

Driven to Return

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The Russian invasion in the 1980s drove Mohammad Khan Kharoti from his native Afghanistan. Mercy Corps drew him back.

He was a doctor in Afghanistan and now works as a technician in the nuclear medicine departments of Southwest Washington Medical Center in Vancouver and Kaiser Permanente in Portland, where he lives.

Two years ago, he started the Green Village School in his home village. At the time, the Taliban ruled the country but Kharoti was able to quietly negotiate with them to allow both boys and girls to study at the school. Last February, he accompanied a \$2 million shipment of clothes, medicine and other supplies provided by Portland-based Mercy Corps to Afghanistan.

He spent six weeks visiting the clinics, hospitals and schools supported by Mercy Corps. Kharoti was also able to see the school he started and visit his family.

It was a bittersweet time: Joy at seeing the people he loves was mixed with sadness about the hardship they've endured.

"The Afghan people have suffered for a long time," Kharoti said. The combination of poverty and drought inevitably lead to disease.

Kharoti grew up in a nomadic family. His father never learned to read or write but always had high hopes for his son.

"You will be going to school," lectured Kharoti's father, who died when Kharoti was 11.

A generation later, Kharoti's son was graduated at the top of his class at Portland's Wilson High School and is on the dean's list at the University of Washington. He also has three daughters who are excelling professionally and academically.

"I wish my dad could see them," Kharoti said wistfully.

Sending children to school is the key, he said, not only for individuals to better their lives but for world peace.

"Education is the truth, it is the light, it builds bridges around the world," Kharoti said.

Kharoti's own education was made possible by two humanitarian organizations and an American doctor who advocated for him. The doctor helped him attend Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

"Many people have given to my life. I have to always pass it on," he said.

While Kharoti is living a good life as a United States citizen, Afghanistan is never far from his thoughts.

"I am the fruit of their culture," he said. "When a man leaves a society, he does not leave it forever."

Growing up in a nation devastated by war is the reason he prays for a peaceful resolution in the conflict between the United States and Iraq, Kharoti said.

"I don't want any young boy to say, 'My mom and dad were killed by American bombs.'"

Caption: Mohammad Khan Kharoti visits recently with his extended family in Helmand province of Afghanistan. A Portland resident now, he's lived in the United States for more than 10 years and went back on a humanitarian mission with Mercy Corps. * Mohammad Khan Kharoti visits the operating room at Lashkar Gah Hospital, about 150 miles south of Kabul.

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