

A TEENAGER FROM THE ROOF OF THE WORLD



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Jumajhul belongs to the Wakhi people. He lives in the Pamir mountains in Afghanistan, at 4,600m above the sea level, in total isolation from the world and surrounded by yaks. He is probably the only teenager in the world who has never heard of Messi or Ronaldo. Although his life is very hard, he enjoys it and wouldn't exchange it for anything.



I have my own stone-built house. It is stronger than a yurt, I live without my parents who are staying in another village a two-day walk away, where they take care of a herd of yaks. I see them every three months, when the weather allows it. I have three brothers and three sisters who also live with my parents. I share my house with my wife. Following the Wakhi tradition, we married early, around the age of 15.



My wife left for the two summer months with some yaks in search of new pastures. There is no phone network, so I've not had news for a month now. I'm a little worried as she's only 15. I love my culture because women still wear traditional clothes and I find them very beautiful.



My uncle brought back a solar panel from the town. It is very useful: we can light one yurt after it's gone dark. In the village, there is television. The temperature is too cold to keep the batteries in the radio too.



I love music and I miss it. So I play rubab, the traditional Afghan guitar and everyone sings and slap on jerrycans to accompany me.



My days are always the same: in the morning, I get up at 4.30 with the sun. I drink milk and eat the bread made by the women.



Then I take care of my animals. I go to the pasture in the most beautiful grasslands. I also pick up yak dungs, which will be used as fuel for heating and cooking.



The yaks are my friends. Without them, I could not survive here: they feed me with their milk and carry me on their backs. In our community, social status depends on the number of animals that you have.



Moments of relaxation are rare because we have to work hard. I like to jump over rivers with my friends. The loser falls into icy water, no need to find a penalty!



I have never left the mountains. My uncle, who is the head of the village, was able to travel to Ishkashim, the largest village in the valley, three days from here. What he told us did not seduce us: you must pay for everything in the city! Everything is expensive. We own only our yaks and our sheep!



My idols are the buzkashi players: two teams compete against each other and they must drop a dead sheep in the opposite camp while riding horses. You have to be very clever and very strong too. If I had a horse, I would take part in the buzkashi.



My future is in the mountains: I was told that in the valley, peace has returned and tourists will come back to Afghanistan. I hope that many will visit us and discover our culture. I will be their guide so they can see beautiful sceneries in the mountains. We, the nomads, are the only ones who know all the secrets of the roof of the world!



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