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CHIME THROUGH THE YEARS

STORIES FROM ACID ATTACK SURVIVORS

CHIME FOR CHANGE Through the Years: The Female Fabric is a series curated by CHIME Managing Editor Mariane Pearl featuring stories from the CHIME journalism platform archives by women around the world.



Gulnaj's Story:



I am 20 now, but when the acid attack happened, I was only 18. The boy was from the next town over where my maternal grandmother lives and I used to visit her frequently. That day, he saw me and started following and verbally harassing me all the way back to my house. I tried to avoid him, then repeatedly pleaded for him to leave me alone, to no effect. A few days later, his brothers came to my home and told my dad that they liked me and wanted me to marry their brother. My dad asked me, and I said no, I wanted to study. So he replied that he wouldn't want to marry me off against my wishes. After this episode, I didn't see him for two months. Until one afternoon, I was returning from college when I saw him. He was behind me; I turned to look at him and he threw acid at me. **I fell down; I tried to get up and run. Many guys had gathered around.**

I pleaded with them, screamed, 'Save me, he's throwing acid on me!' But no one came forward. I fell down again. He had a knife in his hand and slashed my neck. I raised my hands to protect my face, and my fingers got cut. I lay there shouting for help, there was acid in my eyes and I couldn't move.

I somehow got up and ran to a close by house. By then, the entire village was following me. I cried, "aunty give me some water, my eyes are burning." **But, instead of helping me, the people inside the house fled. They didn't give me water. I ran out again, and that's when he threw acid on my face, it poured down my body, my ears.** Even then, I pushed him and ran. There was an "uncle" on the road, he caught the boy while I kept running towards home where my mom saw me and fainted. I went straight to the bathroom and poured water over all myself. It was burning like the inferno itself. Finally, my cousin took me to the hospital. **The doctor said that we had to pay money right away or I would lose my eyesight forever.** Somehow my mom managed to get the money. Two months later, I came home, I was supposed to take my exams. **I was fully burnt yet even the college authorities didn't help me: my hands weren't working, but they didn't give me a writer.** I became secluded from society and went through the agony of multiple surgeries which involved grafting skin from the thighs and using it to repair my face, a process severely painful and crippling. The surgeries were expensive and had a lot of side effects and sometimes little success.

I passed four subjects and failed one. I wanted to study more. **Today I graduated as a journalist but I am studying further.** Hothur Foundation is supporting me so I can excel in journalism despite what happened to me. I don't believe I should hide my scarred face, because I haven't done anything wrong; **the attacker is the one who must hide his face. He got a 10-year imprisonment sentence.**

Sumana's Story:



I was married by the young age of 19 and spent eight happy years with my husband and child. But in one occasion, my husband became suspicious of me. Later on, I understood why: as it turned out, a man I didn't know was creating trouble between me and my husband by falsely claiming that we were having an affair. Soon, **I went through a painful divorce after which the man who had destroyed my marriage proposed to me in front of my house.** The minute I said no to him, he signalled another person to throw acid on me, burning my face and destroying my eye in a matter of seconds. **The attacker was imprisoned for a short time and released from jail. He now roams the streets freely, and I am left to raise a child alone despite having undergone almost 16 surgeries.**

I have always been interested in beauty and fashion and had a dream of walking the ramp. Today I can say, I got to accomplish my dream and walked the ramp (with Iulia Vanthur). I am currently helping handcraft head couture for Ara Lumiere. Hothur Foundation is also helping to me **to start my own beauty parlour.**