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The Story of An American Jihaadi Part One

By Abu Mansuur
al-Amriiki

Exclusive

**U.S. JIHADIST
UNVEILED**

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***Important note:** In the Somaali language the letter "C" stands for the Arabic letter "ع" ('Ayn) and the letter "X" stands for the Arabic letter "ح" (Ḥaa). The letter "O" is used to sound like "Oh," and doubling it only makes an elongated version of that sound...NOT like the sound in the word "Spoon." Instead, the letter "U" is used for that sound (i.e. the "spoon" sound) and is doubled for elongation. The letter "I" is used to sound like the "E" in "Egypt," and doubled to elongate that sound. The letter "E" is used to sound like "Egg" and doubled to elongate that sound.

Introduction

In the Name of Allaah the Most Beneficent the Most Mericful. Indeed all praises are due to the Lord of the Worlds and may He send peace, blessings, and *salaah* upon His Messenger and upon his family and companions, as well as those who follow his guidance until the Day of Judgment.

Due to the unpredictable nature of the environment in the lands of Jihaad, I decided now is as good a time as any to release the first part of my auto-biography. Although nothing special, I thought my addition to the Jihaadi library could at least provide some benefit. I find the advice of Abu Muscab as-Suuri¹ that we should document our history extremely important for a number of reasons: 1) events are happening more rapidly in the age of Globalization, 2) the war of narratives has become even more important than the war of navies, napalms, and knives, 3) with the internet, recording events and spreading reports of them has become extremely easy (so we should take whatever we can get).

Due to the necessity of security the first part of this auto-biography only reaches up to my affiliation with Xarakah ash-Shabaab al-Mujaahidiin. I'm sure everyone can understand the need for such measures. But in all reality the lands of Jihaad are all similar and history inevitably repeats itself, so I would imagine that the following information is enough of a glimpse into reality to provide the foundations for future insight.

Still alive and well (by May 16 2012),
Omar Hammami
Somaalia

Who is Abu Mansuur al-Amriiki?

¹ I have found myself affected by Abu Muscab as-Suuri's advice and example in numerous other ways as well. Following his lead I have written numerous strategy papers under the pen name: Abu Jihaad ash-Shaami. See: An Islaamic Guide to Strategy, A Strategic Study of the Prophetic Siirah, The Vision of the Jihaadi Movement and the Strategy for the Current Stage, and A Strategy for the Land of the Gathering (Syria).

According to my passport, my drivers license, my social security card, my voters registration card, my library card, and any other form of identification in the hands of the FBI the CIA and all of the rest of the alphabets: I am Omar Shafik Hammami. If that is all you wanted to know you can just stop reading here.

For those who would like to continue: since the cat is already out of the bag, I might as well set the story straight for history's sake. I am Abu "Muxammad Shafiiq" Cumar bin "Muxammad Shafiiq" bin Cumar bin Shafiiq bin Saliim bin Mustafaa bin al-Amiir, an-Najjaadi, ash-Shaami, al-Amriiki, al-Kanadi, al-Iskandari, as-Soomaali (the oldest son of the oldest son of the oldest son). That looks tough doesn't it?

Basically, as the story goes, there was a nobleman from around Saudi Arabia who decided to move to a place near Damascus called Dayr Catiiyyah. I've been told by my family that this man was from the tribe of Banu an-Najjaar. However, after a bit of personal research, I found out that the tribe in that area is called Banu Najjaad (and they are relative newcomers to Syria which would explain why the Amiir is only a few fathers back). So it's possible they made a slight typo in narration. We don't know this man's name or much about him, or much about the Najjaad tribe, at all. I attribute this fact to two things: 1) the Disbelievers/Apostates who secularized the Muslim world had a goal of removing the tribal system as part of their agenda to weaken the Muslim society, 2) when people live in urbanized environments the tribal system begins to weaken until it is no longer important to the city-dwellers anymore.

Regardless of how it all happened, that is as far back as I can determine my lineage for now. Even the two names before the nobleman, Saliim and Mustafaa, were only mentioned to me by my grandfather's brother.

However, my great grandfather Shafiiq is of course well known. It is said that he still owned a Turkish Bathhouse which was the reason for the last name: al-Xammaami. These bathhouses are not toilets like some uncultured people might think. It's like a spa resort or something of that nature which normally exists in the main market. There is a sauna, showers, a massage table, and all of that stuff. It's strictly for men and there isn't *usually* any lewdness (for those Disbelievers who may misunderstand). For those who are already snoozing, I repeat: this name is just a title that was given based upon occupation. In Syria, or rather urbanized Syria, most people do not know their tribe; they simply have a title based upon the occupation of their forefathers.

At any rate, to continue, I am told that my great grandfather was religious and a kind man. As for his son, my grandfather, then he was a successful businessman and is well-known by many elite in Damascus. He married two wives (not at the same time) and had 9 children (4 from the first wife who died, then 5 from the one who is still alive). Although he made Xajj at least once in his lifetime (I hear more than once), he was not a very religious man. He died around February of the year 2012 and Allaah Knows best what he died upon.

This last detail, my grandfather's unreligious nature, is an extremely important detail when it comes to understanding who I am. My grandfather did not raise my father and aunts and uncles in a strict religious manner. He tended to raise them more based upon the Arab cultural practices of the time. Of course, this can only lead his children to become anything but religious. There was one exception to the rule however: Rafiiq. He was a very intelligent young man who had an unusual religious streak. He became affected by the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwaan al-Muslimuun) early on and he decided to enter the Syrian Air Force. It was a common strategy of the Ikhwaan to attempt to topple governments by penetrating deep into the military, and the Air Force was one of the most influential wings of the military. Not only did he enter the most influential part of the military, he also managed to become a high ranking officer (and he was one of the youngest to reach that rank). Regardless of his original intentions for taking such a position and his actual ideology, once the fighting between the Ikhwaan and the Syrian government started, the dictatorship only looked at whether someone was praying five times a day to decide whether or not he should be put in jail. Thus my uncle spent over 20 years in a tormenting hell of a prison. Despite the hardship he did not change his beliefs in the least. Now, by the grace of Allaah, he is free and I ask Allaah to protect him and guide him.

As for my father, then he had also intended to enter the Air Force but he received a visa to study in the United States instead. Unlike his brother Rafiiq, my father was not interested in the ideas of al-Xasan al-Banna or Sayyid Qutub. My father wanted to become a successful doctor and make a life for himself. He left for America at a young age (still in his late teens) with only a bit of money in his pocket. He was accepted into the University of South Alabama, but the tuition was to be paid for by him alone. So he began working long and hard jobs to provide for his education. At one point he was working on some dredge boats, other times he was washing dishes at local restaurants, and so forth. To make a long story short, he became a successful civil engineer (but not a doctor because he had to change his mind due to some technicalities that I don't remember now).

Enter my mother. Somewhere in this whole mix my father managed to meet my mother. She was a typical southern protestant girl which attracted my father's conservative background (which was, as I mentioned above, due to Arab culture instead of Islaamic teachings). Her name is Debra Elizabeth Hadley. Her father is Martin and her mother is Glennis McGill. Both the Hadleys and the McGills are of Irish descent but that is about all I know about that side of my lineage. I don't know my great grandfather's name from the side of my grandfather but I do know that most of my relatives from that side were bootleggers and they were known to be rowdy. My great grandfather from my grandmother's side used to give us money to buy candy from the gas station (nickels and quarters) so we used to call him: Nick-nick Papa. However, my great grandmother from my grandmother's side (Ruth) used to call him Reese. The McGills, in contrast to the Hadleys, were a bit well-off and more respected. It's no surprise then that they were a bit angry when their daughter Glennis married Martin Hadley. They had five children (two girls and three boys) from which my mother Debra is the eldest.

I don't know if the reader is following nicely up to this point, but he should realize that this is a very strange combination. An Arab from Syria marries a little southern belle from Alabama! This is another important detail in understanding who I am.

My mother was in college as well and she later became a primary school teacher. Somewhere, throughout all of that she had my sister Dena Lutfieh Hammami. Lutfieh (pardon the spelling if it's wrong Dena) was the name of my father's biological mother; the first wife of my grandfather Cumar. Three years later, she had yours truly.

All I can say about my early childhood is that I was brought up like most of the privileged children in America. My parents cared about me and my sister and tried to raise us the best they could (according to their conflicting standards of good). Since my mother was working, she couldn't tend to us every second of the day and instead we were put in expensive daycare centers which used to teach us pre-school type things.

When I was very young my father took us to Syria where I remember being kissed a lot and thrown in the air to the joy of my relatives. In fact, I don't remember when that trip took place exactly (I think my mom told me I was three). It's quite possible I am remembering a later trip. But it's not important.

I remember that I used to get into trouble a lot in pre-school. I used to bring whistles and toys to the playground by smuggling them (unsuccessfully most of the time) in my pockets. I remember a friend of mine named Brandon who used to slide on his knees to rip up his jeans. I also remember a little boy named Carlos who used to like to kiss the boys! I found out later on in life that I had spent my time with older kids because I used to bite the children my age when they tried to play with my toys. They decided to send me to children who would bite me back. I think that influenced my upbringing. I find that I tend to take older and more mature friends than the rest of those my age. Also, I remember struggling to read those little books about the cat in the hat and the bug in the rug and Jack, Jill, and the hill. Along with my mother reading to me at a young age and encouraging us to check-out library books, this might have strengthened my linguistic skills (despite the lousy bit of literature this book will probably end up being, I usually score the highest in grammar and reading on those SAT tests).

In another school, in which Brandon attended as well, I remember I used to have a bit of a crush on a girl named Lacey. I also, had a bit of a hatred for a kid named Zack and his friend Preston. Once I called Preston behind a gas tank to "tell him something". When he came I punched him! As punishment I was kept from watching the same musicals and cartoons we used to watch daily, so I didn't care too much. Once, Zack was pestering me so I threw a dirt clod at him. It hit him square in the eye. The teacher called us over to her and then told Zack that he deserved it. Ha ha. Another time I was invited to a girl's birthday party, named Stevey (yeah, it's a girl), and Zack was in the pool with his little floaties on. I saw a look in his eye and I cried until my mother took me back home! Ha ha. Another time, Brandon, who was supposed to be my friend, decided to kick me in the nose with his cowboy boots. I never understood why he did that. There was a little girl who was a bit of a tomboy who gave me a refrigerator magnet in the shape of Wisconsin. She told me one

time that if I do not eat the little seeds of those 'V' shaped weeds she will not be my friend. I told her: So what.

That was just a window into my early childhood.

Something that really shaped me, however, in my early childhood was the fact that my mother used to take me and my sister to Church. That fact actually shaped all of us... the whole family. I don't really blame her for that in the way that a son could blame his mother. I can only blame her from the perspective of a Muslim blaming those who do not follow the true religion of God. She felt she was doing the right thing for her children.

This fact did not seem to be as secretive as my father made it out to be later on in life. My father was not a religious man in those days. He did not pray or go to the Masjid. In fact we used to celebrate Christmas in the house as well as birthdays. Also, my mother used to tell him she is going to church and she would take us along with her (while 'hiding' our church-clothes). Of course she used to say that we were only going for Sunday dinner (which we did used to eat, along with bacon and pork sausage) but I guess my father just trusted her. Once, I came home with a little wall decoration that had some Bible verse or something on it. My father asked me: 'Where did you get this,' and I lied: 'From a Church parade that came in front of our house.' That was the best I could come up with. My mom used to tell us that we have to keep our religion secret from our father. So when he asked me that question in a serious manner my natural instinct was to lie. My father was not fooled. He became angry and I think he decided not to go to my grandparents' house again.

Regardless, we still continued to go to church. I was "saved" (as the Christians would have us to believe) and baptized in the Perdido Baptist Church. I used to tell my grandmother that I'm going to become a doctor so I can do missionary work. I used to read the Bible some times and I was the best student in Bible school. I memorized the names of the books of the Bible and all of the little verses that are used for Christian creed. During Christmas holidays we used to go to my grandparents house to meet with the extended family and celebrate.

I also used to spend that time (Christmas holidays) deer hunting like good old boys. My accuracy with the shot gun those days was not as good as my accuracy with the AK though. Let's just say I missed my good share of deer. I used to climb trees, chop 'em down, hunt squirrels, build forts, rafts, and so forth. It was an escape to the quaint country from my snobbish suburban atmosphere.

I used to spend a lot of time with my grandfather, Martin. He was a hilarious man. Maybe that stoked my love for humor. But he was not religious at all. He used to drink six packs of Budweiser like water. He used to smoke pack after pack of Marlboro as if it was air. He had been in a number of bar fights. He had also been in the Navy for a while. He used to get sea sick and I guess he probably didn't like the discipline so he went AWOL. Eventually the Vietnam War came up or something of that nature and people started ditching the draft. He had a friend that worked with him at the butcher shop who put his hand in the meat grinder in order to be excused. He used to have a hook which might have

actually helped him in his work as a butcher. My grandfather, on the other hand, had some “hunting accident” where he lost his foot. Later on he had some car wrecks and his leg was amputated up to the thigh. He used to have a fake wooden leg and sometimes he would just use crutches. Eventually he developed cancer from his lifestyle and he was in and out of the hospital. I saw him on his deathbed having cigarettes put in his mouth for him. He looked at me and told me that he loved me. As far as a human is concerned I used to really love the man. But as a Muslim I can only say that he lived and died upon a very bad form of sin and disbelief. Even for Christian standards it is difficult to assume that he is to be forgiven. He used to yell at the preacher when he came to the house to call him to “salvation.” The preacher didn’t forget that. He said something about my grandfather at his funeral that really angered my grandmother. Anyway, he was a Disbeliever and he died upon that. So there is nothing left but God’s Justice.

My grandmother became a nervous and lonely woman after the death of my grandfather. As far as who she is... I don’t know much about how she used to be as a young girl but history tells us that she had somehow married a very rowdy man at a very young age. However, as time went on she became more and more religious in her old age (although she still remained married to Martin and continued to deal with his drunken fits for many years till his death). Now, after his death, she still goes to church and tries to help others when possible. An example of that is that she used to take care of her mother, Ruth, on her death bed despite the difficulty of that task. Its worth mentioning that Ruth used to complain a lot, even before becoming extremely old, and she even became a bit crazy there at the end (Alzheimer’s or something). When I would visit her she would tell my mother that a little Arab man had just come over to her bed and kissed her. Anyway, to close the chapter about Glennis, what I can say about her is that although she is a typical WASP conservative (maybe prejudice) country old lady, she is still always telling me that she is praying for me and from my part I’m also praying for her.

As for my uncles, it seems they have embarked upon the same path as my grandfather for the most part. Most of them smoke and drink, except for one of them. He tried to clean himself up (due to the wishes of his Hawaiian wife) and eventually became a pretty healthy guy. They also did the military thing like my grandfather, but they were a bit more successful. One was in the Air Force and another was in the Navy for a few years. The one in the Air Force is very much opposed to Islaam, but the other two are just not interested in things that go beyond the scope of their everyday life. I ask Allaah to guide them.

Keeping up the heritage, my aunt used to be a bit of a partying type herself. She took the road of my grandmother for a while and got mixed up with men that drink and are not interested in “making a life” for themselves. Eventually she woke up though. Now she is a pretty successful woman who is married to a pretty successful cowboy (literally he has cows). She asked me a few times about Islaam, but that is about as far as it goes.

My cousins are of different backgrounds. Some of them are of Hispanic background (cousins through marriage only), another is Hawaiian (half of course, from the mother's side), and some are just “white” (for lack of a better word). Some are still stuck in the “small town” mentality of Perdido, Alabama and others have a broader outlook. Some of

them have actually become successful; married with children and good jobs. But I can't really point at any of them as being religious (I mean religious Christians). I grew up with them and I used to love them dearly. But it was difficult for them after the death of my grandfather to have the same type of family unity we used to enjoy. There was also the fact that they found it difficult to deal with a Muslim (me) in the family. Some of the rift, however, was actually from my side. I personally had to distance myself from their beer, religious celebrations, and sacrilegious comments.

Now going back to me...I remember a bit of kindergarten. I used to talk a lot (which hasn't changed). So my teacher Ms. Dumas decided that I should be "isolated." That was a very evil thing to do. All of the kids used to play games and I was at a table by myself with a puzzle. I still used to talk to the other kids when the teacher wasn't looking though.

My first grade teacher was Mrs. Adams. I remember I used to get angry (even from kindergarten) and I would be sent to the principal's office. So Mrs. Adams told me to count to ten if I get angry or to just stomp my foot or something. So one time she made me angry and I began yelling "1, 2, 3, 4..." while stomping my feet! Of course, I still had to go to the office. Most of the time it was to write the same sentence over and over 100 times. "I will not stomp my feet and yell at the teacher."

I think having the IRA on one side of my family tree and al-Qaacidah on the other might have given me a bit of a bad temperament.

At any rate, I was from the best in the class in reading, math, and art (and so forth). And that continued through second grade as well. My second grade teacher was Mrs. Lacey. She used to love me. The thing about her class was that my mom's classroom was just two rooms down the hall. Once I didn't understand a worksheet or something so I put the paper in my shirt and walked to my mom's classroom to get the answers! That wasn't my usual practice (i.e. cheating), but I didn't like getting less than perfect grades from a young age. I think the teacher knew but she just liked me. Once I got angry and started throwing my chair down and stomping out of the room. She just looked at me and laughed.

My third grade teacher was Mrs. Jones. I think she liked me a bit as well but she was a bit smarter than the other teachers. She decided that the reason I talk in class and make people laugh while they should be doing their work is that I am always the first one done with the work. It wasn't like I was just answering the questions quickly to play around. I used to get some of the highest grades. One time she paddled me in the presence of my mom and till this day I don't really remember why she did that. But after that incident they took me for an IQ test. They never told me my score, but I was soon taken to advanced classes. That class used to teach us different languages and we used to answer "mind-benders." It was a really fun class but it was only once a week. (My teacher for that class through 4th and 5th grade was Mrs. Campbell and she dedicated 'Did you ever know that you're my hero' to us at the school talent show. Nice lady.)

There was one incident that occurred around that time. My friend was putting round potatoes on a spoon and then stepping on the spoon. The potatoes would fly up and hit the

bottom of the table. I thought that was a good idea. I tried it and my potato flew into the lap of one of the teachers. I was taken to the principal's office where I lied through my teeth for a few hours (until the bell rang). I told the principal, Ms. Bigsby, that the spoon dropped, then the potato dropped, then I laughed at a joke and stomped my foot.

In fourth grade and fifth grade we started having multiple teachers for different subjects. Those teachers used to like me but I'm having a hard time remembering the names. Once Mrs. Flanoy, as I think it was, told me that I should sit next to her at lunch. I think she was just saying that she liked me, but all I knew was that it was also a tactic used by teachers to punish rowdy children. I became super angry. I was thinking: this time I didn't even do anything wrong. I started slamming lockers. She just laughed and told me to forget it. She said she just wanted company.

In sixth grade my teacher was Mrs. K (Katsimpales or something like that) and also a second teacher (forgot the name but maybe it was Mrs. Miller). This whole time (up till this grade that is) my education was being carried out in the city of Fairhope where my mother was a teacher, although we were actually living in the city of Daphne. Both of those cities are suburban towns outside of the main city of Mobile (which is the second largest city in Alabama and it is known as the Port City). Things were pretty normal throughout this grade except for the fact that the elite children I used to be with were in another class that year. I think that was an act on behalf of their parents, or maybe it was a tactic of the teacher. Either way, I started having different feelings in that grade. Maybe it was because of the change of friends (or lack of friends). I didn't have a problem making friends, but I didn't like having friends that were less intelligent than me. So I started having a lot of thoughts like: 'What is going on in the brains of these other children?' I used to watch them at break and lunch and their conversations were about nonsense. I remember going from group to group one day asking them: 'What are you talking about?' When I didn't get any productive answers I felt very strange.

Fortunately that weird period didn't last very long. My sister and I had been very active soccer players from a young age. We were both star players. So there was one night where my sister (who was now in the ninth grade) wanted to go somewhere with her boyfriend. Yeah, her part of the story has been a bit left out here. My sister and I were pretty close. She likens it to us being a bit like twins. We had tons of inside jokes and shared experiences. Anyway, she was going through some serious issues because my father was trying to tell her to dress modestly and not to talk to boys without explaining to her that this is because God told us so. He would just tell her that is the way it is and you have to do it. She looked around and found that no one from her disbelieving friends had those rules and she rebelled. My mother, however, was not as much of a stickler about those rules and she used to help my sister weave in and out of them at times. My sister took advantage of that as well. So my mother became angry that night for some reason and she left me and my sister in Fairhope. We both eventually came home by getting rides from friends and we found out that we were grounded from playing soccer. Unknown to our parents, however, we both had some money and we (at least I) could not miss the weekend soccer games. We told our parents we are going to the neighbor's house and we paid some people twenty dollars to take us to the soccer field. My sister ditched me and went to her boyfriend's

house. I was confused to find her missing from her soccer game and when I called she told me “she is coming very soon”. During this fiasco our neighbor’s came knocking on the door asking where we were because they wanted to play ball or something. Our parents realized the plot and we were busted. This time, we were told that we must change schools.

This is another serious turning point in my life. I went from being one of the most popular children in school to becoming a virtual no body. For the first time in my life I was standing at the break area without a single friend. I almost started crying. During this period I had also been going through some other changes. I began dressing more like a ‘skater’ and acting less preppy. That was mostly because of my sister’s influence. However, in the new school, Daphne, being a skater meant that you actually had to skate. I tried that for a while but it wasn’t my sport. I also had a bit of a crush on a ‘preppy’ girl so I left that whole scene and became somewhere in between the two styles. It didn’t take long for me to acquire new friends. By the seventh grade I was the class vice-president. That did not delight the teacher in charge of the Student Government Association because I was known to have my bouts with the teachers. That particular teacher (a Cajun named Mrs. Dryden) had a go with me a few times. I finally ended up crying one time and telling her that I don’t know why she hates me. Ha ha. Largely if I felt the teacher was singling me out or trying to oppress me in some way I would become more hell for her. However, when the teachers liked me and just rolled with my jokes, I tended to respect them and I tried not to disturb the class. Most of the time I just couldn’t let a good opportunity to tell a joke pass me by.

By eighth grade I think I was the most popular guy in school (that could be a big headed statement but I think it is backed by truth). I used to be a social butterfly. I would hop from circle to circle and associate with all of the different types of people. When I was in seventh grade I was known by people a grade ahead of me, so by the time I reached eighth grade I think all of the grades below me definitely knew me as well. Even people from other schools used to know me by name. The main reason was that I was a funny guy. I also didn’t just do what everyone else was doing. I had a specific style of my own. I remember cases in which parents would come up to me and say: Oh, you must be Omar!

There was a side story going on throughout these past few years. I had a teacher named Mrs. Hirsch (I always get the spelling wrong). This lady was a bit of an inspiration for me in many ways. As I said before I was placed in advanced classes. In Daphne this particular class was not once a week (as it had been in Fairhope till around sixth grade) but rather it was a particular hour of each day. And since this particular teacher was specialized in literature, the advanced class had a lot to do with that subject. So she used to make us write, write, write, and write. I’m sure she would red mark 90 percent of what I wrote already. ‘Don’t use ‘very’,’ ‘Well’ is a hole in the ground,’ ‘That’s passive voice,’ etc. She used to like me though. It was something that transgressed words. Everyone knew it. I remember one time she told the class that she used to have an Arab student with beautiful green eyes that made her feel nervous when she is teaching. I didn’t know who she was talking about because I always felt that my eyes were brown (although they become a bit greenish in certain lights). She also told the class one time that if anyone had a writing style it was me. She used to call me: lesser god Omar (which is despicable Shirk and disbelief

but I'm mentioning it here to show how much she liked me). When I became angry I was allowed to simply leave the room and she was cool with that. Many times I was allowed to eat in class or do things that other students only wished to be able to do. As far as I know I don't think they disliked me for that. At least they used to still laugh at my jokes.

She gave me a passion for learning. Or at least she increased that passion. And she had us study other religions and ideologies as well. In fact, she had converted to Judaism (which is actually a big detail in understanding who she is) and I remember doing a research on Judaism for the class. She also had us do a lot of public speaking. She groomed me for one contest and she helped me until I became second in the county. Everyone said I should have won it and that the judges were biased, but it's all good.

This relationship completely flopped after eighth grade for a number of possibilities (mainly two); marking another serious turning point in my life. This is going to require a bit of back-ground...so please prepare for a long explanation here:

There was a kid that used to come to his grandparents' house (across the street from us) during the summer. His name was Charles. This guy was a criminal simply put. He used to dabble in drugs and theft and he had been in prison multiple times. From around seventh grade or so my sister and I had begun to hang out with him and his cousins during the summer. He had a cousin named Michael and another girl cousin named Candice. My sister had already been experimenting with drugs so this was just another opportunity for her. For me, it was a first time. I was just trying to be cool and do what my big sister is doing (just like I had already taken the 'skater' style in sixth grade because of her). I will save us all the details of those times. The crazy thing about these friends was that they used to go to Church with their grandmother and they were involved in Church activities. Mostly Charles just wanted to find girls and to please his grandmother who used to give him money. I was just along for the ride and to follow the footsteps of my sister. On one such day, my father found out that we were at Church. He came to the Church and took us home and he promised to make problems for Charles' grandparents. His grandfather (who used to be a professional boxer) later came to the house and challenged my father (who was in much better shape than him) to box. My father said fine, but we do it my yard. My father was setting him up for a legal crisis. That never happened. What did happen is that we got into some serious trouble. My father started locking all of the doors and the windows. When we saw that we fled across the street once again. My father realized that this would have to be handled more politically than he expected. He sat us down (after we were talked into going back home) and asked us why we were going to Church. I began to cry and I told him openly that: 'I am a Christian!' I think that struck him deeply. He had been a 'Muslim' his whole life without ever thinking about what that meant, but he knew that it was a must to be Muslim. But now he was seeing his children becoming other than Muslims before his own eyes. That caused him to think a lot about his life and the reason for life. He began thinking that his children are going to Hell if they don't become Muslim. He then began thinking that he too should become a good Muslim if he wanted to escape Hell.

My dad made connections with the local Masjid and he found out that they have weekend school. That was perfect. He thought that he would just put me in that school and I would automatically just become Muslim. The idea wasn't so bad except for the fact that they placed me in the class of 7 year olds. That too wasn't so bad except for the fact that those 7 year olds knew more than me about Islaam and the Arabic language. That was not a common experience in my life. I was the one who was the best of the class and the most intelligent. How could I be showed up by some little kids?

Of course I did what anyone in my situation would do...I ran away. Of course, having no where to run to, I ran to my grandparents house. The same night I was back at home! But that was a clear sign to my father that this weekend school is not going to work. Instead he got a little red book called 'Basic Islaam' or something like that and told me that every Saturday we will read from it. I didn't like being kept from my friends on the weekends nor did I like that he was trying to take me away from Christianity, so I decided not to listen. When he would read I would sleep. Except for a few times in which he would ask me the questions at the end of the chapter. My passion for learning could not allow me to fail those little tests. Regardless, my father changed the tactic anyway. He told me to read instead. It's pretty much a given that the person reading can not sleep.

I began learning the meaning of Tawxiid (monotheism) and the history of the Prophets and many questions that had bugged me about Christianity began to become clear. I remember asking my mother after coming back from Church one day: 'Mom. How can God be three and one at the same time?' She told me: 'You will know when you get to heaven.' That didn't satisfy my hunger. I also used to wonder why we have the Old Testament, which is full of the names of the Prophets, and then the New Testament which is just about Jesus (peace be upon them all). It was as if the Bible was a mix of two different religions: the religion of the Jews and the religion of the Christians. When I learned from Islaam that God had sent all of His Messengers to tell the people to worship Him alone, things became clear. I remembered how the Pharisees had changed the teachings of Moses and Jesus was rebuking them. I remembered how Jesus became angry and kicked them out of the Temple. Moses had come to teach the Jews to worship Allaah alone, but they were constantly changing the teachings of Moses. Then Jesus came to straighten out all of those misunderstandings. It was no longer a mystery. The people who came after Jesus simply did the same thing. They began changing his teachings and telling people that Jesus is God or the son of God (we seek refuge in Allaah from such disbelief). So it was necessary for Muxammad (peace be upon him) to come and clarify these things to mankind.

I began to sympathize with my father and his belief. I remember in the summer of my seventh grade year I went with the president of the class (as I was the vice-president) for a vacation. During the trip his parents began discussing what Islaam meant. They thought that Islaam meant to worship Muxammad. At that time I did not count myself as a Muslim but I couldn't let the facts become muddled without clarification. I told them that my father is a Muslim and I know what he believes. It was somewhere around that time that I laid in my bed before sleeping one night and I decided to pray. That was not strange because as a Christian I used to pray before sleeping on many occasions. But this time it was different. Instead of saying: "In Jesus's name I pray, amen," or "through the precious blood of

Jesus,” I decided to call upon God alone. I decided that that was the only way to find out the truth of the matter. I said: Oh God, please guide me to the correct religion from these two religions. I also remember having strange dreams at that time. I was climbing a mountain and entering caves at the different levels. Each cave had a devil. Eventually when I reached the top there was a bright light in the cave. I even had a dream that my mom was barbecuing me and my sister on a very huge grill. Ha ha. At any rate, I began talking about Islaam with other people and then saying: “We believe,” instead of saying: “They believe.” I also started to pray with my father sometimes, because I had already learned how it was to be done. Sometimes, though, when I saw him going to pray I would hide or pretend not to see him praying. I would pretend to be very interested in the TV although the reality was that I was lazy or something.

It was the summer of the eighth grade year when I went to Syria. My cousins were very happy to see me, but they did not know who I was exactly. They must have heard that my mother was teaching us Christianity so they started to try to teach me how to pray. I told them I already know and I showed them that I knew. I used to like one aunt and her children more than the rest of my aunts and cousins. This was my father’s full sister Qamar. Her husband was a lawyer and he had gone to Xajj and used to pray the five prayers daily. Her son whose name was Cumar, like myself, used to pray with his father sometimes and I would join them. It was around that time that he began teaching me some small chapters of the Qur’aan. But more importantly than learning those chapters was a day in which I prayed all five prayers in their times without missing any of them. I think that was the day that Imaan entered my heart. I felt so good that day that I promised to always pray my prayers on time. Of course, there were times when I was a bit late for some, but for the most part I upheld that promise.

When I came back from my vacation I had become a different person but I was placed back into my old environment. It was like a struggle of two worlds. The drugs, the girls, the friends, the TV, and everything hit me with a big slap. Due to the blessings of Allaah, I managed to hold on to my prayers. I even went to the high school for some mandatory meeting before starting my ninth grade year with an Islaamic hat on. My friends laughed at me but I didn’t care. Mrs. Hirsch was there that day and I think it was that year that the relationship flopped.

So that’s how this ties back in to the fall out with Mrs. Hirsh. I can’t blame it all entirely upon the fact that I became Muslim though. It was more of a sense that I had become conservative while she had always taught us to be liberal in our thought. But beyond that there was another possibility: I think she was having marital problems and I was taken as the symbol of all that is wrong with males to vent her aggression.

No matter what the real cause was, she started to dislike me very noticeably and I felt hurt. I responded by pretending that I did not like her as well. Then she left the school and went away.

Ninth grade was a really transitional year. I think it was the end of that year when I realized that the sun is setting at a different time and that the time for the Noon prayer is going to finish before I can make it home at around 3:30. My father came to the school and talked to

the teachers and explained that I needed a place to pray. The first day they gave me a private room and then they told me after a few days that I would have to pray in the library. That would have to be thanks to Mrs. Mcmeans, who was an atheist evolutionist anti-religion activist. Up until that point, no one had ever seen me praying. I used to tell them that I was Muslim, but that is about all of the Islaam they could see from me. In fact, I was elected president of the ninth grade class that year because I was still very popular (although they tell me it was the sophomore year, so I could be confused, but the point is the same). But now was the test. I would have to pray in front of all of my friends despite being the only Muslim in a southern suburban town. God gave me strength. I went to a corner and prayed the four units of the Noon prayer during one of my classes. Then for some reason I could only find time during my lunch time. So I would pray and then go to socialize with my friends.

I think it was my tenth grade year where things became really clear. The summer before that year I went to Syria again and this time I was going to the Masjid all of the time and meeting with religious practicing Muslims. Unfortunately, I think I ended up mingling with some Sufis that summer, but it didn't really affect me so much.

When I returned for my tenth grade year I found that I had different classes than most of my friends. So that only left me lunch time and break time and the weekends to socialize with them. Lunch time was taken up partially by prayer, and the weekends were taken up partially by Friday nights and Saturday mornings at the Masjid (while my friends went to Church on Sundays). This distance from those "friends" caused me to realize a lot of things. Those "friends" only cared about me so long as I was in their face making them laugh. They also only cared about me so long as I was a Christian or something close to it. That led me to use more of my lunch time for prayer and remembrance of God. The last resort I had to socialize was break time and by that point I had become so alienated that I began praying during that time as well. I would go outside to the front of the school where there was nice calm scenery and pray Dhuhaa prayers (but not towards the flag pole like they said in the Vanguard documentary, rather I used a "no parking" sign as my Sutrah instead!). One day a girl (my old neighbor Kate Chandler) came up to me and stood next to me while I prayed and then touched my shoulder! After a bit she kind of nodded to herself and walked off (she was a nice religious girl). On another occasion an African American guy saw the Miswaak behind my ear and began yelling for everyone to see the guy with a "blunt" behind his ear; which led to a huge scene. I just walked over to them after finishing my prayer and told them that I am Muslim and there is nothing strange about praying to God. They stopped laughing and got real serious.

So anyway, as this slowly became my normal modus operandi, it would be around my tenth grade year that it started becoming clear that Omar is a Muslim and Muslims can't do drugs or have girlfriends. Of course it was an upward battle, but I had some new friends from the Masjid that used to give me support on the weekends.

I began to feel that I was being flung into an ocean and being asked not to get wet. I went to my father and told him that I need to do home-schooling or I need to go to the new school being prepared for the Masjid for my eleventh grade year. That did not go over well.

I think I went to Syria again that summer. I remember I had to leave all of those Sufi friends and I began socializing with other practicing people and going to the Masjids. The only problem that year was that I had become more religious than my family over there. They started telling me to shave my beard and not to wear Islaamic clothing. I wasn't an angel at that time either, but I was religious enough to make them scared. The one thing that used to get me through all of those tribulations was holding fast to my prayer.

When the eleventh grade started I remember dreading it. I used to enter the school saying the words of remembrance for entering the bathroom and when I left I would say the words of remembrance for exiting the bathroom. School had become more disgusting than a bathroom in my mind. Of course, I still had good grades, and so forth, but I tried to limit my relationships with the disbelievers that surrounded me. At times it was very depressing. Some people became worried and thought I was suicidal or something! That was never the case. I was merely thinking about why I come to school instead of going to fight Jihaad for instance.

That year I think I got in trouble a few times (I think I skipped school or something... yeah, a cop brought me to school for skipping and then I just left a second time to go chill at the beach, ha ha) but the biggest issue was related to religion. Someone came into class talking about something he had seen on the lockers in the hall. Some Christians and Secularists were having a battle of words. So one Secularist wrote on his locker that: "For you your religion and for me mine." (Of course he did not understand the true intent of the verse) So the person entering the room told me: "Omar is this from the Qur'aan?" I told him yes and I began reciting the verses in Arabic. There was an obese kid named Mikey in the class who thought of himself as a Buddhist. He used to do and say very strange things. At any rate, he began to laugh at my recitation. He told me to recite it again upon which he laughed again. I didn't like that at all. I charged him and grabbed his neck and asked him to laugh now. He could only make weird noises. The teacher, Mrs. Athiest Mcmeans, flipped out. She said let him go and began calling the office. I asked her why she let him laugh at my religion while she defends every religion on earth but Islaam. She was always attacking Islaam, but when people worshiped private parts in India this was something we had to respect and we could not say anything bad about that (Shout out to Gene Ponder who doesn't like her either!). I ended up going to the police station for that incident.

Turns out, Mikey's mom is the District Attorney! Ha ha. In the car my dad told me to just stay quiet. I told him: if they ask me I will just say that we kill people for making fun of our religion! My father flipped on me and told me to just keep my stupid mouth shut. Ha ha. To explain my frame of mind, around those times I used to go to the website of the Mujaahidiin of Shiishaan in the school library! But to summarize the story, I didn't say any of those things in the police station and Mikey the Buddhist decided to act Buddhistly and just forgive me.

You can see here that my father was becoming a bit worried about how religious I was becoming. At one point I decided that I needed to go to the Friday prayers in order to stay sane. I would take my car and drive to Mobile and pray. My father, however, decided that

that would hurt my education. So he prevented me. I thought about it and decided that this is something obligatory upon me and he can not tell me not to go. So I would go to a different smaller Masjid. My father still busted me. Eventually he told me (just before he was about to leave for Xajj) that if he found me going to Friday prayers I would be kicked out of the house.

I called up a Shaykh we both knew and he gave us the ruling that I should go to Friday prayers every other week. So that is how that crisis was solved. But it wasn't the last.

I had to suffer through the eleventh grade year but I had a plan in mind. I was going to score high scores on the ACT and then enter the University of South Alabama a year before my class (skipping my twelfth grade year). By the grace of Allaah, that is what happened. It happened after convincing my counselor, who used to be my English teacher, to give me a recommendation (I used to chase him around the classroom and secretly tape toilet paper to his back to make the class laugh). This guy, Mr. Chancey, was a hardcore Christian. He and another guy named Mr. McKenzie used to try and argue with me about religion often. They never had any real good arguments but the thing about them was that they would "attack." I was the only Muslim around and I was trying to show a good example. I would try to stay calm throughout these "attacks." Only on a few occasions would I "attack" back. I do remember one time in the counselor's office. I was already fed up with school and no one, not even my Muslim father, understood me. Mr. Chancey was trying to tell me that having relationships with girls is ok and that I should stay and get a scholarship. I felt like crying out of my loneliness. In many classes I would simply keep my head buried in Riyaadh as-Saalihiin to get myself through. It started to affect my grades a bit but I only had to have a three point something GPA and I had always made straight A's. I do remember doing very poorly on a math exam about logarithms during that period though. When I received the test paper I asked the teacher: What in the world is a logarithm?! He told me he had been discussing it for an entire week!

Thankfully, college was a big breath of fresh air compared to high school. I didn't have to sit in class for hours on end with the same people I knew for years. I could wear my Islaamic clothes. I was just minutes away from the Masjid. The change was radical. But it still wasn't heaven on earth.

It was during that time that one of my old friends from high school got interested in Islaam. He had converted previously along with a group of other people in high school but it didn't really stick till later. In my eleventh grade year I used to call people to Islaam actively and I even tried to make a Muslim organization (although I was the only Muslim ha ha). I would announce Islaamic Studies classes over the public announcements and then sit in the cafeteria on Thursday mornings with Da'wah materials. So, through these efforts and by the Grace of Allaah, many people realized that Islaam is the truth (mostly people who were not blinded by seeking popularity)... but the test of peer pressure was too much for them (even though they were not very popular to begin with). So they all left Islaam with the exception of this brother who goes by the name Bernie Culveyhouse (as seen on TV). Anyway, we were hanging out one day and we came back to my house to find that my sister had come to visit my father.

A small rewind is necessary here for us to appreciate the significance of this occasion. I mentioned that my sister had become a bit rebellious but I did not mention that her rebellion led her to leaving the house at the age of 16 or so. One day she snuck out of the house (which became normal for her to the point that she was put in Juvenile Detention multiple times for it) and when she came home my father told her: you either follow my rules or get out of the house. She said: really? And she left the house. She stayed with my aunt for a while and then with her friends for a while and then finally she ended up at the house of her new boyfriend. Terrible situation. One of the worst casualties was our relationship. I remember trying to find ways to hang out with her, and she too says that she eventually regretted having less quality time together. She was usually too busy partying.

She wasn't a dumb girl though. Something inside of her told her that she has to make something of herself. She left the partying enough to make good grades in high school. She graduated and started college. She was nothing like the rest of her loser friends who could only think about where the next joint was going to come from. Eventually she was accepted into Auburn University and she got a different group of friends. Albeit they still liked to party, but at least they were a bit intellectual. It was around that time that she started to take my father's olive branch. My father is a bit of a quiet and strict man. It is not easy for him to ask his daughter to come back home or to forget the past. On the other hand, my sister has a bit of a western woman complex and she doesn't want to say that she was wrong either. It was a bit of a stalemate. Eventually, though, she decided to come home to visit my dad and my dad took that to mean a truce. He was so happy that he wanted to take a family picture.

Enter me and my friend, Bernie. "Oh, you came at the right time. Let's get a picture!" There is nothing wrong with that ordinarily but many of the scholars hold the opinion that it is not Islaamicly legal to take pictures without a good reason. The argument behind that is a bit beyond the subject matter. Regardless, of which opinion is correct, my father assured me that he taught me Islaam and he knows it better. Of course, there is nothing wrong with that either, except that Allaah has told us not to obey the parents in disobedience to Him. Therefore, I told him that I respect his opinion but I do not want to take the picture. My dad wasn't sold. I was told to leave the house, and so we slept at Bernie's house that night. I figured my dad would have let off some steam over the night so the next morning I knocked on the door and my father asked me what I was doing back home. That is when I realized that he wants me out of the house until I take the picture.

I had just seen years of this same situation between my father and sister so I knew he was serious. After a few days I took the hint. I went to friends' houses and I began working side jobs. This went on for some months until everyone I know tried to tell me that I am wrong and they even went to my father to try to make him ease up on me as well. Eventually, my father conceded to their requests and told me that I do not have to take the picture so I went back home. I did not go back home because I was begging to return to that lifestyle. I went back home because I did not want to disobey my father. Otherwise, staying at home had become difficult for me. I did not want to go to a secular college; I wanted to study the religion.

Previously, I had wanted to go to Jihaad and make Hijrah but I had a mentor who (although he had wanted Jihaad and Hijrah himself at some point far back in his teens when it was still acceptable to the U.S.) had become more interested in seeking knowledge and therefore, as a product of his example, I began reading more “Salafi” books and articles. So, while going to Jihaad and making Hijrah does not require parental permission, seeking knowledge does. Therefore, seeing that my father was not agreeing to Madinah University, I was a bit stuck.

I also wanted to get married because, despite wearing Islaamic clothing and having a beard, some women would still take their chances in the liberal college environment. I was also a bit fed up from my past experience in high school and I was ready to get married at any expense. But my father simply refused that I get married until I finish my degree. Another crisis. He said: You can get married, but you must go to college and I will not pay for the marriage. I said: Great! I'll work on the side. He said: No...so long as you are in college you cannot work!

All of this caused considerable heartache for my father, because ever since I was young I was always exclaiming to my father just how much I wanted to be a doctor. I think the message got through. I can recount numerous occasions in which my father told my mother in the midst of a heated argument: "Omar isn't going anywhere. He is going to stay right here until I finish paying his way through med-school." I think it was a way to both ensure the success of your child while also living a bit of your life through him. I didn't intentionally throw his dreams, and my previous dreams, out the window for kicks. I had just changed my priorities from succeeding only by Dunyaa standards, to succeeding in the Akhirah. My father once said: "I have a son that only thinks about the Akhirah and a daughter that only thinks about the Dunyaa!"

For me, I just came to the conclusion that helping the Ummah is not simply a matter of adding another doctor to the list. I figured we had enough doctors. It was just that no one was stirring them up, coordinating things, and channeling their money in the right direction. One charismatic leader could theoretically "make" more money for the Ummah in a few charity drives than one doctor could ever make in a lifetime.

So...one day I just couldn't take the futility of it all any longer. I went to the Dean's office and I withdrew my name from the University. Within minutes this information made it back to my father. I guess they call the parents when something like this happens or something. So my father confronted me in the office of the Masjid (he had become in charge of the Masjid by that time). He said: what did you do today? I told him I withdrew. He said: I don't want a bum living in my house.

So it was 'hit the road Jack' for me once again. I took my things and I went to a friend's house. I began looking for jobs and I moved into an apartment. It was month to month for some months! I had some good Muslim room-mates for a while and then they all split their separate ways. Then it was down to me and Bernie (who also moved out because he was supposed to get married around that time). In those long months we had tried every job

possible that seemed Islaamicly permissible. Eventually I would find something that was not allowed and I would quit the job; except for the telemarketing job. I was selling light bulbs and trash bags and stuff like that which was “made by the blind.” The only problem with that job was that I was too good hearted to force people to buy things. They would just yell in my face and tell me not to call. Ha ha.

It was around this time that I was trying to get married to an Ethiopian girl in Canada. Bernie had gone to an Islaamic conference in Canada and he had met the Ethiopian girl’s best friend and was planning to marry her (which was the reason for splitting apartments). So in turn he set me up with the Ethiopian girl. I made a few phone calls and then I decided to meet her father. At the next Islaamic conference I met the father and he told me there would be no problems. YEAH right!!

I went back home and tried to scrounge up some money. I was working multiple small jobs. In the morning I was going to this program to get my GED and an A plus certificate (because when I skipped my last year of high school I didn’t get a diploma and when I quit college I didn’t get a diploma so I needed the GED as some form of degree). That program paid me a few dollars a day and I got bonuses for passing drug tests! (Shout out to Amir West and the crew!) Then I managed to get a job with the Boys and Girls Club for a few hours in the afternoon. That paid a hundred dollars or something a month (or something like that). Then I was working for the Masjid school as a janitor which I used to do at night. Eventually the GED/A plus program finished and I entered a community college to learn Air Conditioning and Heating during those hours.

As you can see I made a U-turn from my Computer Science degree at the University of South Alabama (but not immediately because I had first gotten a Java Programming certification by reading the book and taking the test at the same center for the A plus certification). But it wasn’t because I couldn’t make the grades or something of that nature. In fact, I was one of the few who were actually programming their projects by themselves without cheating. First of all: I was fed up with this whole western lifestyle. Secondly: I was just trying to get married quickly because of the temptations that surround young men in the West. Thirdly: I realized that the computer is the medium for communication and storing information. So any computer job will require me to deal with all aspects of the company I work for. In the West it is virtually a given that every company is doing at least one thing Islaamicly unacceptable. Therefore, I decided to look for a technical job (like fixing ACs) that doesn’t have any illegal aspects.

But you can also probably imagine how this option was failing as well. The reason for the failure was that these permissible jobs are generally the jobs that don’t pay that much money. Secondly, since I was a practicing Muslim with the beard and everything, people in the Heart of Dixie didn’t jump to hire me.

In the beginning the AC job was actually looking like it might be cool (pardon the pun). I actually fixed a friends AC by myself and I started filling up car ACs with refrigerant. But I found out that the whole business is run by Masons or something. If you don’t know the super duper sly snake under folded bi-forked tongue handshake you aren’t going to get the

job no matter how smart you are or how many degrees you have. I saw some extremely grey-matter-deficient people getting jobs while I was left searching. It's also possible that I didn't have blue-collar friends. Most of the people at the Masjid were doctors and engineers. So I didn't have someone to get my foot in the door. Don't forget that Alabama is not the most financially advanced state of the Union!

As for the Girls and Boys Club, then it was thoroughly depressing. I remember they took us for a seminar to make us positive and boost our morale. That lasted for like one day. I looked at the "mentors" and saw how messed up they were and I realized that even if these (cracked up) people manage to teach something in these two hours that will benefit these kids, they will go home to a crack house that will erase everything. But even that was a far off dream because the "mentors" we are talking about here were always getting drunk and partying on the weekends (don't forget some of them are forty or fifty years old). They used to teach the children (nowhere near pubescent in age) that having sex is ok so long as they use a condom and they would encourage them to tell their sexual experiences (as if children that age should already have any!). They let little five year old kids sit on the computer and listen to: "Wanna come to my hotel?" and sing it; while they laugh and exclaim how cute that is. There are fifteen year old girls there that have only seen their mothers with man after man. They have no shame about coming up to you and treating you as if you could be their next boyfriend. Once, the boss called me into his room to "show me something." When I entered he showed me an email that said: "this is what happens when you eat too many pork rinds..." and then he scrolls down to show me a very very fat lady in a bathing suit. Another time they were laughing at the fact that I told them that I am a virgin. Then one of the lady "mentors" asked why I can't touch women? I told her that as Muslims we don't have relations with foreign women out of marriage. She told me that she is going to touch me. Then she started chasing me around the place saying she is going to touch me. Another time the boss went around grabbing the breasts of the female "mentors" and telling them they were flat-chested. That place was a nightmare. I was trying to teach the young children to read with the computers but they would use the internet to go to Black Planet and some other off-limit websites and it was impossible to keep tabs on them without simply shutting off the internet. I finally decided that this job is bad for my religion and I put in my resignation.

As for cleaning the Masjid, it wasn't so bad. The only thing that made it depressing was doing it at night because I had no other choice. Another depressing thing was having the administration complain all of the time because they were close friends of my father and they were strongly against me being outside of the house. They didn't want to give me the job in the first place but my Muslim friend, who used to do the job by contract, left me in charge when he went out of town.

In general, the Masjid was a bit behind in many aspects. Many shaved or trimmed their beards. Many had Ikhwaani mentalities when it comes to the issues of al-Walaa' wal Baraa'. There was also a general focus on education and getting good jobs as if that was the key to liberating the Ummah. In all reality, that focus seemed more based upon living the American Dream or living well than anything else. So, it goes without saying that a guy who has it all and can be a rich doctor but decides to wear un-ironed clothes and clean

toilets for a living is not going to be very well accepted in that society. Let's not even get into the al-Walaa' wal Baraa' issues or the issue of Hijrah or what have you. To get a feel for the community, one may find a very heart-warming speech by my "Shaykh" from the Masjid in which he gave me a thorough tongue-lashing and offered to come to Somaalia to get me!

So, as I was saying, it is clear from the above that my endeavor to marry the Ethiopian girl was not going so well monetarily.

There was also another problem there. My friends had begun listening to scholars who had been considered off limits before. According to the "Salafi" ideology (or rather the Neo-Salafi ideology) anyone who talks about the "Muslim" leaders or talks about Jihaad, like Sayyid Qutub, is a serious heretic.

I had become a bit distant from that type of stance for two main reasons. I was in University when September 11th happened. I came to class one day and this non-practicing "Muslim" told me to check CNN where I saw a plane going into the towers. I was wearing a Thawb and turban and I was confused. I asked the people around me: are there people in the plane? Why did that happen? They looked at me as if they wanted to kill me. Later on some people would actually do more than look at me in that way (some acted like they would run me over while driving their big trucks, others yelled at me from their balconies with beer cans in their hands shouting "my buddy died in Afghanistan," others got out of their cars at red lights, others acted as if they would not fix my car unless I denounced bin Laden and praised George Bush, and so forth). I didn't really have a clear position about the whole thing at the time. I was mixed between the "hatred of terrorism" instilled by the "Salafis" and between my real hatred for America, the disbelievers, and their oppression of the Muslims. Although I did go through a denial phase and blamed it on the Muslims for not engaging in enough Dacwah (as is reported by the USA school newspaper the Vanguard) I still remember finding myself alone in the Masjid that day and I jumped up and said: Allaahu Akbar!

But 9/11 itself didn't "radicalize" me as they say. I took things a bit more intellectually than that (and luckily so, because most people who do come to Jihaad based on emotions and revenge usually leave fairly quickly once it runs dry). In specific, there was a well-known scholar who was having a scholarly debate with one of the top scholars of the "Salafis," Shaykh Rabiic bin Haadi al-Madkhali. This guy...psh...may Allaah guide him. He just attacks everyone like a rabid dog. The scholar was defending himself with proofs and Shaykh Rabiic was just attacking him personally based upon nothing but conjecture. I started to have serious doubts not only about Shaykh Rabiic or those who follow him, but the whole "Salafi" movement as a whole. I noticed that it was supposed to be built upon seeking knowledge and thereby bringing about change. However, those who ascribe to it rarely seek real knowledge. They are only engaged in talking about one another. Even if they seek real knowledge, they hide their findings when it comes down to issues that anger America and the Saudi government. All of this led me to the realization that I should read both sides. I should hear from those scholars that have been warned against all of these years.

The second thing that made me leave the fake “Salafi” way is the war in Iraq. As I said the original act of September 11th and the invasion of Afghanistan didn’t really change my perspective. But for some reason (maybe due to the other changes I mentioned), by the time the Iraq war started I could not find anyway for us to say that it is anything less than obligatory to fight the Americans there (I just happened to think that the Jihaadi groups upon the truth were not clear yet and that seeking knowledge might be more rewarding). One of my Neo-Salafi friends, however, tried to hold the view that it is not Jihaad because he thinks he heard about a Fatwaa from Shaykh Mash-huur Xasan Salmaan (which turned out to be false)! I was as sure as ever that this type of cultish methodology wasn’t for me.

Just to tie things back here to my marriage attempts, the Ethiopian girl in question was highly influenced by her aunt who was a big fan of people like Shaykh Rabiic. So my change of heart about “Salafis” was not exactly thrilling to her.

But, methodology aside, above all, the largest problem in my path to marriage was that the girl’s father was a Suufi who loved his homeland (Harar) and wanted his daughter to marry a Suufi from there. He also seemed to like money a lot and that was something I could definitely not provide so long as I chose to seek my wealth from Xalaal means.

Around this time I found out that my uncle, Rafiiq, had been released from the torture chamber of the Syrian regime. So I had to go see him. This was the man I had only heard about for my entire life. So I told my dad (who was still angry with me) that I have to go with him to Syria. My dad took this as an olive branch and we had a good journey there (with the exception of the time he yelled at me from the opposite side of Charles De Gaul airport for stopping for a cappuccino while we still had a 2 hour wait before our flight).

I would come to have many strange memories about that airport. Once, when I was young, my dad wanted our entire family to tour all of Paris during the short day or two while we were in transit to go to Syria. We saw the Eiffel Tower and the Arch of Triumph, and what have you. Everything in Paris is small and we found ourselves laughing at the baby cars (which probably makes the French hate tourists even more). I think some of the Frenchmen purposefully misdirected my father and we ended up in the middle of nowhere at mid-night. Apparently the metro stops at that hour and lets everything off no matter where they might be. So we huddled together in a phone booth to escape the cold while we waited for a taxi. The man arrived and drove us like a maniac to our hotel (which I would eventually become used to through my stays in Syria and Egypt, but it never stopped being scary). I think we had to pay a grip of Francs for that crazy taxi ride. On another trip I was "randomly" picked by the airport security for a security check before boarding the plane back to America. The lady could not believe that I was in college to learn about air conditioning nor could she believe that I had no idea of my grandparent's address in Syria (no one really cares over there). So some "specialists" came in a rush to go through my bag as they expected at every moment to become blown to smithereens. The Americans did similarly once I reached home, but they at least tried to cover their feelings. One man told me: "Welcome home son," after asking me how I was treated in Syria (which wash much

better than the way I was treated just after 9/11 when I had to take my shoes off and answer for why my beard was "scruffy").

Anyway, we reached Syria and I met with my uncle for the first time to find that I was still a bit too "Salafi" for his tastes. Despite that, he still loved me a lot and wanted me to travel around with him and his friends; which was to be a learning experience because I learned about what jail is like and how the Muslims coped with their torture. It gave me more of a hatred for the disbelieving rulers of the Muslim countries. It also gave me an urge to free the Muslim prisoners around the world. He told me how the Asad Regime would prevent them from praying and fasting. Once during Ramadhaan they sent a brother out of the cell to get the food which they were suppose to eat before the permissible time. The guards told the brother he must eat from the food before taking it unless he could catch the little bird that fluttered in through the window. The brother made Ducaa' and walked up to the bird and grabbed it with his bare hands! He told me how the brothers would take turns sacrificing for the weak, by standing in front when the guards came in to beat them. Those brothers would cry if they were refused their turn, and they would hide their sickness in order to not lose it. My uncle would always take guard just before Fajr prayers and he would take the beatings for anyone that was seen going to the bathroom to perform ablution. On numerous occasions the guards would promise that they would carry out the punishment, but he would make Ducaa' and they would always forget.

Punishment ranged from electrocution to severe beatings to death. The most common would be for the guard to force a brother to double himself up inside of a car tire, causing his head to be glued to his thighs. Then they would take the rubber belts used in tank engines to whip the bottom of the brother's feet while suspended in the air and doubled up inside of the tire. Some brothers had the soles of their feet ripped apart and others are unable to walk properly till this day.

But he also told me of the resistance and how one brother had his house surrounded by three rings of soldiers. He put one hand out the door with a white flag and he placed a grenade in the other. Then he threw the grenade in the direction he intended to run and managed to cut through all three rings and outrun the explosion of the grenade. Another brother was captured near the border of Turkey and he managed to derail the car by attacking the driver and he escaped. He later came to visit his sister in the center of Damascus at the government hospital by pretending to be a high ranking general. Once they realized who he was he jumped from the second floor and disappeared through the river bed.

Despite these stories, I was still having my "Salafi" leanings. So instead of thinking about how to get to Iraq I was actually planning to go to Yemen to study with the scholar I mentioned above who was having debates with Shaykh Rabiic.

This is where things became strange. A bit impatient, I decided to take the little money I had and go to Yemen secretly. The time I chose to do that was a bit bad but in all honesty I had become tired of following my father and uncle around the countryside looking at the water-wheels. I had become sick from the water in the north of the country and my father

was starting to order me around more and more. It was as if I was fifteen all over again. That wouldn't be so bad in and of itself, but the reason why I was kicked out of the house was still present: I wanted to study the religion and I wanted to get married and I wanted to practice the religion fully without being ordered to be moderate all the time. So I took off. Unfortunately, my aunts, uncles, and cousins joined together to form a coalition against this decision of mine. I planned to get my things and leave Damascus the morning after arriving from the north. But, to my surprise, that morning I found my father had already arrived and was in the house! His speech about how worried he was wasn't so bad, but the next move was the clincher. My uncle calls and tells me that the secret police are after me and I have to give him my passport in order to take it to their office and pay them off. I handed over my passport and they all sighed a sigh of relief.

When my father wanted to leave back to the States he assumed I was coming as well. Or at least he planned to take me whether I wanted to come or not (after all, they had already managed to swipe my passport successfully). I managed to get my plane ticket back from my father and I simply slipped out of the house the night before the travel. I was told by my aunts that they had tried to give me medicine to put me to sleep but it only made me drowsy. They were the ones who eventually slept and left me a way out. My father left that day, albeit he was very angry. Now I just had to get my passport back. But my family was against me. My only option was to stay at my aunt's house (Saxar), who, due to that decision of hers, was temporarily 'disowned' by my father and by the rest of his other brothers and sisters living at my grandfather's house. I told them to give me my passport but they told me that I would be thrown in jail if I pass through Jordan to go to Yemen. They told me so many things that I didn't believe (because I had already realized the secret police scare was a fake). Eventually I found out that it would be difficult for me to enter the camp in Yemen so I just dropped the whole thing. Ironically, a short while later they wanted to give me back my passport so that I could go make Cumrah (which would require me to pass through Jordan). I asked them: What about going to jail and all of that talk you gave me earlier? They felt embarrassed. Regardless, my plane ticket was going to expire before I could return from the Cumrah so I had to leave it.

This was only a much summarized version of a very terrible situation.

Afterward, I came back to America without any job (I left them all when I went to Syria), without any school, without anything. Actually, I had some kitchenware that one of my roommates took as his own! I ask Allaah to guide that guy. He was an ex-con with female problems. I tried to teach him the religion and rehabilitate him but he just took my apartment as a base for womanizing the neighbors. He never paid me anything, he just used to eat and sleep and talk on the phone.

I had become so averse to America that I wanted to leave. Not to mention that I had no real way of providing for myself through Xalaal means (because the last few tries were a failure) and the woman I wanted to marry was living in Canada. So I worked in a hip-hop clothing store and I sold some hip-hop shoes at the flea market to raise enough money to pay off all of my bills and I jetted out. (As a side note, while working at the flea market and also on other occasions while selling Islaamic books or chilling at the Masjid, it seemed

obvious that the FBI was trying to send me reformed crack heads as spies to entice me to talk to them about Jihaad. I began realizing how true that hunch of mine was once I saw how many brothers went to the slammer for such stupidity after my departure.)

I took my car and a few hundred dollars and drove from Mobile, Alabama to Toronto, Canada with a few stops along the way. I stopped at my sister's house in Birmingham and almost suffocated in the night on cat dander (Is Isabelle still alive?). Then I continued my trip to Detroit, Michigan where I slept at a friend's house who advised me to cross the border in the early morning. It wouldn't be my first time entering Canada but every time was a like a new cute experience.

The lady asked me: So umm where are you going. I said Toronto. She said: Where in Toronto? I said: the West side. She said: How long will you be staying? I said: It depends on the hospitality. So she laughed and told me to enjoy my stay. Immediately after leaving the checkpoint there is a feeling like entering a new world. There are Tim Horten's fast-food joints all over the place and people speak from their nose. It reminded me of my neighbors from Seattle who used to yell out: "Jennifer honey it's time for dinner," in a nasal accent (Sorry Mrs. Seeds it isn't really that bad). When you enter the restaurant for the first time in your life you'll see that almost every dish is accompanied by coffee and a doughnut! We used to have a blast asking the Canadians we met: "How 'bout that hockey eh? Wanna have a coffee at Tim Horten's or should I get ya a Fresca?" Everything is the same, but slightly different. Dollars are called 'Loonies' and a two dollar coin is a 'Toonie.' That became important on one occasion because I think I got badgered in the airport once for not knowing what a bloody 'Loonie' is. But, eventually I got used to the accent and I started to have an addiction to Tim Horten's coffee. My mom on the other hand, when she came to visit, would insist on acting as though she had just entered a third world country and would shout with excitement whenever she saw places like Walmart.

I can't really blame her though. I truly believed at a very late age in my life that only Eskimos lived in Canada and that it was a rolling tundra of ice. In contrast, what really happened is that I found myself feeling like the backwoods hillbilly who had never lived in a city larger than the rebel-flag-waving, overall-wearing, under-developed Mobile, Alabama. I had seen Chicago, Detroit, New York, and what have you, but I had never actually *lived* there long enough to get my bearings.

Before going on to discuss this new phase of leaving America for Canada, it demands to be said here that my mother helped me a lot throughout my pre-Canada period. She used to pay for my gas and she would buy me food and the like. Once a week we would go out to dinner and she would tell me about her schooling.

In fact, my mother used to care for me a lot. Even after I became Muslim she would wake me up and cook food for me during Ramadhaan and things like that. Of course in the beginning she used to say some pretty terrible things and every now and then she would fall back into saying some things, but she was mostly confused about how her son became a Muslim. She was left in the house without her son and without her daughter and she could no longer understand her husband who had become a practicing Muslim. Her school

even seemed to be becoming a nightmare. Another thing that hit her was that there was a scandal in Perdido Baptist Church where she used to attend Church since her childhood. I think it was difficult for her to imagine the administration of the Church as scandalous people. So she was dealt a blow to her religious vigor throughout that whole thing.

My mother is largely an emotional woman and she doesn't like to look at things in a mathematical logical way. So when she feels bad, she is not likely to agree with that thing making her feel bad no matter how rational it is. She is also very much attached to her family (which is, of course, an emotional thing). So I see her resistance to Islaam largely based upon the fact that her family is Christian and that she sees Islaam as the reason for not understanding her husband and son, and maybe even the reason for being alienated from her daughter as well. I just pray that Allaah guides her before she dies.

Anyway, when I reached Canada I started working the next day. I had a few Somaali connections and I got a job delivering milk to Somaalis. It was one of the worse but most hilarious jobs of my life. I would wake up at around 3 o'clock in the morning in the blazing winter of Toronto, Canada. I couldn't even feel my body parts nicely in the house which would make me hate the idea of even looking outside. I didn't have proper clothes for the weather but I would throw on a bunch of layers and my sneakers and go out into the ice. I used to drive a van with no heater to the place of the milk. There I had to lift those heavy crates on to the van in that cold. Don't forget the cold. Then I would go quickly to the first apartment building. Remember here: this is my first week in a large city and I'm delivering to the entire Westside! I got lost so many times its ridiculous. That's not so bad though. It gets worse. I used to arrive at the front door with a grocery cart full of milk, eggs, and milkshakes and then ring the apartment of one of the Somaalis. Remember that the time is around 4-5 o'clock in the morning. They say: "Ya Waaye?" (who is it?) I say: Assalaamu Calaykum. They say: "Ya Waaye?" I say: Assalaamu Calaykum. When I get fed up of waiting for them to answer my Salaams I say: "Wilki Caanaha," (the milk boy) and they say: "Ya Waaye?" Ha ha. Finally they stop answering and I go to the next apartment. Eventually someone buzzes the door open for me. I used to really hate that. When you enter those buildings you just get hit with the pungent smell of marijuana and you see people urinating in the elevators and on the stairs. You start to wonder: who are they trying to keep from entering this place? The door should work the other way around. People shouldn't be allowed out of this place unless I buzz the door open for them!

Anyway, let's say you get into the building. Now it becomes so extraordinarily hot that you want to take off all of those layers but you have no where to put them and you will just have to put them on again in a few minutes. That's not so bad either. Now you knock on the door and they look through the peep hole at a white guy. When they finally get the courage to open the door they speak to you in Somaali. Some of them honestly don't know English. They think you are trying to pull a prank on them. When they realize that you are the milk man they ask you for some milk using Somaali numbers and then here comes the clincher. The week I started the boss raised the prices on the milk! Blah blah blah. I have no idea what they are talking about. They are just yelling at me!

There was one funny day when this lady had taken so much milk and so many milkshakes on debt that the boss said: no more. He said she should pay up or no more milk. Then his heart became soft and he said: ok she can have milk but no milkshakes. She didn't know much English but I understood that she refused to pay money, and she also didn't want any milk. She only wanted milkshakes! I said no. She said: 3 miliki shack? I said no. She said: twoooo miliki shack? I said no. She said: oooone miliki shack? Ha ha ha.

There was another lady that used to get like 8 bags (each three liters) of milk a week. Something crazy like that. I said how can this lady drink all of this milk. When I knocked on the door a young boy came to the door who was about as wide as he was tall and I knew the answer!

The worst day was the last day. I had been working through the worst of the winter for a month and I had become fed up. Some days I was walking deep in snow or I was being blown backwards by high winds with heavy milk in my hands. Sometimes you find that the person you are delivering to is not even home after you do all of the work to get to his house. The boss was a very nice man and he was paying me nicely, but I couldn't keep it up. The last day, I filled up the buggy with milk and eggs and so forth and I headed for the front door of an apartment building where there was some construction going on. There was a detour and the ramp to the door became strange. The buggy tipped and everything fell out and busted and broke. I was on the ground I believe. People were walking by and looking at me like I was crazy. I had snapped. I put the stuff back in the buggy calmly and went to the van to fill it up again. When I started to go back to the building my mind was rushed with all of the reasons why I did not like this job. I started running with the buggy and kicking it! Ha ha. Of course I tripped and the buggy fell and broke. I put the things back into the van while some janitor was yelling at me and asking me if I was crazy! I called the boss and I told him it's over. He pleaded but I told him I just can't do it. He himself was tired of the job and was trying to give it away. Eventually he did give it over to someone.

A few days later my Somaali connections got me a Pizza delivery job. Xalaal Somaali Pizza. It was nice. I already knew the city from the previous job and the weather had started to change a bit. I used to translate books on the weekdays and deliver pizza on the weekends. It wasn't stressful at all. The only issue became the fact that I was still not married.

I finally looked at my life and decided that I have to move on. I told the Ethiopian sister that it's over. She cried a bit, but she just went on with her life. She is a great sister and I still regret that it never worked out between us. May Allaah make things easy for her and guide her.

You'll note here that my quest for marriage had been a vehicle that eventually led me to becoming more religious (by virtue of providing a Sharci reason to leave the constraints of my moderate environment) and it led me to have a stronger urge for Hijrah, or semi-Hijrah (because I realized that leaving America had become the best option for both my Dunyaa and my Aakhirah).

Anyway, now that the stress for saving up money to please her father was gone, I now had time to read more. I went back to reading Islaamic books. I used to read from morning till night in the good old days, but then the work had started to eat away from my time. Now I was back on track. I also started reading the books that were “banned” by the “Salafis” and I realized that the problem with the “Salafis” is extended to their most famous scholars: al-Albaani, ibn Cuthaymiin, bin Baaz, Muqbil bin Haadi, and so forth. The true followers of the Salaf were more adamant in standing up to the rulers and they had a clear understanding of Kufr and Imaan. I also started to feel my old emotions towards Jihaad once again and I began to believe that Hijrah is Waajib. At that time I had left the thought of marriage and I started thinking of going back to Syria and waiting for the Jihaad to spill over from Iraq (who would have guessed that it would start from within?). I think I was watching the Khattaab documentary quite a lot those days.

In the mix, my friend Bernie, who had previously set me up with his wife’s best friend, the Ethiopian sister, was now setting me up with her own real sister. At first I refused and told him that women are holding me back, but he insisted. Then I spoke to the sister over the phone and decided I should follow-up the opportunity. I sat with her father and he asked me his famous three questions: Why are you here? I said: to marry your daughter. He said: good. Why am I here? I said: you are her father. He said: Very good. I am her Wali and you have to have a Wali to get married. He said: How will you support my daughter? My heart broke. I thought: no... not again. I started trying to explain my situation and my possible schemes (at the time I was trying to get a truck driving license which was going well). He said: No no no. Will you do whatever it takes to support her? I said: of course. He said: then you can marry my daughter. Then he paid for our lunch and left.

I realized this was a great opportunity and I began organizing the marriage. There were some problems in the organization, because I didn't have the money for anything lavish, and my mother-in-law ended up boycotting the wedding. Ha ha. Some of the contention was also related to the fact that I wanted to make sure that everything was done by the Sunnah on top of the fact that I also did not want to start off our married life in debt. In all reality, I was fed up with material things and I did not want curtains and furniture and so forth (I had been sleeping on the floor in a sleeping bag for a few years by that point).

She seemed to really want to marry me, despite my intentional attempts to persuade her otherwise (by telling her how I won't allow TV and I will be focusing on seeking knowledge and not on buying her flowers), so I gave it a chance. She was incredibly funny and was able to finish my jokes for me and sing commercial jingles better than me. She had the Western woman complex, which was to be expected, but she was also a bit open-minded about things at times. So we prayed our Istikhaarah and it was a go.

As the marriage drew near, I realized that this was my chance to extend the olive branch to my father. A bit ironic that the thing which split us eventually united us isn't it? Anyway, I told him I wanted him to come to my wedding and to be a part of the whole ordeal and after some persuasion he came with my mother, my sister, and even her husband. Yeah, I forgot about that.

Dena eventually got married to a Disbeliever which really angered my father. The thing is though, my sister is not a Muslim or a Christian. So it really doesn't matter who she marries. It's better for her to be married than not married. So I supported the whole thing. Her husband, though extremely hilarious at times, is a pseudo-intellectual pot-head who makes dumb remarks about Islaam when he gets drunk (Sorry Michael), but I have hope that they might both become Muslim one day. My sister is especially open-minded. She isn't jumping at the idea of being a Muslim because she has Hippie reservations about everything. But at least she is willing to talk about the issues and she doesn't just say that all of our religion is unreasonable. Once I explained why I couldn't take part in a birthday party for Michael's relatives because they were drinking wine. I told her that some things are so terrible that even being around them is an evil act. I likened it to sitting back and watching a woman get raped. She immediately understood and passed on the rationale to Michael.

I figure, her issue is simply that she has yet to sit back and think about the reason for life. She is still in the period of life where you have clear goals. I must finish University. She did that. I must get a Masters. She did that; she became a physical therapist. I must get a job. She did that. I must get a house. They did that; they got a mortgage. I must have a child. They did that. Now she will be busy with paying off the mortgage and so forth. Eventually, once the kids are nearly raised and retirement is in sight, people start to ask: what next? 'What next' is death! I told her before (when I started practicing strongly) that I have to please God and she said: But you are still young. I told her: death can come at anytime...so she got scared. Ha ha. When people are young they have delusions that death can't come to them. But when they become old, they can't fool themselves any longer. Maybe when she reaches that time she will decide to choose a religion and I hope she chooses Islaam. May Allaah guide her and her husband and children.

So anyway, they came for the wedding, although it was really uncomfortable for my father. He had also had to deal with being in the company of Bernie's mom after a bit of a falling out that occurred after Bernie drove my car out into an intersection and got us T-boned from a blind spot! He dealt with it all fairly well though. He even gave me some money and was very kind throughout the whole thing. But I took the opportunity to drop another bombshell on him. I told him that I'm making Hijrah to Egypt. He said: What?! Ha ha. I told him I want to go to Azhar (which was really true at the time) to study. I don't think Azhar is a great place but I figured it can't hurt to finally get a degree and please my father (even if the degree is an Islaamic one). He had just been through some years of separation from me, so I think he was hesitant to make more friction. Not to mention that I was now a married man and it was difficult for him to say that I had to come back home. So he blessed my Hijrah. In fact, he and my mother came back to Canada before I left and took my car back home to the States and they wished me a good trip.

My wife had become pregnant between the wedding and the Hijrah and it was difficult for her to leave her family but she was strong and she came along. My friend Bernie, his wife, his daughter, and his mom (who had become Muslim by the grace of Allaah) were all coming with us as well. That made things easier for my wife.

There was a bit of a problem at the airport. We had one-way tickets and I think the disbelievers became scared that we were planning to hijack the flight. As a result, we had to buy round tickets and they tricked us on the price and the refund policy, but my father-in-law helped us with the money and I ask Allaah to bless him and guide him for that. He is not a very religious man but he made so many things easy for me in ways that some religious people did not. Anyway, the airport security had dogs and some swat team looking police or something like that at the gate when we boarded the plane. I became nervous and waited for my sister-in-law to come with her baby so they could see that we were not trying to do something. They asked me: Where are you going? I said: Egypt. They said: What are you going to do there? I said: Tou... (I wanted to say tourism but I was afraid my tongue would slip and say terrorism so I said:) to...to... visit the pyramids. They said: Cool, and let me board.

Things were pretty normal. We stopped in Athens, which looked weird (looked like an Arab country and not Europe), then we arrived in Cairo. The police there did the same type of check on us. The guy stopped in front of me and said: Inta min ayn? (where are you from) I said: excuse me? (pretending to not know Arabic) He said: Where did you come from? I said: Greece. He said: Before that? I said: Canada. Then he pulled me aside and they made a folder for us; apparently because we had beards and we were religious. When they wanted to spell my name I pretended to not know how to spell it well in Arabic.

Then we had to find a taxi. Anyone who has been to Egypt knows what that is like. People start grabbing your luggage and throwing it on top of cars because they expect you to just pay whatever they say. Eventually we found a van and we made a good deal and we went to Alexandria. We had a friend there who had promised us a house to stay in. He told us it was not such a good place but I didn't really care. When I got there, I realized it was a terrible place. But I still didn't care. I looked at the faces of my wife and the rest of the crew and they were devastated. Bernie's mom had sold her house and everything she owned to make Hijrah with us and now she was seeing her life fold before her eyes. I went out, knowing a bit of Arabic and having been to Syria before, and started looking for houses.

That day I went around asking people for the Caqqaari (which is the real estate man in Syrian Arabic). So they pointed me to a really big fancy building. When I entered with my Islaamic clothes (which is actually weird in Egypt; in the government buildings at least) people started looking at me strange. I was even looking at them strange. They looked like lawyers and businessmen. It didn't look like a real estate agency. When I reached the office I started telling the lady that I need a house that is like this and that, not too big, not too expensive, and such and such. The whole office started laughing at me. They said what do you want us to do? I said you are the Caqqaari right? They said yes, but you need a Simsaar. Ha ha.

I found a few Simsaars chilling at a coffee shop and they gave me some tips on some houses that were faaaar away for like 200 dollars a month. It sounded like a good idea at the time. I took Bernie and we hailed a cab. We went all the way there and back which

costs (if you don't know the prices of things) about 15 dollars or something. The houses were not very special and the landlord looked like a snake, but it was the best we had at the moment. Bernie was not sold. He had grown up as the only child and he had never set foot outside of a "developed" country. So when we made it back to the family, they were also not too sold. In fact they were having some serious paranoia about everything from the dust in the room, to potential thieves, to the paint on the walls. It seemed that a hotel was the only answer for the night (and to tell the truth, in certain corners, the house truly was a "dump"). So I told them to put the things they will need for one night in a bag and we will go to a nearby hotel. We walked (what a scene) through downtown Alexandria (the Raml station) to one of the most expensive and historical hotels. When the people at the door saw the Thawbs and Niqaabs they told us that there is "No room in the inn!" We took a cab. Hotel after hotel told us that there are no rooms available. Finally I got a smart idea. I asked the cab driver for *him* to get out and ask if there are rooms available. He came back and said there are many. Ha ha. When we entered the lobby the jaws of the hotel managers dropped.

That night was a rough one. Bernie and his family had decided over night that they must go back to the United States for him to get a college education! Ha ha. I was shocked at how quickly they could change their minds. They sold everything to leave America for Hijrah and now they were willing to go all the way back because of a dirty room. My wife was also shaken up a bit. I had already made up my mind so I wasn't worried about anything but finding a place quickly before the money finishes. Before Fajr prayer the next morning (due to my jetlag) I left the hotel to look for the Masjid that I was told about by my Egyptian friend from Canada. I got thoroughly lost in the middle of the night, but I eventually found a man with a long beard and a big Thawb and I followed him. Then I asked him about the Masjid I was looking for and he led me right up to the door. I made contacts with the brothers and told them to find me an apartment and they assured me that everything would be ok. So on the way back, after praying Fajr, I bought some Falafel and some Shawarma and I took it back to the hotel. As I was walking I would stop to talk to people and I was enjoying the sound of Qur'aan which was drifting through the streets from the many radios tuned in to the recitation. I had finally made it to the land of the Muslims.

When I showed up at the hotel with the food and my great news, I found my wife, as well as Bernie and his family, with practically one foot on the plane. I assured them that I was going to find a good place and I went upstairs to sleep a bit. It was around that time that I realized that we had not informed the family of my Egyptian friend that we were leaving their dirty apartment. When I called them I found out that for a full day they had been worried about us. They asked us where we were located and I told them the name of the hotel. They told us that we are only one block away from their house! They sent their daughter to pick us up and we took a cab to their home. That move saved the day. Immediately everyone was talking about how much they love Egypt! I was surprised at how quickly people can flip their decisions but I was just happy that things were going in my favor so I stayed quiet.

We ended up staying in that house for about a month or so. I will save the details of the strange things that happened there but I will say that for the most part the family was very hospitable. They cooked and cleaned for us and did not ask us for any money. The father of my Egyptian friend had worked for the Azhar before and he took us to Cairo multiple times to help us get enrolled. He also helped us look for houses. May Allaah reward him.

Eventually I found a house across the street from them because I had grown accustomed to the people in the area and the Masjid there. The place was also very good for transportation and there was a decent market nearby. The only problem was that the house was small, dirty, ill-lit, and so forth. That was the natural trade off for it being so cheap in such a nice area. I took out all of the old furniture (which was full of termites) and put it across the street at another friend's house. I then got the place painted and I bought a decent mattress. My wife was not thrilled. She was especially not thrilled when her sister was renting a house for two or three times the price in the nicest part of Alexandria. The apartment was full of trappings. It had a western bathtub, a dishwashing machine, and so forth (some of the stuff didn't actually work though). The thing about the place was that it was very far from transportation and it was far from a good Masjid with good practicing people. What it was very close to, however, was a family of American disbelievers who became close family friends!

There were obviously different intentions behind our choice to move to Egypt. I didn't let that hinder me. My goal was to find a good place for my family, to try to provide them a cheap house of their own, and then go to a land of Jihaad. After getting stabilized, the next thing on my list was to find a job. I had already been doing translations and I continued to do so, but I was also looking for a side job like my old pizza job. I had some really bad experiences with jobs in Egypt. In all cases, I was not the one begging for the job. I was being begged. But in all cases, after having accepted the job, I was the one treated as if he is unwanted. The only clear reason I could find for that was either the fact that I was too religious for them (most likely the case) or that they only wanted an American to work for a few weeks or a few months to show off their company because they could not afford to pay sustainable high wages (which is also a big possibility). In one case I was hired (as I found out later) to be a lucky charm for the boss because he was having some problems with his rowdy son. He figured that having religious people around would give him good luck. Strange I know.

Eventually, after Bernie changed his mind a few times about which school to enter, he showed up at my doorstep and told me that he is taking his family back. I tried to convince him by taking him to a Shaykh I trusted but the Shaykh just told him that going back is a good idea! I was very surprised and my position towards the scholars of Alexandria started to change.

After they left my wife became very lonely and the pregnancy started to become an issue. I also decided that its time to find a new apartment. That was also the time in which all of my job options came to a real crash (even the translation). So the stress became very great and my wife was not having a blast.

I worked hard to get us a new apartment. It was much better but it was a bit far from transportation. The Masjid and the people in the area were nice but the general atmosphere was less sophisticated than the last area (more donkey carts and less educated people). The baby issue became less of a stress on my wife (partly because my mother offered to come and partly because we found a good doctor and a good hospital). Also, when my mother finally did come (as is coming up) she brought some money (some of which was from my translation job) and I found one of the better side jobs of my stay in Egypt (although it was one of those which I mentioned above as ending badly).

The Azhar thing didn't work out because the enrollment must be done in Cairo. I would wake up early, ride the train to Cairo, reach a bit before Thuhr, and spend hours dealing with taxi drivers and waiting in lines. The bureaucracy of Egypt is amazing and to enroll in Azhar you have to chop down the largest tree in Cairo with a Falaafel. Eventually I kicked off with the secularist office workers who were verbally abusing all of the brothers from less fortunate backgrounds from all over the world and I told them that they don't care about the religion. Unsurprisingly they turned down my application for some mad technicality days before the enrollment would end!

Instead I found one of the more "Salafi" leaning Qur'aan teachers who taught many of the teachers of Azhar. He was finishing up his Masters in Qur'aan studies and he used to give lectures on ash-Shaatabiyyah from memory. He liked me a lot because he used to teach Somaalis about Culuum al-Qur'aan in Canada during Ramadhān each year and he wanted me to teach him English. In turn, he allowed me to be his only student that was still reading Xafs can Caasim. Usually he only accepted those who were ready to move on to Shucbah. I was originally reading ten pages a week, but it eventually went down to five. In total I only managed to read about 6 Juz' total, but I benefitted immensely.

I didn't really attend too many lectures during my stay in Egypt, but I made good relations with many of the Culamaa' there and I continued reading and translating and improving my Arabic.

That was the scene while I was there, and it was under such circumstances that I met one of my best friends and closest brothers: Abu Muxammad al-Amriiki, Daniel Maldonado (may Allaah free him from the oppression of the Americans). I was surfing the net one day and I found someone talking about the English institutes in Egypt who sounded like an American. I read what he had said and I noticed that he was talking about Alexandria. I managed to get his email address and ask him how it could be possible that another American is living in Alexandria. I told him to give me a ring so we could discuss things better. A few minutes later I received a phone call and my mobile phone read: 'Daniel.' About a week prior to that incident, a Shaykh had told me that there was a new American with children that needs some help finding a place to educate his children and so forth. He gave me the phone number and I saved it on my phone. I had completely forgotten about that. When I asked him if he is truly in Alexandria he told me to come over to his house and see for myself. About an hour later I was standing in front of his apartment building. We chatted for some hours and it was obvious that we had a lot in common.

One of the main things that struck us both was that we both had a love for seeking knowledge and a love for helping the Ummah. As I said before, I had been dabbling in the idea of Jihaad for some time now, but I was also under the impression that there was no where for me to go and the only answer was to call others to the realization that at least something must be done. Abu Muxammad was a bit more advanced. He had spent his time as a Muslim reading about Jihaad and discussing Jihaad with other like-minded people. His only problem was that he felt that it was impossible to find a way and therefore the road to Jihaad was blocked. Regardless, Abu Muxammad managed to give me guidance about which books are necessary to read about Jihaad and about the Jihaadi Manhaj. He also told me about some Jihaadi scholars that I had previously been too scared to read from. I remember when I finally decided to read “Millatu Ibraahiim,” by Abu Muxammad al-Maqdasi. I was at work. I went to the website, I opened the book, I took a deep breath, and I read the introduction. I was so surprised to see how well the Shaykh was supporting his ideas with proofs. I was even more surprised to see the names of the scholars he was quoting. Abu Muxammad, my friend, had been telling me that I should read more about Muxammad bin Cabdul Wahhaab but I didn’t take it very seriously. When I saw Abu Muxammad al-Maqdasi quoting things from him and his children and grandchildren that I would never have dreamed of hearing from a “Salafi” scholar, I was dumbfounded. I went on to read the chapters about Jihaad, Hijrah, and commanding the good and forbidding the evil from the book ad-Durar as-Saniyah.

Any remaining doubts in my head that were instilled by my early days as a “Salafi” (i.e. neo-Salafi) had been removed. Jihaad is truly an individual obligation upon all of us. We do not have to wait for a Khaliifah to establish this obligation of Jihaad. There is nothing wrong with making Takfiir of the rulers and those who judge by other than the Sharicah and make friends with the Disbelievers. I had become a Jihaadi (call it Salafi Jihaadi if you want, or even call it Muslims who believe in adhering to all of the Sharicah, and not just some parts, if you choose).

It was around this time that I remember telling my wife that there is some fighting going on in Somaalia. That wasn’t anything new except for the fact that the ones fighting were ‘Islaamists.’ I thought that was a nice little news item for the day, but that was all.

In the midst of all of that, my wife gave birth to a very cute, fat, white baby girl, and we named her Taymiyyah. Fortunately, my mother was there for the birth and she helped my wife enormously. She was only able to stay for a few weeks though and then she went back. I tried to take her around during her stay and give her a good time. It was a bit of bonding time. She told me that she felt so great to have someone hold her hand while walking in the streets (which was necessary due to the crazy Egyptian driving and the extreme over-crowding). I made sure she had a few chances to take pictures in places like some old outdoor market like a typical tourist, but I used to just try to make it quick before everyone looked at us like we were stupid!

Anyway, the issue of Somaalia started growing larger by that time and it was becoming clear that the ‘Islaamists’ would soon take over the country. Abu Muxammad and I couldn’t just sit back and watch. We started making our plans.

In the mean time I was approached by a brother who was a doctor and one of the first people to help us on our arrival to Cairo. He asked me if I would be willing to help in a mission of humanity! So I asked him what in the world that would entail. He told me that there was an old Shaykh with a brain tumor who needed to travel to Germany for an operation. He was blind and needed someone to lead him around; not to mention tend to him once he had his operation. I tried to find another solution but I was the only brother in the area with an American passport; which would allow me to travel without a visa and accompany the Shaykh.

I explained the situation to my boss and then I went to the Shaykh's house to meet him for a day. Shortly after that we met up in the airport and the entire responsibility was immediately thrown on my shoulders. They gave me about 8 thousand Euros, the tickets, and the hospital documents, but what they didn't give me however, was a map!

The trip, despite the hardship it entailed, was inspiring. This Shaykh was extremely practicing and I remember in one instance we were the only two who could be seen trying to make ablution on the plane for prayer. I had to use a cloth and some bottled water to wet his arms and feet and it was quite a scene. In fact, many people on the plane began trying to help and I think they too were affected to some degree.

When we reached Frankfurt (I believe it is) we were treated fairly well by the German airline (Lufthansa) and we were given access to a special room with snacks while we waited for our flight to Munich. But once we arrived in Munich, I was extremely baffled as to what to do next. Fortunately I met a man from Greece who told me he loves Arabs and he let me use his mobile phone to get the address of the hospital. Then we went down the escalator to the metro and I just stood there standing in front of this vending machine that sold train tickets. I had no clue how to work the thing or which of the fifty different types to buy. But by the grace of Allaah, a man stepped out of the metro and gave us the exact ticket we needed for free! Apparently it was a slow day and the man wouldn't need the extra units the ticket provided, but it was both a mercy from Allaah and a very generous act on behalf of that Disbelieving man (may Allaah guide him).

While on the metro I met an American man who worked for a German company that was also based in America. We had a good chat along the way, but I could tell he felt a bit uncomfortable knowing that we were Muslims. Once we broke the ice, however, he began asking me about my "dad." I started laughing and told him that the Shaykh was not related to me; rather I hardly even know him. He thought it was extremely odd that I would put my job on hold (and probably lose it) to travel to Germany with some man I don't know. I think it made him a bit sentimental in fact (may Allaah guide him). Anyway, we reached our stop at something Plaza (or Platz) and we had two big suitcases to deal with, along with some tall stairs. I decided to execute a risky plan by putting one of the suitcases with the Shaykh on the escalator and then taking the other suitcase with me up the normal stairs. The other options would have entailed too much crowding and I would run the risk of having the Shaykh fall on the bags. I don't remember the details, but at the time it was the right thing

to do. A nun sat there and watched us while holding her breath, but I managed to get there in time to tell the Shaykh "Step Now!" and we avoided a fall.

A taxi was waiting for us and after explaining to him the address we were taken directly to the hospital. I then spent quite some time trying to get some decent service out of the nurses because I believe it was a Sunday and no one really felt like working. Eventually I found enough people who spoke English to get the Shaykh to his room and then we relaxed. They gave us some funny sparkling water and tea was ready at the tap. The food they provided was "wholesome" and in decent portions but it was often strange. I shrugged it all off and I began reading books for myself and also out loud for the Shaykh. Sometimes he would even ask me to read Qur'aan to him (despite my terrible voice). In fact, I remember that I used to read the Qur'aan quite loudly in many public places in that hospital! Ha ha.

The most important part of this journey was the opportunity for Dacwah and the inspiration I received from the old man despite his wretched state. He was adamant about his prayers and fasting despite his illness. He was also prepared with Dacwah materials to give to the doctors and nurses, and overall I think they were fairly impressed.

We had a few PR set-backs though. The environment in Munich was much worse than I remember about Mobile. The way women dress (even at work!) and consort with men was terrible. This became an issue since many of the nurses had limited English skills and when they couldn't understand me they would begin to giggle. The Shaykh would always tell me to go and demand things from them, but at the same time he wouldn't forget to tell me not to laugh or giggle! I was caught between not wanting to get involved in conversation (especially over matters that would make us look like strange guests) and between not wanting the Shaykh to feel as though I didn't respect his needs. On numerous occasions he took matters into his own hands and started yelling at them in Arabic!

Another set-back was my wish to not have the nurses see the old man's Cawrah after the operation. I wasn't allowed to see him between the operation and his exit from the ICU, but afterwards I felt that he was my responsibility. This led to a very messy situation and the room began to stink. I tried to wash the Shaykh's clothes once or twice and I would help him with ablution and the bed pan, but eventually they complained of the stench and I was forced to get him in to a wheelchair and wash him myself. Even these trips to the bathroom and the showers seem to look funny to the nurses and we became the source of quite a few jokes.

The Shaykh also had some form of preserved meat that he brought with him from Egypt and he had me ask the nurses to warm it up every night. Eventually they started to refuse because they felt it was becoming unhygienic. There were many other things that led the nurses to be a bit weary of us.

Despite that, while the Shaykh was sleeping or in the ICU I had the opportunity to have many conversations with the doctors and nurses, and they used to see us pray and ask questions. I used to make the Adhaan out loud on the balcony and one Catholic man told

me that when he hears me praying he prays too. He told me that he likes Muslims and he believes the problem with Hitler is that he didn't kill enough Jews! I also had a few run-ins with some Ethiopian nurses, which was a bit uncomfortable at the time (seeing as though they were about to invade Somaalia and my wife is Somaali!), but overall things weren't too bad.

I also had the opportunity to travel around and see some sights during those off hours. Munich is extremely beautiful and I kept wondering what Jannah would be like. I saw BMWs everywhere and everything was orderly and green. I even visited a few Masjids, but some of them were not hospitable. One Turkish Masjid was the basement of a restaurant. It was full of Suufi stuff and the people were smoking upstairs. Another Tabliighi Masjid was much better and I met some Egyptian Ikhwaanis whom I managed to persuade to come visit the Shaykh. I also told the Tabliighi Imaam that I should get the reward of a half Khuruuj because I would be in Munich for 21 days during which we were engaging in worship, seeking knowledge and teaching, Dacwah, providing services for our brothers, and whatever else they require. He didn't like that line of questioning and decided to avoid me.

Once the Shaykh was back to his normal self and the Ikhwaanis showed up, the topic often turned to how the Muslims were oppressed in the jails of the Apostates. The Shaykh himself had gone to jail back in the days of Saadaat and he used to sing "Fii Sabiil Illaahi Namdhii" while reminiscing. All of that re-stoked my desire to free the prisoners. I started thinking about how going or not going to prison is written for us regardless of what we do...so shouldn't we try to free the prisoners while we are still free before falling to a similar fate? I also noted how this old man had been afflicted with a brain tumor and blindness and I had recently seen a boy fall of the Tram in Alexandria and have his arm severed. If all of these hardships and injuries are written for us regardless of what we do... shouldn't we strive to live our life in the path of Allaah and hope that the rewards of those injuries are multiplied?

Upon finally leaving the hospital I saw a few Saudi men with pipes and lighters smoking in the parking lot in front of the hospital. They were talking about crack and making other dumb jokes about drugs so I became extremely angry. I told them that we had been trying to make Dacwah for three weeks in this hospital and now anyone that walks by and sees these Arabs will have to choose one of two options: 1) this is the way Muslims are, or 2) the religion of the Muslims is so terrible that even they don't want to practice it! So I gave them a tongue-lashing to the dismay of our new Ikhwaani friends who were driving us to the airport. I suppose Allaah wanted to teach me humility on that day because at that moment one of the nurses arrived and understood that we were leaving... so she rushed towards me to give me a hug! I immediately threw my hands out and refused, but I don't think any amount of explaining would have made it clear to those present that this was certainly not a normal occurrence!

When we finally returned to Egypt, I refused the payment the Shaykh's family insisted I take (which was a few thousand Euros) because the Shaykh had incurred more expenses than he had expected due to an extra operation that was deemed necessary. They had to use

a tube that entered the huge vein in the thigh and reached all the way to the brain in order to place a shunt in one of the spontaneously grown vessels surrounding the tumor. Usually the situation is much worse, so the doctors remarked how "lucky" the Shaykh was that his body had managed to reroute the blood successfully around the tumor. They also remarked that my medical vocabulary wasn't that bad, and I responded that they were catching on to a few Arabic words pretty fast themselves (may Allaah guide them).

Anyway, now that I was back, I was running around trying to get my daughter's citizenship and passport, while I continued to translate to make enough money for the journey. I figured it was going to be risky but my wife was Somaali, so I had a good cover story.

It turns out, however, that my Somaali wife was not so thrilled about making another move...to Somaalia (the land she had migrated from due to the war that was so common there). I finally decided it's no good continuing to urge her on, so I stopped, but Abu Muxammad urged on his wife and she finally agreed.

My mother and father came during Ramadhaan and I was busy finishing my plans while I was also trying to spend time with them. They had no idea that this would probably be the last time to see their child. I wanted to inform them, but I knew that if I did they would do anything in their power to keep their son, and their new granddaughter away from the war zone in Somaalia.

When I found out that my wife was too scared to come along I decided to hide the plans from her and simply write her a letter, in which I would tell her that I had gone to see Somaalia. Then, I told myself, once I made it I would send for her later if she chose to come. I split the money that I had between us and I left written instructions for her that she would have to go to the embassy and show them the plane ticket to get the emergency passport for my daughter. After preparing all of this I told her and my mother that I was going to Dubai to look for a better job (because my father had recently told me that he thinks Dubai is better than Egypt) and I left for the airport. I felt bad leaving my mother like that but I used to ask myself: what if the door to Jihaad closes because you want to wait an extra week with your mother? I also felt bad leaving my wife and daughter behind but I used to think about the situation in which my wife decides mid-route to go back. I could not afford such a tragedy (monetarily, mentally, and even my security would be in jeopardy). I just told myself that they will be coming after me very soon and I knew that all of these possibilities are just a test from Allaah. I knew that Jihaad was an obligation upon me even if it meant that I would be put in jail and tortured because of it.

I'm sure my daughter will grow up being told how selfish her father is, but it was exactly my selflessness that caused me to make my decision. If everyone stayed behind with their loved ones, who would be left to help those who had had their loved ones murdered, or those who had been separated from their loved ones by prison or chaos? She must grow up to understand that obeying Allaah is the best way that I can ever help her, because He will bestow blessings on us in this life and I may receive the right to intercede on her behalf in the next. When Ibraahiim left his family in the desert, or when he took the knife in order to slaughter Ismaaciil, it could not be said that he was doing what is against his family's best

interest. I pray for her daily, and I pray that she can learn to love her father despite the distance between us.

This feeling of bitter-sweet farewell was on my mind throughout my ride to the airport, and I was even half certain that I would never see my family again because I would be imprisoned before ever leaving Egypt. I was eyed by a few Egyptians, but my dress was typical of a normal tourist (to the point that they started trying to cheat me out of my money) so I slid by. Eventually I arrived in Dubai, but then there was the issue of my arrival being on a one-way ticket. I was afraid that the Egyptians would see that I was going only for transit and that my actual destination is Somalia. That might have been enough to spoil the trip from the get go. Luckily (by the grace of Allaah) I had a friend living in the Emirates. I showed them my friend's number and they let me pass the gates into Dubai. But not before a man from the security stopped me to ask me some questions. He asked me in Arabic where I had come from, I said Egypt, and then he asked for my passport. When he saw the "big blue" he started speaking fairly decent English and asked why I was in Dubai. I told him I was here to visit a friend and before I could finish my words he said: Do you smoke?! I looked at him like he was stupid and asked him: Why? Do I look like I smoke?! He then let me go but told me I had to put my bags through the machine.

I'm not sure what that was supposed to accomplish, but I have come to the conclusion that whether you show them that you are religious or not, they are going to check your bags and run you over with a metal detector. If you say "No!" maybe that means you're an extremist, and if you say "Yes..." they might think you're lying to hide your extremism. Whatever the rational is, I don't think their security measures are really going to save them, but they are definitely annoying.

Anyway, I arrived, and I was free. For some people it would be a wonderful vacation to walk the streets of Dubai. For me, I just wanted to get out of there. The next day I took a bus to the Gold Market and I asked around until I found the Daallo Airways office. I bought myself a one-way ticket and then I went back into the Gold Market to buy myself a nice New York Yankees hat (it was part of my cover story). I didn't stay there long and I didn't want to. I only went to one Pakistani restaurant and one Syrian restaurant (I couldn't resist) and the rest of the time I tried to stay home. That was probably a good policy because at one point I was fairly sure that I was being followed.

To make matters worse, the day of my flight I went to the wrong airport and I stayed there looking very suspicious for a long time. Eventually I asked some of the workers there and they directed me to the right airport in time for me to catch a cab and make it there. My ticket said Mogadishu but the gate corresponded with a flight to Djibouti. I asked around and they told me that this was indeed the correct flight. I just assumed they had grouped the two flights together at the same gate or something. The flight was delayed for a good while and I was the only white man amongst a sea of Somalis. Some of those working at the airport walked by and looked at me in amazement. I just acted casually and asked which way is the Qiblah? Ha ha. There was a strange black man waiting along with us and I got the feeling that he was working with the counter-terrorism people over there in Djibouti.

When we finally arrived in Djibouti I was forced to become 100 percent certain that this flight is not a direct flight to Mogadishu. I saw war planes outside the window and I started to think that my travel had now come to an end. My only hope was to stay on the plane. One brother on the flight had sensed where I was going and he told me not to act religious. Ha ha. Other than my beard I was looking anything but religious. I was going for a Hippie look with my hat turned back and my long hair. But when I was told we have to change planes I didn't think any of that would matter. The second a lone white man was seen boarding the plane to Somalia I figured it would be over. I got down off the plane and a man was ushering people to enter Djibouti or to enter the plane to Somalia. When I took the direction of Somali he turned back and told me: No no no, it's this way. I just pretended not to hear him and he was too busy to come after me. I ran up to the plane and I shoved my ticket into the face of the man standing in the doorway to the plane. He was a bit shocked and told me to relax. I just kept putting it in his face until he took it and he let me board the plane.

I remained in a very uncomfortable state until the plane took off. It was a very old plane and it became very hot, but that did not bother me as much as finding myself landing in Hargeysa. Once again I thought: this is the end of the road. I had just read about a Shaykh who had been imprisoned in Hargeysa for saying that the Americans are disbelievers. So I stayed on the plane and invoked Allaah. It was very hot but I could not chance going out of the plane and being seen as the only white man going to Mogadishu. Eventually the plane took off and a sense of joy overtook me.

I began talking to the people next to me and I found out that there was a woman on board who I used to deliver milk and pizza to in Canada. She told me that she had been in Cairo recently, so that coincidence was so great that I was forced to chit chat. She got my whole story (except for the Jihaad part) and after some minutes the whole plane knew that I was going to Mogadishu to visit my wife's grandmother. I was glad that I did not tell her the reality.

We landed in Mogadishu and I was still not certain whether or not I would be encountered with thugs or 'Islaamists.' I told a man next to me that I would just follow him. He looked at me as if he wanted to run as far away from me as possible. So I realized I'm in this alone. I walked up to the immigration booth and I smiled and gave them my passport. When I saw the man's beard I half expected him to hug me and shoot some bullets in the air. Instead he told me that the Islaamic Courts are the government now and they can only accept people with a visa. My heart dropped. He called another man over to interrogate me and then he went back to his work.

I told the interrogator that I was here to visit my wife's grandmother. He asked: Where is your wife? I told him that she was afraid to come until I saw the situation. He said: How can a Somaali be afraid of Somaalia and you are not afraid? I told him I have no idea but it's the absolute truth. He then said: I'm sending you back. I told him: Listen, I need to pray Casr.

I went to the Masjid in the airport and prayed Casr next to brothers carrying AKs. I was extremely happy to see that sight. I even saw some trucks that had a place for mounting a DSHK. Some of the brothers came up to me and asked if I was a Mujaahid. I had not yet chosen to explain that I was here for Jihaad so I told them: Allaah Knows best who is in His path.

I went back to the interrogator after praying and I told him that a very good idea had come to me. I told him that if he sends me back I will be jailed so the best thing for him to do is to just put me in jail here in the land of the Muslims. It was around that time that an SUV pulled up and inside was another interrogator. I was told to enter the SUV and I did so a bit hesitantly (partly because I thought I was being sent back, and partly because I thought I could just be killed at any moment). I saw an AK next to the man and I figured I was being treated as a spy or something. They told me to bring evidence that someone knows me. I told them that I'm coming to visit my wife's grandmother. At one point they asked for a visa and I told them that the Prophet (S) never asked for visas. People who make Hijrah must only say the testimony of faith and I am a Muslim. They couldn't debate with that but they didn't accept it. I finally told them that I came for Jihaad but they did not accept my proof of identity. Finally they told me to call my wife and to have her call her grandmother and prove that I'm here to visit them. The only problem with that was that I hadn't told anyone that I was coming due to security reasons. She was surprised about the whole thing, but she called her grandmother anyway and they came to the airport to get me. The interrogators accepted this but it was clear that they were still very suspicious of me.

I later realized that the good cop in that scenario was none other than the famed terrorist Fazul, may Allaah accept him as a martyr.

The car came to pick me up and I was taken through some very rugged roads to my grandmother-in-law's home. They seemed happy to see me, but they were also very confused why my wife was not with me. I had bought some small gifts just to prove to the Disbelievers that I was going to visit my wife's grandmother so I gave them to her. They were indeed very small and they looked at me in even more amazement! Ha ha. One of the gifts was black female gloves; which is a strange gift for an old woman who doesn't wear the full Islaamic covering.

I didn't care. I had made it to Somaalia. The only thing that bothered me was that I did not see people that looked like al-Qaacida on every street corner. But I had already heard some strange things about Shaykh Shariif from the internet so I was already expecting to find some moderates and some un-Islaamic ideas.

I don't think it made things any better that I was staying in one of the worst areas of Mogadishu. I was in the Madiinah area which is full of a lot of the tribes that were typically against the Islaamists. I think it's good that I didn't know that little tid bit at the time because I probably would have become extremely paranoid. Instead, I used to pray in the Masjid near the house for many of the prayers and I would even go to the Bakaarah Market quite often.

I started receiving phone calls from the Courts that this was not a good idea and that the “peace” was not really as peaceful as it might seem. But I had a Somaali guide with me, the husband of my wife’s aunt (he was from the Hawaadle tribe) so I didn’t really encounter any problems and I didn’t see any danger. There was only one instance where some guy started yelling a bit heatedly that this white man only came to destroy the ‘Sacd’ tribe (which he happened to be from). Fortunately, the people in the market all told him to just drop it and go home.

I remember those early days well. I was relieved to have finally reached but I was full of anxiety about how I was going to get my family to come and how I was going to join the Mujaahidiin. Up until that point I wasn’t too sure about the Courts and I hadn’t figured out what I should do next.

My main activities were buying the things I needed as well as making phone calls back to my wife in Egypt. It was during one such phone call that I learned that the Canadian Embassy had refused to grant my daughter a passport. Since she was less than a year old she needed to receive an emergency passport to travel and that required the signature of both parents. My wife explained that I was in Dubai and I could not sign, but they merely told her to have her husband sign in the Canadian Embassy in Dubai. I thought that was completely out of the question because I had narrowly made it to Somalia in the first place and I felt that I would be put in jail if I tried to leave and come back once again. My wife, however, did not want to hear anything less than ‘at your service my love.’ I told her a hundred times that I will walk from the south of Somalia to the north by foot if it would help matters but I’m not leaving the borders. Eventually she put on enough tears till I told her: fine, but if I go to jail it’s your fault.

So I got on the bus (which I used to ride frequently) and I went to Daallo Airlines and bought a ticket. The flight was about a week later so they told me to come back in a few days to confirm the flight. So a few days later I got on the bus once again and I confirmed the flight (although they told me I had still come too early). Anyway, when I reached Kilometer 4 (which is a big name for anyone who knows about Somalia) I was accompanied by the husband of my wife’s aunt as well as her uncle.

It’s important to note here that her uncle was a real criminal. He was known for taking people’s money and running away with it. He used to eat Qaat and he even had some very questionable ‘marriages.’ Then, his new game was that he was a reformed Tabliighi that prays Qiyaamul Layl. Ha ha. Eventually he became a translator for the AMISOM!

Anyway the husband of the aunt went to catch a bus going to our area and the uncle strangely disappeared into the crowd. I remember feeling very vulnerable at that point because I didn’t know where I was, I didn’t have a weapon, and I was surrounded by Somalis that I did not know. I just pretended like I was unconcerned and that everything was normal, but I don’t know if I played it off so well. Anyway, the guy came back to show me the way to the bus and as I was making my way through the crowd some one pushed me into a lady. I tried to apologize as best I could and then I got on to the bus as quickly as possible.

When we got off that bus I did a normal quick check of my pockets and realized that something was missing. My plane ticket was present, but my wallet (with only about 20 dollars in it) and my passport (which was more important) were both missing. It turns out (in hind sight) that this was an incredibly good thing for my life but it really angered me deeply at that point. I went back to Km 4 and I started asking the soldiers from the Courts to help. Instead of finding an earnest Mujaahid I found a young man in a camo suit talking in a corner with a girl (which really turned me off to the Courts even more). Then we went to Bakaarah and told the people in the 'passports' section of the market to alert us if the passport was found. We also went to the radio station and made an announcement of my name and that my passport was missing (very dumb move from the security perspective I guess but at the time it seemed like a good idea).

Anyway, to make a long story short, the uncle had told one of his friends to pickpocket me and then he pretended to have no clue about what happened after that; although he came up with some crazy contradictory stories soon afterwards. Eventually he decided to pretend that he could do some research and find the passport for a 'fee.' This fee eventually became the price he would have to pay the man to give us the passport. Then when he asked for 500 dollars I told him that it's too much. Instead of saying that he will try to haggle the man down he began haggling with me directly. Then I told him: it seems that you have some interest in this passport as well and not just the man who stole it. After that it became war between us.

He tried once or twice to put on a friendly face. He came over to the house I was in for breakfast and my wife's aunt had just told me that she saw a dream last night that I had found my passport. This joker pipes up... 'YEAH! Me too! I also saw a dream. But it wasn't like that. I saw that you had to do a lot of searching and finally you got it.' Then he told me a story. He said there was a Shaykh who used to read Sunan Abu Daawuud to the people. So one day as he slept in the Masjid someone stole his book (which is a few volumes long depending on the printing). So he went to the market and asked everyone if they had seen his book. One person would tell him: Yes, so and so has it. So the Shaykh would go to so and so and only find one volume with him (which he would buy of course) and then he would ask if that person had seen any other volumes. So after paying for each volume and chasing these people around the world he finally got his book. I think the moral of this story is pretty clear. This guy really thought I believed that this fairy tale was real. Psh.

After some run-arounds I eventually tried to get the man put in jail (which eventually succeeded to some degree). I went to the Masjid I normally prayed in and I took the Imaam to the side. I told him the whole story about why I had come to Somalia and I told him the story about my wife and daughter. Finally I told him that the uncle had stolen the passport and he got on the case. He called all of the people in the neighborhood from the man's tribe (Majertaan) and we sat in a circle in his house to discuss what to do. After everyone had spoken, including the uncle, I let him have it in a very big way. I basically told these people that this man is either a Murtadd or at least a Munaafiq because he told me that he likes

Cabdullaahi Yusuf and many other dumb things. I also explained how the whole story had played out and eventually everyone in the room was agreed to put the man in jail.

Around that time my dad got wind of the whole thing and called my wife's relatives in Somaalia. He said: 'What are you doing in God Forsaken Somaalia (with some expletives)?!!' I told him I'm just visiting, but I can't really come back now that my passport has been stolen. I think he must have come close to insanity at that moment but he decided to just think about killing me after he had saved me from the God Forsaken Land. I continued playing the role until I finally told him much later (after reaching Kismaayu) that I was here for Jihaad. He flipped! He said it's not your war! Just find a way to Djibouti and they will help you. I think he thought I was telling a sick joke and me, I thought that his plan sounded extremely 'likely.' Then the phone cut as he was giving me the embassy's phone number.

Anyway, while that was going on I was also going to the UNHCR headquarters to try to get them to send my signature to the Canadian Embassy in Egypt. When they saw my religious clothing they scoffed at me and told me that they could not do anything to help me. But when my wife pressed the Embassy and they called the UNHCR directly the story changed completely. I was now treated like their master and they were at my disposal for anything I might need. I found that extremely disgusting, but I didn't care as long as my family could come.

What I later found out, however, is that my signature was only going to provide my daughter an emergency passport directly to...Canada! My wife had been tricking me the whole time. That was a very big let down, and I was extremely saddened that my daughter would return back to the land I had tried to save her from.

It was strange how so many things were coming to a head at the same time.

I had already realized that my wife and daughter might not come, and it had become a bit of a trial being a white man in Somalia. Riding the bus and walking in the market was becoming a source of off color comments (excuse the pun). Therefore I saw it fit that I search for a second wife very quickly. So the Imaam once again helped out in that endeavor as well; while he was simultaneously helping me to plan to rescue Abu Muxammad and his family from the airport. I was supposed to provide for them a house and get things ready for them since I was the first to arrive.

I had not informed him of my departure because he had been called to the National Security office in Egypt a few times for questioning and I was afraid they would get it out of him. But he, on the other hand, gave me notice of his departure a few days in advance and I tried to get things ready the best I could under the circumstances. Instead of coming on the appointed day, however, they decided to come early and they didn't have any real means of contacting me. So I found out that they had reached Mogadishu the night of their arrival (although they had already arrived that morning).

I tried to search for them and I was told that they were with a member of the Courts. I called the number and I tried to get to that part of Mogadishu but it was too late at night and the area was extremely far away.

On the day upon which I received the news about my daughter going to Canada I ended up praying Maghrib in the Masjid as was my routine and on my return to the house I passed through the local market area. It was there that I saw five religious looking men standing next to a sedan. As I made my way closer I saw a white man from amongst them. It was Abu Muxammad!! I was extremely excited and I started hugging them in joy. This action of wrapping ones arms around another person also tends to have another result (although it was not intended at the time)...finding out that that person is packing. Ha ha. These brothers definitely were and I later found out that the reason for their caution was that I was living in a very bad area this whole time.

Most of the brothers I met on that day, have all either been martyred or imprisoned by the disbelievers (may Allaah hasten their release).

At any rate, I took them to the house and they told me that they were the Shabaab (not to be confused with what eventually became Xarakah ash-Shabaab al-Mujaahidiin) and that they had come to take me to the place of the Muhaajiriin. I was extremely excited once again, but I found it very ironic. I had been charged with preparing the way for Abu Muxammad and his family and I had been trying to save him from the airport and so forth. However, the reality of the situation was that he had saved me from this frustrating lifestyle (living with non-religious people in a bad area) and prepared the way for me to realize the dream of joining the Jihaad.

As I said before, I was about to get married at this time to a second wife but the brothers told me there would be time for all of that later on. Regardless, I had already completely lost sight of that goal now that I was going to join the brothers and get training. So I rode with the brothers across the city to the house of the Muhaajiriin where I was told that we would be traveling to Kismayu the next day. And so it was... and it was: so much for the second wife idea.

They told me the trip would take 2 weeks but I scoffed at them after hearing that the distance was only a few hundred kilometers. I jokingly asked if we would be backpacking for it to take that long. But, although I took it as a joke, the following day we bought everything we would need for a long journey.

It was that day that I met the Spy. I had already seen him the night I arrived at the house of the Muhaajiriin where he had told me to make myself at home. He was giving me tips about shooting in three bullet bursts as I was learning to open and close the AK, but I didn't really have a chance to think he was weird until the next morning. When we woke up we decided to walk to a nearby hotel for breakfast and he started to tell me about self defense and weapons and so forth. Then he would stop and say; but I don't like to talk about my past. Then when we reached the hotel the other brothers seemed to treat him in a weird manner and he himself had become a bit nervous. He told me that he had an

appointment with some Muslim Aid agencies and that he also wanted to go see if any new Muhaajirs had come to the airport. When the time for the appointment slid past he just told me: maybe it's better anyway (which seemed a very fishy response to missing an 'important' appointment.) He also told me that I could work for him since I knew how to type. When I asked what I would be doing he told me that he might send me to Dubai to buy him a special type of jelly!

In my defense for not realizing this guy was a flaming spy, I had been told that there was a very big trainer who had recently been sent by al-Qaacidah. I assumed that this might be the guy and that is why he was acting so secretive. I also just assumed that any American in Jihaad will always be a bit eccentric and ethnocentric so most of the things he did or said I just let slide. But, you know, I think that spy thought I was an idiot, and it's possible that after he escaped he tried to send another spy in his image to infiltrate the ranks by trying to become close to me through telling me tall tells. But that's another story entirely.

Later that night we were taken to a big garage and we waited for hours for these big trucks to be loaded up with guns and bullets and food before being loaded with us. During that time the Spy continued to give me military tips about taking advantage of any opportunity I found for sleeping (which is really great advice by the way). All the while he was insisting over and over that he was going to be a civilian on his trip to Kismaayu. Just more weird stuff from him.

That night was the night I was given my AKM (which I still have and own as a personal gun now) and a magazine of bullets. I felt like I had just been given an atomic bomb that might blow at any second. Ha ha. I had no idea how to use the thing, and I had only shot a pistol, a shotgun, and a small .22 rifle prior to that in my deer/squirrel hunting days. But since I had been shown how to open it and hold it earlier that day I felt that I could take on the responsibility of carrying the gun and maybe even try to defend myself with it if it came down to it.

So anyway, we got on the trucks and we pulled out of Mogadishu to the sound of 'Allaahu Akbar,' which was being chanted by us and even by the normal people we were passing on the roads as we left the city.

That night I became good friends with many brothers who would later be martyred or captured (may Allaah hasten their release). We were lying on top of dates and tires and so forth on the back of those huge trucks. As the truck entered crater after crater on that terrible road to Kismaayu we would lie there staring at the stars while one of the brothers sang Nashiids. Sometimes we would have discussions about paradise or about some other religious topic. Other times we would explain our stories of making Hijrah and how we were so blessed to leave the lands of the Disbelievers. In short, it was the dream of any Muslim who has the love of the religion burning in his heart.

We slept some on the back of the truck and we woke up in the morning in a place called 'Impressa.' I can tell you that today, but at the time all I knew was that we were near a place called 'Baraawe' which lies on the ocean and its inhabitants are 'white' people. I felt

it extremely necessary that I go see these people (and possibly get married Ha ha) because I could relate to being a white person in Somalia. Even I was actually called 'Birwaani' a few times by some passers-by along the way to Kismaayu. There was no time for that type of luxury on this trip though. So we simply ate some pasta under the shade and followed it up with some mangoes. We had a brief nap. Then it was back to the grind.

Since we had reached daylight, some of the people decided that it's best that the white guys be put in a special car. Abu Muxammad and I did not like that idea for two reasons. The first was that we wanted to be with the brothers. The second was that this special car was a double-cab truck that was full of people. It was absolutely impossible to stretch out as we had been doing on top of the other large truck. But when times get rough... you just make the best out of them. That's what Abu Muxammad tried to do at least. He just leaned his head back and started snoring. When he got into a semi-deep sleep and his neck became limp we hit a 'gi-mongous' crater and Abu Muxammad's head smacked the back windshield and cracked it nicely. Ha ha. I think we kind of got used to the whole thing after about a hundred kilometers.

We passed by some other places and we bought some camel milk from women who were carrying it in plastic 3 liter jugs (which used to contain cooking oil). Those jugs are really important here by the way, especially for a Mujaahid. Anyway, I wasn't incredibly accustomed to any type of fresh milk especially not camel milk at that point, so I didn't fall in love with it at first sight. It also has a way of making the bowels move which isn't such a good thing while traveling.

Anyway, the trip was pretty much a lot of the same for a good while especially the road between 'Kunyo Boro' and 'Jilib.' This road is notorious for giving people headaches, not to mention during the rainy season. The craters become filled with water and become nearly impassable mud puddles. So it's a long swerving (from the left side of the road to the right side) up and down (entering the holes and exiting them) journey. But it's actually extremely monotonous except for the occasional need to get down and push the car when the four-wheel drive no longer helps. The monotony is derived from the fact that the road, despite the bumpiness, is actually pretty straight, at times for as much as the eye can see, which can really kill the morale. There are times when the Bedouins (carrying their stick with the classic 3 liter jug) can outpace the car on that road. You just here their little sandals clicking and see them zoom passed. So here you are, seeing kilometers of craters and mud puddles ahead of you, while your car is going slower than the pace of a man! To make matters worse the scenery consists only of extremely thick thorn bushes on either side of the road. It's not a picnic. That's for sure. The one plus is having the opportunity to travel at your leisure just after Fajr or Casr. You can come across miniature deer (Sagaaro) or wild turkey (Kaaburaay or Dooroo Kaliif) which make for some great hunting. After tons of trips down that road it has eventually become a mastered skill and a bit of a ceremonial thing to hunt and feast on the meat.

It was on this road, I think somewhere near 'Xaranka' (which is sometimes explained as coming from the word 'Xaraam,' because of the lewd acts perpetrated by the bandits that used to run the village), where the big truck broke down. Once again the Spy began his

normal bag of tricks. This time he started telling me how to find drinking water. He took a plastic bag and put it in a tree to catch the rain. He also took out a shirt and began filtering water from the mud puddles into a plastic container. Then, when he saw some sheep, he started walking in the bush looking for the owner, while refusing for anyone to follow him (which was one of the strangest points of all).

Since it had begun to rain, we huddled under the broken down truck and we started reading Qur'aan and having conversation. It was like being on a camping trip (which I had wanted to do ever since I joined and quit the boy scouts in 2nd grade). Eventually the Amir decided to send some of the small cars forward and leave some people behind to guard the big truck.

I continued on with some of the brothers until we reached a barrier of water at around Maghrib time. Sometime before that we had encountered some Arab brothers and, once again, I was sure at the time that they had to be some huge al-Qaacidah leaders. Ha ha. They had helped us to push the car out of one of the mud puddles and then they were right behind us for the rest of the journey. When we stopped at the barrier of water we ended up sleeping right next to each other. Axmad Madobe was with us that night as well. He was the 'Mayor' of Kismaayu and he was posing as a very hardcore member of the Shabaab at that time (later it become known to me that in reality he was a very hardcore supporter of his own stomach and then of his own particular tribe). He came around and passed us some mosquito nets; which were extremely beneficial for that place. Jilib was just down the road and it is notorious for having some huge mosquitoes. One of the Arab brothers, Abu Xafs (may Allaah accept him as a martyr), had slept under the net and was wearing some thick socks, but still the mosquitoes gave him a run for his money the whole night. He woke up with swollen ankles.

That morning we woke up to find that the road in front of us was actually not a road at all. It had become a river. There were tractors stationed to pull cars across and those who were not in the car had to pull themselves across the river using a rope that was tied from end to end. When it was my turn I tried to keep my gun and other important items out of the water (which I managed to do even though I fell into a deep hole). When I reached the other side the Arab brother, Abu Xafs (with the swollen ankles) was singing Nashiids for the brothers crowded around him. This guy was absolutely amazing when it came to Nashiids. He would even pretend to re-wind the 'tape player' by making the squealing rewind sound. He had been in a Tunisian jail for terror charges (playing with Nitric Acid and other chemicals ha ha), and after being set free by virtue of a French passport he made it to Somalia. When he arrived he began his experimentation immediately and he always traveled with Sulfuric and Nitric Acid wherever he went. It was also there that one of the brothers (who would later be our 'trainer' may Allaah protect him) gave me a belt for my gun (which I had for an extremely long time until it broke and caused me great pain).

After this we reached 'Jilib,' which soon became our favorite town. Abu Muxammad and I would roam around with the brothers and buy cokes and Sambusas and then polish it off with tea. We ended up staying there for about a week. One brother, who had been in Jihaad for a while (although he eventually lost steam and left after some mad events), continued to

tell us to take advantage of the opportunity to take showers and relax, but all we could think about was getting to the fight (which is quite typical really).

It was at that hotel in Jilib that the Spy decided to continue his irregularities. This time he came to me and Abu Muxammad (since we were staying in the same room) and told us to make a bomb out of two batteries. I thought it was a very dumb idea, but since he kept insisting I took them to the Tunisian brother and told him that the guy wants a bomb from this stuff. So the Tunisian brother just put a bunch of match heads inside of the batteries and lit it on fire in front of us. I thought it was extremely dumb at the time but the Spy would later use that day as “smoking evidence” against Abu Muxammad. The Spy had gotten in to many arguments with people and Abu Muxammad was not the type to back down. So I think this was the Spy’s way of framing Abu Muxammad for any future retribution. In fact, he had even come up to me one time and said: 'Tell Abu Muxammad not to talk about martyrdom operations because there are people here looking for those types of people.' He said: 'Tell him not to say stuff if he isn't serious.'

At the time this just increased my suspicions that this guy is some huge al-Qaacidah guy that was going to plan the next 9/11! Ha ha. But later on I realized how extremely bait this man was. I even found out that he had asked someone to keep an eye on a Palestinian brother from the Scandinavian countries (may Allaah accept him as a martyr). He said: 'I want to know where he ends up.' Very strange guy.

Anyway, we got back on the road and it wasn't long before we were wishing we were back in Jilib. We were on an asphalt road that somehow turned into a river just like the previous section of 'road.' We could see little huts under the water that had become completely abandoned. It was somewhere around those huts that the driver (of one of the large trucks this time) got too far off the asphalt and put the tires on some soggy mud. The truck tipped to one side and people started freaking out. The driver just kept digging us deeper into the mud until me and Abu Muxammad told the guy (very forcefully) to just stop! When he did we had to get out of the car from his side while hoping that the whole truck wouldn't tip on us.

We walked through the river and made it to some dry asphalt. I don't know if this was a new discovery, but walking on black asphalt at around noon time, on the equator, for a few kilometers is not very fun. We finally arrived at a new river (bigger than the previous ones) which must have been around a place called 'Kamsuuma.' After becoming thoroughly dehydrated I started looking at the flowing 'red' river. It was red because of the red dirt it was carrying with it. So drinking that water would mean having a big mouthful of red dirt. I had already drunk red puddle water so I was desensitized to the types of dangers we are always reminded about in the West. When I came close to drinking multiple brothers, including one Sudaani doctor (may Allaah accept him as a martyr), told me not to drink the water. So I went back towards a little shack where some brothers were gathered. There was an Ethiopian brother there (may Allaah accept him as a martyr) who began laughing at me and telling me that not drinking that water indicates that I am from the new generation of Mujaahidiin. I didn't like that too much but I didn't really take it to heart. I just took some of the 'red' tea that had been cooked with red river water and I tried to pretend that it

might quench my thirst. I then ran underneath a big truck for shade and I think someone finally handed me a plastic bottle that had a few sips of purified water.

The method of crossing this river was also special like the last. The SUVs were all caulked like the wagons on the Oregon Trail game. Ha ha. Then they were floated across the river. The people were placed on some pieces of wood that were tied on top of some 20 liter jugs (which, like their 3 liter cousins, used to have cooking oil inside of them and are also extremely important in Somalia). Then we floated across the river to the other side; all of us, except for the Spy that is. He decided to get out and swim around in the river, which only made him look stranger to everyone else.

It was after that that the Spy decided to walk ahead of the people we were with and he took a gun with him this time (despite being a civilian for the trip). He told me to come along and I placed a bullet in the chamber. It turns out that Axmad Madobe and some other guys had already gone forward and they were resting under a big tree. We too decided to join them under the shady tree and we sat down. It was there that I tried to take out the bullet without first removing the magazine. Therefore, I merely replaced one bullet with another bullet. So to complete the safety precautions I pointed the gun up in the air and pulled the trigger. Boom! Abu Muxammad swears I almost shot him but I was sure that I pointed the gun up. In fact, the only thing that was injured from the bullet was my pride. Ha ha. Everyone looked at me like I was extremely dumb (but that wouldn't be the last time to make that stupid school boy error).

We pressed on until we finally made it to Kismaayu. It's really beautiful to enter the city for the first time because everything becomes extremely green and there are some rolling hills, and then long flat plains, filled with all types of cattle. We had seen many beautiful sights prior to that but this time we were happy to see our new home so it made it all the more beautiful.

Jilib for instance, is full of mango trees that line the banks of the Jubba River. There are monkeys and all types of wildlife. There are banana trees and papaya. The whole scene looks incredibly tropical.

Kaamsuuma is also not really much different in its description but during the flood season we didn't really go looking around like we did in Jilib.

We entered Kismaayu and we were taken to the house previously owned by the criminal Barey Hiiraale (which literally means the man with freckles and balding streaks). He used to run the city for a pretty long time on behalf of his tribe (Marexaan) which was also the tribe of the former president Siyaad Barey.

It turns out that Kismaayu has been the stage for some crazy feuds between some sub-clans of the Daarod tribe. There are the Harti clans on one side (which include Majertaan, Dholbahantey, Warsangeli, etc.), the Marexaan on another, and the Absamey (which includes Ogaden, Bartiri, etc.) on yet another.

This bit of information is important when we take into consideration the fact that Axmad Madobe, and quite a lot of those with responsibilities in the city, were all from the Absamey sub-clan (in fact, they were mainly from Ogaden and then Muxammad Zubayr after that). That really caused a ruckus in the very beginning. There were some pretty riotous protests and people even let their love of their tribe lead them to saying some crazy types of disbelief. Some people, instead of saying they don't want a particular tribe, started chanting that they do not want Shariicah or Laa ilaaha illa Allaah and so forth.

When we arrived the protests had ended but the people still did not like us at all. Therefore we were put on a type of lockdown inside the house in which we were supposed to stay.

The Spy didn't like that at all. Neither did I or Abu Muxammad, but we didn't take it all in the same light as the Spy. We just thought that since we had made Hijrah and since we were now living in the so-called city of the extremist Islaamists we should be able to go anywhere we wanted. The Spy, on the other hand, felt that he had been placed in prison (which could have been the case). He would pace up and down and talk about how uncomfortable he felt.

One day he decided to walk around the city without taking permission. Abu Muxammad and I figured this might be a good opportunity to see the town but, once the Spy left the premises immediately people started following us. One brother came to us and told us to go back so I stopped there. The Spy was trying to make a get away so he kept walking. Abu Muxammad just followed. Finally a car came to pick us up and the Spy had talked them into taking him to see the airport and the seaport.

This fits into the grand scheme of things because in Jilib he had spoken to someone over the phone and told him that he is going on a safari to Kismaayu. He told the person that he can find it on the map. He also told the person to tell another person to check on his boat (very 'fishy') and to prepare some money. He said not to alarm anyone because things are not grave.

He had also told someone that he had been the captain of a ship... which reminds me. He told me one time in Jilib that he used to work for a company that made alarms that detected biological weapons. He said that biological weapons are a good idea as long as you can figure out a way to make them attack a specific type of DNA. He also used to tell me that I should think of ways to kill people with chlorine gas inside the United States. In Kismaayu he told me that he used to work in Afghanistan and he tried to argue that the Northern Alliance is made up of real Muslims. He had also told me that he was placed in charge of a 'farm' (maybe code word for a jail) in Egypt and that some officials there owe him a favor. They could even give him Egyptian citizenship if he wanted.

All of this was just a bit strange to me. Some things fell into the al-Qaacidah theory and the other things I discounted as indicating that the man was simply still American at heart about some issues. When he talked to me he used to like for me to read Qur'aan and tell him about Tafsiir. He would also debate about certain Fiqh topics and at times he would tell me that the proofs I was using weren't really in Saxiix al-Bukhaari (although they were

of course). He even told me once that I should think of leaving Somalia and going to Saudi Arabia to get a Sharci degree! But with other people he would debate about how America has helped the world with so much aid and that America is not the problem we are facing as Muslims. I think the guy must have been one of these Murji' Neo-Salafis that thinks its OK to work with the Americans as long as he is fighting terror. I think that's why he was so eager to find out who would be willing to leave Somalia for an outside operation.

When the guy reached the airport he started asking about the flights that go to Mogadishu. When we reached the seaport he started looking around until he 'vanished.' We found him having a discussion with one boat owner and it seemed to me he was trying to organize an escape.

Whatever his plan was, it didn't work. We went back to the house and the Amiir began asking him questions. He was asking him to provide someone who could vouch for him that he was a real Mujaahid. He only knew that one brother from his area in the States was present on the front line and he assumed that that brother would just vouch for him despite only knowing his name and where he prays. That didn't happen.

He was also confronted with his contradictory stories. A Muslim Aid worker, a boat captain, a Mujaahid that wants the frontline, someone who wants to organize outside operations, and his latest: he was sent to Kismaayu to help out with the development of the city. He was told to prove the last story by writing out what types of measures could be taken to improve income. He started writing out a system for fishing licenses and he also suggested that we bring the Chinese to start using our ports for business. The Amiir (Abu Talxah as-Sudaani, may Allaah accept him as a martyr) was not really impressed.

I think the man was very close to being slaughtered but the Amiir decided to send him back to Mogadishu. The Spy seemed to believe that it was perfectly OK for a Mujaahid to come to Somalia and then go back to Dubai unhampered. So he had planned to do that. He told me and Abu Muxammad to make sure that he wasn't killed on his way to Mogadishu and he seemed extremely nervous when we gave our farewells.

The brothers in Mogadishu were waiting for him when he arrived and despite their best judgment they allowed him to board the plane and leave to Dubai. The unfortunate part of the story is that he would later be taken to Kenya to point the finger at all of the brothers he had seen in Somalia who had now crossed the border and fallen into Kenyan hands. But to tell the truth, I'm more a fan of erring on the side of caution, instead of going on a witch-hunt, slaughtering every suspicious character in sight. I think Abu Talxah made the right call, despite the unfortunate results. But I think there was another Spy that wasn't so lucky (he apparently was busted with some proof against him and he confessed).

When the Spy was finally out of the way, I think we actually started going out more regularly. We would go to the beach to run, swim, and play soccer. It was a type of physical training in order to prepare us for going to the front line.

I was, for one of the first times in my life since middle school, actually excited about doing exercise. But since it had been such a long time since the last time I was physically active I started feeling some weird pains in my Achilles tendons (I think that's what it's called anyway). It was about one day later that I started walking like a duck. Ha ha.

It hadn't gotten too bad yet when we were asked what we wanted to do. The Amiir sat down with us and said that there are two options: 1) the front line and 2) specialized training. It seemed, for some reason, that many people were really hyped up about the specialized training and becoming a commando or James Bond. I just told myself that I had come for Jihaad and to help the Ummah the best way I can; not to become an Amiir or someone special. So Abu Muxammad and I told the Amiir that we wanted the front line. We were also accompanied by three other brothers. One was the Ethiopian brother who became a martyr in Idaley. The other was a British Somali who became a martyr much later on during some fighting in Mogadishu in the last days of Ramadhaan (while having been recently married just prior). The last was an Eritrean brother who was amongst those who became martyrs in Bergal in the North of Somalia when their boat came under attack at the port. I ask Allaah to accept them all.

So when the day came for the brothers who wanted training to be taken to their camp, Abu Muxammad and I did not get our things ready. Then the Amiir ordered us to get ready, so we went to him and explained that we had already chosen to go to the front line. He told us that we would have to get a week of training and then we would be sent. This would have been fine and well but we had begun to realize who our trainer would be.

As I said I had begun to walk like a duck around that time and I couldn't really run so well. I expected that would go away in about a week (which it might have if I had rested more) and I just planned not to exert myself for a while. Instead, the brother who had given me the gun strap was now telling us to do some crazy forms of exercise. We woke up one morning to have this guy yelling and telling us we have to run like this and crawl like that. It felt like some form of extreme torture.

There was glass on the ground and we were told to walk on our fists while someone held our feet in the air (like a wheel barrow). I could do that, so I did (with some bleeding fists). Abu Muxammad was hanging in as well. We were told to carry two 20 liter jugs filled with water by placing them one on top of the other and placing our arms under them at about waist level. Then we were told to run back and forth. I think I wasn't strong enough for two, but I think Abu Muxammad might have done it. We were not allowed to rest throughout all of this and we continued to run and do jumping jacks and so forth until one brother puked his guts out. He was told that he only has 5 minutes to rest and then he will be punished with the trainer's stick.

Let me remind here that I was still walking like a duck. So when the running got intense I told the trainer I can't run any more. He told me to do abdominal workouts instead; which I did for a long time. Finally, it was time for the other guys to do abdominal workouts. So instead of me getting a rest to do another form of exercise I was told to keep up with the other brothers. The trainer stood over my head and told me to raise my feet up to his

stomach. Then he would throw my feet back down. That is a normal exercise, but when someone's stomach is on fire it's not so easy to keep up with the rest of the pack. I eventually became fatigued and I was striving to get my feet up for one last time when the trainer took his stick and whacked me between the legs. That was a very painful experience. I told him that he will pay the full blood money if I find out that I won't be able to reproduce, but everyone thought it was funny, so the torture continued.

Abu Muxammad finally had enough at one point because he was told to do something that would aggravate an old back injury he had. This trainer didn't realize that Abu Muxammad was older than him, nor did he have any real understanding of physical training or medical conditions. So he just wielded his stick at Abu Muxammad and told him to get back in line. The trainer also didn't realize that Abu Muxammad had some ghetto tendencies about him. Waving a stick wasn't the right move. Abu Muxammad got angry and started telling him not to do that or else. But the trainer didn't understand English so the charade just got worse. That was the last day for Abu Muxammad to train with the trainer and it was the reason he would not even ponder entering a training camp led by him.

I wasn't exactly having a field day with this brother either, but I managed to tell myself that I have to obey so long as he is the one in charge. That mentality got me through quite a few crises. But, needless to say, I was extremely disappointed about this new training camp idea.

When we arrived in the camp, and we got full confirmation of who would be in charge, Abu Muxammad told me that he was leaving immediately. I had to talk him in to staying with a long list of arguments. I even had to try and cool down the Arabs and explain that this is normal American behavior. Ha ha. I had seen both cultures so I could understand where both sides were coming from.

Fortunately for us all, Abu Muxammad got Malaria that night and he was taken to the city to be treated and he didn't have to go through the torturous week that was ahead of me.

The next morning we were taken to the beach just after Fajr. We only had some salty tea and I think we might have eaten some dates or something. Then we were told to run up this big steep hill (even me...the duck) and after that we made it to the ocean. There we started the normal torture routine all over again. You know, I forgot to mention, the trainer believed that beating the muscles with a stick would hasten the workout process. I told him that beating Muslims is not allowed. He said: 'I am like a doctor that is doing what is in the best interests of his patient or a school teacher who is whipping his students.' I told him: 'I am a full grown man, and not a child, who can be beaten with parental permission, and you are not my doctor whom I asked to heal me.' He didn't seem to be convinced and the beatings continued.

That day we all became so tired and no one would allow another person to lean on him for fear of falling himself. One particular instance of the type of exercise we went through was group push-ups. It should be noted that many Somalis find it hard to do a push-up because they tend to have small chests (although I guess I'm one to talk). I've seen them walk for

hours on end, even carrying heavy things sometimes, but it's extremely rare to see them do a good push-up. So we were told to do 20 push-ups together. When we reached 10 or so we were told to start over because someone had made a mistake. We started over and when we reached 7 or so we were told to start over because someone made a mistake. We kept that up until no one could even do one push-up. I know there are some people that can do 100 without stopping and such madness but I don't think they reached that level in one morning workout.

There was a little island off the beach by about 1 kilometer and the tide was out. So the brothers were all told to run to it and come back. I even tried my best but my duck walk caused me to nearly crack my head open on some weird coral reef looking rocks. I was told to run in a circle on the beach instead. The trainer asked me around that time if I felt any pain. I laughed. I told him I started feeling pain the moment I stepped out of our tent and started running up that stupid hill! He himself laughed and told me to continue running.

We were also told that day to dig our graves in the sand. It started off ok but under the sand we found a very hard rocky layer of dirt. My fingernails started to bleed from the digging (because we were told to only use our hands) and the sweltering heat was not helping matters. We were told that the first person to finish will receive a bottle-cap-full of water (like 10mL or something!). Up until that point water had been off limits. We had continued to run and jump and tumble in the sun until our tongues were made of salt and there was no longer any saliva to swallow. We were told that the people who finish last will be told to fill their graves with their noses, and later it was changed to filling them with their elbows. I somehow managed not to be last and the trainer gave us all a cap-full of water.

We were then told to lie in our graves where we were jumped upon. The trainer would jump from grave to grave stepping on our stomachs, arms, legs, etc. Then they made a ditch connecting all of the graves and we had to crawl between them doing countless push-ups and sit-ups. At one point we were taken into the ocean to do sit-ups while water was being thrown in our face. Then we did push-ups in the waves while the trainer kicked us in the stomach (but they were pretty light kicks in all reality). One British Somaali brother was trying to help us all out by changing the environment from one of forced torture to volunteering for hell. He would give the brothers morale and everyone was making Takbiir. It actually helped a lot, because I wasn't liking the atmosphere of oppression.

When we finally embarked on our journey back to the camp at about Casr time, it comes to no surprise that we were all up in arms about the fact that we were being taken back by the trainer through a winding route through thorn bushes. Eventually one brother exploded and I think the trainer finally realized we'd had enough.

When we came back to camp I remember drinking for a few solid minutes without feeling that my thirst was going away. The water in the camp was normally too salty to drink but that day I had decided that a truck-full of purified water must have been dumped into the water tank. It's possible the salts were needed at that point after all of the dehydration.

All of this continued while I had yet to see any real training. I kept asking one of the brothers I knew from amongst the training staff to hurry up and teach me the weapons so that I could get out of there and go to the front line, but he just assured me that all of that will come in due time.

To interrupt for a little history refresher, when we arrived in Kismaayu for the first day the brothers on the front line had received a victory the same day. I believe it was the day of the battle of Raam Caddey. That battle, as I was told, occurred when the scouting party of the Ethiopians and the Murtaddiin on one side met with the scouting party of the Mujaahidiin on the other. The battle ended in victory for the Mujaahidiin and multiple Murtadds were killed and slaughtered and some Ghaniimah was captured.

It was around two weeks later I suppose that the Mujaahidiin engaged the Ethiopians in the battle of Idaaley. That battle raged on for nearly a week and it was during that battle that the entire training camp was ordered to get ready for war.

The numbers in the camp used to be close to one thousand but the daily beatings and the hard work caused hundreds to sneak out and leave. There was one case in which some people had slept through their shift of guarding. So they were lined up and told to extend their hand to be smacked with a stick 10 times (although it would have been more if I hadn't have explained that there is no more than 10 lashes for penalties other than those prescribed in the Qur'aan and Sunnah). One unlucky customer was crawling all over the ground crying in agony. I think I later found out that he had fractured his hand or something.

(Just to throw in a disclaimer, the trainer really did mean well. He actually thought this was the best way to train people. He himself had gone through much worse and he used to explain how his Kung fu teacher would make them do crazy exercises. Despite his tough appearance, he used to cry in the prayers when he heard the verses of the Qur'aan recited. So it's not like he was a terrible guy.)

Anyway, when the Amiir came and found out about all of this he was surprised and ordered that the punishments and the level of the 'workouts' be taken down a few notches. But there wasn't much time for that anyway because everyone was ordered to prepare to go to the front to help the brothers who had begun the battle of Idaaley.

In the beginning, however, I (along with most of the Muhaajiriin) was supposed to be prevented from going to the front line. We pleaded till the point that some brothers were crying. Then we were given permission and simultaneously denied permission by a higher Amiir. Realizing that this rollercoaster was not good for our spirits, the trainer came to us and told us: 'If Allaah wants you guys to leave, no one can keep you back.'

Then, the next morning, it was made official that no one should stay behind except for the trainer and a few of his helpers. I was almost taken as a helper because of my duck-walk but Allaah Tacaalah gave me the strength to walk normal long enough for the trainer to

give me permission (and in all reality the pain was actually much less by that point and I was walking normally by the time we made it to Bu'aaley).

So we pulled out of the camp with everyone chanting 'Allaahu Akbar.' It was the thrill of going to the front line plus the thrill of leaving that training camp all rolled up in one! But the thrill would only last till we reached the house we had been staying in from the very beginning. Our new place of residence was only moved slightly down the road from there to a place with tons of people and very little water (and it was around that time that I had been hit with some really weird stomach bug...very untimely). Then a few of us were moved back to the old house that night before being taken back to the no-water place the next day. This was nerve racking because each time we moved we got excited thinking that we would finally be going to the front.

It turns out that Abu Muxaamad had been staying in that same house finishing his bout with Malaria. I was excited to see him and I was also excited because we had just received the news that day that the Shaykh Ayman azh-Zhawaarihi had sent a message to us in Somalia telling us to guard the southern outpost of the Muslim lands. Abu Muxammad, despite his terrible situation, was also thrilled to hear that we would be finally going to the front line and he forgot all about his lingering pains and decided to join us.

Eventually we managed to get out of Kismaayu, but not very far. They took us to a nearby village which I believe must have been Goob Weyn. On the way one of the cars tipped over and a brother died and some others injured. Then we lingered around the place till night time where we were lined up and counted. Finally, after all of that was finished we got on the trucks once again, this time heading towards Jilib.

We arrived in Jilib before Fajr where we slept. I woke up for the prayer not knowing where I was, where the brothers were, or how to find water. Eventually I managed to get my bearings. I prayed and then I started looking for my next objective: food and something to drink. When the sun was up a bit I went into the market with some brothers and we bought some tea and cake or something. I think Abu Muxammad bought coffee at that point as well. Then we were told to get on the trucks and we started heading towards Bu'aaley.

That trip wasn't so bad except for the trees around midway between Jilib and Bu'aaley. The brothers were riding on the back of the big truck (while us white guys were put inside again either for security or out of honor and respect...I don't know which) so the thorns of the trees were really tearing them up. One brother got a thorn to the forehead and he likened it to being shot by a bullet. Ha ha.

It was on that road that I was put in charge of holding some RPGs for the first time. I thought that they were some type of sensitive bombs and I was cradling them like a baby. I remember feeling like the world was on my shoulders. Ha ha. I had yet to realize that it's nearly impossible for them to blow up, unless maybe I threw them in a very hot fire perhaps.

The truck broke down for a few hours before reaching Bu'aaley but we finally reached at around mid-night. Bu'aaley is a significant place because it was the battlefield upon which Barey Hiiraaley was finally defeated for good (i.e. for the year 2006 at least), after he had fled from Kismaayu without a fight. That battle led to all of his cars (over 30 including those with and without weapons) becoming caught in the mud and later taken as Ghaniimah by the Mujaahidiin.

The next morning all of the brothers were gathered in one place in the city and we were given food. Then we were lined up again and split up into groups. The Muhaajiriin were told to guard the big truck of supplies and we stayed like that until around Casr.

This whole time I was extremely annoyed that we had been taking so long to get to the front to help out our brothers. Even a few times I remember holding my urge to use the bathroom because each time someone would use the bathroom everyone one get off the truck. Some people would start hunting mangoes; others would bathe in the Jubbah River, and so forth. It was really annoying. So this wait in Bu'aaley was not much different.

I finally started asking when we are leaving and how can we wait here while our brothers need help. The brother I asked looked like an Amiir and he told me: you guys are going back to Jilib. My heart sunk. Then I just laughed it off. I thought this guy has no idea what he's talking about. I even told one of the Amiirs over the Muhaajiriin and he too thought that was ridiculous. Then I told the guy he must be mistaken, but he just replied that the Mujaahidiin had retreated from Idaaley. They were currently in Diinsoor and they had already begun the retreat to Bu'aaley.

There is a road that goes directly from Bu'aaley to Diinsoor and if we had driven at a good pace, we could have reached the battlefield in about 10 hours. So that is as close as I came to joining the group who fought in Idaaley. After that day we began the chain of events that we like to call: "The Insixaab!"

In hindsight I decided that the entire Strategy of "conquering" Baidoa was a complete failure on behalf of the entire leadership of the Courts along with the leadership of the semi-autonomous "Shabaab," (again not to be confused with Xarakah ash-Shabaab). On one hand, it is said that Shaykh Shariif and many others in Mogadishu did not want to spread beyond the borders of what is generally seen as the area of influence of the Hawiye tribe (which definitely has a drawback from the perspective of methodology). On the other hand, in response to this tunnel-vision approach, people like Abu Cabdallaah as-Sudaani decided to continue spreading the reaches of the Mujaahidiin's fledgling army despite the lack of reinforcements from the Courts leadership. On occasion he was left with only \$100 in his pocket. Now, while this drive of his is surely commendable from the angle of courage and good intentions, it inevitably led to the downfall of the entire movement (which, also in hindsight, would ironically end up being a plus for us all).

The folly of this strategy is found in the fact that the Ethiopians essentially allowed the Courts, the supposed home team, to extend their supply lines and to take on the role of the offensive; while they, in turn, remained comfortably on the defensive in a built up city

close to their own borders. Even if the war was to be fought conventionally, the Courts should have used their strategic depth to their advantage by drawing the Ethiopians all the way to Mogadishu. If the conventional battle failed, the capital city would be within reach for the fighters to fade into the populace for urban guerrilla warfare. Instead of such a strategy, the Courts ended up simply running away after a short conventional fight (which sapped them of most of their manpower, weapons, and equipment) far from refuge; without laying any ambushes for the oncoming Ethiopians and without allowing for urban warfare in Mogadishu.

It would later prove to be extremely ironic how the Courts sought to "salvage" Mogadishu only to go back months later to try a destructive conventional-style armed struggle against the tanks of the Ethiopians on Warshada Street during the famed 9 days war. Unfortunately, it would take many failures for the Mujaahidiin to realize that ambushes and irregular urban warfare were the true keys to success against a much stronger occupier.

Anyway, to go back to the "Retreat" ... it was extremely depressing having to traverse the same terrible road back to Jilib with the knowledge that we had been forced back by the enemy. In hind sight it is even more depressing to know that we had the resources to give the Ethiopians more than a run for their money on that road as well as the Mogadishu to Kismaayu road. I remember that I complained, during the trip to Kismaayu, about the style of conventional warfare that we had chosen to fight. A friend, who had been around longer than I, quickly responded by assuring me that the leadership of the 'Shabaab' (which happened to be a bit of a coalition similar to the Courts, while simultaneously being *inside* the Courts) had already planned for guerrilla warfare. That must have been a knee-jerk response to keep me happy because there wasn't the slightest sign of preparations.

We re-entered Jilib and we started to be moved around much in the same fashion we had been moved around before in Kismaayu. We jumped on the trucks to be moved to one house, then to another, then to the outside of the city, and then back again! It was extremely confusing. One time they placed us next to a small drainage canal with some unwholesome people. They all looked like Mooryaan (bandits) and many of them started making off with their weapons. We were left with virtually no food or drinking water so I told Abu Muxammad that it's just me and him now. No matter what happens we had to stick together. I took a metal container that used to hold bullets and I scooped up some green slimy water from the ditch. I used a lighter Abu Muxammad had with him to make a fire and I boiled the water. He also had some Nescafe coffee with him and I made two cups for ourselves. He was busy trying to get network to call his wife (may Allaah have mercy on her), but I think it cheered him up a bit.

Some time after sunset we were finally checked-up on and once the leadership realized how dire the situation had become (i.e. all of us Muhaajiriin had been left with no food for the better part of the day with some AWOL Mooryaan) we were returned to the city to a nice house with food. It was around that time that I managed to get someone's phone and some phone cards. I called my wife's number in Canada and I found that she had just arrived the day before. She seemed calm and relaxed now (could have been jet lag), so I took advantage of the situation to explain to her that I would probably be martyred in a few

days. I told her to take care of our daughter and raise her properly (because I used to have serious bouts with her about watching television and I realized that now she was right back home in Canada in the middle of the MTV theatre).

It would also be during this short stay in Jilib that I would get my last glimpse of two dear brothers. Fazul had appeared along with almost everyone else from the "Shabaab" (to the great dismay of Abu Talxah who had hoped that the Mogadishu branch of "Shabaab" would put up a fight long enough to buy his branch some time in Kismaayu). When he saw me he remembered our encounter in the airport and said through a big smile: "So you're still here?" I think he half expected me to really be a spy or something. I wouldn't see him again despite living within meters of him during his last days in Somaalia.

The second farewell was for Abu Muxammad. He was given a choice to follow the large bulk of Muhaajiriin to the forests of Chiamboni or to stay with me and hopefully engage in some fighting with the Ethiopians in Jilib. Since his wife was being sent to the border, he chose to go along with the other brothers (which proves that he never shot a bullet at the enemy, nor did he get any military training, despite being sentenced for 10 years for nothing.)

I told him that if he saw Xasan Turkey, whom we thought to be a huge AQ operative, that he should give him my salaams and I told him how jealous I was that he would meet him first. He was busy tending to his wife and children in the midst of a calamity so I didn't have much time to say goodbyes. And with that we departed our separate ways. (It is worth noting that I would later learn that Abu Muxammad would be coerced into testifying against Taariq Mehanna his capture and detention. It would seem that different times and places can sometimes affect our character. May Allaah forgive us all.)

A short while later those of us Muhaajiriin who did not go to Lekta (a seasonal river in the Black Sea Forest of Chiamboni) were taken deep into the forest on the old Bu'aale road that we had come to know so well. Once again we were surrounded by Mooryaan. A lot of them. At times, I was more concerned about protecting myself from them than the Ethiopians. In fact, some of the brothers actually got in to a little exchange of volleys with a group of them who they stumbled across while doing reconnaissance in the area. One day they became especially rambunctious and they actually admitted to us that they were about to run away. We told them to give us their guns and they became a bit sober. That night, after Cishaa' prayers, we went to check on one of the groups of the Muhaajiriin and they told us that the Mooryaan had all left. This, although expected to some degree, was a bit outlandish considering how great their number had been that afternoon (maybe 200 or so). We started down the road to find clothes, empty cookie boxes, dishes, pots, pans, and all kinds of trash...but no people. It was a very spooky moment. We decided to check on the Mooryaan who had been placed in front of us as well. It was just a mirror image. I began to feel relieved and vulnerable all at once.

We called up that friend who had told us about the spectacular preparations for guerilla warfare and we told him that we were in the forest on the front line with about 25 Muhaajiriin and no senior leadership. He explained to us that there were some very good

brothers still ahead of us and that he was too busy helping the leaders prepare on the Mogadishu road to come to us immediately (and he was absolutely certain that our road wouldn't see any fighting anyway).

We ended up praying Ciid out there, and we tried to make the best of the situation. A few times we managed to get some ice from the city for cold drinks and we cooked pasta. We also had occasional Qur'aan classes and we tried to keep morale high.

One day a car came and dropped off a brother by the name of Abu Xafsah (may Allaah accept him as a martyr). He told us that in the morning he would be going ahead of us to see those brothers we had been told about. We asked if we could follow and he agreed. It turns out that the car we were waiting for was carrying Cabdul Qaadir Kommandos (who I would later meet up with again) and Abu Zubayr, the future leader of what officially became known as Xarakah ash-Shabaab al-Mujaahidiin. When we arrived to see the brothers (probably about 30 of them) I began asking about our strategy. I was told that we would be executing multiple ambushes on this road until we reached Jilib. At that point the fight was to become a last stand. I was completely sold on the idea (without immediately realizing that time had run out and preparations were completely non-existent). I heard the brothers explaining that the sound of the Ethiopian trucks had now become audible at night time so I decided to ride back to Jilib with the car and look for the materials we would need to prepare our ambushes. I had watched a lot of movies and I decided I was going to machete my way through the forest!

The people in the city guarding the ammo, along with most of the leadership, did not seem to think that the enemy would attack from the Bu'aale road. So I had a hard time trying to get more bullets much less grenades. I wasn't able to get anymore than about one box of AK bullets. After giving up on that I turned my attention to getting some machetes and axes, and some food.

I found out later on that Shaykh Shariif (may Allaah destroy him) had visited the camp in my absence that day and he gave the Muhaajiriin a talk about how he realized the many mistakes he had made and that he would not repeat them if given victory over the Ethiopians.

When I returned to the camp, another brother and I began trying to prepare for our mission. I was filled with the realization that time had ran out but it seemed that everyone else had yet to clock on. In other words, no real preparations were made.

I don't know if it was that same day, or a day after (the days had begun to go in to one another) but we had just eaten around Casr time when some brothers came frantically running out of the forest. They said: 'It started!!' We hadn't heard anything at all and we were a bit amused at first. Then we heard a nice and loud BOOM and we came to our senses. The brother who had been working with me to make preparations started to place the brothers in groups of 2-3 about 50 meters apart from one another, a mere 2 meters off the road. A more seasoned veteran was with us and he tried to explain how bad of an idea this was but it was no longer the time for being rational.

At around the same time a truck came from Jilib that was chanting ‘Allaahu Akbar!’ We saw some of the same Muhaajiriin that we had just placed in positions on back. We found out after they zoomed past that the car was under the direct command of Shaykh Shariif. We went back to re-position the brothers and we found that this small change of plans had rattled many of them into wanting to walk back to Jilib. After some convincing the brothers were repositioned and we went to our own stations to wait for the enemy.

As Maghrib set in, the sound of bombs, missiles, and artillery were nearly drowned out by the sound of the mosquitoes. I remember praying for the enemy to hurry up and come so that I could become a martyr and leave the mosquitoes to the less fortunate. In the darkness some little critter started to run at me in a dangerous manner. I thought it was a scorpion so I grabbed my knife and smashed it. I was thoroughly pleased with myself, but when I used the small light on the tip of my lighter I found out that it was some sort of crab! Ha ha.

The brothers in front continued the fighting till close to Cishaa’. I kept wondering when this ‘ambush’ was going to end. I was trying to reconcile all of this with the beautiful strategy that had been explained to me the day before. In the midst of my pondering I think I overlooked the calm that had set in. One of the mines the brothers had set exploded (probably on an Ethiopian vehicle) and the enemy decided to just call it a night.

A man appeared on the road in front of me and the brothers quickly told him to stop. He was to be the first of a trickle that turned into a flood. The road became swarmed with brothers. Some were injured, some in shock, and some had just become zombies that kept up a steady stagger back to Jilib.

The Ethiopians had executed their patented battle plan. They sent ground troops ahead of the vehicles to scout out the positions of the Mujaahidiin. They were walking deep in the forest to ensure that they would effectively flank anyone trying to lay in ambush near the road. After successfully executing this flanking maneuver and carrying on a small firefight they quickly returned back to inform their commanders of what they had found. Slowly, the artillery that had previously been shot randomly in the air for its psychological effect now started to find its target. BMs started raining down on the brothers. This is how the commander Abu Xafsah was martyred (his torso was ripped from his waist). This is also how the Mujaahidiin completely lost morale to continue the fight.

We were told that Shaykh Shariif had taken his group to the front and he began walking deep into the forest towards the enemy with only a pistol in hand. Some of the other leadership then talked him in to returning in order to salvage the Courts the loss of their great leader! In hind sight it would have been better for him to have been martyred on the right cause that day instead of becoming the right hand man of those very same Ethiopians he was charging towards with his pistol.

Since I did not go through the traumatic experience myself I was completely baffled as to why everyone was so ready to just give up so easily. The injured were being treated while some people walked back to Jilib and others just sat staring blankly into the darkness (one

young boy had lost both of his eyes to a bullet and was crying terribly). I, on the other hand, was yelling at everyone to get organized. We needed to set up an advanced position in case the enemy tried to attack us in the night. I was trying to get the brothers ready to set up a real ambush this time.

No one listened. I just kept yelling at those who were walking back to Jilib that it was an act of cowardice. I think it was easy for me to say that since I had not been through the grueling week of Idaale and Dinsoor, and now this. Finally, Cabdul Qaadir Kommandos showed up and ordered everyone to go back to Jilib and that was that.

When we reached Jilib we found it absolutely empty. We barely managed to find a truck to pile on and immediately we started racing to Kismaayu. Everyone was confused, discouraged, and tired. Another group of Muhaajiriin who had made their way to the front was even less lucky. They stayed behind to help some seriously injured brothers in the dark of the night some meters away from the enemy waiting for bullets and backup! When nothing came for some hours they made their way slowly back to Jilib to find the last van pulling out of the city. One of those brothers, Abu Ayyuub (may Allaah accept him as a martyr), later executed the martyrdom operation of Baidoa and the other was martyred in the car of an-Nabhaan that was allegedly air-raided by helicopters near Baraawe (although doubt still surrounds the incident). May Allaah accept them all.

I remember almost falling off the speeding truck a few times and I also remember another truck that sped past us, extremely close to our legs, towards the enemy (probably to join them!). Somewhere along the line we stopped, got down, and slept with absolutely no sentinel but the angels. We woke at Fajr, prayed, and started the journey once again.

We passed through the villages to find people standing on the road staring at us. Later we found out that the hypocrites had left Kismaayu to come forward to meet the Ethiopians with a victor's welcome! When they saw that we were NOT Ethiopians they just stared at us in silence.

When we reached the front of Kismaayu some well-wishing Muslims told us that going through the city would be crazy. He told us that the entire Jaysh of the Mujaahidiin had left in the night and that Kismaayu was completely empty. The Mooryaan had already started gathering the cars and ammo of the Courts to battle it out between themselves. Our driver didn't seem to care. He took us straight through the middle of the city, and straight through the thousands crowded in the streets to stare at us in silence as we chanted 'Allaahu Akbar!'

One brother was so naïve that he told me to close the safety of my gun because it was impolite! I told him that these people could start shooting us at any moment and that I didn't care too much about manners at that moment.

When we finally made it to the road that leads to the airport I saw a Mooryaan standing at a checkpoint with his gun. When he saw us he immediately jumped on a passing lorry that was going in our opposite direction. When it passed I leaned out past the other brothers on

the back of the truck and I took a pot-shot at the guy. Must have been a good shot. He fell down and I later found out that he broke his leg.

At that moment more bullets rang out at the front of our truck. I looked at the brothers still sitting on the back of the truck and realized that they were in no state to answer questions. I jumped down and ran to the front of the truck where I saw Mooryaan making a break for the trees. I tried to aim in the midst of it all, but I don't think I got any of them.

It turns out that another truck full of Mooryaan came up to us and they shot out our radiator. In response, the brother in the passenger side of our truck shot out the brains of their driver! That was what led the Mooryaan to flee. Instead of chasing them, the brothers started trying to figure out which truck to board now that ours was in need of a radiator and I think theirs was also busted. In the confusion we left behind the cars and anyone who was Somali. I was told to board a different truck that now carried only a few leaders, some injured brothers, and some Muhaajiriin.

This truck got us to a small village outside Kismaayu where we met some less belligerent Mooryaan. Our car literally broke down at the very sight of the village and we walked in to have some tea and pasta. We also managed to exchange the broken down truck for a ride on a lorry South.

We past through Afmadow (which led many normal Somaalis into believing that the Mujaahidiin had caught some Kaafir Americans and taken them hostage), stopping only briefly to get some water and cookies. I almost lost my gun and bag because, while I was eating, the truck I was previously riding on almost took off, with my stuff, but without me. When I found them in the lorry that had left me, I decided that I wasn't going to let that happen again. But, instead of boarding the same lorry I was placed on another one. I didn't like being separated from the other Muhaajiriin but I was told that we were all going to the same place and I was also offered a place to stretch out and sleep (which was an offer I could not refuse!).

I woke up in the middle of the night to find the lorry parked and empty. I started searching out the brothers in the darkness. I found a few brothers sleeping here and some others there. Finally, I ran into Axmad Madobe. He was trying to interrogate an Oromo man who only spoke English. He thought that we had entered Kenya and he was trying to explain that he wanted to turn himself over to the Kenyan government!! I later learned that the ONF (I think its called) had sent some of its people to fight along side the Courts despite having completely secular ambitions. This guy was blindfolded and taken away. I too walked off and began getting ready to pray Fajr, thinking about how strange that scene had been.

We had stopped at a very large lake called Taabtaa and all of the leadership was present. After the sun started to rise I stumbled across Shaykh Shariif and some other guy from the old Ittixaad movement. He told me 'Come here dear brother,' in his less than fluent Arabic and gave me some milk tea and Canjeera. He started to ask me about how I had made Hijrah and so forth. When I asked about Xasan Thaahir Aways, I was told that he was

showering and that he would come just now. When he showed up he looked extremely angry and on that note I left them alone.

Some time before Thuhr, as a barrel of rice just became ready to eat, the call was sounded for everyone to hop back on the trucks to continue our journey to nowhere. By that time the brothers stopped joking about running away to Kenya because it started to seem more like reality than a wisecrack. I was placed on a twin-cab pick-up truck along with the Muhaajiriin once again and we headed towards Doobley.

Once we reached the city and I managed to find an opportunity to get off the truck and stretch my legs, it seems we were immediately met with the welcoming committee. I heard out of the 'blue,' it seems, the loudest gun fire I had heard up until that point. Despite not having been 'officially' trained to handle my weapon, I found myself grasping my gun with the safety open in perfect ready condition in the slightest fraction of a second. I don't know if it was some form of natural safety impulse or my old deer hunting days, but I was aware that I was ready to shoot anything that appeared dangerous and within my vicinity.

I searched the scene for a 'technical' as they are called and assumed that at any moment some renegade band of 'Mooryaan' would come wheeling around the corner with a stolen truck with a large, and blazing, truck mounted weapon. It took only a few seconds to realize that the ground was completely safe, but rather it was the sky that was now full of imposing danger. A helicopter had appeared over the horizon and it was shooting very large cannon at will.

As horrifying as that *should* be I scanned the faces of the Somali brothers there with us and all of them seemed to be quite comfortable while watching the scene in semi-awe of the dangerous machine hovering above our heads. I was told as it turned and went back from whence it came that this was standard protocol and they only do this in order to scare us when they think we intend to cross the Kenyan border. I thought better of second guessing the natives and I completely disregarded the scene as a scare tactic from that moment on.

Admittedly, I was slightly confused though when I was told, not long after, that I should stay under the thatched roof of a small hut, which lies within a slightly larger compound, in order to hide from the view of those very same planes and helicopters. I found that strange considering the news I was told only minutes prior, but seeing the presence of some of the leadership of the Courts, once again, I obediently complied with the orders.

It was around this time that I caught my first glimpse of Shaykh Xasan Turkey, and within that same compound I also brushed passed Shaykh Xasan Dhaahir Aways whom I was then seeing for my second time.

These scenes didn't last long. I only remember that the city was empty. There were no restaurants, and there was no food. I only managed to catch two brothers tearing away at a bag of pasta just before they devoured it all. When I asked as to the source of the food they had no answers, but it seemed as though they felt guilty. I didn't bother going in to it

further. I remembered I had carried some dates along with me from Jilib so I broke them out and shared them with those around me.

Some time later an old single-cab pick-up was brought into the compound for the Muhaajiriin to load. As I sat waiting to leave I was awarded with two brand new Russian hand grenades still within the original packaging by Maclim Qaasim (the explosives expert). I didn't fully know how to use them more than anyone who had previously watched a Rambo flick, but I felt grateful to have them.

It was my pleasure to be sitting next to Abu Ayuub the Istish-haadi that day and he was unusually cheerful, considering what he had been through thus far. He was telling Maclim Qaasim, who gave me the grenades, that it had become high time for him to prepare his car to finally have his chance at blowing up the Ethiopians. On that note he turned and asked me: 'Why did you come to Jihaad?' I thought it was a strange question, but I replied honestly: 'Because Allaah made it obligatory upon me.' His counter-reply was even stranger than his original question. He said: 'Oh, so you're one of those types.' I couldn't help but feel intrigued. 'So then why did you come then?' I asked. He became a bit thoughtful and calm then he said with deep sincerity: 'Because I want to see the Face of Allaah.' I pray that he got his wish.

On that note we began to roar off through the tiny village almost knocking down fences with our exposed legs hanging off the side of the truck. We stopped as we exited the city to scold some few men who had already begun taking advantage of the situation to seek payment from any car that might pass, and then we were off once again. Our legs were still exposed and the trees on the side of the narrow path were still too dangerously close to one another. Our driver was also a bit too heavy on the pedal and too heavy on the eyelids for our comfort. But all we could do was hold on and hope for the best.

It's not really an option to sleep in those sorts of situations, but it is possible to fall into standby mode. It was sometime in the middle of the night when I was coerced out of my daze to help dig mud from underneath the tires of the truck. It seems we were helplessly stuck in the dark of the night in a monster mud puddle.

When I saw nearly ten brothers all scurrying around the tires covering themselves in mud, I felt it futile to add my hands to the mix. I told the brother who had been a semblance of an Amiir on that truck that we should wait for another truck to pull us out. With that I pulled out my green plastic corn bag, which I was also awarded in Doobley, and I made myself a nice sleeping position.

It seemed only a short time later when I was once again coerced to leave my comfort zone to dig the mud from the tires because: 'All of the brothers are digging while you are lying here relaxing!' Not to be a prideful person nor risk an unnecessary spat with this self-appointed Amiir I got on my knees and started filling my clothes with mud in vain efforts of dislodging the truck. When he saw that he immediately felt better and let me be on my way, albeit much more uncomfortable than I had been minutes ago.

I'm pretty sure we prayed Fajr there, but I'm not sure how it was that we finally got out of the hole. It's possible another truck came to pull us out, but I don't remember having that distinctively fond feeling of knowing that: 'I told them so,' so it's possible the mud finally gave way to the digging.

Regardless of the cause, we found ourselves moving along the muddy road from puddle to puddle until we finally got stuck in a real doozey of a position. It was a series of serious mud puddles strung along the only route forward. This, of course, was the signal for us to find something to eat and we found a little pond of sorts, which I think was even complete with ducks if I remember properly.

I can't remember how many of these scenes flicked passed before I began to see people walking backwards with orders to fetch something. It seems there were some bullets or weapons that had been thrown off the truck some hundreds of meters back. Somewhere along the way the orders of whether to carry them or leave them changed a few times and the new mission became preparing ourselves to pray Thuhr. I remember being lucky enough to have found decent water to use for Wudhuu' (because most of it was mixed with a wonderful hint of diesel) and I remember also being clever enough to go ahead and pray Thuhr and 'Asr while I had the chance. The next thing I remember, though, is being surrounded by helicopters.

I don't remember being on a truck at that moment, and I am pretty sure we had all begun walking by this point because of the number of vehicles stuck helplessly in the mud. But, the funniest thing is... I don't even remember hearing the approach of the helicopters until they reached.

It was all the same for me, anyway, because all five of the attack helicopters were immediately dispelled by my short term memory as a highly coordinated scare tactic! Even as the cannon sounded and brothers abandoned their weapons (even the anti-aircraft guns), I was still merely walking into the bushes with the intent of staying out of sight as I had been ordered earlier, the previous day, in Doobley. It never occurred to me that these helicopters had been sent to destroy us or our vehicles.

I turned to one of the smaller leaders I had been walking with and I asked him: 'Do these people think they can scare us?' When I studied his face, I saw a type of fear that did not lend itself to misinterpretation. It was only at that moment that I began to take the whole matter seriously. A few seconds later a huge blast took my hearing and replaced it with bells and chimes. I had suspicions later on that one of our brothers was martyred in that blast because I had last seen him in that direction. In all of the commotion I believe he had become lost, whether he was injured or martyred I don't know, and in conclusion no one ever heard of him again.

When the helicopters seemed to have finished their job we hurried into a pickup truck where another smaller leader, but of greater courage and standing, was at the wheel. This was Jacfar Dheere (may Allaah have mercy on him). When the truck refused to start, he calmly opened the hood and began fiddling with parts. Each time the truck would manage

to start briefly before he would have to start the process over again. And each time the sound of the helicopters coming in for a second attack seemed to become louder. Eventually I lost my nerve and I told the brother, in whose face I had seen fear, to dismount and return to the bushes; seeing as though the trucks seemed to be targeted. His reply was that: 'Jacfar is the Amiir. Tell him.' I told him: 'You tell him,' and eventually it seems even Jacfar decided it might be best to abandon the truck.

This time we didn't return to the vehicles after the coast was clear. Instead we walked in single file lines for the remainder of the day (and the night for that matter). Even the leaders were on foot.

It had become Casr time but the sun was still scorching and the adrenaline of 'combat,' if that is what it could be called, had left me extremely thirsty. As if an answered prayer, the skies briefly clouded over and rained down a sprinkle of water. The chief benefit of this mist was to cool us down, but with the help of my green heavy-duty corn sack I managed to catch some of the rain and drink a few helpful mouthfuls. This had the effect of an addictive drug and it wasn't long before I found myself stepping out of line periodically to take handfuls of red liquid from the tiny mud puddles that had accumulated.

During that walk I remember experiencing another shocking incident, although quite mundane in nature. I had stashed away in my pockets some stale biscuits and dates that I had found at one of our stops (probably Doobley) and I thought it was a good time to 'share them with the brothers.' I took a small pinch of the mixture which had been crushed to a powder and then I passed it to the brother behind me. He was Somaali but I motioned to him and expressed in Arabic that he should take some and pass it back to the rest of the brothers. It happened to be the case that we had salvaged a first aid kit and we were taking turns carrying it. When it came my turn I asked a brother who was behind me by a few brothers if he had enjoyed the biscuits. When he stared at me blankly, as if I was trying to torture him with a horrible joke, I realized the brother directly behind me had eaten the entire bag or kept it entirely for himself.

We eventually arrived at a huge mud puddle, which could be termed a small creek, and we were amazed to find a few vehicles still operating. We prayed Maghrib and Cishaa' there and we found ourselves, as we prayed at that spot, next to Xasan Dhaahir Aways once again. I was also told later on that that was the spot in which Abu Muxammad's wife had been buried after she died of a heart attack or some other strange illness.

If I'm not mistaken, it was also at this spot that we were rounded up to be given a speech by Shaykh Shariif, Xasan Dhaahir, and others about the virtues of Jihaad. We were then asked if we were ready for Shahaadah. A few other Muhaajiriin and I stood up and began walking to the spot that was being motioned towards for those ready to give their life for the religion. Shaykh Shariif stopped us and told us: 'We already know that you Muhaajiriin have left everything for the religion. We don't intend you.' It's also possible that this had taken place somewhere around Doobley, but I felt it was an important event regardless of its exact place and time.

Sometime before Fajr I saw Axmad Madobe and he told us that he would reserve his pickup truck for the Muhaajiriin since we didn't know where we were supposed to be walking. Some wounded brothers were also piled on and we managed to proceed for about a few hundred meters before Fajr. All the while we were stopping to remove trees and to cut down new paths to avoid mud puddles. Being overstuffed on the pickup truck while deathly tired also entailed nearly falling off at irregular intervals.

After stopping to pray Fajr, the truck was swarmed by a group of people who had been walking previously. One Somaali brother, who looked as though he was new to the matter of practicing his religion, decided to take my seat by force. When I objected, along with a few other brothers, he pretended not to hear anything. Finally, I got off the truck and asked for my bag. Everyone refused to sit up to give me my bag because they too feared losing their positions. Eventually Axmad Madobe climbed out of the truck and asked me nicely to get back on the truck. I explained to him the situation but he just coaxed me into leaving the whole matter.

To my dismay, it wasn't long before we were told that anyone who is able to walk (i.e. not injured) should get off the truck and walk. I began to regret making a ruckus about walking, but I decided I should stick to my word. So I called out for my bag once again, and eventually I managed to pull it out from underneath a brother (who used to badger me over that for years to come).

For a while the feeling of being free and not smothered by a pack of tired and hungry men was liberating. But it didn't take long for my feet to expire. Every so often we would stop at a small water hole. Once we found a group of brothers who managed to find an abandoned tin of milk and some old plastic bottles. They sat there for quite some time drinking milk, laughing, and telling stories. Up until that point I had been a bit of a free lancer though, and I felt it was time to keep walking. Many brothers had passed me, and I had passed many, but there was only one that I had stuck with thus far. He was the brother who had previously been in charge of us during our trip from Mogadishu to Kismaayu and one of the first brothers I met when they came to save me from my in-laws.

We continued walking together at a decent pace and at every stop we were urged on by the myth that the village of Kolbiyo is just around the corner. I remember concentrating very carefully on that myth as I made it my mission to continue to keep placing one foot in front of the other.

While we were in such a trance we stumbled upon a group of brothers who had stopped near a water hole. Immediately I recognized Xasan Turkey from amongst them, although I had only caught a glimpse of him in Doobley. I knew from his age and the manner in which the brothers were sitting around him that he must be the Amiir. My friend asked me: 'Do you know who this is,' and I replied in the affirmative. By that point the only thought in my mind was whether or not I should give him Baycah at that moment or wait a bit later when there were only few brothers around!

We had been told that this was the leader of al-Qaacidah in Somaalia (although he was merely a spiritual figurehead and the local host for the real leaders in all reality) and ever since Egypt it was my dream to join his army and to have the distinction of being that much closer to being led by Shaykh Usaamah himself. By His grace, Allaah, the Exalted, prohibited me from making such a rash decision at that time and the benefits of that became manifest later on in the story.

Nevertheless, Baycah or not, when this group got up and on the move we thought it was wise to stick with them and terminate our previous practice of free-lancing. We walked on with them and stopped every now and then until we had been told by one too many Bedouins that Kolbiyo is 20-30 kilometers away. That number never decreased no matter how fast we walked despite having been reminded of it for a solid day.

Xasan Turkey (may Allaah preserve him) finally made a brave decision. He realized that we could not continue walking like this for long and he had briefly heard the sound of cows in the distance. With that he turned the group towards the trees and we left the path all together. By Allaah's grace, we were joined by two men who were well acquainted with forest life and this would not be the first time in which they were entrusted with guiding us all to safety.

After a few minutes walk in the bushes we would be ordered to stop briefly to hear the direction of the moo's, then we would continue again in the general direction. When we had begun to lose hope (because the moo's never seemed to get any closer) we eventually stumbled upon hoof tracks. After that discovery we continued to gain on the moo's to eventually catch sight of the shepherd who had been directing the cows away from us the entire time!

I never felt so elated to see cows or Bedouins in my life. The only thing that came to my mind was food and how we need to make sure that we can eat now and carry more with us. Since I had found myself close to Xasan Turkey by this juncture I decided to pass on my grand idea. Back in Toronto my wife used to love a type of Somaali bread which was best described to me at that time as a type of large, thick, fajita. My hunger and need for portable, durable food immediately brought those memories flashing to mind. The only problem with my idea was that it was met with a bit of a cultural barrier. I could think of no cheaper, modest food to suggest, but when I was met with scoffing laughter, I realized that this bread must be some form of delicacy. It goes without mention that I was extremely baffled when we were finally presented with hot cooked meat by those Bedouins who could not have been asked to cook bread instead!! It's also a bit humorous that while one group of people was laughing at me for suggesting such an ornate delicacy another group, who did not understand the Somaali language, thought that the word 'Sabaayaad,' was equivalent to the Arabic word: 'Sabaayaa,' which means slave girls. This trend was to be a common one throughout our journeys. I don't remember having one joke, one suggestion, or one idea understood properly for the greater portion of a year. Believe me, it was thoroughly distressing.

That night I was also served with a cup of milk tea (in my orange cup that was to be my fondest friend). I was so hungry that I found myself reveling in the fact that the tea had such a tiny hint of sugar that it could barely be made out. It was as if I had discovered gold. I remember drinking the tea in careful sips, in order to savor every moment.

We stayed at that place for only one day (although I was told later that many wounded remained there for quite a time) and then we were directed to continue our journey through the bush till we reached this Bedouin man's brother, who happened to be his 'next-door neighbor.' In reality, this next door neighbor actually lived a full night's journey through the bush.

We followed some guides (although one of them seemed to want to defect in the night for some odd reason) until we reached the general area of our new host, 'Aadin,' who I have seen on a few occasions since those troubled days. This area, I was later told, is called 'Serbiya' for some strange unknown reason or another (maybe an old UNOSOM base?). It was to become our home base for many months afterwards, but our first taste of hospitality was to be plates heaped full of 'African Pie.' The Somaalis call it 'Soor,' the Kenyans call it 'Siimaa' or 'Ogaali,' and I, being from down South, call it 'Grits!' When it's made a bit soupier than the thick consistency at which we used to eat it, it is normally called 'Uuji,' or 'Borash,' (Somaali for porridge).

The only problem with this meal, which I had no way of seeing in those early days of extreme hunger, was that it was never served with salt or butter as I was accustomed to having it for breakfast before school. Instead, there is some strange obsession in this part of the world to add sugar to the mix! When times are good (and we didn't get to see those particular times during our journeys) the Somaalis like to drown the sugary grits in cold milk and then try to eat, or rather slurp, the concoction with their hands. I highly recommend never ever sitting by to witness such a sight unless you have reached the level of starvation that causes cockroaches to look like the world's most uncelebrated hors d'oeuvre.

Usually, we found ourselves eating the stuff without any spices at all; which was fine by me because it meant no sugar on my side of the plate. When sugar was abundant I would take my handful of sugar and put it in my pocket for later and pray that the other people didn't pollute my side of the plate too much. But, when six hungry people are at a plate sides start to become imaginary. There will be plenty of stories later about that though.

This new spot of ours had all the makings of a National Geographic, Discovery Channel, documentary. The only problem with the scenery, though, was the fact that we were strictly ordered to stay under bushes at all times for two main reasons: 1) Bedouins often frequented the water source and 2) there was a constant buzz of reconnaissance planes above our head morning, noon, and night.

There is no telling how much fuel the Americans wasted patrolling the skies for months. I don't know if we were so proficient in hiding ourselves, if Allaah was simply protecting us with His grace, or if those damn planes are absolutely useless. Whatever the case, they

didn't ever manage to do us much harm other than keeping us under the trees for most of our breathing hours.

It was just as well anyway because the sun in Somaalia happens to be a few thousand light years closer to the earth's surface than any other country. Any attempt to leave the little cover and shade the tiny trees can afford leads to an immediate heat stroke. I remember finding the utmost difficulty in motivating myself to go use the restroom despite the incessant need. By this time everyone was complaining of strange slime in their stool and I don't believe anyone was anywhere close to 'regular.'

The trouble with using the bathroom was ten fold. There was the problem of finding a plastic bottle that was not currently in use at the moment, then there was the problem of lugging your hundred pound gun around while trying to fill that bottle up without falling in or getting your gun unnecessarily wet. We must remember now that the Bedouins and planes are still marauding about. After these tasks are completed it becomes necessary to find a place that is not inhabited by human or animal, that is not currently being used as a bathroom, that can not be stumbled upon by anyone while you're in your comfort zone, and finally a place that is not too far to cause yourself to become lost or the unknown victim of some tragedy that people never came to know of. If you finally reach that place without loosing an eye from the thorns you may then use the bathroom while clutching your gun in the event that a wild animal or enemy approaches. After all is well and done it is finally time to retrace your steps and eventually return to your place of languishing under the trees until the next round.

With that said, it was still the case that we found ourselves relaxing at the waterhole on multiple occasions. People would forget to rush us away as we filled up our water bottles at a time when the planes had drifted away somewhere off in the distance. A few of us Muhaajiriin would sit and reminisce about how we used to watch these scenes on the television! Frogs, crabs, different assortments of birds, fish, and so forth could be heard or seen on our imaginary television screens as we sat on our haunches and murmured back and forth (only whispers were allowed...in fact reciting Qur'aan slightly over a whisper was even an act of war).

The most common discussions were whether or not it was lawful to eat frogs, whether it was worth it to try to catch enough crabs, and whether it was possible to catch any of the fish or birds without using bullets or bombs. Usually, once we ran out of options, we would find comfort in remembering the different restaurants, fast-food joints, and home cooking we had experienced in our lifetimes.

Sometimes the discussion would irk out a few of the brothers who couldn't handle to hear about such things in his time of hunger. Sometimes I found myself irking myself out, because I would inevitably remember a time when my pocket was full of change and I carelessly drove past an ice cream parlor, a Krispy Kreme doughnut shop, a café, or even a convenience store without so much as stopping for a treat. I even started to hate myself for not gorging on things that I used to take for granted like milk and bread. I used to promise myself that if I were to get out of the jungle I would always make it a point to eat a lot of

those foods that I used to disregard. Daydreaming would always lead down strange paths such as these.

While we were at this place, our home base, Jacfar Dheere came down with Malaria and he was only to be seen reciting Qur'aan to himself afterwards. There was only one time when he and a few other brothers were summoned to come up with a defense plan when news had reached us that the enemy had parachuted in, or landed by helicopter, not far down the way (because there had been a day of unusual reconnaissance activity). That plan was deemed utterly useless by myself and another brother, but it didn't matter long anyway because the whole scare forced us to get on the road again. It should be noted that Xasan Dhaahir Aways's group was actually attacked in a similar way at one point, so it wasn't entirely impossible.

Once we were on the road, it felt like we were on the road for a long time afterwards. It seemed we were always directed to follow some path or another in the dead of the night to reach a waterhole. Some nights we would get lost and miss our mark. Other times we would reach the next morning and stay there long enough for Aadin to bring us more provisions for a few days or so. It seemed we were never allowed to get used to our new confines (under the trees infested with body lice) for too long before we were forced to march through the thorns at night to another unknown destination.

There were a few rules to these marches and likewise there were a few tricks. The rules were: no flashlights, no noise/talking, walk in a single file line, only stop when told, and so forth. The tricks were to try to stay at the front of the line (because they always get more and longer breaks due to having the valid excuse of waiting for the people in the back to catch up), never take a shortcut (because it probably leads to a hole or a thorn bush and that is why the guide didn't go that way), always keep your arms in front of your face (in case a hanging branch of thorns comes back to your face), keep your mind busy with Dhikr (especially long phrases that you've intentionally ordered in such a way to keep your brain focused), keep your water bottle full and drink small sips at long intervals, take any opportunity to drop down and rest, and so forth. Sometimes I would even pretend that I was watching myself on a TV screen, as though this was some form of Chechen Jihaadi flick!

It was always interesting how important terrain became to us through those marches. The distance to waterholes started to make a profound change in our lives. Even the slight change in consistency of the ground, along with its level of moisture and type meant the difference between toiling for hours in boggy sand, or slipping around in black mud, or having a swift march over firm dry clay. The types of bushes in the area also decided whether it was the face, the legs, or the arms which would be at most risk to the thorns. Some thorns were hooked, others were huge, and then there were the mundane versions. Some bushes actually came with the compensation of berries.

The animals also differed with the scenery. Sometimes baboons would be seen on the path or heard squawking and grunting in the trees (sometimes they sound like someone who is grunting to tell you he is in the bathroom at the moment). In other locations there were

lions. Sometimes we would pass through territory that allowed for our skilled hunters to try a shot at an Oryx.

You will be forgiving of my memory if I can't remember the directions, or the proper sequence of these marches. What I do remember is that one of our first marches took us to a bush which looked like one huge consolidated green mass. After clearing away the man-eating thorns and burrowing our way inside of the leafy cave we found that we had replaced the baboons that used to occupy our new quarters. It was at this spot that I remember having one of the first experiences of many. We were told that the airplanes are up and therefore no one can go to the waterhole (which most of us had yet to see anyway because we had recently arrived). Seeing as though it was time to pray and there was limited water, it became an issue of importance. We were being told to perform Tayammum out of necessity but other people could be seen using up our little stores of water to perform Wudhu'. That didn't sit well with me and for some reason or another I decided to wait till the end of the time (which was extended due to traveling) before complying. I had a hunch that water would come.

Within a few hours some people had been sent to fetch water. Soon afterwards other people began leaving to roam about. Eventually I was able to get my water and pray, but I was dismayed to find people making fires in the open, others walking around idly, and others running around searching for fruits and berries. I thought it was extremely audacious to tell the people, or rather to force the people, to perform Tayammum (as if water was non-existent or only enough for drinking purposes) while in reality there was no real danger; especially after allowing such out of control behavior only hours later.

I don't remember staying there long. We went on another journey where we came across a similar bush during the night. We had missed our mark and we decided to take cover during the day instead of exposing ourselves to reach the waterhole. When these situations occurred we were told that we can not cook and water was of course scarce. We waited nearly the entire day one time with no food simply for fear of blowing our cover. Some scouts had been sent out to find some small water and we were each given one cup of sugar water to last us. The irony of it all was that a shepherd passed by with his goats and seeing as though Bedouins are extremely aware of footprints (especially when they are in the tents and they look like boots), he sent some of his goats 'astray' to wander into our little enclave. It was extremely obvious that we were an army in a bush and that he was a nosy Bedouin. Eventually I think we were allowed to cook and I think, ironically, the cooking was probably done at night!

There was another march where we missed our mark and we found ourselves extremely thirsty. I was explaining to my friend that I could hear the glad tidings of chirping frogs in the distance and we should send people to search for water. He took this for desperation and asked Shaykh Xasan Turkey to provide me some of his own personal water to drink when we rested for the night. That place had the great distinction of being infested with baboons and, worst of all, small, light red, biting ants! All night long we changed places to run from their fury. Of course, when Fajr finally dawned we were forced to go through the normal routine of knowing water is near but being forced to pray with Tayammum. But

once the sun raised high enough the scouts found a huge water source not far off. We spent the day searching for berries while fighting off ants.

There are multiple types of ants by the way. While we were searching for berries I started to become acquainted with our mirror image from the ant kingdom: army ants. All I knew of them from such a brief acquaintance was that they like to march in straight and fortified lines at night and you disturb their order at your own risk. When attacked they disburse and scatter to minimize loses should a heavy foot come down on them while they are so consolidated. This, of course, has the effect of wreaking havoc. More on those guys later.

There was one night, if it wasn't the very next, in which a light sprinkle had served to dampen our clothes just after Casr. We waited in the open for the sun to clear the clouds and dry us at least a little, but it only came out after it was just about to set. The entire night we were forced to rustle in our wet clothes and to fight the cold to get a blink of sleep. A few brothers were also scared awake by the baboons and eventually we were evicted by the ants. It was one of the most memorable nights of our misery.

There was another eventful water source, although I can't be one hundred percent sure it was not this same one, which we reached by treading through an amazingly tangled trail of thorns and vines in the dark of the night and the dark of the trees. There were many a humorous scene on that crazy trail which was only increased in comedy once we realized the next day that we had barely missed the front entrance (which was quite wide and spacious) and instead decided to make our own.

I believe it was the same place that we had set up camp when we heard some large vehicles passing on the road nearby. We were immediately set up into positions in a 360 degree fashion. The Shaykh was placed somewhere safe and we awaited our enemy. (We found out later that this was the cue for a few brothers to ditch out in fear until the danger had passed!) I remember watching my part of the line when I started to hear something like people walking. I told a brother next to me and I readied my gun. Eventually I caught a glimpse of them. It was a group of them walking very stealthily without making much noise. I waited for them to get within a few meters and then I opened my safety and yelled: 'Staaaaag!' (Stop). When I saw the fear on their faces and the fact that they were hardly armed and ready I realized they must not be an enemy. It turns out that they were scouts we had sent out and they too had been aware of the large vehicles that passed. They were coming in stealthily to avoid being seen and in order to tell us of the danger.

This water source as it turned out happened to be one used frequently by the Kenyan army. After going through our normal fiasco of burrowing through bushes and evicting baboons, the neighbors had the compassion to warn us of such. This warning was of no real additional value because on that day we experienced an extremely unusual flyby of a very low flying prop plane. The brothers had just seen a large lizard run passed and we were debating whether to try and catch and eat it, when the plane flew by as if to scout our position. In addition to that strange event, when night came the entire sky became full of planes, helicopters, and satellites as if there had been a jail break.

That was the night in which Xasan Turki took another good decision to reduce our baggage and thin out our lines. All of the young brothers were grouped together according to destination and then they were sent out with a little money, letters from the Shaykh, and some instructions of how to proceed. We were told later that many of those brothers were captured, but most of them were also eventually let go.

We left that place in the cloak of night, under the roar of the sky, and we headed out to a place near the 'American' road which we stayed for quite some time. It was there that Jacfar finally succumbed to his Malaria which he had been fighting through all of those journeys. It was also there that we heard the American's air-raid of Axmad Madobe and his people. Abu Muxammad's son, Muxammad, was said to have been a witness to the whole incident. All of that and more...

That particular spot had a water source which was frequented by wild boars, which had the effect of changing the quality of the water very quickly given its shallow nature. I used to like to go there with the intention of trying to look for game to shoot, because other than baboons and pigs there were also Goder (Oryx) to hunt.

Our hunters had brought us a Goder or two throughout the experience and it was enough meat for us to eat for about two days. When hunger set in, I used to go to that brother and beg him to go hunting for us. When he would refuse or remark that he couldn't find anything, I used to take it upon myself to do a little mission of my own.

Once I had gone off towards the water source to have a shower (which I was rarely motivated to do because of the inevitable, and almost immediate, return of the filth, but the body lice was a plague). As I had nearly removed my clothes I saw three large Goder run passed me at about 10 meters distance!! I threw my clothes on and started trying to track them. They couldn't have gone far right?

I came to a crossroads full of different tracks but I decided to follow the ones that look like they were skidding out of flight. First I took that path but slowly it started to split up and I started to lose sign anyway. Each time I would return back to the crossroads and pick up a new track to follow before coming to a dead end. When I decided to just go back to my shower I somehow took a small wrong turn at the crossroads and I found myself immediately lost! It was humiliating and frightening all at once.

I had been told never to go hunting because I would become lost and now here I am living the fruits of my folly. If I shoot I will surely be found but I will be thoroughly scorned. I decided to keep a hold of myself and try to get back. Everything seemed alien as if I had entered an entirely different forest, but I kept walking. Eventually I came to foot prints that I eagerly followed but not knowing where they would lead. It was not until I heard and then saw some of the brothers coming up the path that immediately I recognized the path as the one I normally take to the waterhole daily! I cordially greeted the brothers and told them that I had just wanted to get something before having a shower.

That spot was also the place in which we became under siege by a massive wave of roly pollies. They were everywhere and they would not allow us to sleep in the day. It seems at night that they would also retire to sleep in their holes underground. The worst thing about these little creatures was that their crawling starts off with a tickle but once they find a nice spot they start to nibble! Those little creatures are a curse.

There was also the day in which some Bedouins brought us a few goats in the middle of the night. I remember this night well because of a curious incident that was to follow. I was usually not allowed in the kitchen because I was deemed useless (which really rustled my feathers seeing as though I had passed home economics classes with flying colors at least three times) but this night I had the honors of holding the flashlight for the brothers while they cleaned the animals and cooked them. There was a policy that states that those who take part in the cooking receive an extra share called the: 'Caamiliina calayhaa' (taken from the verse about Zakaah), so I was inclined to take something small seeing as though the others were also doing so. After all, I had stayed up with them as well.

I decided not to be greedy so I chose a bone instead of taking meat. And it must be known that their style of cutting always meant that bones were hardly left with anything of substance on them. It also must be known that their style of cooking meant that anything of substance was going to be rendered equal to concrete in its consistency. Therefore, the bone I chose was not only of this nature but it was also the part of the shin bone of the goat which only had some remaining cartilage in tact. Immediately I was stared at as if I had taken the lion's share of the meal, but I didn't care much to bother. I just sat and gnawed away at my bone. This is when the incident played out. A brother, who was notorious for having hands that could not stay to one side of the plate (may Allaah accept him as a martyr), walked in at that moment, sat down next to me, and said: 'The bone...' I looked at him and he repeated: 'The bone...give me that bone.' I told him: 'I'm eating it,' but he only replied by reaffirming his interest in it. I was perplexed. I was so shocked that I simply handed him the bone and went to sleep.

There was also the time in which we sent a man off to come back with news and it seems that instead of bringing us the money and provisions he only brought us a small portion and kept the rest for himself. I was happy to finally get some milk in our tea again for a change, although for only two days or so. It was an answered prayer after a few of us had become afflicted with days of constipation. That guy later ran off with one brother's pistol to never return with it.

Finally, that place of ours was cleared out once Jacfar Dheere breathed his last. He had been hanging in despite all odds for a long time but each day he had become weaker and weaker. He had to be carried to the bathroom, he had to be forced to eat or drink, which he normally vomited up, and he was in a generally wretched situation. Despite all of that I never heard him complain once (not even during the marches when he was forced to keep up with us and his appointed assistant left him behind). Once, during his sickness we told him that he has to eat because he is a Mujaahid and he must get well to fight the Kuffaar. That day we saw him try to eat with voracity, but he inevitably vomited it all. There were also other moments in which he was always careful to protect his Cawrah despite his

terrible situation. Another time he mustered the strength to speak when he heard the Ducaa' for wearing new clothes. He repeated the portion: "And die as a martyr" in a loud voice a few times. The brother who used to attend to him (may Allaah reward him) also informed us that he used to help him recite the Faatihah and the Tashahhud in his prayers that he was always eager to pray, despite having great difficulty in remembering what to do. The day before his death the brother mentioned that Jacfar didn't need any help on that day, he remembered the Tashahhud perfectly. He was also seen staring off into the forest that day as if he saw something. When he was asked what he was looking at he said: 'The brothers,' (although there was no one to be seen). He also told his attendant on that day that they would soon meet up together in Firdaws. The next day he was being taken to the bathroom when his soul began to be taken. We read on him briefly and he became conscious once again. We stepped away for one minute and he was pronounced dead.

That night we had to guard his body from predators and the next morning one of the most useful brothers began preparing his burial. We dug without having any tools at first until we had made a sizeable hole. Finally, the tools came and the digging became easier. That useful brother had already made a stretcher, he had cleared the way for it to be carried from where Jacfar lay till his grave, and he had prepared logs to cover the grave. I have never seen such a brilliant burial with such little resources. A Shaqq (trench) was made in the middle of the grave where Jacfar was placed. Then the logs were placed over the Shaqq. Then grass and debris was used to fill the spaces between the logs. Finally, mud was made to plaster the entire surface of the logs and debris until it became one smooth uniform surface. Then the dirt was poured back in on the grave and thorns were placed over it to keep out the predators.

Soon after that ceremony we were told that we would be moving back to our home base. It would be there, back at the national geographic lake, that we would finally enter into a new phase of our journey. It was as if we were getting a signal that we were now reversing our steps to come back to civilization.

But before we actually set off we were awakening one night before dawn by the sounds of a million bullets trying to leave the barrel of one gun in about half a second, at regular pulses for a good minute or so. Later on we realized that we were close to Kolbiyo where Axmad Madobe and his crew were being blitzed from the sky. I heard that Abu Muxammad's boy, Muxammad, was there and that only he (by virtue of running into the forest) and Axmad Madobe survived. In hindsight, it would have been better for Axmad Madobe to have died instead of coming back just to join the Kenyans in attacking Somaalia.

Once we commenced our journey I was charged with carrying an extra gun and some extra Kilos of food. This was the first trip in which I walked up front and I was striving to place my feet in the same spot Xasan Turkey's had landed. For an old man he could really walk. In fact, after this whole thing was over, despite being around seventy years old, he still decided to marry an eighteen year old bride from a neighboring village, as a means of solidifying political ties.

Anyway, once we arrived at the lake, many of our brothers from the Ansaar were allowed to leave and find their way back home; to eventually rejoin the fight against the Ethiopians. But, despite the new trend of thinning our ranks, we would also begin a new trend of increasing our numbers as well...only this time the vast majority of those now entering our group were to be Muhaajirs who had been scattered throughout the forest.

It is worth mentioning here that Shaykh Xasan Turkey truly did a great deed by staying in the forest (despite the griping and complaining of those stuck with him) for the sole purpose of collecting every last Muhaajir into one group to take care of them and protect them. I ask Allaah to give him Jannah and forgive him for any of his misdeeds.

It was during this short stay that we met up with Abu Cabdallaah as-Sudaani (Ciise Cusman Ciise), and a few other Muhaajirs. Cabdul Qadir Komandos also joined our group at this stage.

Abu Cabdallaah had almost died of Malaria and he wouldn't take on a leadership position for quite a while. He did, however, come with news that our previous Amiir had been martyred in a very strange incident; leaving him the natural successor. Of course I don't blame Abu Cabdallaah for his death. But the story along with the picture on his camera phone showing that the bullet was aimed precisely for Abu Talxah's heart makes me want to lay the blame on someone other than the Kuffaar.

The reason for this is the fact that there were multiple groups of Muhaajiriin and leaders in the area of Lekta during the time of Abu Talxah's death and none of them were attacked by the Ethiopians until quite a while after the fateful shots rang out. In addition to that tid bit it was also said that he was called to have a meeting with some of the other leaders and he went accompanied by one of his lieutenants (while both of them were only armed with pistols). Minutes later shots could be heard and his lieutenant returned unscratched. He allegedly fought off the Ethiopians single handedly with his pistol while Abu Talxah, on the other hand, was shot square in the heart.

That lieutenant was later martyred trying to defend the wives of the Muhaajiriin (Abu Talxah's included) on the Kenyan border. Once again, he was trying to fend off the Kenyan soldiers with only his pistol. That time, however, he was hit and martyred.

No one till this day really knows the true story about his death, but there were definitely plausible motives amongst some of the other groups who didn't take kindly to Abu Talxah's insistence upon starting a new group in Kismaayu under the spiritual "leadership" of Xasan Turkey.

Regardless, back to the story. By this time we began eating goats more regularly (probably due to the increased number of leaders and the decreased overall number of the group) and this meant that people like me were working quite a lot. It's no small work to prepare a goat in the middle of the forest.

In fact, many of us used to look at the idea of eating meat as a double-edged sword. There is definitely the big plus of taste and getting extra protein, but it also meant that it would be the only meal for the entire day. This meant that from morning till evening you must survive on tea, while toiling in the sun. This also meant that, with the exception of a small amount of rice, the main dish was meat. Now, that's great on occasion but gorging on rubbery meat on an empty stomach just before sleeping happens to really mess up my digestive system.

The way the scene would play out was actually another evil part of the meat eating experience. People who were extremely hungry (those who didn't have any other special food on the side or those who had been working all day) were all placed on one plate... and I have no clue how I managed to find myself amongst such a group. Then, once the whistle was blown, they would all dig in like wolves.

Apparently the best tactic was to throw all of the meat (the boneless and the bones) at the opposite side of the plate (on top of my rice usually) for a quick run at all of the rice in your vicinity. This would be followed up by snatching the boneless meat back from across the plate, and then polishing it off with a few bones while supplies last.

In the beginning, I was amazed to see all of the meat on my side and I would slowly take my time chewing it and enjoying it (because meat is generally not cooked well in Somalia and takes a while to chew). Then I slowly clicked on to why the meat would later disappear as quickly as it came, and I started to take measures to not lose out on the race. For one, I decided to never pick up a bone until the whole thing was over, and two, I tried to focus on protecting my rice from invaders once the meat was gone.

This sparked many Sharci debates and a bit of bad blood to tell the truth...ha ha. But I tried on a few occasions to gather the brothers around a copy of summarized Saxiix al-Bukhaari which I managed to carry with me in my bag. We would go over the chapters about not loving the Dunyaa and having brotherly conduct. That used to help for a few days, but the hunger was a stronger influence.

Those days I would spend hunting fire wood out of the thorn infested woods, starting fires, carrying water in multiple three or five liter containers from a few kilometers distance, and doing other chores like washing dishes and what not. This was, as I mentioned before, because I was stigmatized as someone who could not cook for some reason. It was all well and good though because I kind of enjoyed the idea of getting reward and keeping myself busy. Sitting around amongst people that did not want to talk or laugh was extremely annoying.

It was around that time that a brother gave me his Mus-xaf so I didn't have to wait for other people to finish anymore. I took that opportunity to memorize a few more chapters of the Qur'aan in between my chores, and it really helped to keep me sane and focused.

On one occasion I went with the plastic containers to fetch water from the water hole, but as I approached the bank I found something extremely unexpected. About two meters in

front of me was the middle part of a huge black snake whose head was about three meters to my right! It seemed to be hunting those frogs and crabs that we used to ponder about during our first stay.

I gathered my nerve and decided that this dangerous thing must be killed otherwise it might harm another brother. So I planned an escape route if I should miss its head, and then I took aim at the small head (in comparison to its body that is). I figured shooting it in the stomach will only anger it and cause it to strike me. My only hope was to not miss the head.

While standing and shaking a bit (with an un-calibrated AK) I took a shot (which missed by some inches) and then tried to run like crazy! Unfortunately I fell and dropped my gun, having it filled up with quite a bit of sand, and I looked back to see my worst nightmare. The huge black snake reared up, becoming nearly the height of a man, and flared its cobra-like neck while staring right at me!

By the grace of Allaah it decided to throw itself in the water and run from the source of those mad vibrations, and I gathered myself for quite a bit before my heart stopped pounding. During that time the brothers had left camp and came running up to laugh at me for shooting my gun. Later on I decided it must have been a huge black mamba.

I explained to them the severity of the situation and how big the snake was, but they took it for a tall tale fishing story. I decided to shrug it off, but I was concerned for the brothers. Unfortunately, they would have to find out about the danger by seeing the snake face to face.

The next day a brother was bathing and washing his clothes next to the bank when he saw the huge snake approaching. He managed to run out of the water in time, but despite being a very courageous brother (Maclim Khaalid from Hargeysa, may Allaah accept him as a martyr) he was quite stirred up. Within those same few days another brother, from the Bedouinish Ansaar, took a shot at the snake with his pistol. And with that my honor was redeemed, but the snake still lurked.

The irony of that story, though, is that afterwards I was the one tasked with getting the water; while the rest of the brothers were deathly afraid to approach the bank (especially at night).

We soon left that place and went on to meet the Arabs. Other than some Arabs from Syria, Jordan, and Tunisia, there was a group of mainly Yemeni brothers that managed to stick together, despite the fact that a great number of them were lost to fights with the Ethiopians or to being captured by Kenyans on the border. Daniel was from the second unlucky bunch as he documented in one of his writings.

The most significant benefit we received from linking up with this group was the collective experience and knowledge of Abu Mansuur al-Yemeni (al-Bayhaani) (may Allaah accept

him as a martyr) and Maclim Qaasim. Soon after meeting with them the learning began and it wouldn't stop until Abu Mansuur left Somaalia.

He had a beautiful character and my days with him are from my most cherished moments in Jihaad. He made us feel that we were the awaited hope of the entire Ummah and that every breath of our existence must be placed towards the goal of freeing the Muslim lands from oppression or we would be traitors to the cause.

He rarely ever had to give real punishments to the brothers for several reasons. The first was that our psychological state was incredibly fragile after going through such a trying ordeal. The second was that everyone loved him and simply couldn't bear having him angry at them. The final, and most important reason, was that he made everyone feel that losing the knowledge that he could provide was a sin and if he was angry he would prevent you from classes.

He was rarely seen with a straight face, even in classes, unless he was giving motivational talks in the evening before gathering the brothers for Nashiids. In those talks he would remind us of the rights of our sisters who have been jailed or raped. He would tell us about how many Jihaadi fronts he had visited and he would remind us that our futures will not be limited to the confines of the forest in which we were residing. It was not strange to find him or the other brothers shedding tears for love of Islaam.

Afterwards he would have me translate the Arabic words of the oldies Nashiids that he loved so much. He wasn't a big fan of the new wave Nashiids with more of a focus on how it sounds then the actual literal content. He memorized almost all of the Qawaafil ash-Shuhadaa' Nashiids and his voice was actually preferable to the original on many occasions. Till this day there are numerous Nashiids that instantly remind me of him and take me back to those bitter-sweet moments.

The drawback of this period was the disappearance of Abu Cabdallaah who would travel around trying to make connections and trying to reorganize the Jihaad. This led to a very noticeable rift between the Muhaajiriin and Xasan Turkey, because Abu Cabdallaah was our public relations master and Xasan Turkey could never refuse his requests.

Around this time we were finally joined by the rest of the Muhaajiriin which included mostly Westerners and some Sudaanis. Each group had its own story. In fact several brothers found themselves alone and stranded from the rest, causing them to have a story completely unique from the rest.

As I said before, we were all basically in two groups after the farewell in Jilib: those who stayed in Jilib (the few) and those who took the journey to Chiamboni (the vast majority). For the most part those who stayed in Jilib ended up with Xasan Turkey early on, while those who went to Chiamboni split into about five groups after the Ethiopian attack at Lekta.

During that battle the Ethiopians threw flares to demark the positions of the brothers and then they used light, portable, DSHKs and everything else in their arsenal to rain down havoc on the unsuspecting Muhaajiriin who were told that the enemy was very far away. It is possible that a spy could have betrayed their position, but it is also possible that all of those planes in the sky weren't just there for nothing.

Many of the brothers had become careless of their weapons' maintenance and many of them jammed. It eventually became a battle between about four brothers and a platoon or so of Ethiopians. One of the Muhaajiriin could actually understand Amharic and he told the brothers that the yelling and screaming of the Ethiopians was mostly to say: "Oh my God! They're too many," and "Fear God, why are you forcing me to do this?!" and other laughable phrases.

The brothers fought long enough to evacuate the injured, but the martyr of the operation, Abu Xafs from Tunisia (the Nashiid/explosives guy) was left behind. He received a bullet to the head and was martyred immediately. Another Palestinian brother (Abu Khattaab) was also mortally wounded in the stomach and he would become a martyr not long afterwards (may Allaah accept him as a martyr).

The story of those who decided to head towards Kenya was documented by Abu Muxammad and the story of many of the other groups was documented by Fazuul (may Allaah accept him as a martyr) in his book al-Xarb Calaa al-Islaam.

Brothers were left to fend for themselves having no maps, no money, no source of food, and no source of water. Some brothers were blessed with too much water, others were forced to drink urine and eat the roots of plants. Some ran into the jettisoned can food of the Ethiopians, while others were forced to eat maggots and snails.

Al-Xamdulillaah! I was eating goats and grits with sugar in them! I only went a day without water at the most, while some brothers had to last for three days at times.

Those who were tried the most had many stories of how they felt that Allaah had helped them continue forward. One brother was sleeping alone in a tree for fear of lions when some "brothers" came to him and offered to guard him during the night should he want to sleep on the ground. Other brothers would dream of eating chocolate and awaken with the taste in their mouth without the pangs of hunger that were there before sleeping. Many dreams about what was happening with the other groups were later confirmed as true.

Anyway, after the arrival of these brothers classes became more and more formal.

We took in depth courses on the AK, the PK, the RPG, the F1, and any other pistol or weapon that entered the camp. On one occasion we actually had access to a Draganov sniper rifle. On another occasion we had the opportunity to open and close a T.T., Makarov, a Browning High-Power, a Beretta, and some other Hungarian pistol, all while blind folded. We also received explosives training, mostly in theory, as well as a brief class in booby trapping.

The most interesting class was our tactics course in which Abu Mansuur reenacted for us a famous battle of Khattaab (as he was in Shiishaan for a while and can be seen in one of the videos about Dagestan) and had us take turns leading the battle before dawn. He taught us how to fight in the city, how to set ambushes, and how to plan raids. He taught us the basics of guerrilla warfare and always stressed elements that we would continuously see ignored in future stages of our stay in Somaalia.

I remember on one occasion we were taking turns covering one another with PKs and AKs so that the RPG man could take a shot down our imaginary street when a helicopter arrived over the trees. Ha ha. The imaginary RPG (because it hadn't reached the camp yet) was of no use and we decided to sneak back into the trees to see what would happen. Fortunately, the objective of the mission was simply to scare us (for real this time), because they had no idea where we were. So they fired a few rockets into nothing and then left.

Regardless, we learned the exercise well and it became a favorite joke of Abu Mansuur if he were to run in to a brother on his way to the bathroom or kitchen to drop everything and pretend to cover for the imaginary RPG man! On some occasions he would practice a Yemeni custom of welcoming his guest by shooting imaginary mortar rounds while his imaginary wife went out to slaughter an imaginary sheep!

Another classic memory from that era is related to Maclam Qaasim (who was a real character himself, may Allaah accept him as a martyr). A brother went out to use the restroom in the wilderness in the middle of the night while Maclam Qaasim was keeping guard with a pistol. In the moonlight the brother's return must have been extremely imposing, so Maclam Qaasim called for backup. He said: Bring a gun! Bring a gun! A brother offered him an AK and asked what seemed to be the problem. He tossed the AK out of the way and said: NO! Bring me a BIG gun! It's a huge lion! No! It's an elephant! A baby elephant! Bring the RPG! Ha ha. It wouldn't be the first or last time a brother almost got mistaken for game while in the toilet.

While on the topic of anecdotes... the ferocious army ants were actually a common enemy. We began calling them al-Jaysh al-Axmar (the red army) which was a bit of a play on words considering the fact that the Amxaar (a tribe of Ethiopians) are called the Axmaar by many Somaalis. The semblance in the name was meant to represent the semblance in their tactics. They would stage well planned attacks to deprive us of our comfort and sleep, and the only weapon against them was well fortified walls of hot coals in a 360 degree fashion.

This enemy is an extremely hungry one because it does not have a supply line or anything like a rear base. They are a bit like the Tartars in that they roam the world living simply off what they can pillage. They sleep under the ground during the day time and come out only at night to raid. The only time they can be seen during the day is when they can find water sources or a considerable amount of shade to protect them from the sun. If they are caught in the sun they freeze and die like trolls! In some cases they dig tunnels to avoid sunny areas, only to pop out again under the shade.

They divide their labor according to their castes. There are small ones that tend to focus on transporting food or digging shelters, while there are larger ones that take part in defense and attack. Apparently, there is a caste of really big headed ones that seem to hold the role akin to that of colonels. The larger ones line up on either side of the small ants to defend them as they move. If the line is disturbed they enter attack mode while the rest of the ants scatter to reduce damage.

When the larger ants go on a raid they send out scouting parties in advance to test for fortifications. If they find our hot coals they tend to follow two courses of action: they either wait till the embers die down, or they send out flanking parties to find gaps in the defenses. Once they penetrate the lines they don't simply attack their prey. They climb upon their prey, covering him completely, before giving the signal for all to bite simultaneously. This has the effect of something close to having your finger stuck in an electric socket. You must run to a safe area and hold yourself together while you pluck each one off individually!

I remember on one occasion we were surrounded by hungry lions that don't typically "roar" as you might expect. Instead, they make a powerful grunting noise that sounds a bit like the loud grunting of a man. They surrounded the camp and they were interested in the smell of meat coming from our kitchen. The irony of that was that night, though, is that our main fear was embodied in the fact that all of our coals had finished and we had become surrounded by army ants! The idea of lions had less to do with our terrible night's sleep than the ants did.

On another occasion I found a huge ant hill filled with prehistoric sized black ants that were quite few in number. It wouldn't have been too much of a sight except for the fact that we found them in the act of ambushing the army ants! It was just after dawn and the army ants were in a rush to secure a place to stay for the day before the sun became too hot. They had formed their fortified lines and they completely disregarded the fact that the huge black ants were picking off a good deal of them. A huge black ant could take on up to three or four of the huge headed army ants and still manage to win the battle. They would rush in, grab an ant, become entangled by a few more, and then run away to fight them in seclusion from the rest. This continued until a Muhaajir brother from both Britain and the U.S. whom we called Layth (may Allaah accept him as a martyr) came up to us and stumbled upon the line of ants causing them to instinctively disperse. The huge black ants immediately began retreating back to their ant hill after becoming surrounded by an angry onslaught!

This would not be Layth's only Kodak moment. He was quite an amusing brother. He was like a huge Paul Bunyan with the heart of a teddy bear. He would always be seen carrying his large PK or an axe or some scary weapon, and he would be the first to propose that something or someone should be slaughtered. But when the camp received a few goats one day, we decided to put him to the test. We handed him the knife and watched him come up with 100 reasons for why the goat is unslaughterable! Ha ha. It all became clear after he told us about the time he decided to do an operation in Britain. After going in to the country-side and finding a target it took him a great deal of persuading before he robbed a young man on a bike for 20 pound! He explained how difficult it was for him to go over

and slap the guy off his bike and then threaten him for his wallet. He said: Me...I'm Layth...I don't slap people! Ha ha.

Despite that, he was never hesitant to engage in battle when the time came and he defended his brothers to the death in their last engagement in Bergal, as will come soon.

On another occasion he took an entire 20L with him to the woods in order to shower after a good month of not changing clothes due to the adverse conditions. After preparing himself he raised the 20 liter can over his head and dispensed all 20 liters of cooking oil all over his body!

To tell the truth, I also had a similar incident when I accidentally filled up a 3L can with water without first cleaning out the oil residue. I found myself in an unpleasant situation after reaching the point of no return.

Anyway, as I was saying about the classes...they continued for multiple months, but there was always a heavy blanket of discontent from Xasan Turkey because Abu Cabdallaah had left Abu Mansuur and another Sudaani brother in charge of the camp, but Xasan Turkey would not respect their wishes. On numerous occasions we would receive an order, like rearranging the camp in a more tactical way, or digging trenches, only to have Xasan Turkey negate it after the congregational prayers.

On one occasion, sensing some tension with the Muhaajiriin, the bad crowd that had begun surrounding Xasan Turkey called us to have a meeting to express our discontent. Many of the brothers saw clear signs of insincerity, because none of our demands or advices were being written down, nor was there an active discussion. It would take many years for us to learn that all of those involved in orchestrating that meeting would later enter the Apostate government of Shaykh Shariif.

Sometime during this period of time Abu Cabdallaah had made it to Mogadishu with a small group of Muhaajiriin and they engaged in preparations for what is now famously known as the 9 day war.

Many of the Muhaajiriin had warned Abu Cabdallaah against going under the name of the Courts because of the problems we had seen (in regards to the implementation of the Sharii'ah and unclear goals), and Abu Cabdallaah himself had some qualms with certain leaders (as did Abu Talxah before him) so it is no surprise that we were extremely shocked to hear that he had agreed to unite with all of those people under the name "Hawiye!" In fact, just before leaving we had filmed a small video in which the Muhaajiriin stood behind Xasan Turkey while he announced his allegiance to al-Qaacidah!

That war was marred with several problems. From a strategic perspective the brothers tried to hold ground against a highly skilled and highly equipped land army well before they had the means to do so. From a Sharci perspective, the entire banner was wrong. The results of all of the fighting were feeding directly into the laps of the tribal leaders who would later sell the Mujaahidiin out after the withdrawal of the Ethiopians.

Needless to say, Allaah did not bestow victory upon the Mujaahidiin caught up in that mess and Abu Cabdallaah had to make a very long journey back to Chiamboni after finding out that no one was prepared to shelter him or the Muhaajiriin. Everyone simply turned off their phones and changed clothes.

But that did not change Abu Cabdallaah's resolve in the least. It had to be his single greatest quality that, despite the situation and despite the odds, he could make everything look insignificant simply by flashing his huge smile. He approached the Muhaajiriin and told them that the fighting is still continuing in Mogadishu but nearly everyone has left! Ha ha. That was his explanation of the second large retreat in current Somaali history.

Unfortunately, Abu Mansuur al-Yemeni and those with him were not ready to let all of their complaints slide off their back like that. In fact, with the exception of me and a few other Muhaajirs, there were nearly five different conspiracies brewing, all aimed at finding a means of escape from the forest.

No one left their homes to come to Somaalia because they lacked rice and beans and a tent. No one left their homes to come to Somaalia to get married or to drink hot cokes and eat hard cookies. Everyone had ambitions to help the Jihaad and to save the Ummah, but time and time again the Muhaajiriin were being prevented from even taking a step out of the forest (whether it be towards the village or towards the front). In fact, I was present when Abu Cabdallaah relayed to us the message that Xasan Turkey had ruled that anyone who tries to leave the camp without permission will be tied to a tree!

All of this spilled over into the new plan conceived by Abu Mansuur al-Yemeni and those around him, which was to hire a boat and to leave Somaalia at all costs! The different conspiracies had converged and they were now one single openly announced plan.

This proposal was not met well by Abu Cabdallaah; although we didn't understand his anger cloaked behind his huge smile at the time. He gathered us again and told us that all of the Muhaajiriin must leave Somaalia because he can no longer assure their safety! We were outraged to say the least. Many of the brothers who had previously conspired to leave were now compelled to stay. Did he just kick us out?! Ha ha.

I won't lie about having thoughts of leaving to find a way to another Jihaadi front, nor will I lie about the fact that I was later put off the idea after the plans for leaving seemed a bit crazy and un-thought-out. I also won't lie about the fact that I thought my prospects for engaging in something useful would rise once the amount of Muhaajiriin decreased (however rational that thought was). But it was really a few dreams that tipped the scales and caused me to stay.

We had a very sincere brother with us (as it appeared to us, while Allaah is his Judge) from the Levant who claimed to be a descendant of the Prophet (S). He was never seen backbiting anyone despite the treatment he received from a good deal of the other Arabs.

He was always found trying to help and serve the brothers and he eventually became a deputy trainer for Abu Mansuur al-Yemeni.

One night it was my turn to hand over the night guard to this brother, so I walked over to where he was sleeping and woke him up. When he saw me he began smiling a huge smile and said I just saw you! He said: I was having a dream that you were in Afghanistan. At the moment I was more interested in having some dreams myself, so I told the brother to go use the bathroom and come back to tell the story once he had already begun his hour of guarding. I waited for him patiently and when he returned he told me that he had forgotten the rest of the dream and that it was my fault. Ha ha. This dream initially had me leaning towards leaving.

Another more important dream, however, would come just before their departure. He saw that he was in a Masjid and after prayers he saw a Jordanian brother who had returned home before the retreat. Then he saw two Yemeni brothers that had left recently (after a huge fiasco that almost turned ugly between them and Xasan Turkey's guards). Then he asked about me and another white brother from the West and he was told that they stayed with Xasan Turkey and then he made for them a way out. Then he saw a black book that had the name Shaykhul Islaam ibn Taymiyyah written on it.

The interpretation of the dream was fairly straight forward. The brothers in the Masjid all made it home safely (which actually happened) and me and the other brother would stay behind. The book was interpreted to be the blag flags leading up to the coming of the Mahdi (although there is some weakness in those Xadiiths) and the name ibn Taymiyyah was symbolic of the correct Manhaj.

In hindsight, all of these dreams seemed to have been the foretelling of my future role with the Shabaab, but Allaah Knows best.

These were just some of the factors that led me to stay in Somaalia, but Abu Mansuur al-Yemeni was a bit disappointed by my decision. He called me to the side one day and told me that he really wanted me to follow him. It was moments like that, when we were alone, that I really understood how much he loved me. When other people were around it was different. He was a bit of an entertainer and he didn't like the way that my questions were always aimed at finding out what he had in his hand. He used to love hearing questions and he used to love answering them until I opened my mouth! But on other occasions he would make vague positive references about me to the others in order to keep me from having a big head. He even appointed me as a Sharci teacher at one point after telling me that I have to be serious and not let this get to my head.

I had to refuse the offer and he in turn had to move on. Typical of his style he simply brushed it off by telling my friend next to me: "You know what we call people like this in Yemen? We call them Bagar!" Which means cows! Ha ha.

So it was Somaalia for me and a few other Muhaajirs and Abu Cabdallaah decided to divide us up based upon that criterion. All those who wanted to stay would be swept off to

an "advanced" training camp, and those who wanted to leave would be taken to the village to wait for their boat.

This long awaited "advanced" training camp was one of the major factors that led to a few of the brothers staying behind. They wanted to get a better grasp of explosives and other weapons before leaving Somaalia for another front or before going back to wreak havoc in the West.

I personally didn't care that much, but I started to get a bad feeling about the whole thing.

It was around that time that I was impaired for a good two weeks because my gun strap broke and the mouth of my barrel landed squarely on my ankle bone. It became pretty toxic pretty quick.

This might have had something to do with the fact that my immune system had dropped to a dangerous low due to the inadequate diet and the incessant staph infections.

I eventually had to have surgical intervention where large chunks of rotten white flesh or solid puss, or something, were extracted from my ankle. The pain was excruciating at times and I was hopping around and whining a bit. Abu Cabdallaah took the opportunity to make quite a few jokes about how he'd seen REAL injuries in his time. In Idaale he had seen people ripped apart by RPGs. He had had an entire tree explode and fall on him. He saw head injuries and dismembered body parts. He was even hit by fragments from a rocket when those helicopters came by to "scare" us.

Anyway, it wasn't this that turned me off so much, because the brothers didn't push me beyond my ability, but it was just the new "system" that I didn't like. We were now to be treated like "soldiers" who were meant to be put through hardship just because 'We say so.' There wasn't a focus on learning or WHY we were learning, it was a new focus upon hardship and doing 'What we say.' We began marching and holding our rifles like toy soldiers and all that fun stuff.

On one occasion we were taken on a trip in the middle of the night on a road that has huge holes and snakes and we were told that we can't use flashlights. The thorns were terrible and after reaching the road we were forced to stand in the mosquitoes and wait for an order to return. It turns out that some food had been brought to the camp and it was a great opportunity to put us through some hardship in the middle of the night.

I didn't have qualms with hardship per se. In fact, on one occasion, back when Abu Mansuur was the teacher, I and the brother with the dreams were the only two who showed up for class in the hot noon sun for "crawling" classes. I completely ripped up my arms and legs for that class. But what I didn't like was the way this new thing was being packaged as though it were meant to "break" us.

I could have re-framed the entire situation for the brothers by saying: "Brothers, we have a great opportunity to get reward here. The food we will be eating for the next week has just

arrived, but the road is a bit long and treacherous and we don't want you using any flashlights for security reasons. Who is ready?"

We used to carry 20 liters of water from further distances and carry huge bags of food from distances even further than that during Abu Mansuur's tenure. Only the volunteers would have the honor to serve their brothers. This indeed is the Islaamic way of raising men.

But instead we were met with drill sergeants who thought that, after months of psychological pressure, what we really needed was some pointless hardship. The goal was not to build our character or raise our morale and Imaan...but to "break" us and turn us in to robots that obey first and understand latter.

I was definitely not a big fan of that. If conforming before understanding had been my strong suite I would probably have never embraced Islaam, nor would I have migrated to the lands of Jihaad. It seemed to go against everything that we had learned from Abu Mansuur who used to give us leadership classes entailing stories of how the Prophet (S) would choose the best person for each particular job in order to bring out the virtues of his character.

Really to tell the truth, I had had enough of the psychological pressure and I was ready to just learn something new or to relax.

There was one notable instance where the drill sergeants made a rule that all of the nutritionally deficient Muhaajiriin would have to give up their stores of supplements. Of course the Ansaar would have to as well, but you have to remember that they had recently come to this camp and they had not gone through the months of torment we had seen. They were now being sent from Mogadishu by the leaders who wanted to see them "get toughened up" in the jungles of Chiamboni before joining the ranks.

A group of Muhaajiriin were furious because they had just reached the moment in this journey where they could finally have access to money and a reliable method of receiving food from the village. Some had huge stocks of milk and biscuits. Others had dried meat and coffee. There were candies and sweets as well.

I stood out of line and told the drill sergeants that this is unnecessary and these people's private property should be respected. If they would like to start a rule today it should not include confiscating private property that was acquired yesterday. All eyes were on me and immediately the mood turned in to one of "look at the softy!" I was used to that, but this time I had the wonderful delight of telling them: I don't own even one piece of candy. I didn't have any personal food at all! I was merely standing up for the rights of my brothers.

This type of mentality would be the cause for much of my woes.

I also had a knack for not having conventional Sharci opinions (at least by the standards of the Mujaahidiin in Somaalia), which didn't go over too well with the leadership. I remember on one occasion Xasan Turkey called a meeting of the entire group to discuss

why I had decided not to shorten prayers after staying in one place for a week or so. Everyone was given a chance to give their opinion before I was allowed to talk. I told the brothers that I follow the opinion of completing prayers after staying in a place for four days and that we shouldn't get into Fiqh issues like this because it entails many other subsidiary matters. Xasan Turkey refused that answer and demanded a Daliil. I eventually began to mention a Xadiith in Bukhaari to which I was quickly reminded that we don't need such Xadiiths in the face of an Ayah of the Qur'aan. I was dumbfounded and decided to just try to hide better when I prayed!

Anyway, I was eventually labeled a virus and I was allowed to stay out of the training course. I spoke to Maclam Qaasim and I told him that I didn't feel that we were learning anything more than what Abu Mansuur had already taught us at the expense of our psychological well-being. He told me he understood and asked me if I wanted any special food! Ha ha. He would give us private lessons on the side as well, and answer any questions we had without a fuss. On some occasions he would give me access to his teaching books for me to read and then return, after him giving me a short quiz.

Slowly other Muhaajiriin started dropping out of the course with complaints of being sick or what have you. They decided to take a less direct approach with their plight, which eventually worked and led them to receiving their food and the rights to buy more.

It didn't stop there though. Now the tide had changed once again and I found myself on the opposite end of the spectrum. Many brothers began talking about leaving Somaalia again and sneaking out of the camp. I told them to have patience and that we should obey the brothers in things that were not outlandish.

Finally I convinced the brothers to present their complaints to the leaders of the camp in an official and organized manner. I told them that we need to deal with our problems in the proper way instead of just running away or leaving Somaalia. Grudgingly both sides agreed and I arranged the meeting.

To be fair, Cabdallaah Toosan and Maclim Qaasim (may Allaah accept them both as martyrs) were incredibly cool teachers and they wanted to help us in any way possible, but they kept repeating that their hands were tied and that Xasan Turkey would have the final say about everything.

I finally arranged a meeting between all of us and Xasan Turkey after much persuading and it ended miserably. After giving a long speech about having patience he finally turned the mic over to the Muhaajiriin to have their say. I was immediately confounded by the absolute silence that followed.

They were all looking at me!

I knew the individual issues of each brother (their concerns, demands, and so forth) but each one wanted me to present his case on his behalf. So, true to form, I spoke for a good half hour mentioning everyone's problems but without mentioning names. And the meeting

ended with Xasan Turkey as sure as ever that I was the one stoking the Muhaajiriin to organize these meetings to complain. Which was true, but if I didn't direct their complaints to the leadership through the right procedure, they would probably all be organizing a jailbreak of sorts!

Despite all the drama, we were eventually saved by Abu Cabdallaah for the second to last time. He returned from his journey to learn that we had all dropped out of "advanced" training! He sat with us and heard our complaints and "forced" Xasan Turkey to bend on most of the issues and then he pretended the whole thing hadn't happened.

Abu Cabdallaah was usually a wise man and knew when to move on. He must have also realized that the "advanced" training he promised was not what we were expecting and I think he cut us some slack. That camp only allowed each person to shoot around 10 AK bullets a piece and only one RPG was shot by one chosen person from the entire camp. I think the Ansaar went on to shoot around 5 PK bullets a piece and two people got to throw an F1. It's not exactly the Faaruq training camp of Afghanistan.

He was very easy on us that time, but it could have been that he was preparing to give us bad news. He sat us down not much longer after that and told us that this time he would be gone for 6 months! For us that was like saying 6 years. And indeed it was.

Before leaving he promised to provide us with tons of explosives material to experiment with and bullets and so forth, but he didn't make too good on that. The other promise though, was that if he should take longer than 6 months, he would make a way out for us, and that one, the most important of all, he kept.

Later on we realized that he had left Somaalia to try to make contact with the leadership of al-Qaacidah to announce an official branch (now that Abu Talxha was a martyr and Fazuul was hiding out in Kenya). We haven't heard from him again after that and we ask Allaah to preserve him, wherever he is.

In his absence we received the terrible news that the 12 Muhaajiriin that left had been discovered when disembarking their boat near Bergal in Puntland. Abu Mansuur al-Yemeni had been prepared for this moment and he told everyone to make Ducaa' that they would not be taken captive. It is said that he had seen beautiful green birds a day or two before that incident while they were in the ocean that no one else could see. He had seen prison in Yemen (in fact he had been amongst those who broke out through a tunnel) and he was not fond of returning. Instead he took his visions to be a glad tiding of martyrdom. Six of the twelve were martyred in that battle, and six escaped. They put up a great fight despite the difference in number and despite the fact that they only had the ammunition in their ammo belts to fight with. One brother swears that he saw an American soldier amongst the Puntland security and he says he may have killed him. Allaah knows best, but after the fight the Americans admitted that they sent in cruise missiles to bomb the battlefield (which didn't really do much other than look good for the media).

The loss of our brothers (some of the best I have met in Somaalia) was a severe blow to our morale, and the loss of our trainer was incredibly significant. I would later take on his Kunyaa as a means of preserving his heritage. We would also take great efforts to spread the knowledge he passed on to us, while trying to pass it down with his same methods and good spirit.

In fact, after Abu Cabdallaah left we started receiving more and more graduating classes of Ansaar in the camp. It was to such an extent that the camp actually turned into camps. This development led Xasan Turkey to grudgingly give us training roles...despite ALL of the previous history. But to tell the truth, even those who had gone through the "advanced" training eventually realized that we had been trained by Abu Mansuur al-Yemeni more thoroughly than them. As a result, we were eventually called in to give them a short one week seminar at the conclusion of their "advanced" training in many topics such as security and intelligence.

I attribute this change in roles not simply to the increased number of trainees or their acceptance of our skills, but also to the fact that the people surrounding Xasan Turkey went away briefly to deal with matters that were tribal related. They wanted to secure support and funds from Shaykh Shariif for their proposed Ogaden project which ultimately aimed at taking Kismaayu and then leaping into Ethiopia. With their influence out of the way Cabdallaah Toosan was allowed to run the show.

Toosan was extremely lovable and had a great respect for Muhaajiriin. He had been trained by al-Qaacidah during the old UNOSOM days and he was open-minded as a result. Many ideas we presented he acted upon and he left the training program largely in our hands. This was despite the fact that we had benefitted greatly from him and Maclim Qaasim in private, and we saw them as our elder teachers (especially since Maclim Qaasim had graduated from Afghanistan after having trained with the Russians back in the Siyaad Barre times).

This new freedom gave us room to improve many aspects of the training, but to our dismay, he made sure to place a Somaali brother in charge over the marching and hardship, so we weren't really able to do much in that department. I was placed in charge of the Sharci class and I immediately changed the focus to matters of Manhaj as opposed to the basic courses on Tawxiid. Although that may sound strange, and a bit trite coming from an ex-Madkhali, it was absolutely necessary.

There were many Muhaajirs who had serious qualms with the way the Courts had been managed and they were diametrically opposed to ever taking that name again. It's worth mentioning that Abu Cabdallaah had left a Kenyan Arab as the Amiir of the Muhaajiriin with a white Westerner as his Naa'ib. This new Amiir fought tooth and nail against going under the name Islaamic Courts and he was also opposed to the idea of taking land in the Jubba region while the true fight was near Mogadishu and it required a focus on guerrilla tactics.

Needless to say, when I was the only Muhaajir who agreed to be filmed by al-Jazeera under the name of the Islaamic Courts, the Amiir and a group of the Muhaajiriin were not too happy. But my rationale was found in the teachings of Xasan Turkey, which he would reiterate daily after Maghrib prayer during our jungle sabbatical. He said that he had always intended to derail Shaykh Shariif's plans by taking on his name and then announcing radical opinions. He would take a harder line than Shariif was ready for and then announce it in the media, leaving Shariif caught between denying his links to Xasan Turkey and between accepting the hardline. So I had every reason to believe that this video was simply part of his old strategy.

The problem, however, began to emerge when trainees in the camp began associating themselves with Shaykh Shariif and referring to him as the Amiir. This is happening while Xasan Turkey continues to announce in his speeches that he is from the "Shabaab" (i.e. not from the normal Islaamic Courts army) and that Chiamboni was established by al-Qaacidah and so forth. But we noticed less distancing language regarding Shaykh Shariif and slowly word got out that he was actually talking directly to the Asmara camp and receiving funding from them.

We were certain that this could only lead in the wrong direction, and we began speaking out about it in the Sharci classes. We discussed how the Ikhwaan were led astray by use of the parliament and how other groups like the Suruuris are prone to betray the entire Jihaad due to weaknesses in their beliefs of Imaan and Kufr. To illustrate our points we took large passages from Dacwatul Muqaawamah by Abu Muscab as-Suuri and then we would adapt the situation to Somaalia.

This had the effect of an atomic bomb within the camp and once again I was labeled as the trouble maker. In fact, Xasan Turkey called the entire camp for a meeting in which he called me out by name, although he added that he had forgiven me.

It was obvious though that the true discontent was to be found with those around him like Shaykh Taahir and Cabdullaah Qayliye. Those guys later joined the Axmad Madobe/Kenyan camp and one was killed and the other severely injured. Shaykh Taahir openly told us: If you don't like our Manhaj...LEAVE! I responded to him by saying: This land is not yours, it belongs to all of the Muslims, and you can't make us leave. So he stayed quiet.

But the battle began playing out more and more in their dealings with us. For one, they decided to put the entire camp through an inquisition in which anyone who "had doubt in their religion" was to step out of line. This line was code word for "having doubt in the Manhaj of the Asmara group" who were openly allied with secularists and former parliamentarians. A few brothers stood strong and they were treated very badly after that, while others decided to just go with the flow.

There was another occasion when the Muhaajiriin were nearly rounded up for disobeying orders, while they had clearly received permission to go to the village from the very same leaders ordering their punishment. After that incident Xasan Turkey held a meeting with the

Amiir and Naa'ib and explained that it was a mistake for the Muhaajiriin to ever have an Amiir to begin with (although it was Abu Cabdallaah's idea).

By this time it should be noted that a number of us had gained rights to living in the village. Before Abu Cabdallaah left he gave us permission to go to the mountain and make phone calls. He also advocated us getting married and having other such privileges.

My first phone call was to my wife in Canada. I had spoken to her previously by using radio call, but that was an extremely terrible way to have a conversation. The Somaali man in between has to realize when to hold the button for you to talk and when to let it go so that you can hear the person on the other side. But now I had a chance to actually speak by phone (despite the terrible connection and interference of the wind on the top of the mountain).

Needless to say, after finally acquiring this privilege, I was completely surprised to find that the wife I had been dreaming about for long hard months was absolutely adamant that I should divorce her! I told her that it is ridiculous to ask such a question, but she insisted that I was in the wrong for not giving her a phone number or an address! I told her that I live under a tree and that I am speaking from a mountain. She didn't seem to understand. She refused to come to Somaalia and she insisted that I should simply come back to Canada and live happily ever after (fat chance!).

I returned to the forest after that phone call extremely upset, only to be called back to the mountain on the next day (which is a good three hour car ride back to the village). I didn't mind going to the village or speaking to my wife, but I was further dismayed to find out that she was as adamant as ever about the divorce. She told me that my daughter needed a father. When I told her that I AM her father and that I never wanted us to separate and that she should come to her homeland of Somaalia, she refused everything. It was on that fateful night that we parted our ways.

I had already assumed that she wasn't going to come to Somaalia long before, during the passport crisis, so I had already begun looking for other options.

I told Xasan Turkey to find me a wife and I ask many brothers to search as well. I had been waiting for a much older sister to arrive in Chiamboni for about a month (and I wasn't extremely picky at the time) so I thought nothing of Xasan Turkey's order for me to present myself at his private camp the next morning. I assumed he would simply tell me the older sister had finally arrived and I would be allowed to go to the village for marriage. But I was extremely shocked when he told me that the sister only speaks Swahili! That didn't fit the description.

He asked me if I was ready to marry the sister and I told him that I hadn't even seen her yet. He told me that it didn't matter. I had to decide from the forest whether I was prepared to marry a girl I hadn't seen who speaks a completely different language. So like any man in my situation I said YES. Ha ha.

The next condition, however, was almost stranger than the first. He stipulated that I would have to chop off my golden locks or else I wouldn't be allowed to marry. I agreed laughingly, assuming he couldn't be serious about something like that. But a few days later I was met by Toosan in the village with scissors in his hands. He butchered me thoroughly and left me with the shortest haircut I have had seen since I was 15! I stared at my long blond hair on the ground (my hair is normally brown but it had become lighter due to the sun) and almost wanted to cry, but I felt it must be worth it.

Al-Xamdulillaah I met Umm Muxammad (Muxammad Shafiiq is the name of my first born boy who died after a week from birth, may Allaah have mercy on him) the next day and I was happily surprised to find her to be a pleasing young girl. We agreed on almost everything, but the family would still have to be enticed into the agreement.

I spent a long month in the forest learning Swahili basics (although it didn't save me from messing up and saying stupid things during our honeymoon) while praying that the family would accept. After all, Xasan Turki had told me that the entire village had refused to marry a Muhaajir and that this girl was my only hope. They were all afraid that a Muhaajir would disappear just like another brother who had been detained by the Kenyans for many months.

Eventually, after much bargaining, I managed to marry my wife and I earned the right to become a resident of the village. I could now live in a mud hut and eat fish until my heart was content. Other brothers would eventually get the same rights now that the village had heard about rich (although I was brass) white Arab men in the jungle! The village actually became a hot spot for Muhaajiriin and we would have cookouts and Ciid celebrations. Although it was quite a dangerous place because attack helicopters would fly over at times. Each one of us had to prepare a trench in his yard for the worst case scenario.

I remember one night we were told that the Mooryaan from a neighboring village had been making problems. I heard a lorry and some people running and shouting so I jumped in my trench and cocked my weapon. It turned out to be brothers and they were extremely terrified! My neighbor just told me to go back to sleep as he normally does when strange things happen in the night.

One time I had heard owl noises from 360 degrees around our camp. This is a common sound used for communications at night and I was certain that we were surrounded. He told me that he had heard owls tons of times at that camp, so I felt good and went to sleep. The next morning he divulged that it was simply a lie to shut me up!

Anyway, now that we were moving towards the village, it was around that time that my absence in the camp led to a complete explosion amongst the rest of the Muhaajiriin. I used to buy canned tomato paste and spices to "spice up" the beans and rice, and put a smile on the brothers' faces. I would also lead them in singing Nashiids in an obnoxiously loud voice while other people were sleeping or doing "serious" things. I would also go on long passionate rants about everything that was wrong with our situation and then end it all rolling in laughter like a deranged hyena. This was the only way to keep sane and even

when the leadership would chastise us after the prayer for laughing while Quds was under occupation...we would set up camp well beyond the "no-laughing-zone" and laugh downwind of them.

But now that I was gone, even the Amiir, who used to laugh at my loss of sanity, had finally lost it himself.

Just for some background here, one day the Amiir was on a hunting trip and I pretended to be a water buffalo in the trees. When I saw him close to taking aim I quickly made it clear who I was and we both had a good laugh. He asked me why I was alone in this part of the forest and I told him that I felt like I was in jail. He had just come back from living inside a house for months in Mogadishu (because he retreated from Idaale to Mogadishu and never left until the retreat of the 9 days war), so he thought I was extremely silly. He said: this expansive forest is a jail?! I told him: There is no wife behind that tree or behind that tree! And he became certain from that day forth that I had completely lost my marbles.

It seems that the brothers whom I had normally reassured and advised had finally given up on the option of raising complaints to the leadership. This time they came with demands.

After a few hot meetings with Xasan Turkey, it was only a few weeks later that waves of Muhaajiriin would leave Somaalia for Kenya highly discontented.

Coincidentally, this transpired around the same time our 6 month wait was supposed to end, but there was no sign of Abu Cabdallaah. What we did find, however, was that my former partner (whom I had been together with since he and Abu Muxammad rescued me all the way up until Jacfar Dheere died) had come to rescue us once again. He had been given orders by Abu Cabdallaah to take the Muhaajiriin to Kenya should he be late in honoring his 6 month promise.

It should also be noted here that during the time I was getting married (while the issue of Manhaj was still warming up) we had been visited by a delegation from the Salaaxud Diin camp of the "Shabaab" (i.e. as opposed to the Chiamboni camp of the "Shabaab"). Abu az-Zubayr, al-Afghaani, Shaykh Fu'aad, and several other leaders arrived in Chiamboni to hold talks with Xasan Turkey. It seemed that they wanted to peel him away from Shariif and the Asmara camp before it was too late.

Ironically, Yusuf Indhacade was also present. Abu Cabdallaah had brought him to us previously after the retreat of the 9 days war and he gave us his testimony that the man had been reformed. He said he came back from Xajj and entered the fighting. He fought with courage and was injured in the arm and now he has renounced his life as a warlord and so forth. Now, on this particular occasion he hugged me, as he did before, and gave me \$100 for my marriage and pronounced how much he loved the Muhaajiriin. He eventually ended up fighting for the government of Shariif.

Anyway, this group, minus Indhacade, eventually left Chiamboni to start Xarakah ash-Shabaab al-Mujaahidiin and their announcement of absolving all ties to the Asmara group

coincided roughly with the fall out with Xasan Turkey over Manhaj, due to our Sharci classes. This meant that Somaalia was now split roughly into two camps (while the Xarakah ash-Shabaab al-Mujaahidiin camp was extremely small).

This is an important note because, although we were starting to feel unwelcome in Chiamboni, because of the evil people surrounding Shaykh Xasan Turkey, we now found an alternative to leaving Somaalia all together in the new Xarakah.

Indeed, that alternative played a big role in what happened next, because many of the brothers did not want to leave with Abu Cabdallaah's deputy. They began asking whether or not Abu Cabdallaah had sent him to order us, or simply to give us permission as a second option. This led to weeks of waiting for phone calls on the mountain, which were plagued by interference and a terrible excuse for code.

Much later Saalix an-Nabhaan told us he was privy to those discussions at a time when he had lost all of his known safe-houses in Kenya. He was looking for a way to escape the Kenyan police and he thought it was extremely unwise to bring white Muhaajirs from the West, like myself, into a security situation like that.

Some of the brothers told us that Abu Cabdallaah had given them secret information that he had planned to send us to Kenya for operations, so they were still adamant about leaving and getting a head start before Abu Cabdallaah returns. Other brothers were already leaning towards getting involved in the new guerilla war that started against the Ethiopians, especially now that the Shabaab had made their Manhaj clear. So we split in to two groups.

Originally I had intended to leave, but once again I thought that the prudent decision would be to stay due to the instability of those who would be caring for us on the other side. They had not managed to have proper communications throughout the fiasco, so I sincerely doubted their transportation skills as well.

Now that the groups were made there still remained, for those of us who wanted to stay, the obstacles of money, permission from Xasan Turkey, and permission from Xarakah ash-Shabaab al-Mujaahidiin.

The money was acquired quickly through old connections with the Courts and the permission from Xarakah ash-Shabaab al-Mujaahidiin came after a bit of a wait, but the idea of asking Xasan Turkey was a difficult one.

After much debate, eventually our new Amiir, the former Naa'ib, decided to ask permission for a group of the darker Muhajiriin while the rest of us would sneak away by boat in the middle of the night.

Our destination was Baraawe and we would be leaving from Ras Chiamboni... which meant we had one LONG journey on our hands. It should also be kept in mind that the Americans are in the water and the Mooryaan (bandits) ruled the land. So our only hope was to never be seen by anyone.

Leaving Chiamboni wasn't extremely difficult but the ride to Kismaayu was a real doozy. The other white Westerner and I had to wear women's clothes that fully concealed every portion of our body, and then we piled inside the tiny engine room of a boat, and sat there in the heat for 24 hours!

I don't know if anyone can really know what that feels like without going through it but it's a mix of being sea sick, deaf, claustrophobic, hot, and uncomfortable. The brother with me was vomiting in a bag and we had to find clever means of using the restroom. We were sucking on lemons and sipping water to compensate for the lost fluids.

Eventually we arrived in Kismaayu in the dead of the night to wade our way to the beach and enter a car prepared by some of the brothers who were residents. They whisked us away to a house, after haggling with some bandits, and there we would stay hidden for two months. Imagine 20 men in one house 24 hours of the day for months without being able to talk above a whisper. At one point it became 8 men in one ROOM for 24 hours with an even stricter security code. We started to hate the guts out of each other!

Slowly we thinned out our numbers and then we took a bus through the many checkpoints of the Mooryaan all the way to Baraawe.

I remember having to sit on a terribly uncomfortable chair with my feet up because I had 20 liters of petrol under me, which produced the loveliest of fumes. I'm not sure if anyone out there knows what it's like to travel in Somaalia even in the most luxurious of transportation, but it's not fun. Add to that the nervousness of passing through checkpoints knowing that the slightest glimpse of our whiteness will lead to a show down.

With all those nitty-gritty details aside, we managed to arrive in Baraawe in the middle of the night where we were eventually welcomed by Abu az-Zubayr, al-Afghaani, Abu Mansuur, Adam Xaashi Cayrow, Shaykh Fu'aad, and other less known leaders.

We were now entering a completely new phase of our stay in Somaalia.

The following are the answers to some questions that were presented to me in the form of an interview by Abu Qalam ar-Ruumi, after reading the rough draft for this humble auto-biography.

1) *The pens have been lifted, and the ink has dried. Still, if you had the opportunity, would you have done anything differently in the past? This relates to both your childhood and later years.*

Fortunately, I view myself as a man with no regrets when it comes to most of my life choices. My true regrets are only those which relate to my sins and to my laziness which prohibited me from engaging in more righteous actions.

When I look back at my life I can see how all of my experiences, all the different environments in which I lived, and all the different acquaintances I have made... I can see how they played a role in shaping me for future trials and even for future roles. I can also see how some of the other choices I would have liked to make in the past, would have led me down completely different, less righteous, roads.

Whatever life brings, I always ask Allaah that it only be something which I am able to handle and that He guides me to adhering to the truth.

There is a long quote from ibn al-Qayyim in his book *Cumdatu Saabiriin* which, although lengthy and not directly related, seems to coalesce fairly well with my feelings on this matter.

He says:

"If it were to be asked: Which of these two are better... to choose to be rich in order to spend in righteousness; or to choose to be poor in order to stay away from worldly trials and to ready one's heart for the Hereafter without being preoccupied by this life; or even to not choose this or that, but rather to choose only what Allaah has chosen without leaning to either of the two options... It should be said that: this is a matter over which our righteous predecessors have differed. Some of them chose to have wealth in order to perform Jihaad with it and to spend it in righteousness like Cabdur Raxmaan bin Cawf and other rich companions. Qays bin Saqd used to say: 'Oh Allaah, I am from Your slaves that are only fit for being rich.' Some of the others chose to be poor like Abu Dharr and a group of the companions. Those looked at the pitfalls of this life and feared for the trials that come with it, while the others looked at the benefits of spending whether in this life or the next. The third group did not choose anything but rather they chose only that which Allaah chose for them. This is the same regarding choosing over the question of whether or not to live long in this life in order to establish the religion of Allaah and to worship Him. A group chose this and hoped for it, while another group chose for death; to meet with Allaah and to have a relief from this life. However, a third group did not choose this or that but rather they chose that which Allaah had chosen for them. Their choice was bound to what Allaah chose without any leanings from their side. This is the example of the Siddiiq (R) because the companions asked him while he was on his deathbed whether or not they should call the doctor. He said: 'The doctor has seen me.' They asked: 'What did he tell you?' He said: 'He said that I may do as I wish.' In contrast, an example of the first group can be found in Muusaa (AS) because, when he was approached by the Angel of Death, he slapped him and caused his eye to pop out of socket. This was not due to love of this life but rather it was only out of love for executing the orders of his Lord and for establishing His religion and fighting His enemies. It was as if he said to the Angel of Death: 'You are a slave that is ordered and I am a slave that is ordered, and currently I am executing the orders of my Lord and establishing His religion.' But when a long life was offered to him, and he knew that only death was to come afterwards, he chose what Allaah had chosen for him. As for our Prophet (S), his Lord sent him news - and he was the most knowledgeable of creation about Allaah - whereby he realized that his Lord wished to meet him and has chosen that for him. So he chose to meet Allaah and if he knew that his Lord loved that he remain in

this life to execute His orders and establish His religion he would not have chosen anything else. Therefore, his choice was in harmony with the choice of His lord. This is just like the case in which his Lord asked him to choose between being a King Prophet or a Slave Prophet, and he knew that his Lord wished that he choose to be a Slave Prophet, so he chose what Allaah had chosen for him. All of his choices in all of his affairs were always subordinate to Allaah's choice for him. This is why on the day of al-Xudaybiyah, he bore the burdens of that day and he completely fulfilled the duties of that role. This is something that was not fully carried out from each angle by anyone else except for as-Siddiiq, because he never had a choice in the matter except that which Allaah chose for him and his companions on that day. He was pleased with it and he went along with it; in full cognizance of his Lord's choice. This is the peak of servitude and Allaah thanked him for it through the thanks which can be found in the beginning of Surah al-Fatx. Even the companions congratulated him for such an honor and they said: 'Congratulations Oh Messenger of Allaah.' Indeed he (S) deserved congratulations for such a blessing that no one else from mankind has ever been congratulated over."

2.) *You mentioned that there have been some differences between the Muhaajiriin and some local leaders in Somalia, as well as other similar occurrences. Although such troubles exist, you are still calling on Muslims, especially in the West, to support the struggle in Somalia. Even you can appreciate the irony, if not absurdity, of this juxtaposition at face value. How do you expect Muslims, especially in the West, to react to this?*

In all reality, most of the Muslims in the West haven't been reacting that well to much of what is happening in the Ummah these days. So I wouldn't be surprised if many people decide to hold up such issues as an excuse for why they are currently ear-deep in Duniyaa. But, at the end of the day, it is only those who have been chosen by Allaah that will receive the great blessing of making it to the lands of Jihaad, and it will be an even smaller number who will manage to *remain* in those lands until they die. In fact, one brother once quipped: 'The true blessing is not making it to Jihaad...the true blessing is *staying* in Jihaad.'

I feel that a touch of realism is needed for those who set out on the journey of joining the Mujaahidiin. I've seen too many people come here on a hype, only to leave once they have finally run out of steam.

Everyone must know that this is not a movie, or a fantasy. This is the Ummah we live in. Yes, of course, some of the best of this Ummah can be found in the lands of Jihaad, but let's remember: this many hundreds of years after the Companions...our best is no where comparable to their least.

At-Tirmidhi reported a Xadiith which has great truth in meaning despite the weakness of the chain. It is reported from Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet (S) said: "You are in a time in which whoever from amongst you leaves a tenth of what he has been ordered with, he will be destroyed. And there will come a time in which whoever from you acts upon a tenth of what he has been ordered with, he will be saved."

We must also always remember that we have been ordered to perform Hijrah and Jihaad, not because it's fun or cool, but because it is the path to Jannah.

To this effect, there is another narration in at-Tirmidhi (similar to the first in that it is true meaning but has weakness) in which Abu Hurayrah narrates that the Prophet (S) said: "Whoever has fear will travel the entire night, and whoever travels the entire night will reach home. Indeed, the merchandise of Allaah is expensive. Indeed the merchandise of Allaah is Jannah."

In other words: Jannah doesn't come cheap. If you want it, you will have to sacrifice everything and even spend the hours normally set aside for rest, traveling in earnest towards your goal.

To be honest, it's rather odd that someone who would like to embark upon a journey as rough as Jihaad (which means a struggle) would have to be reminded that reaching the lands of Jihaad is only the beginning of the hardship. I can understand the extreme courage it takes to leave land and loved ones behind, but to expect a blissful utopia afterwards is quite a naïve notion.

It only requires that one read through the Siirah and then down to the history of the Khulafaa' to recognize the stark reality which has not changed. One is struck by the realization that the greatest challenge that stands between the Muslims and victory is the challenge of overcoming themselves! Once we have fought our Nafs on the personal level, we then have to further strive to unite the community and the greater Ummah towards productive goals. This necessity of unity and its relationship to victory has even been pointed out explicitly numerous times in the Qur'aan.

Therefore, if we observe that the Muslims have yet to realize their objectives and the Kuffaar have still managed to continue their acts of oppression against the Muslims, it should come to no surprise that our challenges from within have yet to be solved. As a result, this realization should remind us that we are still in need of redoubling our efforts; as opposed to using the challenge as an excuse to quit or to never even start.

We should always be optimistic in this endeavor, despite the odds. Only a fool would reject the fact that the Ummah is progressively improving and moving towards the great objective of Khilaafah and world supremacy. Of course there are a few creaky cogs in the system, and no doubt the system is developing slowly, but we have to remember that the Ummah is like a huge vessel in a tumultuous sea and it is not a small kayak in a calm pool. It will take many hands working in unison to assure that the vessel will be capable of turning, and even then it will take quite some time for the wind in the sails to do its work.

In brief, from the above it should become obvious to any truth-seeker that the true absurdity would be to suggest that the lands of Jihaad will always be without tests (social in nature or otherwise) or to suggest that the answer to such problems is to abandon our obligations or to turn our back on the solutions.

But, with that said, I would also like to highlight that the friction I alluded to, through a few examples in my auto-biography, is normally kept in the background and un-noticed. Therefore, it should not be over-rated and used as a lens to view the Jihaad as a whole.

This friction generally only becomes obvious and to the foreground upon reaching the most important junctions in our upward path toward Khilaafah and, as such, it is unavoidable. There is simply no getting around having differences of opinion and such differences will always be at their height when such opinions will necessarily decide the future of the Ummah.

May Allaah bless us all with sincerity and unity of purpose.

2.1) *Some might say it's a bit 'holier-than-thou' to dismiss your detractors as non-genuine "truth-seekers". As you yourself stated in your autobiography, at one point in time all you were concerned with was gaining knowledge, and not Jihad. Many Islamic academics in the West (and elsewhere) have published numerous works examining the current state of the Muslim Ummah. From Afghanistan & Somalia, to Syria & Iraq, no one has argued that Jihad is not part of Islam, or that we should turn our backs to the solutions. Rather, the overall message is: you're not contributing to the solution, you're contributing to the problem, and that there's a stark difference between fitnah [a trial/test] and fasaad [corruption]. As one prominent lecturer put it, you're "... throwing fuel on a blazing fire". Their solution is essentially to build lives for ourselves & others, rather than toss our lives away, and destroy those of others. How do you view this argument?*

Wow! That was a mouth-full! Let me try to break this down into separate issues.

First of all, we have to remember that the Munaafiqiin of the Prophet's (S) age never claimed that Jihaad wasn't from the religion. In fact, at one point they were pleading for it. Allaah, the Exalted, said:

"Do you not see those who were told: 'Hold back your hands, establish the prayer, and give charity,' but when fighting was prescribed for them you see a group of them fearing the people as they fear Allaah, or with more fear. And they said: 'Oh our Lord, why did you prescribe fighting for us? If only you had given us respite for a short time.' Say the enjoyment of this life is but short, and the Hereafter is better for those who have piety, and you will not be oppressed in the least." (an-Nisaa': 77)

So simply agreeing to the obligation of Jihaad is not sufficient in reaping the rewards of truly affirming this obligation with actions.

This is not to imply that everyone outside of Jihaad is necessarily a Munaafiq. It is also true that simply engaging in Jihaad is not a free ticket to Jannah, because a 'Holy-than-thou,' mentality can easily change a righteous action into an insincere action that leads to the Hellfire – and we seek refuge in Allaah from that – but our advice to our brothers should not necessarily be taken in a boastful light. In fact, there are indeed many good Muslims who are burning for an opportunity to help the Ummah but have yet to find a path. Allaah,

the Exalted, has excused them for their circumstances, also in Surah an-Nisaa', after discussing the evil end of those who remain oppressed in the lands of the Kuffaar wronging their souls.

The second part of the question deals with the claim that Jihaad, or the contemporary form of it, is a nothing more than Fitnah. This claim, of course, is nothing new and the Qur'aan has already documented these responses of the Munaafiqiin who choose to excuse themselves from fighting by indicating that there are better options available. We have the excuse of avoiding the Fitnah of temptation (at-Tawbah: 49), the excuse of avoiding futile maneuvers from which no fighting will actually result (Aal Cimraan: 167), the excuse of protecting family and wealth (al-Fatx: 11), the excuse of not following those who are deluded about their abilities (al-Axzaab: 12-13), and so forth.

But without going too far, the real question for us lies in defining the type of Fitnah which has been shunned by our religion. Allaah, the Exalted, said: "Fitnah is more severe than killing," (al-Baqarah: 192) and "Fitnah is greater than killing." (al-Baqarah: 217) The scholars have explained Fitnah here to mean Shirk and Disbelief. Therefore, killing and fighting will always be a better option than allowing Disbelief to roam free, and it will always be a better option than the ballot box.

Finally, I would have to ask such people for at least some historical evidence for their claims. When has Jihaad ever been the source of our humiliation and loss? We all know the Xadiith in which the Prophet (S) informed us that humiliation ensues from holding fast to the Dunyaa and leaving off Jihaad.

Now, in that light, let us take a contemporary example like Syria. The opposition party initially sought change through peaceful protests and political engagement. This led to a one-sided armed conflict and hundreds of dead protestors. Although this heedlessness (going to battle unarmed) is not something promoted by the Shari'ah, we still find the moderate Muslims (by virtue of blessings from the Western powers that be) extremely sympathetic with the cause of the Syrian opposition. This of course produced nothing tangible and after much death and little results, the entire population finally decided that an armed conflict is necessary. When people were dying unarmed the moderates didn't scream about the uselessness of such death, and seeing as though the Syrian conflict coincides with Western interests, I doubt the moderates will be shouting about Fitnah either. Of course there will be more losses and death as the conflict ensues, but at least there will be gains made; whereas previously there was only death while the world watched. The population finally realized that life under tyranny and Disbelief is a life not worth living.

This is a lesson that those Muslim speakers who enjoy White House luncheons should have learned from the old American adage: 'Give me liberty or give me death.'

3.) *What have you gained on a personal level from your experience in Somalia? On a religious level?*

On a personal level I could say that I gained a lot of maturity. I have always been a bit idealistic (and I think I still am to a great extent by virtue of our religious beliefs) but I was force-fed a large dose of realism throughout my stay here. I remember the feeling I got when I saw the brothers leaving the battlefield on the day of Jilib and I had to come to terms with the fact that the angels don't come down and save the day for every battle. I had to come to terms with people not just leaving the Jihaad, but becoming apostates, within days of seeing them on the front lines.

I also gained a lot of acquaintances and relationships that are priceless and I have had the honor of knowing some of the most righteous men of our times.

On the religious level, I think I learned the true meaning of many Aayaat. Just before the battle of Jilib when the Muhaajiriin had been left alone and outnumbered, I gathered the brothers close and we began reading Surah al-Axzaab; stopping at each verse to relish in the vivid scenes that we could see before our very eyes. One brother once said to us after the big retreat, while in tears, that he now knew what it meant when Allaah says in Surah al-Baqarah: "We shall test you with some fear, hunger, and loss of wealth, lives, and fruits." Another brother who had been in many battles said, after coming face to face with tanks and nearly becoming surrounded by the enemy, that he now knew what it meant to feel that your soul has been violently shaken as if in an earthquake and that your heart has come to the throat.

Also by virtue of my surroundings I was forced to study matters of Imaan and Kufr, as well as matters of as-Siyaasah ash-Sharciyyah, in more depth than could be possible away from the lands of Jihaad. There are many topics that come up in the lands of Jihaad that could never be found in a book, and there are many topics found in contemporary books that can never stand a day in the real world, on the ground.

4.) *Do you feel you've lost anything, materialistically or spiritually, through your decision to take up arms in Somalia?*

Materialistically?! You must be kidding. Haha.

But you know what they say: the best things in life are free. All the houses and cars you can buy in this life will never fill the heart's void which seeks for nothing more than the true happiness that only Allaah can bestow.

On a spiritual level, I can't imagine how engaging in the greatest acts of our religion could cause anything but an increase in faith and spirituality. However, I will say that there is a difference between the prayer of the sinner who realizes his sins and weeps for fear of his Lord and between the prayer of the sinner who is blind to his sins and stands in prayer like a marble pillar.

There is an insightful narration to this effect from Tamiim ad-Daari (R) in az-Zuhd of ibn al-Mubaarak (although it has significant weakness in its chain). A man came to speak to Tamiim and eventually, once he felt comfortable, he asked: 'How many Juz' of the Qur'aan

do you recite each night?' Tamiim became angry and said: 'Maybe you are from those who recite the entire Qur'aan in one night and then the next morning they say: 'I recited the entire Qur'aan last night.' By the One in whose Hand is the soul of Tamiim, it is more beloved to me that I pray only three units of voluntary prayer than reciting the entire Qur'aan during the night and then waking up to say: 'I recited the entire Qur'aan last night.'"

I remember the way I used to pray that Allaah delivers me safely to the lands of Jihaad; without taking me to account for my sins and my laziness which transpired before having the true intention for Hijrah. I don't know if I have had a similar experience since arriving in Somaalia.

I'd say that it's easy to become blinded by the idea that Jihaad and Hijrah are so virtuous that nothing more is expected of us. So in that way, if one isn't careful, a lot of the spiritual bliss of worship can be lost.

But, with that said, even for those who don't continue striving for that sweetness of Imaan, there are other things that happen in the lands of Jihaad that force any sincere Muslim to become closer to Allaah (T) by necessity. It is well known that the fear experienced in battle has a very spiritual effect even on the Kuffaar. They say: 'There is no atheist in the foxhole.'

5.) Taking into account the fact that amongst your ranks are medical doctors with years of experience, do you feel you've saved more lives as a Muslim mujaahid, than you would have as a medical doctor? Explain.

Of course, the 'shoulda woulda coulda' of my life decisions is not really mine to know, but I would like to redefine the term 'saving lives' to allow for a clearer response to this question.

No doubt it is only Allaah who truly gives life and death, and the doctor is merely a tool in the process. That is obvious. But my real intended change of focus here lies in whether we are referring to the temporal life or the life of the Hereafter when discussing 'saving lives.'

I once knew a brother who was selling alcohol in a gas station who had seen his friend murdered by thieves. He himself suffered wounds and was shot in the head with multiple rounds. With the help of medical assistance, after the will of Allaah, he recovered fully. It was quite amazing actually. But not long afterwards I saw him in a coffee shop and after a short conversation he began telling me that drinking alcohol is not Haraam! I thought it was terrible for a man to go through such a near death experience and still have such heretic beliefs, but I didn't let myself lash out at him. I continued to convince him calmly and I provided proofs and evidences that drinking alcohol is indeed from the greatest of prohibited actions. Eventually he gave in and accepted.

I don't know the brother's situation now, and I pray that he is further reforming himself, but the point is that giving someone health in this life may only lead to an increase in his evil actions if nothing else is done to save his soul. I feel that saving mankind from the hellfire is much worthier of a cause, than trying to save them from the fire of bullets and artillery.

With that said, we should not forget that the most critical window for lifesaving is usually the earliest moments. This is when basic first aid knowledge becomes critical. The greatest doctors in the world can rarely reverse the damage done by poor steps taken during those golden minutes. Of course, it is also well known that these basic skills do not require years of learning and hands-on experience is actually a much better teacher than books. Therefore, a balanced approach to saving lives can be found for those who come directly to the lands of Jihaad, because there are always opportunities to enroll in lessons of this nature.

5.1) Well, let's talk about the life of the Hereafter then. Do you feel you would have had a greater impact had you actually gone ahead and pursued Islamic studies at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt? Surely the 'Jihad' as you put it is more in need of scholars speaking the truth, than rank & file foot soldiers.

I touched on this topic a bit in Lessons Learned, where I indicated that the long road of seeking knowledge is lined with treacherous obstacles. Knowledge is for action and it should not be an impediment to freeing the Muslim lands in our times. The Shaytaan can easily cause an insincere person to take seeking knowledge as his true objective, which is a terrible folly. The Shaytaan might even begin to lead such a person astray and he may begin to have deviant ideas. Furthermore, even those who manage to stay true to the religion, despite the incredible forces around him in the lands of the Kuffaar, will probably be subject to some form of imprisonment or detention along the way.

The whole aim of becoming knowledgeable for the sake of the Mujaahidiin is to either speak the truth to a wide audience or to provide the Mujaahidiin with insightful Fataawa. However, a deviant scholar will not help us, and a scholar in jail is normally not given a wide audience. Moreover, a scholar in the lands of the Kuffaar will not have the proper knowledge of the ground realities to give an insightful Fatwa.

If a true scholar does make it to the lands of Jihaad he will usually be discredited immediately despite his former status. Likewise, the scholars already present in the lands of Jihaad are often more knowledgeable than many of those who lagged behind, but they are not raised upon the same platform which the rulers provide for the scholars who are promoted to the masses.

For me personally, I felt that my time for learning without acting was over and I have benefitted greatly as a result.

6.) Many prominent leaders of the Jihaadi movement are medical doctors. Do you still feel that your decision not to pursue medical studies was correct? Would you characterize your decision as simply the right choice at the right time, or as being globally applicable to Muslims regardless of circumstance?

Did my dad put you up to asking me these questions about why I didn't become a doctor?
Haha.

I think it depends. From a Sharci perspective, of course Jihaad and Hijrah cannot be put off for things like med school, but that doesn't mean there is anything wrong with having doctors. Even there may be cases where people do not have a way to make Hijrah just yet and they choose to spend their time doing something productive. Some people may have links to the Mujaahidiin and their leader may specifically ask such a person to finish his studies before coming to the lands of Jihaad. But I think that most people in the Ummah are making up excuses like this for themselves while the reality is quite different.

Each person has to be true to themselves and sincere with Allaah (T). This is the greatest and weightiest deed ever, because it is so terribly difficult.

In fact, for the one who has been ordered to finish his studies before making Hijrah the Shaytaan may come to him with whispers about the virtues of martyrdom. The Shaytaan may decide to try to keep this Muslim from obeying his leader and from helping the Mujaahidiin with his medical knowledge, now that the Shaytaan has come to the conclusion that he is no longer capable of keeping this person from Jihaad and Hijrah.

In my particular case, when I look back, I think going through med school would have led me to settling down in America with a large family and too many responsibilities to allow for such a drastic change of lifestyle. I would have missed many opportunities for engaging in some of the most important steps towards re-establishing the Khilaafah, and that is something I couldn't trade for anything.

7.) Much of the criticism from Mujaahidiin & their leaders is aimed at the West and its policies. Being introspective for a second, do you have any criticisms for Muslims who are supportive of your cause, regardless of whether they live in the West or not?

I think the biggest criticism I could aim at many of the supporters of Jihaad lies in their lack of balance in the "gusto" department. Some are merely supporters by name without having any true passionate attachment to the cause. When they hear about the news from the lands of Jihaad, it is a bit like they just received news about a golf tournament. They feel bad for a bit that Tiger didn't win the Masters, but it wears off quickly. We all know that golfers are not really known for having the fiercest hooligans. These guys are probably in a big dilemma from the Hereafter perspective, because they KNOW the truth about Jihaad, they ACCEPT it, but they are not in a state of mind to ACT.

On the other hand, we have our football/soccer hooligans who can't hear that someone from their choice team could have possibly fouled another player and deserved a red card. The referee must be wrong, or the rules of the game need to be altered! This type of mentality really does a big disservice to the cause because now the "team" name becomes immediately associated with mass riots of hooligans regardless of the tact of the actual players on the field. The red-carded player might even accept his mistake and go sit on the bench regretting his actions, while the fans would possibly stab someone for so much as hinting that Ronaldo or Beckham (or whoever) could possibly have been in the wrong.

The Prophet (S) said (as can be found in the Sahiihayn): "Support your brother whether he is the oppressor or the oppressed." The companions were astounded at this declaration which resembled their code in the days of Jaahiliyyah and not their new-found values of Islaam. They said: 'We can understand the oppressed, but how do we support the oppressor?' The Prophet (S) said: "Take him by the hands and prevent him from his oppression."

The Prophet (S) also said (as is reported in the Sahiihayn): "The religion is sincere advice." The companions asked: "To whom Oh Messenger of Allaah?" He said: "To Allaah, to His Book, to His Messenger, and to the leaders of the Muslims, and their masses."

We need people who not only support the Jihaad, but have the passion to make it to the lands of Jihaad and surmount the obstacles and pass the hurdles before them. We also need people who see things for what they are without letting that decrease their passion or deter them; people who will be able to reign in these passions when they are faced with an unexpected reality. They must be able to rise to the occasion, analyze the situation impartially in light of the Shariicah, and put forth productive advice.

8.) Many Muslim figures/thinkers in the West reject the dichotomy of Muslim vs. Non-Muslim, asserting that there are several nuances and subtle realities that need to be taken into account. With the Islamic Courts essentially dissolved into the current transitional government of Somalia, and several prominent Muslim scholars calling for a cessation of violence in the region, would it be fair to say that the conflict, as it exists today, is not simply a matter of Muslim vs. Non-Muslim? Explain.

Well, the dichotomy is definitely there, whether we like it or not. Allaah, the Exalted, says in Surah at-Taghaabun: "He is the One who created you and from amongst you there is the Kaafir (Disbeliever) and from amongst you is the Mu'min (Believer). And Allaah is All-Seeing of what you do." In Islaam, it's the Muslims and then the rest of the world.

However, we do know that the ranks of the Muslims will always be infiltrated by the Hypocrites and they will constantly hinder our progress till the Day of Judgment. So from a practical perspective...yeah...I guess we have to look within just as much as we look without. As I said before, our greatest challenge comes from within ourselves and that includes the people who are true Muslims; not just the Hypocrites.

Just to name a few of the most destructive groups in our times, standing in the way of our obtainment of success, the worst would have to be the Ikhwaan and the Suruuris. The Suruuris are always there to pretend to support change, but they always find a clever way of making something useless look more important than actual tangible steps towards change. The Ikhwaan are similar, but they usually tend to support tangible steps like fighting up until the first opportunity for selling out comes their way. Then they try to derail the entire movement by entering a merry-go-round of politics that leads only downward; without us even touching on the Sharci ruling for such useless actions.

These groups seem to provide a middle path for the Muslims; between sitting and between actually fighting till victory or martyrdom. And, to no one's amazement, half-way options like these tend to please many of the people who didn't start out seeking change with any clear principles in mind. Inevitably, they reach a stage where they have accomplished *something*, but moving forward looks like too big of a sacrifice, so they stop or go back, without accomplishing *the* thing.

Unfortunately, however, the only way for us happens to be the hard way, and the longer we dillydally around, the longer we will be wandering in the desert deprived of the Promised Land.

A great book for this topic is al-Khawanah by Abu Bakr Naaji, and it explains much of the political jockeying we are now seeing clearly post-Arab-Spring.

9.) *No one can predict the future, but as the saying goes, sometimes "the writing is on the walls". Without looking too far ahead (e.g. Malaahim, Dajjaal, signs of the hour, etc.) where do you see the conflict in Somalia heading in our lifetime? How about other conflicts of interest?*

I see Africa as a whole moving towards a unified front and towards becoming the western wing of the newly rejuvenated Khilaafah in shaa' Allaah. Within a few years new fronts have opened in Nigeria, Libya, Egypt, and Mali. Sudan is looking very promising as a new front and I hope Yemen will produce a seat for the new Khilaafah very soon.

But in regards to Somaalia in specific, we have to note that geography has a large vote in strategic matters. Somaalia is bordered by hostile Kaafir nations from nearly every direction that isn't already covered by water. More importantly, one of those nations is one of the most powerful land armies in Africa which shall continue its Crusade against the Muslims till the end of time as was prophesized by the Prophet (S).

Therefore, I see Somaalia remaining as the outpost of the Khilaafah for some time; constantly seeing gains and losses, defeat and victory. The war between truth and falsehood will continue to have a front here; providing an opportunity for those seeking martyrdom to obtain their objective for a long time to come.

This is why the Ummah should give Somaalia its due right. The Somaali people have sacrificed much blood for Islaam and they receive very little help from the wealthy Muslims who horde their wealth for undeserving projects and activities. It isn't just for one part of the body to ache while the rest slumbers.

10.) *All joking aside, do you ever think about returning to America? Why or why not?*

The 'why not' would have to be Eric Holder, war ships, most wanted pictures, and kangaroo courts! Haha

But of course I think of going to the place I was born. Everybody does that. But I couldn't live there or want to die there. I left that land for the sake of Allaah and I hope that that deed is accepted from me, and I wouldn't seek to destroy it for any amount of wealth in this life.

What I would like though, is to have a three day visit to see my mom, dad, and sister. I always think about how my mom and dad used to care so much for our education and how they would always come to our soccer games and take us out for movies. I often wonder what this whole experience has done to them and whether or not we will ever meet again in this Dunyaa. After going through all the hugs and kisses, me and Dena would probably go running around town laughing our heads off and talking about a billion things without ever finishing a conversation about any of them. I'd like to make a round of the restaurants and get some Chinese food, some hot wings, some Nestle ice cream, some gourmet coffee, and a slew of other foods and beverages. I think for the whole three days I would probably freak out just seeing paved roads and riding around without having to hold on for dear life just moving a few kilometers within the city.

But that stuff gets old, and I would have to look for something more adventurous to do after the third day.

I'd also like to have a chance to spend some time with my little daughter Taymiyyah. Last I saw her she was sliding around on the floor seeking out fuzz balls for edible consumption. To see her walking and talking would be an emotional moment.

11.) Despite some of the inaccuracies, the Vanguard interview gave the world a basic understanding of who you were, and the world you came from. But would you briefly describe for us who you are today? In other words, who is Abu Mansoor Al-Amriki?

I don't know. I think those Vanguard guys actually did a decent job. So did Andrea Elliot. But I didn't like the way they portrayed my hometown as some hillbilly joint though!

Unfortunately, I think I'm still the same guy: A walking contradiction from massively different backgrounds, who is seriously passionate about what he believes in, but feels he has to go about doing it while laughing at almost everything along the way.

One brother likes to say: "You know...only "special" people make it to the lands of Jihaad these days..." and then he glances over at me!

However, I would have to say that I have definitely changed in the sense of having grown less naïve and more experienced in matters of strategy, politics, and the world in general. I think that leaves me sitting around scratching my head and thinking quite a lot more than I used to. My wife has to snap me out of it sometimes and ask me why I always have to think even at dinner time. When asked about what I'm thinking, sometimes I have a hard time finding words to express all of the ideas and ambitions swirling around inside of me and I have to take time off by myself to think it over and write it all down coherently.

But, all of these new experiences are productive learning opportunities and they have only increased my aspiration to give what is left of my life for the sake of removing oppression from this Ummah and re-establishing the Khilaafah.

11.1) *We're hearing a lot of talk about "re-establishing the Khilaafah". From an ideological point of view, it's not hard to see why it's important to you and your companions to reestablish it. But pragmatically, wouldn't you agree that all the average Muslim really wants from his or her government is a roof over their head, food in their stomach, and security? Why not just work with the current government to rebuild the rubble you're killing each other over?*

Since you covered the ideological part, I won't go in to the fact that death for this cause is more important than living under a roof.

With that said, I *do* realize that many of the Muslims in this day and age do not give the proper and due importance to establishing the Khilaafah, and this is indeed an obstacle to liberating the Ummah. This is exactly the reason why the so-called "Awakening Councils" were so effective in Iraq and it is the reason why Apostates continue to sign up for duty in the ranks of the TFG here in Somaalia. But I don't see how that obstacle should deter us from continuing to perform the obligation which has been prescribed for us in the Qur'aan and Sunnah. Allaah, the Exalted, has explained to us many times that the people of truth, and thereby the people of victory, will always be the few.

Now, in regards to working with the current government, you have already barred me from talking about the ideological side of this matter, which is clear to all. So I would point out that the current government is not even capable of working with itself to rebuild the rubble it is killing itself over. No Somaali can feel safe under the rule of the TFG bandits and the Kuffaar themselves lament the state of insecurity in the TFG held areas. Despite the millions of dollars they receive, instead of building, they have only managed to add more blockades and obstacles to the destroyed roads of Mogadishu. It is they who bombard residential areas with heavy artillery and loot the markets. It is they who use tanks to level everything in their path. This is well known and documented.

In fact, the members of the TFG have openly declared a lack of confidence in their own system on numerous occasions and those who actively seek to rectify the affairs (without looking for too big of a piece of the pie) are kicked out of the country for being oddballs.

11.2) *You say that you've grown & matured a lot as a result from your experience in Somalia. No offence, but as pleasant as your sense of humor is, it's a bit odd to find a "top field commander" in the middle of a fierce Islamic war, joking around like he's sitting in a coffee shop. We don't find American generals speaking to the media in such a nonchalant manner. Do you really think your humor is appropriate to the environment you're currently in? Is this the image you want to present to the world?*

You make a good point, but I often feel that being casual, when possible, is a better approach when reaching out to those like myself in the West. I come from the generation of

RealTV and my peers can smell a poser from a mile away. Moreover, I felt that a book about myself should be honest and true to who I really am. There is no real virtue in trying to big myself up and create a pseudo-personality for myself. That won't really impress the audience I am addressing and it certainly won't help me on the Day of Judgment.

The real fear that the Americans feel when they see an American in Somaalia talking about Jihaad, is not how skillful he is at sneaking back across the borders with nuclear weapons. The Americans fear that their cultural barrier has been broken and now Jihaad has become a normal career choice for any youthful American Muslim. Trying to show them how serious I am about slaughtering Disbelievers is the side of me they would like to capitalize on to estrange the Muslims from our cause.

This is why Samir Khan and Shaykh Anwar were so detrimental to the Americans (may Allaah accept them as martyrs). The Shaykh openly told them that Jihaad has become as American as apple pie, and their deaths only added the whipped cream icing.

With that said, when addressing the Kuffaar at serious times and in a formal setting, of course laughing isn't going to be the proper style. But...hey! Bush used to do it. He was always making the world laugh at him when he was supposed to say something serious and meaningful!

12.) Stepping back a bit, would you describe for us your experience with the Muslim community in America and Canada? (Starting with your time in your hometown, up until you left the West)

I was blessed to be guided to the Sunnah from an early stage in my road towards becoming a practicing Muslim. I would say that I always had a correct Caqiidah for the most part except for some of the more provocative issues of al-Xaakimiyyah and al-Imaan wal Kufr. This was in large part due to my hometown Masjid. But I eventually found myself out of place in my home community because the focus of most Muslims in the West is simply "living in the West," whereas I was trying to focus on *living* the religion as much as possible. There came a point when the support my close friends used to provide in my early stages coming from Jaahiliyyah actually turned in to a form of dead weight preventing me from going forward.

This is when I eventually cut the rope and went out into the world for myself. I started seeing different Muslims in Toronto and checking out different Masaajid. That is where I began reading the black-listed books and trying to see past the names and labels that I used to fixate on so much when meeting new Muslims. The fact that I was now living in a multi-cultural metropolis really helped my attempt of trying new things and melting down the artificial barriers. I was happy for quite a while until I realized that even this is not enough. Obviously it was never a pure Islaamic society by any stretch of the imagination, but it served as a temporary haven for me while I digested new information and formed new plans for my future.

The Somaalis were really the best community I had come across - whether it was the ones in Atlanta or Toronto – and I found serenity in those Masaajid the most. But the Somaali community was also not without its Western defects. I remember feeling myself in agony upon seeing young Somaalis imitating the Kuffaar in almost everything. One day I even lashed out at my boss for putting up advertisements for a Somaali rap concert (it actually really touched him by the way and he came to pray with me and begged my forgiveness).

But I don't know how much I can blame the youth for this dysfunctional state of theirs. The stark reality in the West is that, instead of giving the youth any real goals, most of the communities (and I mean the old people in charge of them) are simply trying to contain the waves of change or, in some cases, trying to ride them. I actually had the misfortune of selling Islaamic books at an ICNA conference which featured days of rap concerts!

Now in this new age of the War against Islaam, this tragedy will only get worse for the youth of these communities who are now being forced into either becoming FBI prostitutes or life-long inmates. And to Allaah do we complain!

13.) *You undoubtedly keep up with the news around the world, especially in the West. Do you have any thoughts regarding the Muslim community today?*

All I can say is that when groups like MuslimMatters have a large influence over the youth of the West...God help us!

I don't have any real statistics but I feel that many of the deviant sects have become merely a fringe in Western communities, while the main forces are centralized in the hands of the Ikhwaan and the Suruuris (after the demise of the Madkhalis). I think we are seeing similar demographics in Egypt as well (and elsewhere for that matter).

In light of the fear the Americans have for organizations like CAIR (for having ties to HAMAS and whatnot), I don't think the Ikhwaanis are going to continue to gain many active members. It is difficult to tell people that the answer to their problems is to get involved in the same political system that absolutely despises them. The Madkhali movement had a nice bonus of not making much of a fuss about politics or even about living sinfully (very sinfully), but they managed to tear themselves apart like ravenous dogs. All that is really left, short of Jihaad and Hijrah, is the call to do absolutely nothing while calling it something important, and the call to badmouth the revivers of our time while praising glutton scholars for skydiving: i.e. the Suruuris.

Eventually the day will come when the red bull will be eaten as well, and people will either find themselves already surrounded by barbed wire detention camps, or they will find some means of fighting or fleeing.

May Allaah protect our brothers and guide them.

13.1) *Touching on the maturity issue again, don't you find it a bit childish, if not odd, that a leader in the Somali Jihad is concerned with what some random Muslim blog has to say? Don't you have better things to do?*

Ouch!

Well, you know the media front *is* an important effort for the Jihaadi cause and keeping up to date requires us to keep an eye on what is happening with our target audience. The Americans are always trying their best to invent new counter-narratives and they do that through recruiting key speakers in the West, like the names found on MuslimMatters. Of course this inevitably backfires because the second those speakers are linked in any way to the U.S. government, their credibility goes flying out the window, but it is still worth monitoring.

It's generally a good laugh to see how this so called counter-narrative is always focused on calling people *away* from the Jihaadis instead of calling them *to* something (because the Americans won't allow their puppets to rally the Muslims towards anything). This type of reacting is a good sign that our narrative is working.

13.2) *I see you called yourself a Salafi Jihadi, while you referred to others by the term "Salafi" or Madkhali or what have you. Don't you feel that these names are divisive and counterproductive?*

I do feel that these names can become an impediment to understanding, just as they can be a tool for understanding when used correctly in moderation. It is similar to the ascription al-Amriiki that I chose because many different interpretations could be made. Someone could wrongly assume that I have some loyalty to the American government or a sense of nationalism for my country. While the real intended meaning is simply to show the American public that: 'Yes...I was born and raised in American...but now I'm in Jihaad.' I am not simply a disenfranchised foreigner who is jealous of America. I left America while the American dream was firmly tucked under my pillow.

So as long as people understand from the term Salafi Jihaadi that I am upon the creed of the Salaf, and I follow their understanding of the Qur'aan and Sunnah, while I also believe in acting upon that understanding in its entirety, including the act of Jihaad...I don't see anything wrong with using it. But if my intended audience believes that the term comes with a connotation of someone who sits back in their armchair condemning everyone for not fighting, or a connotation of blowing up everything without giving heed to the Shariicah because everything that seems beneficial for the Jihaad *must* be Xalaal...I would simply tell my audience to call me a Muslim Mujaahid who follows Qur'aan and Sunnah according to the understanding of the Salaf.

As long as a term does not contradict the Shariicah and is useful in conveying a particular meaning, I don't see anything wrong with it. No one is saying that these terms overwrite our true name, 'Muslim,' but we are simply qualifying how we understand our Islaam.

Similarly, there are certain Muslims who have deviated from the correct understanding of Islaam and the Prophet (S) foretold us of these groups. As a method of staying away from falling into these deviations and as a method of categorizing them according to their form of deviation, the scholars of Islaam have assigned them different names. Using a name for these people is not what is dividing the Muslims, but rather these deviants have divided the Muslims already by leaving the correct understanding of Islaam.

Of course everyone will claim to be on the true understanding, but the Prophet (S) has left us with the tools to discern truth from falsehood, and if he hadn't he wouldn't have had completed his mission.

I do recognize that these terms can get out of hand and become barriers to understanding and barriers to uniting upon a productive cause, but we must also remember that true unity can only come about when our objectives are the same. If we happen to share interests today, we might not share them tomorrow, and such a unity would be a charade.

14.) Aside from yourself, many Muslim leaders in Somalia are calling for Muslims around the world to support their cause. If more Muslims (on an individual level, not national) supported the struggle in Somalia (financially, morally, and physically) how much of a difference would it really make? Please be specific.

I suppose it's like they say: 'Every little bit counts,' but I prefer to impress upon people the fact that it's less about the tangible victory and more about a victory over our own Nafs. Jihaad is an opportunity to obtain Jannah, and that is priceless; whether we manage to see victory in our times or not. The victory has been promised, and it will come, but the real question is: Will you be a part of bringing it about? What good will it do on the Day of Judgment to say you witnessed a victory you had no part in?

But again, there are times when small amounts of money can change the life of a Mujaahid and his family. There are injured brothers on occasion that need medical assistance, there are children that need food and clothes, and there are widows who have a hard time paying for their bills. These things don't always require thousands of dollars and the light on the faces of these people when they receive even one hundred dollars is hopefully a light that will help us on the day of passing the narrow path over the Hellfire.

Also, many of the brothers that have come and engaged in the fighting in Somaalia have left their mark on the Jihaad through their ideas, their energy, their efforts, and their memory. Some brothers truly are force multipliers just as al-Cabbaas (R) was seen as bringing the effect of an entire battalion. There are brothers that were martyred years ago, but their memory is still an inspiration to many and remains on the tip of their tongues. Some have left a legacy of training that will hopefully be Sadaqah Jaariyah for them on the Day of Judgment.

15.) How does the conflict in Somalia differ from what is portrayed in both Western & Jihaadi media?

Obviously there is a huge deal of skewing going on with the Western media's coverage of the conflict. They seek to downplay the turmoil within their ranks and the oppression inflicted by their bandit soldiers while trying to paint a picture of corrupt axe-murderers for the Mujaahidiin. They often exaggerate their victories and hide the real statistics regarding their losses. They have been known to announce the fall of a city that the Mujaahidiin still control, on numerous occasions. If it were not for the Jihaadi media, they would probably never admit the death of one of their soldiers or the loss of a single battle.

In contrast, the Jihaadi media takes pains to verify information so as to not destroy their credibility before the Ummah or to incur upon themselves the lot of liars in this life. But a Jihaadi film is also not capable of showing the viewer, in an hour or less, what it is like to go through the psychological and physical strain of preparing months, and not simply days, for some of the flashy battles that look so effortless on the computer screen. Of course, the Mujaahidiin are not going to make it something high in their list of priorities to focus on the production of films which focus on the hardships and the losses endured by the Mujaahidiin. This is not lying, nor is it anything odd in any way, but it is a fact that a gung-ho Jihaadi should take in to consideration when preparing his intention for Jihaad and Hijrah. One would do well reading the many Ayaat in the Qur'aan, and he many Xadiiths, about the hardships the companions endured in their journey towards victory.

15.1) *With all due respect, CNN, NBC, and even FOX have shown their fair share of injured and traumatized U.S. soldiers. The scenes (men burnt from head to toe, mutilated survivors, amputees, etc.) were of such a graphic nature, that even Jihadi media groups, such as As-Sahab and Al-Furqan, used them in their documentaries to highlight the losses of American soldiers, and the success of the Mujahideen. By contrast, as you said, we really don't see injured Mujahidin in any media group production. We're not saying they're lying, but at the very least, wouldn't you agree there's some lack of balance in the reporting?*

I don't know how true that is from two angles. First the Kuffaar don't normally promote showing pictures of their dead in the media. The Liberal media is always getting shut out of the story because the military is protective of what information is spread. If it weren't for certain freedom of information laws, I doubt we would ever see anything of the sort. Secondly, the Mujaahidiin always show their martyrs because death in the path of Allaah, for us, is not something to be ashamed of. And if we take Jihaadi media as a whole, there are multiple Jihaadi videos where the wounded are seen during and after the battle.

16.) *How involved is America in the conflict in Somalia?*

Hmmm...hahaha. Well...the skies are always filled with American aircraft. The Ugandans and Ethiopians are often trained by Americans. Much funding for the government comes from America and their allies. Obviously a good deal of political capital is spent painting over the TFG's inequities in order to sell it off as a viable option to the "International Community." Many of the apostate diplomats are trained in the United States and groomed for their future roles. American intelligence agencies are based in the Mogadishu airport

and they actively seek to recruit, with their stockpiles of cash, anyone who might be useful in gathering information about the Mujaahidiin.

That means they are running the full gamut of diplomatic, intelligence, military, and economic support for the enemy here in Somaalia. The only real thing lacking is that the Americans themselves don't take combat roles. If they *did* send a small Special Forces unit to operate in Somaalia, the only difference between the present situation and the UNOSOM days would be the predominant skin color of their allies. It's a diet chocolate cake instead of the rich vanilla one!

17) Who are you to tell Muslims, in the West or elsewhere, to join the Jihad in Somalia, or anywhere else for that matter? As was evident from your autobiography, you're not a scholar. You didn't even study at Al-Azhar, as you had planned. You're not even Abdullah 'Azzam (may Allah have mercy on him), who at least had the credentials to declare, and call Muslims to Jihad.

Hard to answer that one without sounding defensive isn't it?

Well, I have studied quite a few books in the different sciences, following the curriculums laid out by the scholars. I have had quite a few mentors that have helped show me the ropes and get me accustomed to the proper methods of deriving rulings and so forth.

But regardless of all of that, I am simply calling the people to what people like Cabdullaah Cazzaam (may Allaah accept him as a martyr) and those before him called to. Our call is not something new, but rather it is agreed upon by the consensus of the scholars. A scholar or even a leader is not a precondition for defending the Muslim lands.

Of course, if we were to discuss the precise methods of how to establish this obligation and to engage in Jihaad, I'm sure there would be differing opinions and the opinion most deserving of being followed would be the one which is supported by the most evidence.

18) Could you shed some light on the scholars who have or are actively participating in the conflict in Somalia?

Well in the early days Cabdul Caziiz al-Miqrin and Yuusuf al-Cuyayri (may Allaah accept them both as martyrs) were present during the battles against UNOSOM and the Ethiopians.

But in our times now there aren't so many big names. We *do* have many students of knowledge from all over the Muslim world who are known in their respective localities as people of knowledge, but people of this particular persuasion are rarely given the podium to address the entire world. Some brothers have actually memorized Bukhaari and Muslim or the six books such as the Sudaani brother Shaykh Saalim (may Allaah accept him as a martyr) and many specialize in particular subjects like Fiqh al-Jihaad or as-Siyaasah ash-

Sharciyyah. Those who have memorized the Qur'aan and studied basic books are more than can be counted.

19) *Are you or any Mujahideen in steady contact with Muslim scholars outside of Somalia?*

Of course there are correspondences, and some scholars are more in touch with the ground realities than others, but I would say that this is an area where improvement could be made.

There was an "accusation" raised against Shaykh Faysal that he visited Kenya as a pretext for coming to Somaalia. If that were true, how great it would be if more well-known scholars or students of knowledge tried to make that journey. Having them here is far better than long distance correspondence.

20) *In your autobiography, you talked about your journey towards becoming Muslim. From what was revealed, some might argue that your journey towards Jihad is more a result of your inclination towards the counter-culture, as opposed to your search for the truth. How do you respond?*

I'd respond by asking: Who throws away their entire life for counter-culture?

Of course when I was first starting to practice the religion, and even when I became acquainted with videos about Khattaab (may Allaah accept him as a martyr), I was highly motivated by a sense of zeal. But you'll note that that zeal never got me across the line. It was only when I had become completely convinced that Jihaad is truly incumbent upon me as an individual that I took it upon myself to make that huge leap.

I knew that I was going to become a fugitive for the rest of my life when I made that decision. I was well in to the post-9/11 era. Someone seeking a thrill or a hippy's mid-summer's night dream doesn't normally consciously burn his bridges like that.

21) *There was an intense scene from your description of the 'Insihab', where the Mujahideen had to resort to eating maggots and snails. Could you describe for us the most difficult moment you experienced since you participated in the Somali Jihad? How about the most pleasant?*

To tell the truth, I've been "Baashaal-ing," (Somaali for living it up) as we say. I've seen some hard times, but nothing like what other brothers have come across during their stay.

I do remember though how we were caught up in a counter-ambush by the Ethiopians at Berdale. I stayed behind to make sure everyone had retreated and then I headed out with another five or six guys. One of them was Shirwac (may Allaah accept him as a martyr). I remember him coming from the direction of the enemy just before that counter-ambush and I yelled out to him 'Bin Laadin.' He was supposed to say: 'Bush,' but he just kept coming forward through the bushes wearing his camo, looking like the enemy. On the third try, just as my barrel was pointed at him, he said 'Yeah Yeah Bin Laadin Bin Laadin!' ha ha. When

we reached a clearing we stopped to get our bearings and a few seconds later bullets just started whizzing from every direction. I didn't have to give the order for dispersing because everyone was already in full action! I had my gun slung on my back because I thought we were already out of the woods, so to engage in time I had to bring around to my hip and start taking pot shots at this one Ethiopian who was about 25 meters away. He wasn't looking at me, and I wasn't hitting him, but the bullets kept coming. So I decided to run a few paces and then turn around to shoot some more until I had cleared a decent distance. I almost shot at a few other brothers who were running from the enemy's direction quite a few times throughout this exercise. Ha ha. I eventually started walking and jogging a bit because the enemy seemed to have stopped firing, but I think they were just reloading. A new cloud of bullets starting passing over head as if they were in hot pursuit. I decided I had to ditch the bag I had been carrying for the past 24 hours so that I could jump over some fences and thorn bushes towards a field of Sesame. After making it into the stalks I told the three brothers who had taken my same direction to huddle up. I was finished and I intended to just try a rice-paddy ambush on the enemy if they came after us. The other brothers weren't feeling that! Ha ha. We finally made it to a tree line and we set up an observation post from a tree and waited till night (they never came after us and claimed on the radio that we blew ourselves up!). Our phones were running out of batteries and everyone was trying to explain how they were next to some trees and Sesame. Eventually we had to go back towards the enemy and make hyena sounds till we found each other.

We had been walking since Maghrib of the previous day (while we had been riding in a truck non-stop on messed up roads since the Maghrib before that), and now we had to walk till around mid-night without water (my 1.5 liters of water lasted till the time we met up with each other, but others had finished theirs the previous day). We had only eaten some tuna and a bit of tea since the whole excursion started and now the adrenaline had run out. I remember passing by wells that had no water-baby thinking how torturous that is. We kept walking until finally we were brought some more tuna and some bottled water.

There was another time, one of the first encounters we had with tanks, when the brothers took a shoulder-fired Jeep towards a tank which was now stuck in a trench (which later happened quite often for those idiots). The adrenaline was pumping hard because we assumed that the tank may be able to cross the trench (with the help of a wench) and all of our positions would have been compromised; while anti-tank weapons were extremely few. I had been moving from station to station asking who had any anti-tank weapons and when I found the brother with this particular weapon I was overjoyed and started following him. By the time we reached the bend in the road, where the tank could be seen, we had become around ten brothers or so. I looked around and decided that there was no need for this many brothers and I thought that I should go back and look for some more anti-tank weapons now that I was only carrying an AK and this brother was about to fire his rocket. Some seconds after I had turned back I heard a loud explosion and I was about to shout: 'Allaahu Akbar!' assuming that we had been the ones to just shoot, but when I turned around I saw the entire street engulfed in smoke. I ran back a few meters and started seeing brothers prostrating with missing hands and legs. The tank had been aiming at the wall at the bend in the road and the exploding tank shell turned into thousands of fragments that came at the brothers in a solid wave of metal. One of my best friends had been at the very front

(probably slightly ahead of the explosion) and he came running out of the smoke covered in white dust yelling: 'You don't die until Allaah Wills it!'

Those were some of my closest moments, but I don't know if they were the most difficult. The most difficult would have to be dealing with brothers when patience starts to run low, especially cooped up in a house.

As for the most pleasant moments, it would have to be any chance I can get to live like a normal civilian. Sometimes when we are on long journeys we get the chance to stop at villages or towns for food and whatnot. I like to stroll down the market place and buy things. It's fun just to haggle or to drink tea next to normal people. The people find it strange sometimes and ask the brothers why they are rolling with a Kaafir, but sometimes the people are more aware and they come up to me and smile in admiration and shake my hand. I like to try out my broken Somaali and see how well they can understand. These occasions let me take a break from the security and the pressure for a bit and let me just enjoy life. Although I could never take a purely civilian lifestyle, you sometimes forget how important small things like shopping in the market are until you miss them.

22) *Around the end of 'Join the Caravan', a treatise prepared by the late Sh. Abdullah 'Azzam {may Allah have mercy on Him}, a list of individuals with valid excuses (from participating in Jihad which has been deemed fard 'ayn [an individual obligation]) is given. The last individual included in the list is, "somebody who has parents who do not have anybody besides him to support and maintain them." Although you lightly touched on this topic in your autobiography (during your time in Egypt), would you share your thoughts on this statement by the Sheikh?*

Yes, of course, we don't want to send someone out on a mission to *possibly* save a Muslim life, while such a mission will *definitely* lead to the loss of another. But the grey area lies in deciding whether or not the parents will truly be left helpless, and whether or not the absence of that soldier will be detrimental to the overall objective of defending the Muslim lands. I would say that this decision requires a lot of Taqwaa and some consultation with the leadership of the Mujaahidiin.

23) *To date, what have you personally accomplished in Somalia. What has the Jihad itself, supported by both local and foreign Mujahideen accomplished?*

My biggest personal achievement is to have performed Hijrah and to have engaged in Jihaad. I can only pray that Allaah grants me a righteous ending.

I cannot say that anything I personally did or said has affected the way the Jihaad has been carried out, because there are too many variables involved in each decision. One man's opinion is only a drop in the bucket when it comes to the matters of the entire Ummah. I guess I'll leave history to conjecture about that after I'm gone.

I think the biggest accomplishment of the Jihaad in Somaalia is how it (despite the flaws in implementation) showed the viability of the Jihaadi vision and how it showed that it can be

obtained through armed struggle. The Islaamic Wilaayahs (though not perfect) are a sneak peek of what's to come. Of course we have a long way to go till the Khilaafah is fully reestablished on firm foundations, but I think when we take things in perspective of history as a whole, it's just around the corner.

24) *What do you make of the text, '20 Guidelines on the Path of Jihad' attributed to Sheikh Suleiman Abul-Ghaith (the former spokesman for Al-Qaeda), which includes an introduction attributed to Sheikh Abu Hafs Al-Mauritani (the former head of Al-Qaeda's Sharia committee)?*

The text seems to focus on the most basic pillars of our religion: making sure that our actions are both sincere and in accordance with the Shari'ah. Sincerity is indeed a huge obstacle, and we have also allowed ourselves to fall into the Fitnah of placing what we deem to be in the interests of the Jihaad over the Shari'ah. If these two obstacles had been overcome we would not be talking about a future Khilaafah...we would be living it.

Therefore, it is sometimes essential to return to the basics and to remember that although Jihaad is the top of the camel's hump, we still need to make sure that our camel has a head, a heart, and legs if we intend to get anywhere.

25) *The mainstream media has done a rather good job of highlighting the significant role British Muslims have played in the current conflict in Somalia, particularly in the media field. What we haven't heard too much on is the role of American Muslims (besides yourself) in Somalia. Could you elaborate on the role they've played in the conflict in Somalia?*

That's not fair. Minnesota represented! And they came from the belly of the beast, where freedom of speech in a nonstarter, while the British have been yelling about Jihaad in Hyde's Park for decades.

Those Minnesota brothers have almost all left their mark on the Jihaad and most have them have received martyrdom; while the rest are still waiting.

The Somaalis that came from the West have been an integral part in bridging the cultural gap between non-Somaali Muhaajirs and the Ansaar.

Let's not forget Abu Xurriyah, a Hispanic brother from Seattle who skipped bail and came to Somaalia on a forged passport. He was martyred with Abu Mansuur al-Yemeni in Bergal. There is also Muxammad al-Amriiki, a Caucasian brother who was martyred in Kaaraan. He lived in the adjacent room to me and was the most beautiful brother I have ever met. Both of those brothers came up in hard parts, but Muxammad was a true gem. With the exception of the tattoo on his neck and the missing teeth, you would think that this man was trained in manners at Buckingham Palace. He was always smiling and looking for a way to make his brothers smile too. May Allaah accept him.

And the caravan won't stop till it's over!

25.1) *Do you feel the American and British Muslims who've joined you share any qualities which separates them from the communities they left behind?*

Many of them were manly guys who come from a tough background, but all of them were zealous about Jihaad from an early stage in their road towards becoming a practicing Muslim. This leads us to the element of sincerity. Usually those who allow the love of Jihaad to die within them without acting on it, after completing the first stages of practicing... usually those guys don't make it. It's normally the guys who jumped at the first opportunity when it came and answered the call.

26) *Could you talk to us a little about your experience as president of your former University's MSA? Did that experience help you in any way with regard to the current role you serve in Somalia?*

Yes and no. The no is because our MSA only consisted of around two people, and the yes is because being able to rock a Thawb and turban in the Bible belt post-9/11 in a small Muslim community means you are ready for the worst!

27) *Both you and the late Steve Jobs (of Apple Computers) were born to a Syrian father and American mother. Both of you dropped out of college, and both of you emerged as respective leaders in your chosen fields. Do you feel the both of you share any qualities that cause you to "Think Different"?*

I never knew that about him!

I don't know *that* much about him, and he is dead now, so I couldn't really hash it out with him now.

But if our shared background was the real cause for this coincidence (as opposed to some shared attribute present at creation), I think it has to be the culture clash. That's probably what makes *me* skeptical of everything that everyone else claims is 'normal' and 'the way it should be.' Knowing that half of the family thinks that the 'normal' of the other half of the family is a terribly funny joke (while knowing that that same feeling is mutual on the other side as well) makes 'normal' a useless word.

Let me also share something I found Jobs saying that should ring a bell after reading my auto-biography:

"My mother taught me to read before I went to school, so I was pretty bored in school, and I turned into a little terror. You should have seen us in third grade. We basically destroyed our teacher. We would let snakes loose in the classroom and explode bombs. Things changed in the fourth grade, though. One of the saints in my life is this woman named Imogene Hill, who was a fourth-grade teacher who taught this advanced class. She got hip to my whole situation in about a month and kindled a passion in me for learning things. I learned more that year than I think I learned in any year in school."

So the formula must be: have a Syrian father and a Caucasian mother who inspires a love for reading at a young age, along with advanced classes around third grade with an inspiring teacher!

28) *In your lifetime, what do you hope to accomplish in Somalia?*

I hope to die as a Muslim.

If I can save a few Muslim lives in the process or inspire some more Muslims to do the same, I pray I will be rewarded for that.

I think the fate of Somaalia is ultimately in the Hands of Allaah, and after that it lies in the hands of too many stake holders from amongst the Somaali people for one man to have a huge effect. Everyone is somehow tied to the general current and cannot of his own free will change anything drastically. The Mujaahidiin are in Somaalia because the Somaalis are religious people who want them there. The leadership comes from the populace and the Shariicah is established by their knowledgeable ones and their elders. My greatest efforts will only be a ripple or a little eddy in the grand scheme of things.

29) *What legacy do you hope to leave behind for your family? For the Muslims around the world?*

One thing my father taught me that really stuck, and shaped who I am, is to be a person of virtue and honor. He once told me: 'Omar... You have nothing in this life but your word. Remember that.' I've always held that advice very high and tried to not be seen as a liar or someone who betrays his word and principles. My dad was big on principles.

Those who know me know that I stand for what I believe in. I speak out for what I believe to be right and I speak out against what I believe to be wrong regardless of how bitter it may be and regardless of what might come my way because of it.

I know I can still gain much wisdom from living longer on earth, but if I had to choose one extreme over the other I'd rather be a fool who died for what he believed in than a wise coward who doesn't have any principles.

I hope my children can emulate my intended aim, even if I may have fallen short in my actions.

I guess I hope that the Muslims around the world also take my life as an example. Not that I'm extremely special, but then again I haven't seen too many middle class "white" guys from Alabama in Jihaad these days. Hopefully others will say to themselves: 'I can do that too!'

30) *Are there any conflicts outside of Somalia that have caught your eye? If so, please share your thoughts.*

If you read my book *The Vision of the Jihaadi Movement*, you can see that I am very hopeful about Yemen. It is geographically situated at the heart of the Muslim lands near the holy sites. I also wrote about Syria in *A Strategy for the Land of the Gathering*. Because of the international interests vested in Syria, and the Xadiiths about it being a huge battleground, I don't believe it will be a good candidate for the seat of Khilaafah in the beginning stages. I think Yemen has a greater chance, and then slowly the center of gravity will move towards Shaam.

31) *Are there any news stories in America which have caught your eye recently? How about in other countries?*

I think America is on the verge of becoming a loony bin police state and the Liberals have lost all hope of reforming it. They say the final stages of Capitalism are Fascism and Imperialism. It looks like the past few presidents are just Hitler spin-offs.

There is the economic depression, the occupy movement, the race wars, the "stripping" of rights (a pun for the TSA), and the everlasting wars against the evil external enemies. The book 1984 should have been entitled 2012.

Obviously the Arab Spring news is big, but bigger than that is the news of upcoming conflicts in the Persian/Arabian Gulf (including the full Shi'ah Crescent) and the South China Sea. America has been caught with its pants down after these long "small" wars that drained the economy more than expected. Now they are faced with the possibility of two simultaneous large wars that might turn in to a World War, while they are busy budget cutting and strategy searching. After their defeat, I am looking forward to the new rise of multiple poles.

32) *In the War on Terror, America has increasingly shifted its focus from direct engagement via ground troops, to concentrated Predator drone strikes. With respect to Somalia, could you elaborate on the role these drone strikes have played in the current conflict?*

Drones in Somaalia are racist. They only shoot at white people!

I'm sure they are really sophisticated and they must gather lots of intelligence, but the Kuffaar themselves admit that truly reliable information can only come from the ground from human intelligence. So the real threat is from the ground and not from the air. Without people willing to work with the drones, the drones just buzz around.

32.1) *Have they given America any advantage? Have the Mujahideen been able to effectively deal with this development? Are the drone strikes accurate, or do they occasionally result in civilian casualties? Please explain.*

The drones haven't really changed anything on the ground as far as the basic power struggle between the TFG and the Mujaahidiin. The only aim of these attacks is to separate

the global element of this Jihaad from the local element. They just want to kill off every white Muhaajir they can. It goes without saying that lots of collateral damage will only unite the people against the Americans, so they try to make our departure as unnoticeable to the populace as possible.

Like I said before, there have been lots of "cases" in the past few years, but the "accuracy" is only because of who's on the ground and not because of what is in the air.

33) *Is there anything you'd like to say to Muslims around the World? In the West?*

Yeah. The window of opportunity, to be amongst the elite, is closing. Pretty soon every single Muslim will be engaged in a battle between the Ummah and Kufr by default, and that won't make you extremely special in the Eyes of Allaah. The very best are those who rush to good deeds, the fore-runners, and those who sacrifice before the Fatx. There is no doubt about the victory, but will you be from those who were a part of it, or simply those who rode the wave after it came to shore?

34) *Are there any scholars or speakers in particular you wish to address?*

Most of the true scholars are in jail, and I shouldn't grace the false scholars with explicit mention.

But I would like to send my greetings to the brothers I know, and those I don't know, in the jails of the oppressors, and I hope they reach them in their jail cells. I'd like to remind them that Khilaafah will likely be here before their sentences end in shaa' Allaah... and I say to them: You are at the top of our exchange list. You are an inspiration to all of us and we expect you to become even more knowledgeable leaders for us by the time you get out. The Ummah still needs you.

35) *Do you have any final remarks you wish to add*

Viva la Revolucion!

Closing:

This has been a humble effort to describe my humble life.

Oh Allaah, free our prisoners and rectify the affairs of the Ummah of Muxammad (S). Oh Allaah, do not take us to account for what the foolish from amongst us perpetrate. Oh Allaah, fulfill for us the promise that You have promised Your Messengers.

Oh Allaah, accept my actions and cause me to die in Your path as a Muslim. Oh Allaah, guide me, my family, and all the Muslims to the truth, and cause us to act upon it and die upon it. Oh Allaah, grant us Firdaws and protect us from the Hellfire.

And may Your peace and *salaah* be upon Muxammad, and his family and companions.
And the last of our calls is all praises are due to the Lord of the Worlds.