

A simple request from this child, Lamia, led to humanitarian aid and schools being provided for Afghan communities.

# LAMIA AFGHAN FOUNDATION: A MOM-AND-POP NONPROFIT

By Lyndsey Akers

John A. Bradley decided long before he retired from the Air Force as a lieutenant general that his time during retirement would not be spent working in the defense industry.

Bradley, who proudly served in his last assignment as Air Force Reserve chief and Air Force Reserve Command commander, had a strong desire to work in the nonprofit sector and do something he considered meaningful.

A handful of trips to Afghanistan would end up shaping his future in

ways he could have never imagined. His encounter with a young girl wearing ragged sandals in the coldest of winter months, desperately begging him for a pair of boots, would set into motion his post-Air Force mission: aid, educate, and empower young females in Afghanistan through the nonprofit Lamia Afghan Foundation that he and his wife, Jan, have established. The foundation carries the girl's name.

"When you educate a girl, you educate a family and a village," said Bradley. "An

educated girl will grow up to be a wife and mother who will teach her boys to treat girls and women with respect and dignity. She will teach her girls the value of having an education and being skilled to work outside the home to help support her family. It will give her a voice."

Indeed, for these girls and for all Afghans, many of whom are unable to help themselves due to poverty, war-torn communities, and an underdeveloped society, "education is the key to the future," he said.

As Air Force Reserve chief, Bradley frequently traveled to Afghanistan to visit his airmen. During a trip in 2006, he witnessed a group of airmen and soldiers dispersing clothes and humanitarian aid to women and children just outside Bagram Airfield during their off-duty time.

With a desire to help the cause, Bradley told his wife about his experience. She wasted no time in visiting the local Washington, D.C., thrift stores for items to mail to Bagram. She spent the next six months washing, folding, and packing these items into boxes that filled their home on Bolling AFB, D.C.

When preparing to return to Afghanistan in 2007, Bradley had a C-17 Globemaster III transport loaded with the nearly 40,000 pounds of clothing, blankets, and school supplies that his wife had acquired to take with him.

He and a group of airmen ventured to Shakol village not far from Bagram to deliver cold-weather necessities to a crowd of children. Pushing through the crowd surged a young girl who begged Bradley for boots, just like the pair he was wearing.

Although he did not have any to give her at that time, one of his first tasks on returning home was a trip to the store to buy the boots for the nine-year-old girl, whom he later learned is named Lamia. Four pairs of boots and a large stockpile of clothing and blankets later, the Bradleys prepared a package especially for Lamia and her family. With a photo of Lamia and the assistance of a few airmen on base, the package, letters from the Bradleys, and a warm meal were handed directly to Lamia and her family.

In May 2008, Bradley traveled once more to Bagram to visit his Reservists, with the hope of also checking in on Lamia. With the assistance of the Air Force Office of Special Investigations and an Afghan policeman, Bradley hosted a dinner in Lamia's honor with her uncle in attendance in a small room at the

## FOR RETIRED LT. GEN. JOHN BRADLEY AND HIS WIFE, JAN, THEIR HEARTS BELONG TO A YOUNG AFGHAN NAMED LAMIA.

base's dining facility. Once again, the Bradleys provided Lamia and her family with supplies—even a bicycle fit for a brave young girl. Lamia departed with a full stomach and arms overflowing with leftovers for her village.

The Bradleys have spent the last six years of their lives dedicated to the Lamia Afghan Foundation. They and the foundation have built six primary schools throughout Afghanistan, accumulated and transported more than three million pounds of humanitarian aid to the country with the assistance of the US government, and developed strong relationships with the Afghan government and local Afghan communities.

The Denton Program has played a large part in transporting humanitarian aid on behalf of the foundation. Overseen by the US Agency for International Development, Denton allows for the movement of humanitarian aid to foreign countries on Air Force mobility aircraft on a space-available basis.

Most recently, the foundation, with assistance from Denton, donated and delivered an ambulance for a medical clinic in Khairabad village in Herat province in western Afghanistan.

These accomplishments would be laudable for any organization, but are especially impressive in the case of the Bradleys since they operate the foundation alone as a “mom-and-pop nonprofit,” as they call it. They do not employ a staff; they drive every foundation effort with their own hands.

“This has been our entire life since retirement,” said Jan Bradley. “We don't

play golf. We don't go on cruises. We just want to help needy families while trying to help educate girls in Afghanistan.”

The early years of the foundation proved challenging as donations were scarce. Federal grants and small donations from fellow church and community members familiar with the Bradleys' work allowed the foundation to continue. Over time, word spread of their efforts.

“One day, we received a check for \$25,000, then \$40,000 from the same family,” said Jan Bradley. “We just couldn't believe it.”

Some \$600,000 has come in to date. The Bradleys use all proceeds and funds exclusively to cover the costs for building schools and providing humanitarian aid—and they would have it no other way.

“We pay our own way for our travel and expenses in Afghanistan with our savings and retirement pay. When people give to this work to build schools, we want 100 percent of their donation to build a school,” said John Bradley. “We know it is legal to do it otherwise, but we chose to do it this way.”

Through the donations and grants, the foundation has been able to build the six schools, many with additional security walls, to provide a safe learning environment for hundreds of young girls. The latest school hosts daily more than 3,000 students, who are required to rotate their classes in shifts due to high demand.

Many children in Afghanistan are not afforded the opportunity to receive formal education. When they do get that chance, most of them attend under



In 2007, Lamia greets Lt. Gen. John Bradley, then head of Air Force Reserve Command. At right: Jan Bradley helps a child into a winter coat in 2010. The foundation got started when Bradley heard about the needs of Afghan children and began collecting items for them.



Photo by John A. Bradley

# “NOW IS NOT THE TIME TO FORGET ABOUT AFGHANISTAN.”

a small canopy. The majority of the foundation’s schools include clean water, plumbing, and electricity, all of them considered luxuries.

“We build the schools, the security walls, [and] provide the school desks and school supplies to the students,” said John Bradley. “The [Afghan] minister of education maintains the schools, pays the teachers, develops the curriculum, and provides the schoolbooks to the students.”

The Bradleys frequently traveled to Afghanistan in the foundation’s early years. However a growing danger to their

work in the country has prevented them from returning for several years. A young Afghan man, whom they affectionately referred to as their “son,” was killed because he had been working with them.

“We are hopeful to return soon, but right now it is just too dangerous,” said Jan Bradley.

The Bradleys believe strongly that success in Afghanistan is important to the United States and that Americans should be patient as Afghans develop a democracy.

“They have had a true democracy for only 13 years. We should give Afghanistan time to develop. Educating all of its people will make a difference in the way

their government operates and provides services to its people,” said John Bradley. “Now is not the time to forget about Afghanistan.”

The Bradleys continue their work from their home in Nashville, Tenn., but admitted it is difficult not being able to travel to continue building schools and helping the Afghan people directly.

They are optimistic and anxiously await a safer time to visit Lamia, now 16 years old, and the villages of people who have become like family to them.

For more information, visit <http://lamia-afghanfoundation.org>. ★

*Lyndsey Akers is AFA’s manager of public relations and social media.*