

JERSEY DEVIL PRESS

**Special Issue:
International Human Rights Day 2012**

JERSEY DEVIL PRESS

Special Issue:
International Human Rights Day
2012

ISSN 2152-2162

Online Editor: Mike Sweeney
Production Editor: Samuel Snoek-Brown
Associate Editor: Laura Garrison
Founding Editor/Publisher: Eirik Gumeny

All stories and other contributions are copyrighted to their respective authors
unless otherwise noted.

www.jerseydevilpress.com

Table of Contents:

Editor’s Note	3
How I Upstaged Anne Frank, Robert Buswell	5

Editor's Note:

December 10th is International Human Rights Day and we're publishing a special story in its honor.

No, *Jersey Devil Press* has not gone overtly political. (And hopefully never will)

So why are we publishing this story? Three reasons.

First, one of our missions at JDP is to publish stuff that deserves to be published that a lot of other people won't touch. We like being the indie lit community's Isle of Misfit Toys. Sometimes that means publishing a novella about poo-eating aliens. Sometimes it's a story about peeing on a magical unicorn. And sometimes, it's something a lot, lot darker.

Second, we think we have a thoughtful readership that can handle this story, that can see why we had to publish this incredibly dark piece of satire once it was submitted to us.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, we're publishing this because it's about something truly awful that actually happened to a real person. As we weighed the pros and cons of publishing this, that's the thing that kept coming up: the chance to give a voice – even a satirical one – to a woman who died young and horribly.

And that's why we decided to publish this story even though it violates many of our guidelines and particularly the one about rape. (We probably should say TRIGGER WARNING, by way of preface.)

It's not an easy read, by any means, but we do think it's a worthwhile one.

With all that said, we present Robert Buswell's "How I Upstaged Anne Frank."

— Mike Sweeney

How I Upstaged Anne Frank

Robert Buswell

My name is Aisha Ibrahim Duhulow. I am a thirteen-year-old Muslim girl from Somalia, a country known mainly for our most profitable export: pirate jokes. I'm also the girl who beat Anne Frank at her own game. This is the story of how I wasted my victory with one simple error.

I don't suppose I was any different than any other third-world girl, wearing colorful 1970s thrift store dresses and wiping flies from my eyes, until the day in school when we began reading Anne Frank's diary. Anne begins her book by whining and carrying on about being stuck in some attic and she continues moping until the book's completion. That may not seem the perfect recipe for quality literature to you or I, but she turned it into a bestseller. Her marketing genius for this book, the way she got her name out there, was to die in a concentration camp surrounded by Nazis.

Anne Frank wasn't killed by Nazis, though. She didn't want a Nazi to actually kill her, because they have cold hands, so she chose instead to die of typhus. But she knew she'd be remembered as the girl that Nazis killed. Her strategy was obviously successful because her diary is read and loved worldwide, which may not have been the case sans Nazi typhus.

After finishing Anne's book I contemplated on the beach here in Kismayo. Kismayo, by the way, is not a sandwich spread. It is a Somali city of 70,000 where I live. Anyway, I realized that Anne's strategy for success as an author was replicable. *Aisha*, I asked myself, *do you think you could beat Anne Frank's story? Could you become a best-selling author like Anne Frank, only better?*

I don't know why, but the idea really grabbed me. Anne Frank died forever ago and no one has beaten her since. Little girls don't

even attempt it. I mean *c'mon*, how can you top being killed by Nazis? So we dream of being astronauts, veterinarians, or speed metal drummers, not tragic heroine authors. *Aisha*, I told myself, *top Anne Frank's story and your book will outsell the Quran itself*. You may call me foolish, but it seemed like an awesome idea at the time.

There on the beach I began plotting my scheme. First I decided that I'd have to die. When you're elderly this may not seem like a big deal. But to me, at eleven years old, dying was a hard choice to make. I couldn't figure any way around it, though. You really can't top Anne Frank without dying. *Ah well, so be it*, I thought. Our life expectancy here is less than fifty years, so it's not like I was ever going to watch my grandchildren grow up.

But I had no Nazis handy. Nazis are in short supply these days, especially here. Lacking Nazis, I decided I'd really have to go over the top with my death and to cement my victory I'd need some tragedy in my life before I died. It's like Christ. If he had lived happily right up until the moment he clambered up onto the timber and was crucified, would anyone have cared? No, he had to get some persecution, a whipping, and a spiked crown in there just to make sure. And his book did quite well. But what kind of tragedy could I get into? And then it hit me.

Circumcision. I ran home right then and asked my parents to cut off my clitoris. They looked at me as though I had suddenly brought home effective government, clean water, and an adequate food supply. And they told me no. *You've just gotta do it*, I told them. *It's itchy and it hurts when I pee*. Lies, of course. I was actually rather attached to my clitoris, but fame-seekers must suffer fame's cost.

I wouldn't have asked them to cut me if I'd planned on living long enough to have sex with someone I cared for, but I had plans far greater than such common things as love. Yet I found my parents very consistent in their resistance to the idea. *Not today, Aisha*, they'd say, *we must go shopping. We can trim that clitoris next week, okay Honey?* I would've done it myself, but the act would take

on a different meaning then. Little girls with parent-mutilated genitals are tragic heroines; little girls who cut off their own genitals are just crazy. If I'd lived in Cameroon, I could've had my breasts ironed. They take heated stones and pummel your growing breasts so they won't grow. It's at least semi-tragic, but I didn't live in Cameroon.

I finally wore them down. It took six months of me grouching around about how much I hated my clitoris. *Oh, this nasty thing is really bugging me today*, I'd groan as I sat down to breakfast. *Sure would be in a better mood if someone could snip it with a pair of rusty scissors*. I finally achieved success when I told my mom that if she didn't slice this monstrosity off my body *right now*, then I was going to start using it. I asked her if she wanted to raise a grandchild and she started fishing around in the burlap bag for her dullest pair of rusty scissors.

Yeah, it hurt. If we were wealthier we could've afforded a local anesthetic, but those drugs are so expensive. Don't blame us; blame the tiny percentage of people in the world sitting on most of the world's wealth. I couldn't sit comfortably for a week and it wasn't until my fifth period that I saw that much blood oozing from between my legs again. But I made it through. Anne Frank died with her clitoris so I was already one step ahead. I moved on to the next step in my plan.

Rape. Anne Frank was never raped, or at least it was never recorded. But I couldn't discount the possibility that evidence of her rape would be uncovered in the future. That would be her style. I could just hear her: *Oh, were you raped, Aisha? So was I, but I was raped by a Nazi*. I knew I could easily get ahead here because I had the element of surprise. I considered many options, several too disturbing to mention, but I finally settled on gang-rape. I wasn't going to be raped by just one person, nor by two, but by three people. Eat your heart out, Anne Frank.

It's not as easy to get raped as you might imagine. You've gotta be persistent. You can approach the toughest-looking trio of guys you can find late at night, lift your skirt just a bit, and ask, *Is anyone inclined to rape me?* Use your sexiest voice and you'll probably still get nothing but a slap in the face and an order to go home to your mommy. I think it was tougher for me because I was only thirteen when I got my raping. Most guys frown on raping girls in their early teens. Fortunately, I was able to find three men who didn't.

Now rape by moonlight with a polite and handsome stranger isn't necessarily the end of the world. I wouldn't wish rape on anyone, having been there. But if you ever plan on getting raped, heed my advice: go with just one person, preferably a handsome and polite stranger, and take your rape in a grassy meadow under moonlight. I got raped in a dirty alleyway by three soldiers on a night lit by nothing but the occasional glow of their cigarettes. The cobblestones left bruises on my lower back. Don't do it that way. Seriously, it takes all the fun out of the experience.

I'm not going to bore you with the details of my rape. Suffice to say I bled a lot (again) and it hurt. Well, really it only hurt badly the first time. The second and third times I was kind of numb down there. I don't want to sound like a wimp, but I think I may have cried a little. I mean you can prepare yourself for a raping, psych yourself up, but reality always seems to be worse than your expectations. It always hurts more than you'd anticipated. And if you've allowed yourself to hope that your rape might be something special, something towards the pleasant side of awful, you're in for a big letdown. Rape is dirty. I washed myself over and over again in the ocean afterwards. But I made it through.

Anne Frank died at fifteen, so I figured I'd need to kick the bucket a bit sooner. *Why not thirteen*, I asked myself. *Why not now?* After the gang-rape, I wasn't feeling much like living anyway. What had seemed like such a fantastic idea on the Indian Ocean beach at eleven years old now seemed more than a little unwise. But they don't call me Aisha the Persistent for nothing. I made a

plan, I was committed to it, and I had one last step to go before it was completed.

Death. Anne Frank's death wasn't very tragic. She probably died delirious or in her sleep. That was easy enough to beat. I would need to be killed, preferably violently, while fully aware of what was happening. Also, Anne died on some miserable cot with no one watching. I wanted my death to be public, a big event. I wanted a crowd to attend because it makes for better press when people turn out to watch you die. I had just begun casting around unsuccessfully for ideas when death presented its own unique opportunity.

My parents were unhappy with my rape. You'd think most parents would be supportive of their daughter's plan to get famous, but not my parents. They reported my rape to the al-Shabaab militia which controls Kismayo, so then I had to go down and talk to the militia. They told me the whole gang-rape thing was deplorable and that the perpetrators would be swiftly brought to justice. And that's when I got my best idea ever. *Gentlemen*, I said, *I have committed adultery under Sharia law and I wish for the punishment for adultery to be imposed*. The punishment for adultery, of course, is death by stoning.

They said that it would never happen. They called me foolish. They demanded that I give up the descriptions of my rapists (which I did). But they don't call me Aisha the Steadfast for nothing. I refused to say anything further except that I was a criminal and I must die. I told them I was happy with the punishment under Islamic law. I said, *My skull is too solid. Soften it some with rocks, will ya?*

Had I taken more time to consider other options, I wouldn't have chosen death by stoning. Yeah, it fit my plans perfectly, the innocent raped child punished for that rape by stoning. Anne would be so envious if she could see me now. But stoning is not a particularly pleasant death. First they bury you up to your neck in

a hole and then they throw rocks at your head until you are dead from it. But they don't pick rocks big enough to kill you, just big enough to injure you. The repetition of rock after rock is what eventually does you in. And stoning doesn't make for good post-mortem pictures either, but it was convenient so I went with it.

I really don't know how I ever convinced them to stone me to death for my own rape. No sane group of people would ever stone a child to death for being raped. But they don't call me Aisha the Persuasive for nothing. If I hadn't chosen to author a book I would've had an excellent future in politics or law. At first, when they were beginning to sway on the issue, they tossed around the idea that I would be taken out back and a single large rock dropped on my head. *Oh no, not for me*, I said. *I want a public execution the old-fashioned way.* When the authorities heard this, they rent their hair, tore their beards, and performed several steps of a pop music line dance. *No, Aisha, it is too much*, they told me. *It would be political suicide to stone you in public. The whole world would be angry with us.*

Look, we're in a third-world country here, I said. *Hardly anyone will even notice. Amnesty International might mention it in passing, but then I'll be forgotten. Do you think the world really cares about us? Sure, they send their pennies to us kids in Africa, but they don't really give a shit. They keep the dollars for themselves.* I was lying, of course, because I hoped the whole world would notice, but the authorities didn't know that. They conceded my point and eventually granted me my public execution.

Since I now had an audience, I had to plan my performance. I didn't want to overdo it, but how can you overdo the reluctance to be stoned to death? I decided to play this one for all it was worth. So when they drag me, kicking and screaming, into the stadium in a few minutes, I will be shouting things like, *I'm not going!* and *Don't kill me! Don't kill me!* And I'll cry bunches, as much as I can. Well, not as much as I can. I'll need to save a few tears for when they're actually bashing in my skull slowly with rocks.

And it is here, at the end, when I realize I've made a crucial mistake. Now I have come to my undoing, the one critically important part of my plan that I omitted: I neglected to finish my book! I put so much work into promotion that I haven't finished the product I'm promoting. And now it's too late. I'm kicking myself so hard right now. I asked for pen and paper and I'm telling my story as a warning to young girls everywhere. If you want to beat Anne Frank, don't ever, *ever* neglect to finish your book first.

I've started on my book, but with all the promotional work I've been doing these last two years I had to keep postponing its completion. I thought I'd have a little more time before I died, like Anne did, to sit in some quiet place and reflect. Even when I decided to do the whole death-by-stoning scene, I figured I'd have a few months in prison to polish up and complete my book. I guess that's not going to happen.

I feel sick. It's too late to back out. These guys have guns and they won't let me renege. I asked, *What do y'all think about just cancelling and trying again in about six months to a year when my book is finished?* They laughed. *No, Aisha, this is what you wanted. There are a thousand people in that stadium waiting for you. We have brought in a whole truckload of stones. Don't flake out now, kiddo.* I keep hoping someone will ride up in a big military tank and save me. I'd even settle for someone in a Geo Metro, so long as it were bulletproof. Screw fame, since I'm not going to get it without a book. I just want out. I feel sick.

Yeah, I beat Anne Frank. My story is way better than hers. But I think she beat me too, because everyone knows her name. Name recognition is a big selling point for books and Anne Frank has that in spades. You've never heard of me. Without a book, I fear you never will. It's a beautiful Monday afternoon in late October and I'm dying today. And you've never heard of me. Consider this a cautionary tale. If you're planning a flashy book promotion, then for the love of all that is holy *finish the book first*.

I keep pleading with Allah or whoever is out there to let me die quickly. That, or at least let an uncommonly large stone knock me out early. Considering how generous Allah has been lately, I'm not expecting much. I keep asking the authorities here if they've noticed any strangers in shining armor lurking around out there in the crowd. *We've seen no persons matching that description*, they say.

If I am remembered, I hope it will not be as the girl in a hole with her nose broken, her lips burst open, her eyes blackened, her ears bruised and misshapen, and her entire head coated in a mask of blood. I'd rather be remembered as Aisha, the playful girl who loved life and had an awesome sense of humor. And maybe also as Aisha, the girl who could've been famous if she'd finished her book.

And now they're telling me it's time to go. The stage is set and the audience grows impatient. The star must perform. I will remember the next thirty minutes for the rest of my life.

Wish me luck.

Author's Note: *This is and should be considered a work of fiction, but it is based on fact. Amnesty International reports from multiple sources that on October 27th, 2008, 13-year-old Aisha Ibrahim Duhulow was stoned to death in the Somali city of Kismayo by 50 men in front of about 1,000 spectators. She was stoned to death for adultery, a crime she committed by being raped by three men. Her rapists were never arrested. At one point in the stoning, nurses were instructed to check if she was still alive. They removed her from the hole and found that she was still alive, so she was reburied and the stoning continued. This information is paraphrased from Amnesty International's website and a report by BBC News.*

There is no evidence that Aisha ever experienced genital mutilation. However, a 2001 report by the U.S. Department of State, which cites UNICEF, the Ministry of Health, and CARE International, says, "Virtually all Somali women are subjected to one of these procedures." Estimates of the prevalence of genital mutilation in Somalia, according to the report, range from 90 to 100 percent of women.

Robert Buswell's fiction has been published in *In Between Altered States* and *Jersey Devil Press*. He supports the worldwide struggle for basic human rights and is strongly opposed to any person or institution seeking to curtail individual liberties.

