preferred contractors (often relatives), would continue to prevail in the market against higher quality competition. Yet this was a logical option for increasing employment. The initial requirement would be a census of skilled tradesmen in the village, establishment of a company or a section within the NGO, and funding for administrative management.

Training in construction using concrete blocks, rebar, and forms for pouring flat concrete roofs was also needed as this was the primary means of construction and the engine of the construction field. Levels of skill would have to be measurable, and considerable training in quality control was needed. The quality standards in the region were very low, so a higher quality product held potential for marketing. Tile laying was also a needed skill, with many of the skilled Turkish craftsmen leaving the area due to lack of work since the Daesh invasion. Such work would require very high skill levels and attention to detail, which would require ongoing training, extensive supervision, and rigorous quality control. Pricing would have to be lower than the Turkish competition, due to the market preference for Turkish workers.

Many expats who briefly visited the area brought novel ideas for income generation which were impractical, like clay ovens that burned trash to heat unfinished homes with drafts rushing through them, tanks for fish farming that became so hot in summer they killed the smaller fish, and high tech energy and construction processes that required importing materials not locally available. Importing was frought with difficulties, and sometimes multiplied costs by a factor of five or more, creating problems with the government that disrupted the projects. Others pressed projects that would involve importation of goods, which had become infeasible due to the strife in Turkey, corruption at the border, and the need to work closely with the Kurdistan Regional Government, which became simply too problematic to negotiate.

The hills above Seje village are made of limestone, and a quarry was located just outside the village, owned and operated by a Kurdish company. Their business was disrupted by the economic collapse of the region in the past two years. All cut limestone was imported from Turkey or Iran, with transit across borders becoming increasingly costly. This created an opportunity for high end stone cutting in Seje that could support local workers. Inputs would include large saws and other equipment, but supplies would be locally available.

Sheep and goat production was monopolized by Turkish Kurds living just outside Seje village, who brought their animals to graze on the hills above Seje. Yezidis were slowly bringing more sheep and goats in small numbers to serve households, but no large bands had developed. One man tried to bring a small band

from Mount Sinjar, but fell into violent disputes with Christian owners of water sources and landowners and subsequently returned to the Sinjar District. Kurds will generally not buy yoghurt, milk, cheese, and slaughtered animal meat from Yezidis, due to their bias against the cleanliness of Yezidis, so most production is simply for home use, with marketing limited to other Yezidis, or to local Christians. Live animal sales from Yezidis are not frowned upon, however, and can be marketed in the local Semel and Dohuk bazaars.

A small bakery was recently built in the village, but the owner found it so heavily regulated by the government that it was hardly worth the effort. The government controlled the price of bread, and the supply of wheat and fuel, and scrutinized bakeries arbitrarily and sometimes capriciously. Specialty breads are sold by local Syrians, known for their greater cleanliness and the quality of their goods, but again, local Kurds will not likely buy breads from Yezidis, limiting the potential of bakeries and sweetshops in the village.

Conclusion

On March 14, 2016, Barakat visited my unfinished house to tell me that his brother Faisal had been taken to the emergency hospital for an appendectomy. This was treated as an outpatient procedure, and he was taken from the surgery directly home to their unfinished block house to be laid on a simple metal frame bed and tended by family until he recovered. I greeted each family member by name, and sat down next to Faisal. I made sure that he had the antibiotics that he needed to avoid infection, and that a local clinic nurse would clean the wound once a day.

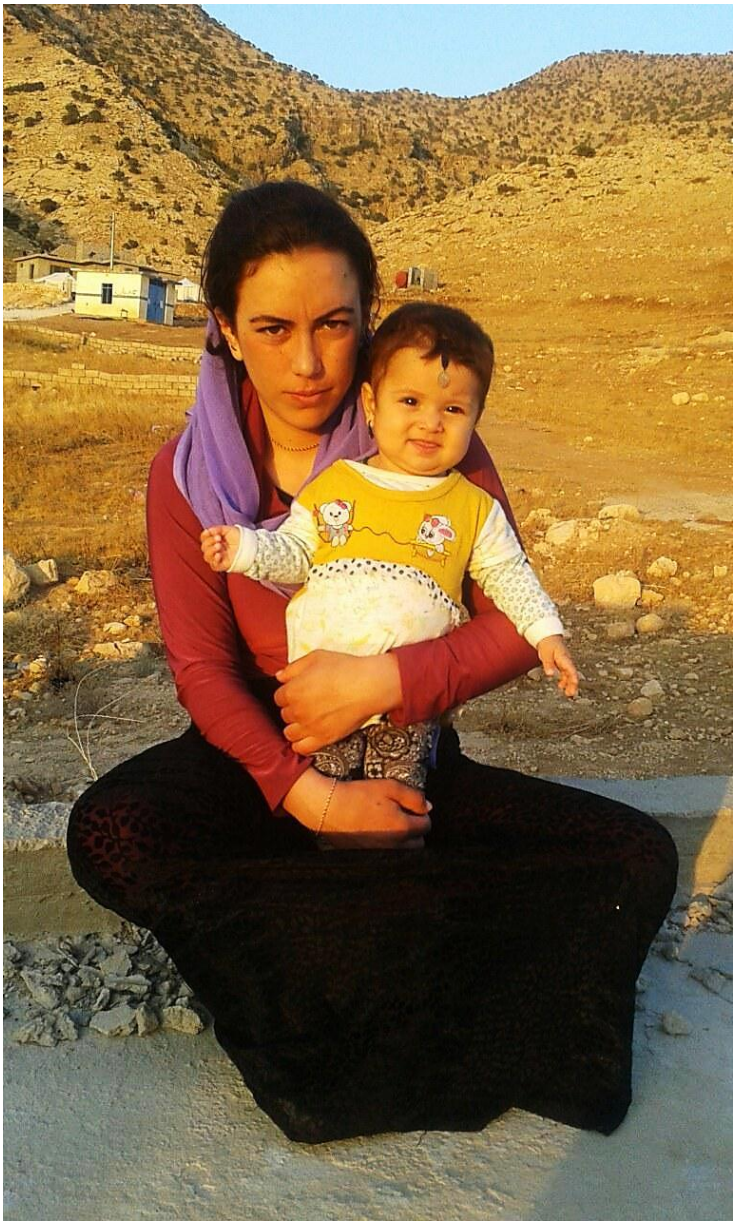
The spring rains were setting in, and it was cold and damp, but they put a kerosene heater near him and kept him covered with a blanket. He was cheerful and enjoyed seeing photos of his native Tel Azer that Barakat and I shared with him on the edge of his bed. Barakat's father urged me and my translator to stay for lunch, but we moved on to our other work, not wanting to strain the scarce food resources of the family.

Barakat shyly announced in his limited English that Almas was pregnant again. He could not contain his joy. But he knew she would be carrying their child into an uncertain future. Life would go on, no matter how difficult it was.

On May 26, 2016, the Office of Yezidi Affairs in the Kurdistan Region estimated that in August 2014 3,000 Yezidis were killed, and 6,255 were kidnapped, with **3,878 still in captivity, of which 1,800 are children**. [Report: Over 2,700 Yezidi children lost parents to ISIS, Staff Writer, Rudaw (Iraq), May 26, 2016]. About 2,700 Yezidi children lost one or both parents. About 1,750 children lost their fathers while nearly 470 have lost their mothers and another 350 children lost both their parents, 220 of those children having parents still in captivity. Over 40,000 Yezidis migrated to Europe since the invasion in August 2014.

Paul M. Kingery

A Faqier Yezidi woman, Nadeera, who fled the Daesh invasion of Tel Azer, Iraq and resettled in Seje Village with her family and remained there long-term, November 24, 2014.



MedEast/Asia Khudeda Ibrahim

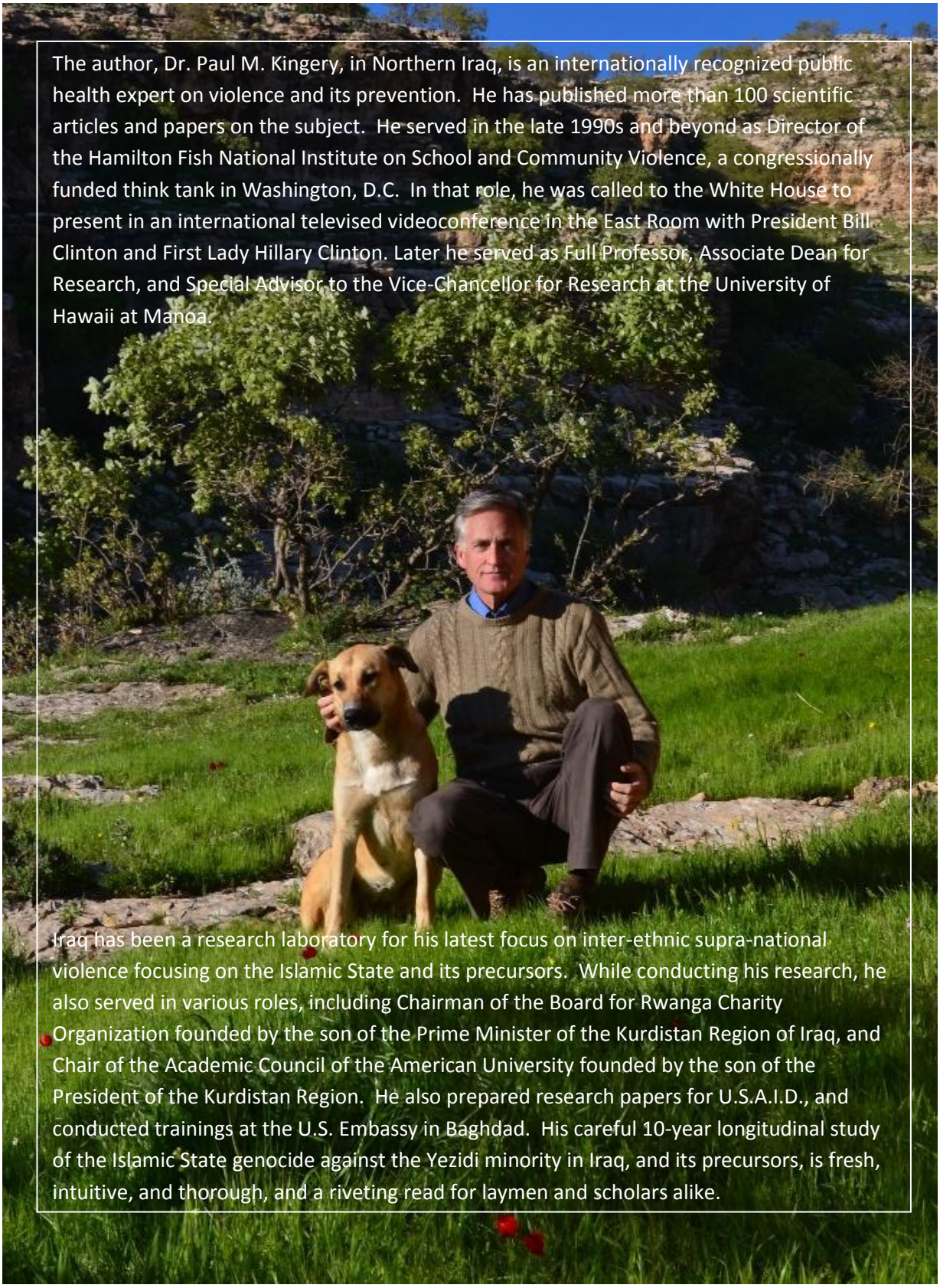
Almas Khalaf Qassim, pregnant with her second child, holding her daughter Vean, Seje Village, February, 2016

Later that same day, the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously agreed that the Islamic State (Daesh) was committing genocide against Yezidis, Christians, Kurds, and Shiite Muslims in Iraq and Syria. This followed similar declarations from Pope Francis, the European Parliament, the International Association of Genocide Scholars, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, and others. On March 17, 2016, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry declared that the U.S. government considers the actions of the Islamic State (Daesh) genocide against Yezidis, Christians, and Shiite Muslims (the majority population in Iraq). He did not include Kurds in his statement. What aid, if any, this would bring to the struggling minority Yezidis and Christians in Seje Village and other places remained to be seen.

Many would choose never to go back, leaving their mud brick houses to the desert. The Yezidi sun was setting over Tel Azer. If it were to rise again, it would find them scattered to faraway places in predominantly Christian nations, or settling in next to Christian villages in places like Seje and Bozan-Alquosh or nearer to Lalish Temple. It was the end of a golden age of freedom and safety for Faqier Yazidis. The night was now upon them. They would struggle to survive against biting poverty, starvation, and limited opportunities in horrible conditions through the night, in hopes of living until the dawn. No one could even imagine, in those, their darkest hours, what a Yezidi sunrise would look like, or where it would find them.

Those wishing to donate to the work of MedEast may do so through their web page at www.MedEast.org. MedEast is an Iraqi non-governmental organization licensed by the Kurdistan Regional Government, and not registered in the U.S., so donations are not tax deductible. The aid would benefit services and distributions to all displaced persons in Seje Village, whether Christian or Yezidi, regardless of their origin.

Photo Credit for Back Cover: Dr. Paul Kingery and his dog Bella, by Yakop Matti



The author, Dr. Paul M. Kingery, in Northern Iraq, is an internationally recognized public health expert on violence and its prevention. He has published more than 100 scientific articles and papers on the subject. He served in the late 1990s and beyond as Director of the Hamilton Fish National Institute on School and Community Violence, a congressionally funded think tank in Washington, D.C. In that role, he was called to the White House to present in an international televised videoconference in the East Room with President Bill Clinton and First Lady Hillary Clinton. Later he served as Full Professor, Associate Dean for Research, and Special Advisor to the Vice-Chancellor for Research at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

Iraq has been a research laboratory for his latest focus on inter-ethnic supra-national violence focusing on the Islamic State and its precursors. While conducting his research, he also served in various roles, including Chairman of the Board for Rwanga Charity Organization founded by the son of the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and Chair of the Academic Council of the American University founded by the son of the President of the Kurdistan Region. He also prepared research papers for U.S.A.I.D., and conducted trainings at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. His careful 10-year longitudinal study of the Islamic State genocide against the Yezidi minority in Iraq, and its precursors, is fresh, intuitive, and thorough, and a riveting read for laymen and scholars alike.