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Ex - Guantanamo Prisoner Was Troubled Youth

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LONDON -- A former Guantanamo prisoner says he battled shyness, loneliness and suicide attempts before discovering Islam on a backpacking trip through Europe, according to a handwritten biography that paints a picture of a troubled London youth.

Feroz Abbasi's 100-plus page account is one of the most detailed written personal stories from a former detainee. He submitted it to a tribunal at the U.S. prison camp in Cuba.

The document was among nearly 2,000 pages of tribunal testimonies that the U.S. government released to The Associated Press under a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit.

Shy around girls and hobbled by low self-esteem, Abbasi's melancholy memoirs begin in London where he was raised in an Arab family disconnected from its roots. He doesn't identify his national heritage, but describes himself as a restless boy with an "insecurity complex."

Although Abbasi admits training as a militant in Afghanistan, the Briton denies being an al-Qaida member. The British government negotiated his release in January, but British police freed him a day later, saying the only information against him was confidential intelligence.

U.S. officials alleged the 25-year-old trained in Afghanistan in 2001, volunteering to participate in suicide operations and meeting Osama bin Laden three times. U.S. forces captured him in northern Afghanistan in December 2001 and sent him to Guantanamo shortly afterward.

In his biography, Abbasi says he was trailed by loneliness for much of his youth and after he enrolled in college his new life and newly found freedom "seemed futile and useless." It was then that he began studying Zen Buddhism and thinking of becoming a monk in Japan, he wrote.

But he lacked the discipline to meditate so he moved onto volunteerism, thinking that by working at charity shops outside London he could ease his restlessness.

That didn't work either.

He tried to kill himself three times -- the first with "poisoned nicotine," the second with a syringe full of bleach -- though he realized he didn't have any. The third time was with aspirin and alcohol, but he said he couldn't stand the taste and decided he didn't want to die.

He eventually returned to his studies but his heart wasn't in it, he said, so he embarked on a backpacking trip that took him to France, Germany, Italy and Switzerland. He said he met a Muslim man who talked about Kashmir, a Himalayan territory that both India and Pakistan claim.

Abbasi returned to Britain with a renewed interest in Islam, reading books about Islam and jihad, or holy war, and joining an activist group -- S.O.S., or Supporters of Sharia or strict Islamic law -- at Finsbury Mosque, one of London's largest mosques, he says.

Local clerics worked with him to cement his faith, something that had been there but hidden -- much like the English translation of the Quran at his family's house, he writes.

Meetings at the mosque left him with fliers describing the plights of Muslims in Chechnya. He later became interested in the Taliban's fight in Afghanistan.

"I have never wanted or ever pledged allegiance to Osama bin Laden," writes Abbasi, denying the U.S. allegation that he was a member of al-Qaida.

He did, however, believe it was his duty as a Muslim to volunteer for jihad.

Calling President Bush's war on terror a "puppet show," Abbasi says he volunteered for actions against America and learned about guerrilla warfare in Afghanistan.

But even there he became disenchanted, complaining of feeling like a "robot soldier."

He tried to escape but was instead captured and sent to Guantanamo, he says.

In his manuscript, Abbasi talks of an Australian prisoner he trained with in Afghanistan referred to as "Golden Boy," whose taste for tormenting animals might have led to "the reasons why he wanted to hijack a civilian plane and plow it into a civilian building."

One Australian detainee -- David Hicks, a blonde cowboy who left the outback for Afghanistan -- is still being held in Guantanamo and is one of four charged with various crimes.