

A Man of Conscience: Lee Dittman Shapiro (1949-1987)

Victoria Clevenger
May 16, 2018



Lee Shapiro with Miskito Indian Children in Nicaragua

Not long after Lee Shapiro and his fellow filmmaker Jim Lindelof were killed in Afghanistan in an ambush of their party by helicopter gunships, and before anyone knew what had happened, this article was published in Today's World magazine as a testimony to Lee's work and character. Now, 30 years later, we are publishing it again (plus a link to the UTS Alumni memorial page, at the end) to remind ourselves that some things can only be accomplished with courage and self-sacrifice.

During his spring visit to the United States this year, film maker Lee Shapiro told his long-time friend, Peter Gogan, that the Soviets were keeping close tabs

on news correspondents in Peshawar, the "capital" of the Afghan exile community in Pakistan. He said that "it is very likely that my team and I have been marked" for assassination. Lee and his sound man James Lindelof, a paramedic from California, were reported to have been killed October 11 or 12 during an ambush (or possibly a bombing) by Afghan and/or Soviet troops northwest of Kabul. The two had been working to "bring to viewers in the West an accurate, filmed portrait of the suffering of the Afghan people," explained Ellen Hori, Lee's assistant in America.

Lee Shapiro joined the Unification Church on June 24, 1974, in Tulsa, Oklahoma. A deeply caring person, he had at first planned to be a psychiatrist. While in medical school, he had a deep experience watching an old Russian silent film. Shortly thereafter, he transferred to the London School of Film. After studying there for a year, he returned to America, where he became a member of the church. He attended the Unification Theological Seminary from 1976-78, and was then asked to pioneer Ocean Church. He made a documentary film called "Ocean Challenge" (1980) and was soon called to make films for various other church departments and organizations within the movement including CAUSA International, which took him to Latin America.

When he witnessed the plight of the Miskito Indians under the Nicaraguan Marxist regime, he felt moved to make a film about the suffering of this brave people. The result, "Nicaragua Was Our Home;" was broadcast nationally by the Public Broadcasting Station and received critical acclaim from the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, and TV Guide. For its excellence, the film also received the CINE Golden Eagle Award and the Angel Award. After seeing the film in November 1985, President Reagan called Lee "a man of conscience" and said, "Your work...is motivated not only by an artist's desire to tell the story and tell it well, but also by your hatred of injustice and your compassion for its victims."

Linda Shapiro's testimony

Lee's wife, Linda Krout Shapiro, a frontline member of CARP to whom he was blessed in 1982, shares:

When we were matched, the word 'joy' came immediately into my mind. Lee always wants to make people laugh and feel happy, although internally he is very serious and dedicated. He is righteous, pure-hearted, and disciplined, and always puts his mission for God and True Parents first.

In pioneering the area of film for God and True Parents, he often had to be very strong to get his ideas across. He felt desperate to be able to use his ability to try to help those people oppressed by totalitarianism. He and I both felt that God had given him his film-making mission. He always did a seven-day fast before starting a major film and went way beyond himself for the sake of each of his films.

Because there was so little coverage of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, Lee wanted to get into the heart of the country and bring this tragedy to the world. Before he went, he talked personally with Father

for two or three hours, and Father gave him his blessing. I think Father could sense that Lee was gladly willing to give his entire self, even his life, for this mission.



Lee and Linda Shapiro

Lee hoped that the film would move the public toward action that could help end the Afghan people's suffering. Father said that Satan wanted to block the making of this film because he knew the impact the movie could have. Father has requested that the documentary project be completed by Lee's staff.

Lee once told me that if he were to die, the best way would be on the front line with the people he was trying to serve. Neither he nor I want others to cry for us, but rather for the people in Afghanistan and Nicaragua, and all those who are miserably suffering under the evils of communism.

Two days before I heard the news, I had prayed strongly to God, 'I want to grow more. Please put me through the most difficult situation. I felt Heung Jin Nim helped prepare me for the news about Lee

because right before I heard it, I had a beautiful dream of Lee, in which he hugged me gently with pure love. Of course I was profoundly shocked by the report, and I repented deeply for not supporting him enough. But I am also comforted by knowing that members are praying for him, and that I can help his work continue here.'

Michael Jenkins' Testimony

Michael Jenkins attended UTS with Lee and offers the following testimony:

Our friendship is one of the most rewarding and endearing relationships of my life. Lee is a very jovial and stable person. He has that rare gift of being able to find a joyful outlook on every activity he is engaged in. His main focus is always on people and how to help brothers and sisters find fulfillment.

Lee loves God very deeply. I remember him telling me how grateful he was to have such a strong and faithful wife. He isn't a person to think that his problems are due to other people or the system, but instead he takes responsibility for his own circumstances. He truly believes that together with God, he is master of his own destiny. Because, I believe, of his willingness to cooperate with his central figures, he is trusted by God and Father.

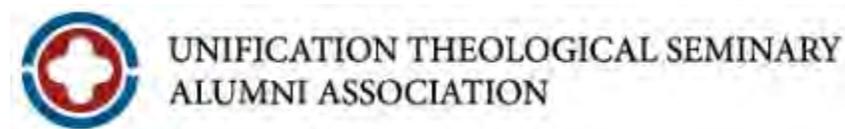
In Nicaragua, a new side of Lee Shapiro emerged that none of us had seen before: He was willing to live in the jungle and even starve in order to bring the Miskito Indians' situation to the attention of the free world. When he returned, I could see that his drive and his commitment to filmmaking was now turned towards the saving of people and nations. There was a fearlessness about this. We knew he'd lived in great danger, but he never referred to it.

The purity of his heart as I spoke with him over our last few meetings was so outstanding that it's not a surprise to me that his sacrifice has become a world event. His willingness to risk his life for the sake of humankind truly exemplifies the noble tradition of our True Parents.

[Please click here for more information, including research into the circumstances of Lee Shapiro's death.](#)

In Memoriam: Lee Shapiro -- October 9th 1987

Robin Graham
October 4, 2012



Some links to pages and articles about Lee Shapiro

A Facebook page started by Lee and Linda's daughter Lily: [In Memory of Lee Dittman Shapiro](#)

Links to articles on [tparents.org](#)

[Lee Dittman Shapiro](#)

[In Honor of Our Brother Lee Shapiro](#)

[Lee Shapiro killed in Afghanistan](#)



Lee and Linda Shapiro

Here is an updated report (2008) from Erwin Franzen [Lee Shapiro](#)

The following is a report I wrote from Islamabad, Pakistan on 10 December 1987 regarding the deaths of Lee Shapiro and Jim Lindelof in Afghanistan. I hope it's not too long for all of you but some of you have expressed interest in getting it, so I felt I should share it with the group as a whole. Anything enclosed in this type of parentheses {...} was added by me as I retyped the report today. (October 2008).

Erwin Franzen

... About mid-November {1987}, U.C. members Carmen Zuniga and Hans Uhlening (alias Jordan) came to try to get mujahidin to find the bodies of Lee Shapiro and Jim Lindelof in Afghanistan, and to take charge of a lot of money and equipment that Lee had left behind here {in the house where I stayed}. They also wanted to find out details about the killings and to do some filming in refugee camps to add to the footage that Lee shot in Afghanistan last winter -- trying to complete his film in some way. They were hoping to film an eyewitness testimony by Abdul Malik, Lee's interpreter who escaped from the Soviet ambush. As they had a lot of equipment, I took them to Peshawar in Masashi's car and during the next two weeks we used the car very much {with Hans doing the driving} -- saving a large amount of money because it would have been much more costly to rent a car. I was hoping to visit some refugee camps with government permission, but it turned out that I would have had to take a government official with me and to rent a jeep, all at my expense, in order to visit the most interesting places (not the "show" camps where everybody goes and that are always shown to visiting foreign dignitaries). So I stayed in Peshawar with

Carmen and Hans (not in the same hotel, though; I paid about \$1.15 a night at a "hippie" hotel [where a lot of people smoke dope openly -- I didn't join them though] whereas they stayed at a hotel for \$ 12 a night each) and went with them to many places including the U.S. consulate, offices of the Hezb-e Islami "Hekmatyar" mujaheddin group that had taken Lee to Afghanistan, and the Afghan Media Resource Center, AMRC {native Afghan reporters trained and funded by Boston University}. AMRC sent a team to Afghanistan to find out more about where Lee was buried and, independently, Aziz Sadat, an Afghan-American who is close to the U.C. in Seattle {Matthew Morrison's contact, I believe} and who had taken Lee on his first trip to Afghanistan last winter, was going to try to find the bodies of the two Americans somewhere west of Kabul.



Carmen and Hans also saw Abdul Malik, the interpreter who was slightly wounded in the leg during the ambush. Malik had already talked to two American consular officials for 3 hours when Carmen and Hans saw him on 22 November. I listened to a tape recording of his testimony later. Apparently, the mujaheddin caravan that Lee and Jim joined (entering Afghanistan about mid-May) was ambushed in Logar Province south of Kabul in early June by helicopter gunships. Around 12-15 mujaheddin were killed and several horses died, and about half of the 120-or-so reels of unexposed Super-16 film was lost. The remainder of the caravan continued its trek north past Kabul and filmed in several provinces including Kunduz and Takhar along the Amu Darya {Oxus} River border with the Soviet Union, then came south through Baghlan Province. They got some interesting footage including the shooting down of a MiG-23. They filmed a bit around the Soviets' big air base at Bagram north of Kabul, but apparently they were discovered and they had to move around a lot, to avoid being captured (I heard only bits and pieces

of this particular part of the tape, because Aziz was pressing the recorder to his ear). Lee had originally planned to get back to Pakistan via {the} northern {part of} Kunar Province to Chitral, which would mean crossing several high passes including at least one over 5,000 metres. But for some reason this plan was changed (there are several valid reasons including the fact that by early October there was already a lot of snow on some {actually, all} of these passes {at that time a snow storm blew through the area and caused havoc in the Hinukush and Hindu Raj ranges as well as the Indus Kohistan}), and it was decided to go west and then south past Kabul. It seems that Lee never managed to realize his dangerous plan to switch from Hezb-e Islami to Jamiat-e Islami, the party of the famed mujaheddin commander Ahmadshah Masood, while inside Afghanistan. He had been warned about this by several people including Masashi.

On the fateful day, 9 October (not 11 October as initially reported), the caravan was passing through the Sanglakh Valley in the northeastern corner of Wardak Province, west by northwest of Kabul, with Jim sitting on the last of the horses. He was sick with hepatitis. There were about 25 mujaheddin with the group and several horses carrying equipment, according to Malik. Around 11 o'clock in the morning, 4 helicopter gunships suddenly appeared in the sky (they must have risen from behind a ridge -- which almost certainly means that the pilots had precise information on the whereabouts of the caravan) and started firing small rockets at the caravan. One of the first rockets hit Jim in the abdomen and virtually cut him in two. He was dead and his horse wounded. Malik said he shouted for Lee to get away from the horses. At first Lee ran but then he stopped and turned back, saying: "The camera... the camera..." Within seconds, before he made it back to the horse that was carrying his \$ 50,000 camera, his leg was cut off below the knee by a rocket (Malik said nothing about the rockets exploding -- but the helicopters must have used machine-guns as well) and he lay there bleeding. Several of the mujaheddin were wounded and one was killed, but the rest took cover nearby and started shooting at the helicopters (probably Mi-24s {NATO name "Hind"}). Malik was hit in the leg but it was only a flesh wound. Then two of the helicopters landed only about 100 metres away (this is somewhat surprising, because I don't think they would come that close and land -- unless they knew for a fact that the mujaheddin were not carrying any RPGs {rocket-propelled grenade launchers -- bazookas}; the Soviets know very well that an RPG-7 can blow any slow-flying or landing helicopter to smithereens at that distance {actually, if I remember correctly it's pretty hard to get a good aim with the RPG-7 when you're under fire, so perhaps the Soviets could feel relatively safe even if they didn't know these mujaheddin weren't carrying any) and 14-16 Soviet soldiers came out, heading straight for the horses. The other two gunships circled overhead and continued to fire at the mujaheddin. Some of the soldiers on the ground fired as well while the others took all of the equipment from the horses and loaded it into the choppers. Then one soldier walked up to Lee, put his gun on his chest and fired twice. One mujahed was also finished off in this way. Malik also said the soldiers took everything they could find from the pockets of the dead and dying. Then they left.

Malik returned to the scene to look after Lee, who was still struggling, blood coming out of his mouth. Lee took another three hours to die.

Later, a local mujahidin commander offered to take the bodies and bury them in a different place, and Malik agreed (he said they were taken to Siakhak but Aziz said after he returned from his trip that they were buried in an area with many graves on the way to Siakhak, which is a big bazaar controlled by a pro-Iranian mujahidin). Malik says he later went to Ghazni Province to see his family (he got married shortly before they started the trip) and to recover from his injury. It is almost certain that Hezb-e Islami in Peshawar knew about the incident within a few days of 9 October, through clandestine radio transmission from a major mujaheddin base not far away. But since they had few details they did not announce the news until 27 October. In the meantime there was a big reshuffle in the political committee, the party's top leadership. Malik did not show up in Peshawar until 22 November, and it is possible the party was hiding him until then to let some grass grow over the affair -- which is extremely embarrassing for Hezb-e Islami and came only a short time after a bomb attack in Peshawar that was an apparent attempt to assassinate its leader, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (he escaped with barely a scratch). Malik says he believes the Soviets did not know that two Americans were with the caravan that they attacked. He thinks the Soviets would have tried to capture them alive if they had known from the start. But the Soviets must have been very well informed. They would not have landed nearby unless they knew the group did not carry RPGs. And they must have known a lot about the movements of the group. This information must have come either from spies, possibly even people within Hezb-e Islami itself who betrayed Lee and Jim, or from high-altitude spotter planes that might have tracked the caravan down and somehow managed to remain unnoticed. Several people in Peshawar told me they felt that Lee and Jim -- especially Jim, who, even though he had already been to the Panjshir Valley in 1985, appeared to have been blissfully ignorant about the dangers of telling too many people in spy-infested Peshawar about their plans -- were in some ways too conspicuous and not circumspect enough about what kind of Afghans they were dealing with. Masood Khalili, in charge of information and media relations at Jamiat-e Islami, told me he warned Lee that too many people knew about his plans. Lee wanted Khalili to arrange the trip to Afghanistan for him so that he could meet Ahmadshah Masood. But Khalili was concerned about security and he advised Lee to go on a short trip to the border areas first, then come back to Peshawar and make a new plan that would be known to nobody but the most trusted people. However, Lee was in a hurry, and he decided to go with Hezb-e Islami and to try to switch parties inside Afghanistan so that he could meet Ahmadshah Masood. True Father himself had approved a \$ 500,000 budget for Lee's film.

There are many questions about the whole thing. Aziz returned from Logar Province yesterday, empty-handed. Carmen had given him \$ 3,000 for the trip, to buy horses, etc. I ran into him here {at Islamabad/Rawalpindi airport} yesterday, and tonight he came to see us here at the house. Tomorrow he wants to go to Peshawar to tell Carmen about his trip. He came here first, he said, because his caravan was attacked twice by helicopters and he lost the horses and most of his equipment, and he says he was covered with yellow spots and was feeling sick -- so he got a checkup at a hospital here. He said he and some other mujaheddin got sick after passing through an area where a chemical attack by the Russians had reportedly taken place. I can't say I am totally convinced that he is telling the truth....

*** End of first report ***

There is a bit more information in another report I wrote the following day:

...The guy who ordered the burial of Lee and Jim in an area away from the Sanglakh Valley west of Kabul where they were killed on 9 October turned out to be a traitor responsible for the deaths of many mujaheddin -- and he was killed in a fight with other guerrillas a few weeks later..... {I added then that I thought Lee, whom I never had the chance to meet,} ...knew what he was doing was dangerous, but he must have been a bulldozer of a man -- very bold and confident, and very determined to complete what he set out to do. And he came very close -- I am sure his film must be extraordinary. It is very sad that the Soviets, of all people, captured his work, his film, for which he died at their blood-stained hands. But I feel that he really died for Afghanistan, for those millions of tough and backward yet intensely proud and somehow even charming people who have been suffering so much.... {the suffering continues, unfortunately}

I went to Afghanistan a little more than a week after Lee and Jim were killed -- not knowing what had happened. It was my fourth visit, one during the King's reign in 1972 and three with different groups of mujahidin, in 1984, 1985 and 1987. At this time we came under pretty heavy artillery bombardment that continued for hours on end but I'm sure it didn't come close to what Lee experienced when they were first attacked in Logar Province -- and yet he continued braving great danger for months in remote areas after that, areas where he couldn't expect any military or medical help at all. Those of us who have seen the film "Saving Private Ryan," I think, got a glimpse of what he faced.