

# Thorne Anderson

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an excerpt of

## *My War*

THIS is my war. Although I last set foot in the country three years ago, I rarely pass more than a few hours without thinking of Iraq and the Iraqi people. I think of the powerless and, to me, nameless child I photographed in Baghdad's al-Mansour Children's Hospital in November 2002. This was nearly five months before the U.S. bombing and invasion, and I was in the country to report on the effects of the Iraq sanctions regime, nominally imposed by the United Nations after the first Gulf War but essentially enforced by the United States. The sanctions were meant to punish the government of Saddam Hussein and to deny Iraq the ability to manufacture weapons of mass destruction. In the process they also deprived Iraqi civilians of lifesaving drugs, hospital equipment, and tools and parts for civil infrastructure. The result, while failing to weaken Saddam's internal power, was a crippling blow to the civilian population. In a 1999 study UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) estimated that the sanctions had been responsible for the deaths of 500,000 Iraqi children under the age of five. Most Americans then were, and even now are, completely unaware of the deep and devastating effects of those sanctions.

For the last three years I have struggled with the urge to return to Iraq.

Kael Alford

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an excerpt of

## *I Walked with Zaidun*

**A**T a conference on “war and public health” in Atlanta in February of this year, I met a doctor studying at a local university on a scholarship. He had been an intern in the triage unit at the Saddam City Medical Center in Baghdad, now the Sadr City Medical Center, the only hospital left functioning after the looting that followed the U.S.-led invasion. On 9 April 2003, the day Baghdad fell, he stayed home from his intern duty at the hospital to treat some neighborhood children who had been injured in an airstrike. “I was so afraid that day,” he said. “It was the first time I saw a poster of Saddam burned and shot with bullets. I didn’t know what could happen.” That same day, as fierce fighting raged along the Tigris River nearby, I made a photograph of doctors trying desperately to save a man’s life in the hospital lobby, the only operating room available in the brimming facility. After they failed, a sea of blood was left on the floor, which I thought at the time was a compound tragedy because blood stores at the hospital were scarce.

The doctor, boyish and lanky, wore a lilac shirt and a silky tie. He smiled widely when I told him I photographed during the invasion in the hospital where he studied, as if I had told him that we share a common ancestor. “It’s strange,” he said. “I have been here only a few months and already I feel very far away from Iraq. It almost doesn’t feel real.” He told me that I am the only person he knows in Atlanta who has been to Iraq, and it was—and is—the same for me. I felt relief in his presence because he is physical evidence that Iraq, in some form, still exists.

When I asked him if he’d be willing to appear in a local magazine story, he said that his family in Baghdad may have “problems” if he is mentioned in the American media. This is a code we both know; his family could be mur-

dered for his crime of being here. He has only a year in the United States; then, if he can find no other way, he will return to the chaos of Baghdad, where his life will surely be in danger thanks to this trip.

The doctor makes me think of Zaidun, a headstrong nineteen-year-old, slightly pudgy with shiny black hair, who helped me work safely when I was photographing around Baghdad in 2004. I was on assignment then to make photos of daily life, and walking the streets of the capital alone had grown risky for me. I wore a long black *abaya* and covered my head with a black scarf, trying to look like one of the conservative local women in the Karrada district, a busy in-town shopping area that is majority Shiite. Zaidun would walk with me, as if he were my brother or my husband, casually keeping an eye out while I photographed bustling street scenes: busy shoppers; men drinking tea standing up; nervous women walking quickly through their evening errands, dragging children at their sides and moving away at the sight of a camera.

I liked to photograph from the late afternoon, when the light arrived at a gentler angle on the horizon, until dusk. I walked with Zaidun as the city streets came to life under bare bulbs in open stalls selling meat, batteries, and vegetables, the heat of the day lifting, the sky going cool blue. On those balmy August nights, it was already unsafe for an Iraqi to be seen with a Westerner, and appearing in a news report was something most people tried to avoid. But Zaidun never flinched at a day of work with me no matter how dicey the neighborhood. He was a little reckless that way.