

Feature writing exercise

Organize information and weave it so that it eliminates redundancy.

Dan Burke teaches government at Seaweed High School. Mr. Burke recently announced that he will take a leave of absence next year in order to work with a humanitarian group, Feed the Children, in Afghanistan. He says he plans to leave in early June. Based on this information and the quotes to the right, write a feature story.

DAN BURKE QUOTES

“I’m one of the few social studies teachers here who doesn’t coach athletics. They asked me if I’d like to coach basketball, but I didn’t want to split time between teaching and coaching, so I declined.

“I worked as a freelance photographer in 1994-95, covering the Afghan civil war. I was there in 1996 when the Taliban took control of the country. To make matters worse, the country was in the middle of one of its worst droughts ever. It was nothing to see people with rationing coupons standing in line for hours to get bread. Those with no other resources resorted to begging, stealing, rummaging through garbage, whatever it took to survive. The country was in complete ruins then.

“I have one memory that really stands out. One day in 1996, a couple of friends and I went to watch a soccer match in Kabul, hoping for a little diversion. During a break in the action, two men accused of crimes had their hands chopped off. Afterward, the hands were hung outside for days to make sure other people saw them. It was a horrible thing to witness.

“I remember one little girl in particular. Her name was Haziza. A beautiful little girl, maybe 11 or 12 years old. She grew up in a village near Kabul. Her father was a candy vendor. One day, the Taliban came to her village to conscript boys into the army. Her father protested that his sons were still children. They killed him on the spot and left with the two boys, ages 13 and 15. A month later, Haziza and her mother escaped to Pakistan.

“When I met Haziza in a refugee camp, she couldn’t read or write, but she was extremely bright and curious. In a room full of schoolchildren, I noticed her right away, and we became friends. I taught her to take photos and gave her a point-and-shoot camera. The shots she came back with were remarkable. They really captured the human spirit fighting to survive amid such desolation and horror.

“After I returned to the U.S., I tried to stay in touch, but it was impossible. I’m not sure if her family returned to Afghanistan, and if so, what happened to them. I realize I’m going back to a different place, a better place I hope, but not necessarily a good place. I hope to play a small role in bringing peace to people who have known little more than war and hardship. But most of all, I hope to find Haziza.”