

BY DEBORAH ELLIS

FICTION

LOOKING FOR X
THE BREADWINNER
PARVANA'S JOURNEY
MUD CITY
I AM A TAXI
SACRED LEAF
JAKEMAN

NONFICTION

THREE WISHES: ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN
CHILDREN SPEAK
OFF TO WAR: VOICES OF SOLDIERS' CHILDREN
CHILDREN OF WAR: VOICES OF IRAQI REFUGEES

THE BREADWINNER TRILOGY

THE BREADWINNER
PARVANA'S JOURNEY
MUD CITY

THE
BREADWINNER
TRILOGY

DEBORAH
ELLIS

GROUNDWOOD BOOKS
HOUSE OF ANANSI PRESS
TORONTO BERKELEY

Copyright © 2009 by Deborah Ellis
(*The Breadwinner* first published in 2000; *Parvana's Journey*, 2002;
Mud City, 2003)
Published in Canada and the USA in 2009 by Greenwood Books

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior written consent of the publisher or a license from The Canadian Copyright Licensing Agency (Access Copyright). For an Access Copyright license, visit www.accesscopyright.ca or call toll free to 1-800-893-5777.

Greenwood Books / House of Anansi Press
110 Spadina Avenue, Suite 801 Toronto, Ontario M5V 2K4
or c/o Publishers Group West
1700 Fourth Street, Berkeley, CA 94710

We acknowledge for their financial support of our publishing program the Canada Council for the Arts, the Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program (BPIDP) and the Ontario Arts Council.



Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication
Ellis, Deborah

The breadwinner trilogy / Deborah Ellis.

Contents: The breadwinner – Parvana's journey – Mud city.

ISBN 978-0-88899-959-7

1. Girls–Afghanistan–Juvenile fiction. 2. Women–Afghanistan–Juvenile fiction.

I. Title. II. Title: The breadwinner. III. Title: Parvana's journey.

IV. Title: Mud city.

PS8559.L5494B74 2009 jC813'.54 C2009-902745-3

Cover photo by Laurent Rappa
Cover design by Alysia Shewchuk
Text design by Michael Solomon
Printed and bound in Canada

<i>Foreword</i>	11
<i>Maps</i>	12-13
THE BREADWINNER	15
PARVANA'S JOURNEY	149
MUD CITY	305
<i>Author's Note</i>	433
<i>Glossary</i>	437

FOREWORD

Dear Readers:

I am thrilled at the release of this new edition of the Breadwinner trilogy. It brings back memories of all the women and children I met in the refugee camps in Pakistan – their courage, their pain, and their hopes for a better future.

A decade has passed since the first book came out. During this time, new wars have started, old ones have continued, and refugee camps have emptied out, only to fill up again somewhere else. The Afghan people cannot be blamed for their situation. Outsiders bear an enormous responsibility for all of this.

And ten years from now?

Thank you to all who have shared their stories with me. Thank you to all who have opened one of my books and looked inside. And thank you most of all to those who continue to survive, against all odds, and who remind us that we are capable of better decisions.

Deborah Ellis
2009



THE BREADWINNER

To the children of war

ONE

“I can read that letter as well as Father can,”
Parvana whispered into the folds of her chador.
“Well, almost.”

She didn’t dare say those words out loud. The man sitting beside her father would not want to hear her voice. Nor would anyone else in the Kabul market. Parvana was there only to help her father walk to the market and back home again after work. She sat well back on the blanket, her head and most of her face covered by her chador.

She wasn’t really supposed to be outside at all. The Taliban had ordered all the girls and women in Afghanistan to stay inside their homes. They even forbade girls to go to school. Parvana had had to leave her sixth grade class, and her sister Nooria was not allowed to go to her high school. Their mother had been kicked out of her job as a writer for a Kabul radio station. For more than a year now, they had all been stuck inside one room, along with five-year-old Maryam and two-year-old Ali.

Parvana did get out for a few hours most days to

help her father walk. She was always glad to go outside, even though it meant sitting for hours on a blanket spread over the hard ground of the marketplace. At least it was something to do. She had even got used to holding her tongue and hiding her face.

She was small for her eleven years. As a small girl, she could usually get away with being outside without being questioned.

“I need this girl to help me walk,” her father would tell any Talib who asked, pointing to his leg. He had lost the lower part of his leg when the high school he was teaching in was bombed. His insides had been hurt somehow, too. He was often tired.

“I have no son at home, except for an infant,” he would explain. Parvana would slump down further on the blanket and try to make herself look smaller. She was afraid to look up at the soldiers. She had seen what they did, especially to women, the way they would whip and beat someone they thought should be punished.

Sitting in the marketplace day after day, she had seen a lot. When the Taliban were around, what she wanted most of all was to be invisible.

Now the customer asked her father to read his letter again. “Read it slowly, so that I can remember it for my family.”

Parvana would have liked to get a letter. Mail delivery had recently started again in Afghanistan, after years of being disrupted by war. Many of her

friends had fled the country with their families. She thought they were in Pakistan, but she wasn't sure, so she couldn't write to them. Her own family had moved so often because of the bombing that her friends no longer knew where she was. “Afghans cover the earth like stars cover the sky,” her father often said.

Her father finished reading the man's letter a second time. The customer thanked him and paid. “I will look for you when it is time to write a reply.”

Most people in Afghanistan could not read or write. Parvana was one of the lucky ones. Both of her parents had been to university, and they believed in education for everyone, even girls.

Customers came and went as the afternoon wore on. Most spoke Dari, the same language Parvana spoke best. When a customer spoke Pashtu, she could recognize most of it, but not all. Her parents could speak English, too. Her father had gone to university in England. That was a long time ago.

The market was a very busy place. Men shopped for their families, and peddlers hawked their goods and services. Some, like the tea shop, had their own stalls. With such a big urn and so many trays of cups, it had to stay in one place. Tea boys ran back and forth into the labyrinth of the marketplace, carrying tea to customers who couldn't leave their own shops, then running back again with the empty cups.

“I could do that,” Parvana whispered. She'd like

to be able to run around in the market, to know its winding streets as well as she knew the four walls of her home.

Her father turned to look at her. "I'd rather see you running around a school yard." He turned around again to call out to the passing men. "Anything written! Anything read! Pashtu and Dari! Wonderful items for sale!"

Parvana frowned. It wasn't her fault she wasn't in school! She would rather be there, too, instead of sitting on this uncomfortable blanket, her back and bottom getting sore. She missed her friends, her blue-and-white school uniform, and doing new things each day.

History was her favorite subject, especially Afghan history. Everybody had come to Afghanistan. The Persians came four thousand years ago. Alexander the Great came, too, followed by the Greeks, Arabs, Turks, British, and finally the Soviets. One of the conquerors, Tamerlane from Samarkand, cut off the heads of his enemies and stacked them in huge piles, like melons at a fruit stand. All these people had come to Parvana's beautiful country to try to take it over, and the Afghans had kicked them all out again!

But now the country was ruled by the Taliban militia. They were Afghans, and they had very definite ideas about how things should be run. When they first took over the capital city of Kabul and for-

bade girls to go to school, Parvana wasn't terribly unhappy. She had a test coming up in arithmetic that she hadn't prepared for, and she was in trouble for talking in class again. The teacher was going to send a note to her mother, but the Taliban took over first.

"What are you crying for?" she had asked Nooria, who couldn't stop sobbing. "I think a holiday is very nice." Parvana was sure the Taliban would let them go back to school in a few days. By then her teacher would have forgotten all about sending a tattletale note to her mother.

"You're just stupid!" Nooria screamed at her. "Leave me alone!"

One of the difficulties of living with your whole family in one room was that it was impossible to really leave anyone alone. Wherever Nooria went, there was Parvana. And wherever Parvana went, there was Nooria.

Both of Parvana's parents had come from old respected Afghan families. With their education, they had earned high salaries. They had had a big house with a courtyard, a couple of servants, a television set, a refrigerator, a car. Nooria had had her own room. Parvana had shared a room with her little sister, Maryam. Maryam chattered a lot, but she thought Parvana was wonderful. It had certainly been wonderful to get away from Nooria sometimes.

That house had been destroyed by a bomb. The family had moved several times since then. Each time, they moved to a smaller place. Every time their house was bombed, they lost more of their things. With each bomb, they got poorer. Now they lived together in one small room.

There had been a war going on in Afghanistan for more than twenty years, twice as long as Parvana had been alive.

At first it was the Soviets who rolled their big tanks into the country and flew war planes that dropped bombs on villages and the countryside.

Parvana was born one month before the Soviets started going back to their own country.

“You were such an ugly baby, the Soviets couldn’t stand to be in the same country with you,” Nooria was fond of telling her. “They fled back across the border in horror, as fast as their tanks could carry them.”

After the Soviets left, the people who had been shooting at the Soviets decided they wanted to keep shooting at something, so they shot at each other. Many bombs fell on Kabul during that time. Many people died.

Bombs had been part of Parvana’s whole life. Every day, every night, rockets would fall out of the sky, and someone’s house would explode.

When the bombs fell, people ran. First they ran one way, then they ran another, trying to find a place

where the bombs wouldn’t find them. When she was younger, Parvana was carried. When she got bigger, she had to do her own running.

Now most of the country was controlled by the Taliban. The word Taliban meant religious scholars, but Parvana’s father told her that religion was about teaching people how to be better human beings, how to be kinder. “The Taliban are not making Afghanistan a kinder place to live!” he said.

Although bombs still fell on Kabul, they didn’t fall as often as they used to. There was still a war going on in the north of the country, and that was where most of the killing took place these days.

After a few more customers had come and gone, Father suggested they end their work for the day.

Parvana jumped to her feet, then collapsed back down again. Her foot was asleep. She rubbed it, then tried again. This time she was able to stand.

First she gathered up all the little items they were trying to sell – dishes, pillow cases, household ornaments that had survived the bombings. Like many Afghans, they sold what they could. Mother and Nooria regularly went through what was left of the family’s belongings to see what they could spare. There were so many people selling things in Kabul, Parvana marveled that there was anyone left to buy them.

Father packed his pens and writing paper in his shoulder bag. Leaning on his walking stick and tak-

ing Parvana's arm, he slowly stood up. Parvana shook the dust out of the blanket, folded it up, and they were on their way.

For short distances Father could manage with just his walking stick. For longer journeys he needed Parvana to lean on.

"You're just the right height," he said.

"What will happen when I grow?"

"Then I will grow with you!"

Father used to have a false leg, but he sold it. He hadn't planned to. False legs had to be specially made, and one person's false leg didn't necessarily fit another. But when a customer saw Father's leg on the blanket, he ignored the other things for sale and demanded to buy the leg. He offered such a good price that Father eventually relented.

There were a lot of false legs for sale in the market now. Since the Taliban decreed that women must stay inside, many husbands took their wives' false legs away. "You're not going anywhere, so why do you need a leg?" they asked.

There were bombed-out buildings all over Kabul. Neighborhoods had turned from homes and businesses into bricks and dust.

Kabul had once been beautiful. Nooria remembered whole sidewalks, traffic lights that changed color, evening trips to restaurants and cinemas, browsing in fine shops for clothes and books.

For most of Parvana's life, the city had been in

ruins, and it was hard for her to imagine it another way. It hurt her to hear stories of old Kabul before the bombing. She didn't want to think about everything the bombs had taken away, including her father's health and their beautiful home. It made her angry, and since she could do nothing with her anger, it made her sad.

They left the busy part of the market and turned down a side street to their building. Parvana carefully guided her father around the pot holes and broken places in the road.

"How do women in burqas manage to walk along these streets?" Parvana asked her father. "How do they see where they are going?"

"They fall down a lot," her father replied. He was right. Parvana had seen them fall.

She looked at her favorite mountain. It rose up majestically at the end of her street.

"What's the name of that mountain?" she had asked her father soon after they moved to their new neighborhood.

"That's Mount Parvana."

"It is not," Nooria had said scornfully.

"You shouldn't lie to the child," Mother had said. The whole family had been out walking together, in the time before the Taliban. Mother and Nooria just wore light scarves around their hair. Their faces soaked up the Kabul sunshine.

"Mountains are named by people," Father said.

“I am a person, and I name that mountain Mount Parvana.”

Her mother gave in, laughing. Father laughed, too, and Parvana and baby Maryam, who didn't even know why she was laughing. Even grumpy Nooria joined in. The sound of the family's laughter scampered up Mount Parvana and back down into the street.

Now Parvana and her father slowly made their way up the steps of their building. They lived on the third floor of an apartment building. It had been hit in a rocket attack, and half of it was rubble.

The stairs were on the outside of the building, zigzagging back and forth on their way up. They had been damaged by the bomb, and didn't quite meet in places. Only some parts of the staircase had a railing. “Never rely on the railing,” Father told Parvana over and over. Going up was easier for Father than going down, but it still took a long time.

Finally they reached the door of their home and went inside.