



An eye-opening nature experience in my parents' village

By Farwa Mohsin



Farwa Mohsin, one of six winners of Connecticut Sea Grant's diverse youth scholarship. Photo: Judy Benson.

I never expected to move to my parents' homeland, Pakistan, at age 11, but that's exactly what my mom, siblings, and I did. My father stayed behind because leaving his job wasn't an option due to financial responsibilities. My parents immigrated to America in 1997, and my siblings and I were born and raised in America. The move was a sudden choice made by my parents so my siblings and I could reconnect with family, and most importantly the village in which my parents lived.

The move was difficult, but living in Pakistan for a year is an experience that stays with me as a fond memory. It profoundly reshaped my relationship with nature, as well as my awareness of the impacts of climate change.

My parents were raised in a small village in Punjab, a province in Pakistan. They have told me many stories of how they grew up in Punjab, living close to nature. My dad lived in a mud house, which kept the house cool when the weather was hot and warm when it was cold. He also described how my grandmother would often plaster the walls with cow manure to keep the house walls strong. When I heard this as a child, I wasn't too keen about moving to Pakistan. But our family house there was no longer made of mud. A well-built, two-story modern one had replaced it. So, we had a comfortable home in Pakistan, but there were many instances when we had to get used to the sudden change of environment.

Since we lived in a small village, walking was our main means of transportation. We moved to Pakistan in mid-summer, so the heat was unbearable, sometimes going over 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Walking in such heat would leave us sweating and fanning ourselves. Despite this, the walks were enjoyable because we passed plowed open wheat fields, the greenery of the grass and trees, and the open blue sky surrounding the fields. The fields did not always exude the most pleasant

smells, but the heavenly scenery made up for it. The open fields were even more magnificent when the sun set and the sky above us intensified all the reds, oranges, and yellows of the sunset. The walks through the village became a delightful habit.

Although the walks past the fields were an enjoyable outdoor experience, walks in the alleyways were not. The alleys had open drainage where dirty wastewater flowed and litter was dumped. The drains ran alongside both sides of the alleyway, making walking difficult as we tried to navigate with the dread of accidentally slipping into the open gutter. But this was not the only difficult obstacle to overcome walking through our village.

As our stay progressed, the weather grew cooler. Instead of the searing heat of the sun, there were more rainy days. The rainy days had both benefits and drawbacks. With the rain came strong winds that swayed the palm trees as the days began. Overhead, the clouds would gather in the sky, ready to release raindrops. Then came the drizzle, feeling cool and calming on our skin. Eventually, it would start to pour, sending us inside. The rain was lovely to watch from the windows, but the aftereffects were not.

Facing Page: In September 2022, Mukesh, 11, stands outside his house in Rajar village in the Mirpur Khas District of the Sindh Province in Pakistan, while all the surrounding area is filled with floodwaters. Pakistan endured severe monsoon weather in 2022, with rainfall 67% above normal levels. © UNICEF/UN0698662/Zaidi

From the window, I saw some of the neighboring kids jumping and running barefoot in the rain in the alley. They were enjoying the rainy weather to its fullest, not caring that their feet were getting muddy or that they were getting drenched. I wanted to be as carefree as the kids playing outside in the rain, so I asked my mom if I could join them. However, my mom refused, telling me that eventually, the rainwater would accumulate and flood the alleyways. As the alleyways started to flood, the water rose up to the kids' knees, and they retreated to their homes. The wastewater of the open drainage system and the rainwater were now mixed as the water kept rising, creating a flooding mess. With the alleyways flooded, there was no way to go outside the house without being submerged waist deep in floodwater.

When the rain stopped and the flooding subsided, a muddy mess was left behind from the dirt roads. The mud stuck to the tires of all the vehicles driving through, creating a muddy splash as they passed. While walking, mud stuck to our shoes, and the bottoms of our trousers became soiled with muddy splash marks. Although the aftereffects of the rain certainly created a mud-spattered mess, we were still able to maneuver through our days. After all, we had things to do, so wherever there was a huge puddle of water or a small muddy pit, we would jump over it and prepare for the next obstacle ahead. It wasn't the most comfortable of environments, but it gave me a new perspective. While the extreme heat and flooding I witnessed have long been a part of life in Pakistan, both conditions are becoming more intense and more frequent due to climate change, according to the United Nations Development Programme.

My whole life I had lived in America, so I was accustomed to the environment, nature, and climate in Connecticut where I lived. The move to Pakistan allowed me to have a new experience with nature that had some similarities to America, but was unique in many ways. While I was living in America, I was a homebody who only went outside to play sometimes. In Pakistan, I was always out and about. I experienced nature and climate hand-in-hand as I walked around and explored my village. I came to appreciate how mesmerizing and beautiful nature can be once you spend more time in it, but it can also be harsh, mostly due to the changing climate. I have experienced the changing environment not only in Pakistan through the intensifying heat and

flooding rains, but also in America through the destructive hurricanes, specifically Superstorm Sandy. We lost power for days, due to a downed power line, and the harsh winds and pouring rain didn't help, which caused disarray in our daily lives. Superstorm Sandy was certainly a destructive force of climate change.

I believe that as we admire nature around us, we should take note of how the climate is changing. I also believe in advocating and working toward a cleaner environment to help our climate. Acknowledging progress is also an important way to maintain hope. For example, my village in Pakistan now employs cleaners who pick up litter in the gutters and roads daily. We all should enjoy and love nature, but to do this we must also recognize the changes our climate is going through so we can make the necessary changes in our actions.



In September 2022, children play in floodwaters in Umerkot District, Sindh Province, Pakistan. © UNICEF/UN0698963/Zaidi