

## **Shoaib Sharifi Part Two Transcript**

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Your head will be chopped at four o'clock today. I felt, tasted, and smelt death.

And I cried. So the guy next to me, he put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Stop. Don't die before you die."

**Ramita Navai:** From *Aurra Studios*. This is **The Line of Fire** with me, Ramita Navai. I've been working in conflict zones around the world for nearly two decades. And in this series, I talk to fellow journalists about covering war and the life-changing moments of confronting death. Welcome to **The Line of Fire**.

In this episode of *The Line of Fire*, my guest is the award-winning Afghan journalist and documentary maker Shoaib Sharifi.

This is the second part of my chat with Shoaib. If you haven't listened to part one yet, I would recommend starting with that first - once you hear how Shoaib smuggled a camera into a former football stadium to expose the Taliban's public executions, you'll get a real sense of the man who is now about to tell us the incredible story of when he was kidnapped by the Taliban.

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**Ramita Navai:** Now Shoaib, you've faced death many times in your work, but I want to ask you about the one moment that you were convinced that you were going to die. It was December, 2009. You're covering a story about the Taliban and you had travelled to Kunar province in Eastern Afghanistan. Talk me through the start of your day.

**Shoaib Sharifi:** It was a day, it was a beautiful sunny day and, like many other things, I'm sitting in front of you starting to confess on so many fronts. One of which, when I used to go to difficult and dangerous places, I didn't tell my mother and my wife, because until I returned, they would really feel bad and I didn't want them to worry.

It is hard to convince my wife and my mother - that look, I'm not a reckless person. I'm just putting some mitigation there if I'm going to the frontline. So instead of that, I would say I'm going to X, instead of going to Y. I often mentioned that I was going to a peaceful part of Afghanistan when I had gone that day to Kunar, which the Americans had tagged as the Valley of Death.

So I had gone to really see a new wave of fighting. Obama had just deployed 30,000 troops and I wanted to see how it reflected back on the Taliban. I received a call from my wife, saying, Where you are? And I said, "Well, you know, I am in a very comfortable, lovely place". As I told you, and she said, "I had a bad dream. Come home. Now!" I said, "Look, don't trust dreams". She said, "No, go and sit next to your mum now, because I had a horrible dream that something happened to you". I said, "Okay, I will".

30 minutes after that call. I was taken by the Taliban.

**[Shoaib laughs]**

So I'm not superstitious at all. Although my grandma used to tell me you should interpret dreams and some dreams do mean something.

But I'm so scared of my wife's dreams now. I'm like, can you avoid dreaming about me? **[Both laugh]**

So, it was in the morning. What happened after my wife's dream, we were just approaching this little valley. An old man, like a Dervish, just came and hugged me and was shouting. "I'm not going to let you go! I'm not going to let you!"

I said, what is happening to me, with these people? and then that man disappeared. I'm telling myself I'm not superstitious. I'm not...

**Ramita Navai:** What were you doing? You were walking in this valley?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** I'm walking in this valley with all...

**Ramita Navai:** Where were you going to?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** So I had all my camera and everything packed to blend in, we were walking...

**Ramita Navai:** So you'd spoken to your wife, who'd had this prophetic dream. You didn't listen to her. So serves you right. **[Both laugh]**

And then you left your lodgings and you're walking through a valley and this old man comes up randomly to hug you?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yes, because we had a car waiting for us there. And, we had a bit of the road we had to walk along and this man came out of nowhere and was pushing me back and I just pushed him away and just got in the car and it was only a few minutes down the valley before we were stopped by at the checkpoint and everyone appeared to be in military uniform. Like they have in the national army.

We were taken out of the car and they said our commander wants to talk to you. So they took us away with all our cameras, everything and we saw all those men with long beards, long hair.

So those typical mountain Taliban and they...

**Ramita Navai:** So at that point, you realised that this wasn't the Afghanistan national army?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yes. At that point, in fact I saw that one man that had an RPG, this strap.

**Ramita Navai:** A rocket propelled grenade.

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yeah. The rocket propelled grenade.

The strap, and he also had a gun. The strap of the gun was from a traditional belt. It wasn't a proper special fabric for the gun strap.

**Ramita Navai:** Wasn't like American army material.

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yes. So I whispered to my friend, I said, "Guys, be careful. Don't say many much because I suspect they may not be in the army". And we just within minutes we realised that they were the Taliban.

And still they said, hello, welcome to valley. What are you doing here? I said, well, we are exactly here to see the Taliban and cover the war. He answered. Okay. Carry on.

Then they took us. And they said, it will only be 40 minutes and we will take you to our base. And then you're more than welcome to stay in this village and talk to people.

So for 40 minutes we walked up a steep mountain and they said another 40 minutes, another 40 minutes, another 40 minutes. And it took eight hours.

**Ramita Navai:** They walked you eight hours through the mountains?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Eight hours through the mountains. Each time, every single time - we were not prepared to walk for eight hours into the mountain, but I was asking how long? And they would say 40 minutes, they would not even say 41 minutes.

And when it got dark, they had some code names and we, on two occasions, we had sort of drones above us and they shouted at each other and said, Donkey mode!

**[Shoaib laughs]** Everyone jumped to the floor and they said, Be Donkey! And I said, what do you mean by that?

**[Ramita laughs]**

He said, okay, the Americans will think we are donkeys because they can see on the floor. So act like you're a donkey. I said, I'm not, I don't know how to. So just like four legged positions, just be like, crawl like you could be mistaken by sheep or donkeys.

**Ramita Navai:** No. This sounds like a comedy.

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yeah, no, they meant it. They crazily thought that, okay, if you were in a sort of four-legged position, these heat detectors would see that maybe you're a goat or donkey.

**[Both laugh]**

So...

**Ramita Navai:** Did you do that?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** I had to, because I believe that I said, "Well, I can't get bombed here".

**Ramita Navai:** In that moment could you see the absurdity of it or were you too scared?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** I was too scared as I was really scared at that moment, not from the Taliban, but I was really scared from the base because the American base was only about 300 metres away.

**Ramita Navai:** So you were scared of the drone?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** I was really scared of the drones because I had heard and covered stories of the drones bombing, constantly in that area.

Fast forward down the line when it became too dark and we were almost at the peak of the mountain and it started snowing. It was, beginning of a really harsh winter. Then all of a sudden all that friendly conversation became so hostile and they started shouting and said do not move. And we're going to frisk you.

So at this time I immediately whispered, so we were just at the edge of a cliff. I told - we were three people, two other journalists. All three of us were assigned by a British London-based media outlet to do a story about the Taliban.

So I whispered, I said, throw your phones away because we had some contacts. I had a call from my wife that had called me on that phone.

And then they said that you are spies, they were shouting "You're spies! You're here! You have brought", they kept saying GPS, "you have brought these drone tracing bomb GPS because..."

**Ramita Navai:** So at this point you were at the top of the mountain.

How many people in your team?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Three. It was three of us and about 10 Taliban.

**Ramita Navai:** Right. And, and you're not in a base at the moment, you're just at the top of a mountain?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Top of the mountain, no base.

**Ramita Navai:** And it's dark and it's cold.

**Shoaib Sharifi:** It's really dark and it's cold. And this is the moment we - because they were so friendly all the way until it went dark, we didn't get the feeling that they were really taking us into captivity.

We thought they really...

**Ramita Navai:** You trusted them?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yeah. I mean, we couldn't do anything. We couldn't turn around anyway. Heavily armed men. So they took us another 30 minutes. Now it's in a hostile way and pushing us and constantly swearing at us, all the swearing words and saying that you're spies of the Americans and you have brought GPS.

So GPS is satellite tracing. Apparently there are some satellite trackers that these drones would find and bomb. And I have never, until today, seen it, but they were saying that we had brought trackers into the village to get it bombed and we're all spies. So they took us.

And then from the 10, the rest disappeared and left two - we could feel two walking behind us and then they asked us three - they walked on until there was a big flat gigantic rock, like a flat wall, curved, very flat and said "Turn around, against this". So with our faces against this rock they lined us up. So that is the moment Ramita.

So they led us exactly for execution, there I felt tasted and smelt death with all my senses. It was the moment you're ready for bullets to come and pierce you. And I unfortunately had gone beyond that. I'd gone beyond. So ok, I'm dead. So two things I really saw that I'd never experienced before.

At this time I was married and I had two kids. So I felt my weakness as a dad immediately. I was also amazed with the power of the brain that shows a screen against that rock, with the whole future of your child that would live without a father. I was not thinking about myself, nobody else.

Oh, those two little boys. Oh my God. What's going to happen to them? That's coming. So old stories are coming in fast forward and it's being reflected to you. What I also noticed was when I looked down, my body was shaking, if I say the equivalent of that would be when your washing machine goes so mad that it's jolting the whole building.

I wouldn't believe that the human body would have that much power and would shake so massively. And I looked at my two fellow colleagues. They were not even shaking. They were standing to be hit. And somehow I was really affected more by shaking massively. And it's, perhaps in many cultures, particularly in Afghan culture for man - it is the last thing you would do, you would cry.

And I cried. So the guy next to me, my fellow colleague, he put his hand on my shoulder and said, stop. Well, whatever will happen will happen now, just don't die before you die. Just stop. Whatever will happen. That stopped, really switched that shaking off. I really stopped and when I stopped, I sensed they were whispering to each other that they were discussing whether to shoot us now or later.

**Ramita Navai:** Your captors?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** So two captors, we could hear them and then they walk towards us. And it gives a bit of hope or maybe, are they coming close to execute us? It also makes you reflect on all those executions you have seen because you have seen it as the other two, hadn't seen it. And I knew what it means to turn around with a gun against your head. Somehow, I don't know what caused them to think okay, let's do another thorough search.

And they searched us and said, okay, perhaps we would take you for tonight. Leave it to the military commission's decision. You are spies, but we will take you to your place. And it was at the top of the mountain, a really high mountain. There was luckily an unoccupied barn.

Luckily, there were no cows or animals there. I mean, they could have locked us with animals there. But we were locked in there. So that was only one moment.

**Ramita Navai:** And why do you think they didn't kill you at that moment?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Well, I mean, if you're asking if I ask this for somebody in Afghanistan they would say that maybe because 'your days were left', still you had days - that something happens.

**Ramita Navai:** Fate.

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yeah. Fate, fate, that they thought, okay, let's do a double check. And they did the double check. Well, three days...

**Ramita Navai:** They were looking for this tracker. They thought you were spies and they were actually looking for a tracker?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yes. They were looking for a tracker and when they did a thorough check, they found an iPod with my friend and I was so cross with the friend that I had told him to throw away everything at the first moment. I think his iPod was so dear to him, he hadn't thrown it away.

**Ramita Navai:** Yes. Instructions you've given. If you ever get caught, throw everything.

**Shoaib Sharifi:** And I said, "What is this?" And he said, "errrr". And luckily on the screen I saw there was one digital app, digital Quran, you know? So you play and it reads to the holy Quran to you. And I said, "Well, this is a Quran". And bang played a bit of that and said...

**Ramita Navai:** God, just more quick thinking.

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yeah. And they said, okay. So they got that and took us to this barn.

And we went through further investigations and two of my friends had some cash with them that was also taken. Everything was taken. Including my camera and a very heavy tripod.

So, we have two of our captors inside and two or I don't know how many outside.

**Ramita Navai:** Inside the barn with you?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Inside the barn. This is the moment we...

**Ramita Navai:** And these are armed Talibs?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** These are armed Talibs having all guns. So the two inside, one had PK, we call it a big machine gun, an AK 47 or what we call in Afghanistan Kalashnikov. And our captors were more tired and exhausted than us. They had also walked for eight to 10 hours. So we had a sort of wooden place to sleep and they had their traditional beds. They went to bed ahead of us. **[Ramita laughs]** So our captors who were meant to be watching us, they went and we could hear them snoozing and I was like...

**Ramita Navai:** You could hear them snoring?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Snoring. And we could hear them snoring.

And in front of us, just there. And, two of my friends said, "Let's grab the gun!" The two guns unattended by the wall and "Let's kill the two and run." And I said, "no." And they said, "yes! Let's do it." I said, "hold on, hold on. Let's make a strategy. One person should be in charge here. We can vote. I know I hate you because you didn't throw your iPod, it could have killed us. And I know we hate each other, but let's put hating to after we survive - now let's work on a strategy."

We really need to have one person that should act on our behalf. And they said, "well, we have to kill them". I said, "no, that small AK is near to me. And the big gun

is there. If you rush towards that big and I'll grab this gun, I will kill you two. And I would make history that captives killed each other...

Because I don't know if we kill these two, how many are beyond that wall? Beyond that door? We walked for eight hours. It's full of all these armed men here. Why would we, maybe there's a 10% chance that they would not even kill us. They would not even execute us. Look, they were going to execute us, but they didn't. Something happened. There's a little ray of hope we may survive and you will end it by killing these men."

So...

**Ramita Navai:** So you were having this argument while your captors were soundly sleeping?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yes! God knows, maybe they were pretending that yeah.

**Ramita Navai:** Machine guns on the floor?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yes, the machine guns on the floor.

**Ramita Navai:** In a small barn.

**Shoaib Sharifi:** In a small barn. Yeah.

**Ramita Navai:** And they didn't, they couldn't hear you?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Well, I hope, I mean, maybe they didn't, but - so they were speaking Pashto and we were speaking amongst ourselves a mix of Dari and English and a bit of Arabic.

**Ramita Navai:** So they were speaking Pashto language and you were speaking a mixture of English and the other main language which is spoken in Afghanistan which is Dari?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yes. So we mixed it up exactly to confuse them. So again, thanks to the languages as well because, the other person I was with was not from Afghanistan. So we were conversing in English, but when we were in captivity, we started conversing in Arabic because speaking English would further like justify you are in a spy, but if you speak in Arabic, it will at least reduce them thinking, look at what they say, you know, spies of the West.

So that language really helps in every situation.

The next day.



**Ramita Navai:** So wait, hang on a minute. So how did you convince your two colleagues that you shouldn't kill your captors and run?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Well, first by warning them that I would jump and grab that gun. I mean, I, of course I wouldn't have done it. I've never killed an animal, nothing, but I really wanted them to stop them.

And then I said, let's make a decision. We have to choose one person because very soon they are going to come in and interrogate us. And, we could make an excuse of language or something and let one of us talk so that we are all on the same page and the two chose me. Okay. We agree that I would be sort of an undeclared leader, not to tell the Taliban that I was the leader but I was the person that would converse with them more because I spoke both Dari, Pashto and Arabic.

**Ramita Navai:** And you could make the decisions?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Because both of them didn't have as much experience and exposure to Taliban and Taliban territory as I had. So in a way, I convinced them that let's - let's be...

**Ramita Navai:** You were the man.

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yeah, I should be the man so that we are on the same page.

So later that night, we were served. They brought some chicken soup for three of us. Two legs and bowls full of soup. So we ate and the meat was so hard that it was not even touchable. So roughly boiled, but of course we didn't touch it and that was...

**Ramita Navai:** Did you complain?

**[Both laugh]**

**Shoaib Sharifi:** We didn't complain, but what we learnt on the second night is that we would be served the chicken soup again. And the second night I was a bit like aren't these legs the same legs that were brought the previous night? **[Both laugh]** So I broke one, but you could hardly see. And the third night, the same legs were brought again. So at least I discovered something - the message was either eat them or you will keep having the same chicken legs again.

**Ramita Navai:** As long as we keep you alive.

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yes. So interrogations started and there was, they kept saying, that you are spies and we just said that, no, we were journalists. And in a way - we had come here to tell the unseen and untold story of your people. What is it that you are fighting for? And what's your story?

We didn't obviously mention that we were commissioned by the British newspaper because that would have really not have helped.

So they said that they would share the details of this investigation with a commission.

**Ramita Navai:** And so what day is this now?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** It was night one then.

**Ramita Navai:** So this is the first night?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** It's the very first night.

**Ramita Navai:** When you convinced your colleagues not to kill your captors?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yes. And, the next day I wasn't - I was still not sure about how much my colleagues would listen to me. So the two captors - one's name was Kuchi, the other was Usman. During the day I saw them and I said, look, guys, I appreciate you, thank you very much for guarding us at night every night, you guys, but could I advise you, I mean, are you trained?

And the two guys said you know, "we have been commandeered. In fact, I'm a shepherd, but because once a month in our village, I have to be sort of the local fighter. It is sort of a rotation. I'm not a trained guy."

**Ramita Navai:** So he was a shepherd who'd been forced to join the Taliban?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Well, it's not forced. It is in the village where you live, if it's the Taliban. You either have to pay the equivalent of one fighting soldier's sort of salary or something, or do your rotation. Like you join the army when it's compulsory. Yeah. So I said, I would give you a word of advice that, I mean, if I was a trained man, I would put my gun under my pillow when I sleep.

Because what if somebody is attacking us from the outside? So your gun is next to you. I just didn't want those people to leave their guns unattended because...

**Ramita Navai:** Wow. So you were so scared that your colleagues would try and kill your captors and make the situation

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Worse!

**Ramita Navai:** Worse, so you were giving your captors advice on...

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Not to leave their guns unattended. **[Ramita laughs]** Yeah, I, of course, I couldn't say that, please don't leave your guns unattended because my

friends might kill you. But I said, look, the traditional way in Afghanistan is you put your gun under your pillow, you sleep with it. And if somebody comes and grabs it, it wakes you up, so that's the best place.

And I said, this is how we do it in Kabul and elsewhere. It's just a word of advice. And they did that the next night.

**Ramita Navai:** How did they react?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** No, no, no, no, no. It's again, how you converse and how you appear to be really convincing. And it is also the beginning of bonding. You really have to - they are human beings. And I think, I was believing that we survived that against the rock execution, now we have a chance to use all of our strengths as unarmed, but experienced human beings to see if we could make human contacts and connections that may help to buy some mercy.

**Ramita Navai:** And you were trying to get them to trust you?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yes, exactly. And one thing was that. And, in fact, I was freshly trained just a few months before, trained in what's called hostile environment training. It's first aid on how to survive on a frontline. If you get hit, how would you stop someone's bleeding or yourself until the first aid arrives?

And these people didn't really appear to be very trained. And I was feeling what if we were ambushed or were hit, were bombed, how would these people take care of us if they wanted to? I asked them, do you know if somebody is shot, how would you stop bleeding?

And if there's fighting, because there was a rival valley next door. And then what if we are ambushed? And I said, if we are on our way and we are ambushed and I'm hit, or your friend is hit, what would you do? So Usman said, well, I will fight until death and fire. And I said, well, as you fight, your friend will have died by then because they would be bleeding.

Do you know how to save somebody who's bleeding? He said, well, no. I said, okay, let's organise a first aid training course. It was the afternoon of day two that I called them for training on how to apply a tourniquet.

**Ramita Navai:** Okay. So day two of being held hostage by the Taliban and you were teaching your Taliban captors basic first aid training?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yes!

**Ramita Navai:** Have I got this right?

**[Both laugh]**

**Shoaib Sharifi:** That's true. Yeah, that was for two reasons. So, A...

**Ramita Navai:** Wait. So how are you managing to do this while also living in fear that these men may kill you?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Well, so, this is your very last means that you apply to buy trust. And you don't know what's happening behind that wall who is sitting in that commission.

Maybe if you buy some mercy around these people, maybe their opinion may change the commission.

**Ramita Navai:** So you're in absolute survival mode?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Exactly. You're in absolute survival mode. And that training is also because it's a mitigation that you're handled by untrained people. There have been instances where there have been failed rescue attempts.

I was so scared of a rescue attempt. I was just saying, I hope, oh my God, I hope there's no rescue attempt because literally a lot of rescue attempts have happened, journalists were killed because the way they position you when the rescue attempts happen, you will get wounded, or killed. Then if you get wounded, you're at the mercy of these people and they don't know how to stop bleeding.

So I had to train them. It was first aid training. So that really bounced in a way back to me. So the second night it was Usman and Coochie and Coochie came in and whispered and said, "My wife is pregnant." So I was like, I wasn't sure what to say. Congratulations? But what if I say congratulations to him he might shoot me? What is the context here? Shall I say, I'm sorry? I just looked at him and said nothing. I said, maybe this is safe, so I just look.

And he said, "But she's not feeling well. And could you help?" I said, I'm sorry. I should have explained better that I'm not a doctor. That first aid training that I gave you, I was given that training. That doesn't mean I'm a doctor. I'm sorry. I'm not a doctor.

And he said, "No, no, no, no. I know you're not a doctor, but you are very good at that. At least you must have gone to a hospital with your wife? You must have seen a doctor in your life? But we haven't. You may have gone to a hospital with your mother, so you may know something that we don't know and she's pregnant."

I said, "okay, how many months?" In Afghanistan they calculate based on months rather than weeks. And so for him, for this man it took him like, okay, the next rotation, he would come back. It took him hours until he came back just with that answer, how many months she was pregnant. And she felt really dizzy and had a headache.

And she was in the very last months of being due, like after week 35 in other terms. So we are finishing month eight and we had our first aid kit with some paracetamol. And also my grandma used to make some herbs found in the mountains. Its literal translation is the cut lover plant. It has a very strong smell, super strong.

And if you boil it, we believe that this stabilizes your blood pressure. So I thought maybe it will give a bit of help. And I said, boil that and add some garlic as well and give these tablets as well, this painkiller. So he disappeared for 10, 12 hours. And the next day he came in, was super happy and said that really helps. My wife is feeling better now.

And he also said that after she felt better, it was three or four in the morning that she woke up and woke my mother and myself, we all cried and prayed for your freedom. I said, wow. Okay. At least it's the beginning of something. And I said, well, don't try to pray for freedom. Do it! As in he said, I'm sorry, I'm just a single powerless person.

I can, if they ordered me to shoot you, I will still have to shoot you. But we do all we can, my mother really cried. And, hopefully that would work.

**Ramita Navai:** So your Taliban captors were just uneducated village boys?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yes. And - So quite a lot happened like this - these little things really bought us (together).

But they were still too loyal to their commanders, but this is what happened.

**Ramita Navai:** So they were saying look there's nothing we can do but feel bad about this?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yeah. We felt bad about this, that you seem to be like good people. So we pray that if you're really genuinely good people, if you're not spies, may God free you from this situation.

And so...

**Ramita Navai:** And at that moment then did you think, okay, this is it? We are going to get killed?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Every moment when they come, the way they ask the questions, the way you see that it is difficult to convince them, they are thinking totally differently. Their understanding of how the world works and being objective and why a journalist will travel to these areas for them - any suspicious person coming to the valleys is a spy and this was irreconcilable.

Particularly when they come night two and night three, you would see that they're still in the same place, same position as they were. Every moment, while we were waiting, I knew - we had heard about the military commissions in the past, how they would make the decisions.

And it was just in the beginning of that surge of troops sent to Afghanistan. So everything was against us, but these little bits helped us. So that night I had Usman, so these were the two that we conversed with more. The others didn't show their faces quite a lot. If they would come, they would come with a covered face.

So Usman came, I mean, I'm talking about this as an example of naivety there and Usman came and he was crying, crying so much and holding my feet and crying. And I just sat and said...

**Ramita Navai:** Holding your feet?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yeah, and I said, what has happened Usman? He said, "I feel so sorry for judgement day." I said, "what is it?" The judgment day, the day the resurrection when we in Islam believe that we will be judged by God for our deeds in the judgment day.

I said, "what is it?" He said, "You know, I think I've realised that I think you are good people and we are your captors. And we will be judged by God for doing this sort of wrong thing."

And in my house, I said, wow, that's good. He's feeling bad. Maybe he has a plan for escape or something. I said, well, I wish it wasn't the situation.

And he's now pleading "For God's sake. Please promise that you pardon me? You forgive me." And he's so serious. He's jolting me. I said, "what are you saying?"

"No, no, no. On the judgement, promise that on the Judgement day, when I am tried for this crime of watching over you in captivity, you tell me now that you have pardoned me, you have forgiven me so that I'm not judged for this thing."

And I said, oh my God. Look at me, I'm crying from my captor. He even wants to have a secure judgement day for God's sake. So I said, "okay, you're pardoned." And he says "No, no, no, no, no. Say it from the bottom of your heart."

I said, "do you want me to write a letter to God, go and bring a pen. I will sign that I've forgiven you on the judgement that you will not be put on trial for me. You have done nothing wrong to me."

**Ramita Navai:** You were sparing him from hell?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yes. I said, of course, “for this crime, I promise I will give my word that you're spared for whatever you have done to us.” And really I was so sad as I shouted, “yes. If you want that, you bring a pen, I'll write it.”

And he calmed down and said, “okay, thank God. It's okay. My judgement day's secured as well.”

And then he came again, there's a masked and an unmasked Taliban and said, “look on the first day when we had done some frisking, we took from each individual, we checked, we took all your belongings. We realised that you had some cash as well...”

So can you tell us how much cash you had? Because we put it in a secure place and we will give it back to if and when you're released. So the good thing is we had agreed that only one person would speak. And my colleague said, “Oh, please tell them that I had 30,000 caldares, which was about \$300 back then.”

And my other friend said in Arabic to me that “Tell him that I had \$1,500. Usman took it.”

“No, you had nothing”. So I looked at them, our captors, I said “we only had about \$300 in Pakistani rupees, which Mr. A took.” And I looked, I made eye contact with Usman and I looked into his eyes and I said, we had nothing else. So in a more meaningful way that look, we are...

**Ramita Navai:** So one of your captors had stolen money and you were protecting them?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** So they had individually frisked us but he hadn't, none of them had declared the cash.

**Ramita Navai:** Why were you protecting Usman your captor?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** But it was not about protecting him. It was just building little bits, little bricks of trust. So maybe that would help. These were, yes. I would say in an extreme situation you use any means that you think probably could help for survival.

**Ramita Navai:** So he may feel that he owes you now?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yes, exactly. And so they went and then I told Usman “Look you know why I didn't declare the money because amongst all your friends, you seem to be the most pious and real man and brave. And I see a sense of manhood in you. So I just thought, your family really deserves that.” He still wasn't really appreciative. I said, “do you know how much is that?” He said, “well, you know, there were like 15 of them”. I said, “but do you know how much that is?” He said, “no, I've never had that money”. I said “that money is called dollars. And with that, you could buy at least two or three herds of goats. You could have like 50, 60 goats in these mountains.”

He almost had a heart attack. **[Ramita laughs]** "What do you mean? 50 goats", I said, "yes that's quite a lot of money in this. And still, I didn't say anything, you know, about that money - you should have it". I just said, "we all think that you're a good man. You should have that money."

And then he, again turned with his stupid question that said, "Put your hand in your heart in like an Afghan way that even up until the judgment and beyond you've forgiven me for that money. So I wouldn't owe you people. And that is all mine."

And I said, "that's as clean as" - we have a weird saying in Afghanistan, we say, that 'for you it can be as clean as your mother's milk'. It is how we say it. It's all yours. No, it will never be claimed even on judgement day. And that really helped. So then, Usman really helped us - he said "very soon you'll be cross-examined in your investigation..."

They may come in to ask for a contact and then they will call that contact and cross examine them about the information we had given. So amongst us we decided on one of our friends. So it was one of the other's friends who we knew would be really good to manage the situation - who I would introduce as my uncle, but I didn't know his number. So my fellow captive had the number. They would ask for the number from me. So he had to tell me the number and In Afghanistan they're 10 digit numbers. Is it 11 here? It's one short. Yes, it's a nine or 10 digit number. And it took me hours to memorise that because I had to say that this is my dad's or uncle's number.

But also, by any means, we had to inform them of what we had said in the investigation.

**Ramita Navai:** So you were going to give your captors a number of a friend or relative that could help you?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yes.

**Ramita Navai:** And you needed to get a message to this friend or relative that you were being held by the Taliban and that your lives were in danger?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Our lives are in danger, not just that, but this is what we had said in the interview.

**Ramita Navai:** Yes.

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Because when they cross examine...

**Ramita Navai:** So your answers match?



**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yes. So the bit we were worried about was our association with the Western newspaper, which we had denied. We were all journalists. So there was one bit that was really, in fact, it was that bit that we were really worried about that our friend would know.

But before them, I had to convince Usman that he really should bring me a phone in some way, so we could inform this man.

So I told Usman that look, my mother will be worrying where I am. I had promised her that I would call her every evening about our safety. Can I just, is there any way you could call my mother? Just say that Shoaib is with his friends and he's all fine? And that's it. And he managed to bring in a phone and he said he would be watching me and watching others so that nobody sees me, catches me, for being on the phone. And I'm calling this man saying, Hey, so-and-so, I'm speaking with the three mixes of languages, Dari, Pashto and English to confuse everything.

And this man feels that I'm just a dodgy caller. He hangs up and I call him back saying, Hey, how's everything? He hangs up. And the third time I call him, I named his wife and it was an ex-wife as well. So it was even worse. I said, look, that's your ex-wife. Fortunately or unfortunately I'm a friend of your ex-wife, but also a friend of...

**Ramita Navai:** Why didn't you say this is Shoaib?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** I knew ex-wife but he was a friend of the other captive. So he wasn't my direct friend, but we all knew him.

**Ramita Navai:** He was a friend of your colleague and you thought this is the man that could help us?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yes, exactly. So, I said, whatever I'm saying, make a note of it. Some of that may not make sense. And then I would switch back and say, can you take the phone to my mother?

Because I want to say so with a mix, languages and coded terms. I said exactly where we were, what we had said in our investigation and that was passed. So, Usman deleted the number. And said please do not ask them to call back. And I did that.

The third day we gave them this number for cross-examining as well. On the third day Usman entered and called me out. And normally when they had news announced, they would announce it, indoors.

And this time he took me out and he said, look, I have a bad news and a good news. I said, okay. It was around 10 o'clock in the morning. And third day. I said, okay. Tell me the bad news first. And then please me with a bad news. He said, no, look, be serious. The commission has decided that - these are his exact words.

In fact, he said that today at four o'clock, just after four o'clock the commission has assigned it, that you will be executed. Today just after four o'clock, you will be first, your head will be chopped just after four o'clock today.

So a bit of that shaking, but not that level came. And I felt that all my body, I could see my hands, everything turned pale. And I felt it. I really felt death, you really feel it. It's not numbness, but meaningless, everything loses meaning and you don't want to even ask him more questions.

So I gathered all my energy just to throw this question saying, okay, then what could be the good news? If I'm beheaded, then he said "the good news is that I have decided, even if I lose *my* head, I'm not going to let them chop *your* head". Still, I was composing myself, but getting a bit of energy with that, the second bit of the good news.

And I said, "okay, thank you very much. So, I hope it's not just me. I want all three of us in". He said, "no, no, no. It's only for you." And I said, "you know, it's not fair. Could we decide which one, if you can only help one", he said, "no, I can only help one. And I have only chosen you because I have seen that you're a pious man. You are really honest. And you're a good dignified man". This is exactly the way of his wording - he said "it cannot be transferred this offer to any of your other two colleagues". I said, "okay, then hurry up, tell me, what is the escape plan? How are you going to take me out? What is the escape plan?"

And he said, "there's no escape plan". And I said, "then what is this, how can you spare me from that beheading"? He said, "well, the moment that you're taken to that beheading table or execution table, I'll shoot one bullet at your forehead and you will be gone in seconds and I'll spare you that unbearable, bitter, difficult, torturous beheading. That's my offer..."

Either take it. Or not. That's all I can do. That's the most I can do. The chances are they may kill me after having shot you because that's the way they want to do that".

So it even further reaffirmed that they were serious. And, I had to now answer, it's the moment well you're dying, but how you should die situation. So you have to really process at a very, very high speed of whether to take it or not to take it, what to do.

And he went on saying that we had brought somebody who was working at the base of the Americans, which was down the valley. And it was a very blunt dagger. He gives me very graphic description, that it is a blunt dagger - I hope it's not too graphic - that they do it from the back, from behind. So I felt it exactly as he was saying it and I said, "look, Usman, fine, please. Yes. I think that is a favour you're doing. If that's what you're doing and I really want to be shot rather than beheaded".

He walked away and I shouted, I said, "Usman, Usman please can you make sure that do not just shoot, just make sure they really are seriously taking me to the beheading table. What if they're just out of fun or out of acting or out of torture, they just pretend to be taking me and you bang you shoot me?" **[Shoaib laughs]**

**Ramita Navai:** What if it's a mock execution?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** What if it's a mock execution? What if they just - he turned and looked back and said, that's your problem? There's no joke. There's no sense of humour here. There's no place. We either do it or not do it. I assure you that you will not be shot mistakenly, rest assured.

I re-entered the room. So only until today I'm speaking about this. When I entered there, I didn't announce the bad news to them.

**Ramita Navai:** You didn't tell...

**Shoaib Sharifi:** I didn't tell them.

**Ramita Navai:** Your two colleagues that you were all about to be executed?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Because, because yes. Yes. Because in fact the thing that changed me, perhaps it changed me for good was after that, that whatever situation you are in, the power is in just now. This moment, if you have enjoyed that, however you can. Captivity, but if you can live without a worry, don't worry about the next hour or next hour.

If I just allowed them ...

**Ramita Navai:** So you wanted to spare them?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Spare them. They had, so 10, they had like five or six more hours. And I didn't want them to be worrying, thinking about all that agony and fear and families and why not? They were laughing, they were joking when I entered, one of them was reading a book and then the other was, throwing Pashto poetry and asked me to join.

And I just wanted them to have the rest of the remaining hours of their lives. And I didn't tell them, I didn't tell them up until just now that was the decision. And, so again, there were days left and fate that the cross examining worked and they had spared us, and...

**Ramita Navai:** So hang on a minute, you had hours to live and now you were just waiting for the Taliban heads to call the contact that you had given and interrogate your contact?

And then what happened?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** I was. While they were sort of my other two cellmates in a way, having their own time and reading book and one writing poetry, I was thinking about

that moment, they wouldn't do it right here in front of me. Just a little bit above one metre high door - that any moment they would enter and I will be first.

I was not thinking about myself. It's perhaps - I don't know how I would feel if I was single. There's a big question because I have been through so many similar, dangerous moments when I was single and it has never been so difficult or I would, I don't know why. I think sometimes I call having kids and being married a weakness because I keep thinking about my wife and scenarios and scenarios and scenarios.

Okay. This may happen, happen to them. And how hard would it be. So that I didn't feel like, wow, I'm losing a fabulous life, I would have had a wonderful life. And very weird things were coming in my mind. I always, when I brushed my teeth, unfortunately some of the things get stuck to you. So brushing teeth things were coming in front of my eyes that, oh my God, you know how many times you took care of my teeth and I wasted like five or 10 minutes of my life. I could have listened to music or watched a movie or something.

**Ramita Navai:** But you're having these strange thoughts. And your two colleagues are oblivious, unaware, and you are waiting for the moment for someone to come in to take your way to be executed.

What happened when somebody did enter?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** They entered. It became longer. They should have entered at four and they entered later in the dark. And I started shaking again, the other two were not aware. And then they said, okay, the commission has concluded that you're not spies. Wow. That was a massive, great news, but there's always bad. But you have been tagged as people of the tarmac.

That you need to be continued in captivity.

**Ramita Navai:** What's people of the tarmac?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** People of the tarmac, they were referring...

**Ramita Navai:** City people?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** City people and they continued saying that, so we sat and had a conversation. And we continued after that, that they said you people of the tarmac, you city people, for generations, whatever resources that governments have, you had it, you build your schools, you build your clinics, you have tarmac roads.

And we have always been forgotten and left here and you have taken and sucked all those resources from us. It could have been us and we could have been in a different situation. Most of our houses do not have proper windows.

The only thing that has changed in our valley is from swords, to those English rifles, now to AK 47. The rest, not many of us have seen a doctor.

This is what we can do to take revenge from people of the tarmac.

**Ramita Navai:** *[INSERT] Hello, it's Ramita Navai here. And thank you for listening to my show. I hope you agree that these stories are not only powerful but important. As I speak to some incredible journalists from around the world about what they've learned from working in dangerous places and how it's changed their perspective it would be great to get your help in sharing their personal stories.*

*So please do spread the word and subscribe, rate, and review the show wherever you get your podcasts. I hope you continue to be inspired by the series. And I look forward to you joining me for more episodes.*

**Ramita Navai:** Shoaib, how did that experience change you from living hour to hour with the knowledge that you're going to get executed? How did it affect you psychologically?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** I think psychologically, I've become a person of the moment rather than the day or the week. So fully enjoy this moment. I'm sitting with Ramita. That water. Do not worry about what happens next and enjoying the current moment is a lot of currentness.

If I can explain it well, it is just do the present moment, because every one of those things is valuable. I know that every minute was like days while people must have been outside fortunate doing something, but not appreciating.

**Ramita Navai:** So it's directly affected the way you live your life? It's directly changed the way you live your life?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Definitely it has.

**Ramita Navai:** Has it changed your perspective on life? Do you look at life differently?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Well, it has not made me more reckless, but it has made me really think about the present time, whether it is a good situation or a bad situation, deal with that. Do not think particularly about fears and worries. Whether another moment is coming or not, so this is the moment. Very presentness I would say.

**Ramita Navai:** And what did it teach you? What did, what have you learned from it? Did it teach you about yourself and about life?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** I think the thing that it has taught me is that humanness, you know, I mean, that connection, that bit of connection with Usman and Kuchi has really

taught me a lot. In a weird way I've really, apart from the commander that I haven't forgiven him, but I have forgiven every single one of our captors.

And in a way...

**Ramita Navai:** How can you forgive them when they were going to kill you?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** I think of that term that they use, I have to confess, that really affected me that we were really people of tarmac. I mean, sometimes you're in your bubble of the 6 million population of Kabul and then in that city and how real life is and what it really means, how much it really affects this unfair balance of power and fair development.

And you have had access to good schools, to hospitals while in the same country so many were deprived. And as a journalist, and perhaps that must have really pushed me further to tell stories from unseen and unheard and under less covered or what we call it - under-reported areas.

**Ramita Navai:** I mean, I think this is quite unusual Shoaib. I think you were in the minority of people here who go through an experience like this, and it sounds like you haven't come out angry, but you've actually come out with more empathy. Would you say that's correct?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Well, that's correct. Apart from the commander that he really was the man behind it and he could have released us and he didn't. But others, I found them just normal human beings like us being in the wrong place, having grown up in a really full deprivation. Deprived of education, deprived of other economical means, and with a bit of some intervention, they could have been different people.

**Ramita Navai:** Did any good come of this experience?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** I think it reaffirmed, I had a belief. I'm still a strong believer in love by the way, love in many sorts of ways. It really reaffirmed that if you really live through truthfulness and reflecting love and appreciating the other side and really listening and reflecting love, this could really help you in many ways.

**Ramita Navai:** But this was a deeply traumatic experience.

What about the scars it left behind?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yes, the scars. Well, for immediate months I had nightmares in black and white, every single detail was there. Obviously it took me months of a lot of therapy and counselling.

**Ramita Navai:** Did you have counselling?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** I did, I tried so many and didn't disappear. So, thanks...

**Ramita Navai:** You mean the trauma didn't disappear?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** The trauma didn't disappear. I tried many options and thanks to a very dear friend, BBC friend, Alan Johnson, who had a similar experience in Palestine in Gaza. So he had known somebody, a counsellor, someone in London who was known to be able to edit your dreams. That really sounds weird. So how before going to bed, what you could do to edit your dreams, that you will not have those nightmares and that editing helped and for a year or so I thought they'd disappeared. But I realised that they really are locked, zipped files folder there each time, like now that I open it, my voice changes and that feeling comes and comes.

I mean I'm controlling myself quite a lot when I talk about it. It immediately takes, it's like a fresh folder when you open it on your phone, when you zip something and you open those files, then they are the same quality photos, but they are zipped. So those things are literally there.

**Ramita Navai:** Are you feeling it now?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yes. **[Shoaib cries]**

I don't know...

**Ramita Navai:** Shoaib, sorry.

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Uh, no, that's fine. I try when I said this, I said, I try not to cry because I don't see anything wrong in crying. I think you need quite a lot of crying.

**Ramita Navai:** I think it's so important to cry Shoaib.

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Because I think their advice would be not to zip it. To talk about it and often when I cry I feel lighter, but it is there.

So that, it's so fresh. I mean, it's gone. The fear is not there. I have survived. But it is so fresh, when you open it and it's good to open it. You're right. And it's the thing that I do not talk about it to my wife, to my kids because when you're the head of the family, you really need to appear firm and strong and or maybe it's your wrong perception.

Maybe because I said a bit of that. I told a bit of that to my son. I said, "you know, in captivity" and I talked about the \$1,500, only one part of that. And they said, "oh, dad, That was the equivalent of three PlayStations. **[Both laugh]** You give them money so easily. You could have said other things, could you not?"

So I mean, why I'm telling this weird example, you really need a good listener. You really should talk about it. It helps and also a bit of you really hides behind it because - sorry - in this profession, we see quite a lot. We really see quite a lot. And we are journalists that being objective is of course a good thing, but it's also our enemy that it's telling me that you're must try to be objective, whatever you see should not affect you, carry on. And that objectiveness also makes you lock things in quite a lot.

**Ramita Navai:** Yes, compartmentalise, shut down, be strong.

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yeah be strong and you have to tell the story, you shouldn't be affected by a story.

Well, you're not a robot. You're a human being as well. You are affected by the story, but I mean, we do try, because of that burden of objectiveness. Just before the interview, I talked about that frontline hospital. I can never forget that little child. I was making a film about a frontline hospital and it was a triage situation.

So many war wounded were brought and I saw a nine year old little boy with splattered, soaked hands with blood. And I left the camera and rushed to help the boy. And he was assuring me. Don't worry, don't worry it's my mother's blood. My mother was shot. And that shocked me because I saw that could be my son.

What if my son says that? And that, so I have forgotten about quite a lot of what I must have seen...

**Ramita Navai:** So there's lots of traumatic moments...

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Moments that they get locked and saved, imprinted on the brain that they can never disappear. So you either have to leave the camera go and help, or because you're there to tell the story, telling the stories could also help so that you always have that balance.

**Ramita Navai:** I mean what strikes me, you telling me, you sharing this story, this incredibly personal traumatic story with us, that you've spoken to me about bits of it before. And you've spoken to me about other traumatic stories before, and every time you do what strikes me is your sense of humour. And it's funny because you can, you make me laugh and you make people laugh, the absurdity of moments and the humour in moments, but that pain is not very far behind it.

How do you manage that pain? And you manage to see the humour in this at the same time?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Well, the humour is my true sense of myself and perhaps that is the shield. It's like a shield that's received so many bullets and it still has to...

**Ramita Navai:** Your protective mechanism.



**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yeah. To stand firm, but it would have scars.

**Ramita Navai:** Yeah, your defence.

**Shoaib Sharifi:** That is your defence. And, I think of the moment, the sense of humour even in that story, I fast forward to the very last day, when they wanted to release us, they said, okay, now we want to release you. And we want to please you before releasing, we want to please you.

And we said, oh my God, what are they going to do? So the sense of humour is with every human being, some lock it away because of the nature of the job requires it. So they are Taliban they need to appear angry. Sometimes they release it because they have these free boundaries.

**Ramita Navai:** How did they please you?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** They left and they said they would come back and collect you to please you. And we started worrying. So each one had their assumptions of what they're going to do and the attitudes of, oh my God, what am I going to do?

Are they going to make us something, do something? What would an armed man in a mountain do? What is the perception of the people of the tarmac? Maybe they have got a total misunderstanding and the other person said I think they're going to rape us. And I said, oh my God, I'm going to kill myself and kill them.

And one of them said, don't kill them. **[Both laugh]** In a way, in a joking meaning. He said...

**Ramita Navai:** Getting back at you.

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yeah. So they took us, they come and they took us a few hours down to another room. This time, there was some mattress that at least it was not a barn. And we were waiting for them to come and please us. They entered the room one after another, this time three or four of them with something big and covered with a cover.

So it appeared like a big RPG, rocket launcher, but big. And they open that. And what is there, I guess what?

**Ramita Navai:** What?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** It's a musical instrument. It's a dutar, so it's a double stringed instrument. And they said, look, this is our secret. And music is forbidden in that valley as well.

But...

**Ramita Navai:** So they were rebellious Talibs?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Well, they said, we thought that you're good people and we feel sorry and this is how we could entertain the people of the tarmac. So one of the guys, Usman, played that and said please do not talk about it outside these doors. **[Shoaib laughs]**

**Ramita Navai:** There's beauty in that. They didn't execute you, instead they played music.

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Yeah. So they perhaps wanted a happy ending to that film.

**Ramita Navai:** Shoaib, you're constantly in the line of fire and in danger in your work, but you keep on doing what you're doing.

Why do you continue?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Well, I really love the profession. I think if a profession that you really are passionate about, you should carry on. But I think, I don't know if I was born and grew up in Britain would I have done that or not, I think the country that I come from still has a lot of stories to tell to the world.

I think perhaps that really makes me think that we have decades of deprivation of our stories to be told. Our true image to really, to be told to the world. And that really makes me go on, that the beauty, that sense of humour, that richness, that I am aware of *that* Afghanistan. I'm saying this - still inside that pile of fire, there's beauty inside that I really have to go and tell that story. And also how much the people of the world really should feel responsible that those beautiful humans in Afghanistan, now unfortunately one-third of them, will be suffering from starvation, really need assistance. And it's a joint, we are one world, and there's a joint responsibility that if those people are really helped, they could be successful people like anybody else in that neighbourhood that they would have been in. So that perhaps drives me, that for the richness of my country, I should carry on. It's the right profession to be there and tell the stories.

**Ramita Navai:** If there's one piece of wisdom you've learned from doing this job and facing death and danger in the way that you have, and you do, what is it?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** I think that if you really wish high, you think high or for something then you can achieve it. I would say this for teenagers, for that Shoaib who was 16-year-old and was listening to the BBC imitating just for the accent.

I've been listening and listening to the BBC World. If I fast forward that 20 years down the line, in 2018 and '19, I happened to be also reporting for the English service of the BBC. And one day Ramita I was in a car listening to the car radio BBC world. And I heard the presenter said our reporter Shoaib Sharifi reports from Kabul.

And I was shocked. I was jolted. I really asked the driver, I want to go home. I went and sat in front of my mom. I hadn't noticed that, that the BBC I was recording to imitate as a 16-year-old, I would never ever thought that my voice would come from the same speaker one day and it went so unnoticed until that moment triggered that.

And I told the story to my mother. That mother, yes thank you. Thank whoever I would say. I just noticed today that when I was a teenager I was listening to that radio and from that speaker many times my voice must have come out and I didn't notice. But at that point I noticed that. If you really are tenacious and really want anything, work for it, you would really achieve it.

**Ramita Navai:** And what about the experience of facing death? What's the one piece of wisdom you've taken from that?

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Love your family members every single moment, every single moment. Do not leave it at 'okay'. Today, I'm sad. Tomorrow we will be happy. So let's leave a few days of sadness. I would say every moment really counts.

Just live it with love. Full love.

**Ramita Navai:** Shoaib, that's a beautiful message to end on. Thank you so much for sharing your story with us.

**Shoaib Sharifi:** Thank you.

**Ramita Navai:** To learn more about Shoaib's work, I suggest watching the outstanding documentary he produced and co-directed called *My Childhood, My Country: 20 years in Afghanistan*. It's a remarkable piece of work filmed over two decades as Shoaib documents the life of a boy called Mir while charting the evolution of his country since 9/11. You can watch it on ITV online.

Thank you for listening to this episode of **The Line of Fire**. If you'd like to follow me, my Twitter handle is at @RamitaNavai.

And if you've enjoyed this episode, review, and subscribe. And tell your friends they can find us wherever they get their podcasts.

Until next time.

**The Line of Fire** is a podcast from *Aurra Studios*.

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