



Account of life in Iraq is vivid portrait of brutal lawlessness and devastation

The Gazette (Colorado Springs, CO)

November 2, 2003 | ROBIN A. ROTHMAN; THE GAZETTE

BECAUSE EACH LIFE IS PRECIOUS By Mohammed Odeh Al-Rehaief with Jeff Coplon (\$23.95) Harper Collins

Mohammed Odeh Al-Rehaief was an Iraqi lawyer. He was a national kung fu champion and instructor. He was a father, a husband, a brother and a son.

On the afternoon of March 27, 2003, he snuck into the Iraqi desert in search of American forces and added "traitor" to that list.

He witnessed and experienced countless horrors in his life, long before the morning he glimpsed a young, female prisoner of war in a guarded hospital room.

Something about watching the fearsome fedayeen interrogate Jessica Lynch affected al-Rehaief differently.

In his autobiographical account of growing up in Iraq, "Because Each Life is Precious," al-Rehaief introduces readers to an unimaginable world of lawlessness and devastation.

He paints a vividly grotesque picture of events that bred a lifelong hatred of Saddam Hussein, culminating with his participation in helping free Jessica Lynch on April 2.

Al-Rehaief was tortured when he was found with an illegal television satellite dish. Doctors removed a healthy lung from his daughter allegedly for a high-ranking Baath member's relative who needed a transplant.

Al-Rehaief weaves such moments with Lynch's now-historic rescue, drawing a touching parallel between the dangerously inquisitive child he was and the grown man he has become - one who still questions but has the power to choose. One who chose to take personal responsibility for a stranger's life.

Assisted by New York-based co-writer Jeff Coplon, al-Rehaief's writing bridges that dichotomy, describing adult topics with the almost childlike straightforward style of non-native English.

"A black-clad fedayeen struck a pose of arrogant triumph. He stood on the chest of one dead man and the head of the other, straddling the body of the woman. I thought of (my daughter) Abir, and how this soldier had been a little girl not so long ago," he writes of seeing Lori Piestewa, a member of Lynch's unit killed in the March 23 attack on the supply convoy.

The book's title answers the underlying question: Why willingly risk his life and those of his family? The stories within give the answer meaning.