

On Shelves 3.5.2013: If You Knew Me You Would Care

Natasha Lardera (March 06, 2013)



The book “If You Knew Me You Would Care” by Zainab Salbi with photographs by fashion photographer Rennio Maifredi, published by powerHouse Books, with forewords by Meryl Streep, Annie Lennox, Ashley Judd, and Geena Davis, represents a journey taken to find women who have survived wars, violence, and poverty.

“The women in this book are an inspiration to all of us who aspire to triumph over adversity. It is a personal peek at the most intimate stories as told by women who have survived war. It is a tribute to them, to their survival, their achievements, and their dreams. I hope people everywhere will take away the powerful message of survival this book inspires,” [Zainab Salbi](#) [2], a women’s rights activist, humanitarian, and writer said in a public statement. Salbi is also the founder of [Women for Women International](#) [3], an organization providing women survivors of war, civil strife, and other conflicts with the tools and resources to move from crisis and poverty to stability and self-sufficiency. Salbi served as the organization’s CEO from 1993-2011. Among her numerous honors, Salbi was named as a “21st Century Heroine” by [Harper’s Bazaar](#) [4] in 2010. Newsweek, The Guardian, and the Economist Intelligence Unit each named Salbi as one of the most influential and inspirational women in the world in 2011.

The book was presented by her and photographer [Rennio Maifredi](#) [5] at [PowerHouse Books](#) [6]. The two, who met on a photo shoot, traveled to Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Bosnia and Herzegovina to seek out women who have been subject to the worst trials individuals must ever face, and yet overcame this adversity. Salbi conducted interviews with women about their definitions of war and peace, about their horrific and tragic pasts and their hopes for the future, and Maifredi photographed each of the women interviewed. The interviews and images together create a compelling, global, first-person account of what it means to be a powerful, female, survivor.

Rennio Maifredi is a photographer, originally from Brescia, who is well know for his fashion work: his



photographs have been featured in Allure, Vogue, and Marie Claire, among others. He has a particular passion for portrait photography and his work in that area has been featured in The New York Times Magazine, Time, and Wired. One day, after having photographed a portrait of Zainab Salbi and chatted with her about her work he said the magic words: "I would love to be involved in your next project." Needless to say he soon got a call and he packed his things to travel to war zones with Salbi.

"Obviously the world of fashion is drastically different from that of war," Maifredi said at the presentation, "but I was able to capture the beauty of every woman that stepped in front of the camera no matter what." He was able to do it in silence and peace, with total respect for the survivor standing there. Although an interpreter was with him on set, often words were not necessary. Those women communicated with their eyes, their muscles tensing, their shy smiles and so forth.

At the presentation, a slide show that paired the portraits with Salbi reading her text as the pictures were shown, it was possible to imagine what the atmosphere was like on set. Maifredi is very quiet but always alert, looking through his interlocutor.

"If you knew me, you would know..." each woman seems to scream out of the page when she tells the reader her story. This direct approach humanizes faces that we are used to see and we have detached from. One is looking for any type of job, one has seen all her family die in front of her eyes, ones has buried her mother with her own hands but is now happy to be a "fashion model," another was sold as a young bride at the age of six. The stories, unfortunately, are cruel and countless.

All women featured in the book have been served by Women for Women International. WfWI delivers a tiered, year-long program that begins with identifying those communities that are most socially marginalized and works with women to reach their full potential. Book proceeds will go to Women for Women International.

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[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zainab_Salbi

[3] <http://www.womenforwomen.org/>

[4] <http://www.harpersbazaar.com/>

[5] <http://www.renniomaifredi.com/index.php?id=1>

[6] <http://www.powerhousebooks.com/>