

LEARNING TO BE A SON

Mohammed was born on a riverbank in the African country of Mali, just outside the fabled city of Timbuktu. He has no birth certificate but was probably born about 1972. Adding to the poverty and other difficulties of his life he was born with a clubbed foot. His father died when he was very young and his family moved to Kano, Nigeria to escape a famine.

Mohammed took to the streets in order to survive. When he was about seven he injured his clubbed foot and it became infected with maggots. Trying to cure himself he poured boiling water on his foot, then packed it with salt. Finally, in desperation, he dripped battery acid into the open wound. He survived the ordeal but lost a portion of his foot. Then another calamity struck. He was hit by a car. It broke his collarbone, shoulder, arm, and rib.

Then Nigeria was also hit by famine. All foreigners were expelled. Soldiers forced Mohammed into a truck and took him back to Mali. He had no chance to say good by to friends or family. The lonely little boy almost died in famine stricken Mali. He watched others die, but refused to give in to starvation. When he was too weak to walk, he would crawl, in search of food.

In December 1984, when he was about twelve, Diane Sawyer came to Mali with a television crew to cover the crisis. Mohammed “stalked” the crew hoping for something to eat. He was five feet tall and weighed 65 pounds. He walked with his right anklebone flat on the ground and his back looked like an S. He had TB of the spine, polio, and three kinds of malaria.

Finally he got their attention. Diane Sawyer, with cameras rolling, asked him if he was hungry. “Yes”, he replied in broken English, “all the time.” The camera crew gave him food and Mohammed survived another day.

That 18second interview aired the first time on 60 Minutes in January 1985. Then, on August 11, it was shown as a rerun. This time Cheryl Shotts was watching. She was an Indianapolis housewife in her early 40s. She had three children out of the nest and was searching for the meaning of life. When she saw Mohammed she said: “I know what I’m going to do. That child is my son. I have to find my child and bring him home.”

Within three days Cheryl had severed business ties and began the full time search for her “son.” She, and her husband Charlie, maxed out their credit cards, used up their savings, and took out a loan. They did, however, find Mohammed, and they did bring him “home” to Indianapolis. He arrived on Dec. 7, 1985. A huge banner read “WELCOME TO AMERICA, YOU’LL NEVER BE HUNGRY AGAIN.” Mohammed couldn’t read.

The next morning little Mohammed was shivering in the cold. Clad only in the long handled underwear he had been given the night before he said: “Where is the grass cutting machine? Where is the rug cleaning machine?”

His mother didn’t understand. Mohammed explained: “Didn’t you bring me here to be your houseboy?” “No,” Cheryl explained, “to be my son.”

Then Mohammed said something that broke her heart and also provides incredible insight to believers. He said: “I don’t know what it means to be a son. You have to teach me. But I promise to learn.”

Mohammed had three operations on his foot and two on his back. He had ten spinal disks removed and replaced with fragments from his rib, hip and a lot of metal. He was in a body brace for a year and a half but never complained. He began his studies in the first grade, and is now a college graduate. He speaks English, Arabic, a Berber dialect, some French, as well as the languages of Nigeria and Mali. His ultimate goal is to become the Secretary of State and use his influence to bring peace to the Middle East and Africa. His mother is one thousand percent convinced that someday he will be out country’s top diplomat.

He was not adopted to be a houseboy or slave, he was adopted to be a son. This is precisely the terminology used in Scripture: **“So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir” (Gal. 4:7 NIV)**

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