

Re: Off Topic War Stuff Still hurts my heart Bill

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.med.cardiology/2005-07/msg00896.html>

- *From:* William Wagner <Nonsense here B2wagner@xxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* Mon, 18 Jul 2005 07:53:28 -0400
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<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/18/national/18visit.html?hp&ex=1121745600&en=af18cdebe0c9257&ei=5094&partner=homepage>

Iraqi Boy's Journey to Erase the Scars of War

By JEFFREY GETTLEMAN

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WASHINGTON, July 16 – Ayad al–Sirowiy came to America this week hoping doctors here could remove the war embedded in his face.

Thirteen years old, small and skinny, Ayad was severely burned and blinded in one eye when an American cluster bomb blew up in his face at the beginning of the Iraq war.

A cluster bomb left Ayad al–Sirowiy blind in one eye and peppered his face with scars. He hides them by wearing sunglasses, even in his sleep. Dr. Tina Alster examined Ayad and will try to remove most of his facial scars. [More Photos >](#)

The explosion blasted thousands of fragments into his skin and left scars deeper than that. The village boys tease him, calling him "Mr. Gunpowder." Even on sweltering days, Ayad wraps a scarf around his face when he leaves home, and most nights he sleeps with sunglasses still on. But all that may change.

On Friday, Ayad and his father walked into a laser surgery clinic in Washington to begin a series of treatments to clear his skin.

Ayad curled up on the doctor's chair, eyeing the business end of a washing machine–sized laser.

"Ma, ma, ma," he wailed.

It was the end of one odyssey, which began in a mud hut in southern Iraq, and the start of another.

Doctors say a full recovery for Ayad may be a long shot, but at the urging of a lawyer who read about his plight and labored for more than a year to bring the boy to America, top dermatologists and cornea surgeons are willing to try.

What finally got Ayad here was an unlikely alliance between Joe Tom Easley, a lawyer and well–known gay activist, and Robert Reilly, a Defense Department adviser reviled in gay circles for an article he once wrote calling homosexuality "morally disordered."

Mr. Reilly used his influence to get Ayad into the United States, where

the boy joined a small but growing circle of Iraqi children who have been airlifted to the country for medical help.

"People ask me why this boy, why help him, when there are so many others worse off," Mr. Easley said in an interview. "I tell them, well, I don't know about the other boys. But I do know about Ayad."

Ayad and his father, Ali, flew from Amman, Jordan, to New York City on Wednesday. When Ayad's father took his first look down the canyon of skyscrapers, he shook his head and laughed, "How did Saddam ever think he could fight this country?"

It was about a month after the American-led war against Iraq began that Ayad was injured in his hometown, Kifil, also referred to as Al-Kifl, about two hours south of Baghdad. The town was heavily attacked with cluster bombs, which crack open in the sky to sprinkle smaller "bomblets" over a wide area. Some of them do not detonate immediately, and each year many civilians, especially children, are maimed after happening upon them.

Ayad says it was his family's cow that set off the cluster bomb that injured him, in April 2003.

"Boom," the boy said, as he recalled the incident. "Bomb."

His face swelled to a black crisp, and his family, poor date farmers, had no means to help him. He eventually healed, but his right eye was ruined and his forehead and cheeks were tattooed with ugly blue freckles. His disfigurement led to shame, and his shame kept him out of school. Seeking help, his father made the rounds of American military bases, where he crossed paths with a reporter in March 2004 in Baghdad. A week later, Ayad's picture was on the front page of The New York Times. Mr. Easley saw it. And so did Tina Alster, a laser dermatologist in Washington.

"When I saw that picture, I turned to my husband and said, 'I could fix this guy,'" said Dr. Alster, who would cross paths with Mr. Easley and Ayad months later.

The first step for Mr. Easley, 64, a former law professor who teaches bar preparation classes, was to establish contact with someone in Iraq to help him track down Ayad and his family. He found that contact in Marla Ruzicka, a young American woman working with civilian casualties there. But this spring, that link was broken when Ms. Ruzicka and an Iraqi colleague, Faiz Ali Salim, were killed in a car bombing.

Mr. Easley then turned to American troops based in southern Iraq to maintain contact.

It took months of work to secure the proper paperwork for Ayad and his father to travel to the United States, followed by a bureaucratic blizzard of setbacks, some because the family had used different last names for Ayad on different documents.

In May a letter arrived from United States immigration officials that said their application had been denied, without providing a reason.

"One of the things I learned from Marla was never take no," Mr. Easley said.

So he pressed on. At the bottom of the one-page rejection letter was a contact name, Robert Reilly, and a telephone number.

Mr. Easley immediately called Mr. Reilly, a senior adviser for international security affairs in the office of the secretary of defense.

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With Mr. Reilly's help, Ayad and his father were able to avoid the long visa application process and were given permission to come to the United States under a little-known program called significant public benefit parole, which allows for expedited entry to the United States. The program has been used to bring foreign witnesses into the country to testify in trials and in other instances when the government feels it serves a public interest. When contacted, Mr. Reilly said he was not authorized to be interviewed for this article. The father and son could hardly contain themselves when they landed in New York on Wednesday night.

In Times Square, Ali's eyes lingered on every building, every storefront, every glowing billboard.

"So much electricity," Ali said.

They quickly figured out what American things they liked (grilled cheese) and what they did not (escalators).

Over Afghan kebabs on Wednesday night, Mr. Easley shared the plan for their two-week visit. To restore his full sight, Ayad would undergo a cornea transplant on his right eye at Johns Hopkins hospital in Baltimore next week, which doctors agreed to perform free. To help rebuild his self-esteem, he would have the bomb fragments and the scars removed from his face with laser treatment at Dr. Alster's clinic, also at no cost, which would begin Friday. The first step was to treat a few spots on his right ear and his right hand and then have Ayad return in 10 days for more extensive laser surgery.

Most of the visit's expenses, including hotels and interpreters, have been covered by donations, except for the airfare, which cost Mr. Easley around \$6,000. On Thursday afternoon, Ayad and his father, along with Mr. Easley, boarded an Amtrak train in Manhattan bound for Baltimore. The next day the two joined a stream of well-coifed women heading into Dr. Alster's clinic – the W Hotel of dermatology, with slim leather couches, New Age art and a medical staff decked out in black scrubs. After his father wrestled Ayad's sunglasses off, Dr. Alster began zapping a few spots on his ear to see how his skin responded. They had come a long way for this, pain and all. Ayad looked in the mirror at his ear. It hurt, so he kept rubbing it. But already the first of the ugly freckles were gone.

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Garden Shade Zone 5 in a Japanese Jungle manner.

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- **References:**

- ◆ **Off Topic War Stuff Still hurts my heart Bill**

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