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**A Climber We Lost: Muhammad Ali Sadpara, February 5**

*Each January we post a farewell tribute to those members of our community lost in the year just past. Some of the people you may have heard of, some not. All are part of our community and contributed to climbing.*

**JANUARY 4, 2022** [**MICHAEL LEVY**](https://www.climbing.com/byline/michael-levy/)

**Muhammad Ali Sadpara, 45, February 5**

Even after learning that Nirmal “Nims” Purja, Mingma G, and eight other Nepali climbers had completed the coveted first winter ascent of K2, last January, Muhammad Ali Sadpara, of Pakistan, remained motivated for the feat. “For him, K2 in winter was very ambitious, but he wanted to show that he could climb it,” the Italian climber [Simone Moro](https://www.climbing.com/people/simon-moro-worlds-greatest-winter-mountaneer/) told *Climbing*. “He understood that he could be an icon for the Pakistani mountaineering community.”

Ali, 45, never made it back from K2, undertaken with his then 21-year-old son, Sajid Ali Sadpara, who retreated before the summit attempt when his oxygen regulator malfunctioned; John Snorri Sigurjónsson, an Icelandic climber; and a Chilean climber, Juan Pablo “JP” Mohr Prieto. Ali, Snorri, and Mohr all disappeared high on K2, near the Bottleneck. Their last contact was on February 5. Their bodies were found in late July. Muhammad Ali had grown up in Sadpara, a village near Skardu, Pakistan, and as a youth started working as a porter for international climbing expeditions in the 1990s. He rose up through the guiding ranks to become a high-altitude porter and climber, and his country’s most respected mountaineer.

Ali is remembered as a beloved expedition member many times over. “What defined Ali Sadpara was his one-of-a-kind spirit,” [Elia Saikaly](https://eliasaikaly.com/projects/k2-the-calling/), an alpinist and documentary filmmaker on the winter K2 expedition, told *Climbing* in an email. “You can learn a lot about a man by observing the way others interact with him. Ali was loved by all. He had a contagious positive attitude and an uncanny sense of humor .. [with the] ability to shift the energy of a room (or tent) moments after walking into it. He was also one heck of a talented dancer!”  Ali’s legacy, Saikaly believes, is as a role model for balancing life as “an incredibly strong and accomplished climber and family man,” with a deep humanity. Ali lived in Skardu. He married his wife, Fatima, when he was 19 years old. When he started portering, he would cross the Baltoro glacier wearing just flip-flops, according to a 2018 [profile](http://www.alpinist.com/doc/web19s/wfeature-a64-tcl-muhammad-ali-sadpara) in *Alpinist*magazine.

“He had the physique and the habits of an athlete, and was also good in studies. He never failed a class. Since his elder brother never did well in school, his father was keen to get him a good education and that’s why he moved him to Skardu,” Nisar Abas, a journalist and childhood friend of Ali’s, told [*BBC News*](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-56022457) in February following Ali’s disappearance.  Ali climbed eight of the world’s 14 8,000-meter peaks: Gasherbrum II (8,035 meters), Nanga Parbat (8,126 meters), Gasherbrum I (8,080 meters), Broad Peak (8,047 meters), K2 (8,611 meters), Lhotse (8,516 meters), Makalu (8,485 meters), and Manaslu (8,163 meters). As he climbed more peaks, his exceptional ability to perform in the toughest conditions attracted notice from some of the best high-altitude climbers.For his first 8,000er summit, Gasherbrum II, in 2006, Ali cobbled together his kit. “I didn’t have the right boots, didn’t have a down jacket, let alone a down suit to protect me from the harsh cold,” he told the Pakistani newspaper [*Dawn*](https://www.dawn.com/news/1606183). “I had some second-hand climbing gear which I bought from the market in Skardu and repaired. But I still managed to climb and come back safely.”

In the winter of 2015, Ali joined the Basque climber Alex Txikon and the Italian climber Daniele Nardi in attempting the first winter ascent of Nanga Parbat; Nardi was to die on Nanga Parbat in 2019. The next year, Ali and Txikon joined forces with Simone Moro and another Italian climber, Tamara Lunger. After Lunger turned back near the summit, the other three made the monumental first winter ascent of Nanga Parbat, on February 26, 2016.

At the time, except for K2, it was the only 8,000er still unclimbed in winter. Simone Moro told *Alpinist*, “Ali is to Nanga Parbat what Tenzing was to Everest. ”Still, Ali struggled to land financial backers to pursue further expeditions. Abbas Ali, a close friend and fellow climber from Pakistan, told *Climbing*, “He never could get good sponsors—if he could have had sponsors, he could have done all the 8,000ers multiple times.”

Ali re-teamed with Txikon again in 2018 for a winter ascent of Everest, but the expedition came up short. Regarding the lack of sponsorship, well-deserved as it was, “He doesn’t question why, not out loud,” wrote Amanda Padoan in *Alpinist*. “Back in Sadpara, he says he has too much to occupy him: wheat to thresh, potatoes to dig, cattle to feed, walls to mend, roofs to patch and children to educate. “This other life is good, he says: it reminds him of who he’s supposed to be.” When asked about his dreams, though, she writes, he says he wants a winter ascent of K2.  
Ali is survived by his wife, Fatima, three sons, and a daughter.

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**Young Pakistani heroes**

[**https://library.britishcouncil.pk/five-young-pakistani-heroes-who-will-truly-inspire-you/**](https://library.britishcouncil.pk/five-young-pakistani-heroes-who-will-truly-inspire-you/)

**Aitzaz Hasan 1997 – 7 January 2014**

Hasan sadly died young, but did so in an amazing act of bravery. When he realized a suicide bomber was

en-route to his school, where there were some two thousand students in attendance. Hasan, who was an excellent student and strongly involved in extracurricular activities, gave up his life to protect them. The events unfolded in Ibrahimzai, in Hangu, Pakistan. Hasan and his friends noticed a man wearing a detonator headed for the school. Despite his friends warning him not to, Hasan went to speak to the bomber and ultimately, it is reported, hugged him. Hasan was the only casualty that day as a result.

Hasan’s bravery inspired millions, with the hashtags #onemillionaitzaz and #AitzazBraveheart trending as people encouraged each other to similarly stand up to violence and terror. Hundreds of mourners attended his funeral to pay respects for the sacrifice he made.

**Iqbal Masih 1983 – 16 April 1995**

Masih was born to a poor family just outside Lahore in Muridke. His desperate mother took out a loan in Masih’s name from a local employer who ran a carpet weaving business and was unable to pay it back. With the interest constantly increasing on the loan, Masih was sent, aged just four, to work as a carpet weaver to pay off the debt. Child laborers were highly valued in the Pakistani carpet industry because their tiny fingers allow them to make small, tight knots, resulting in high quality carpets.

However, this is not reflected in their pay, with Masih working twelve hours a day, every day, with only a half hour break, all for only one rupee a day. Masih was also chained down to stop him from escaping, but he did manage to flee at the age of 10. However, he was returned to his hometown and his work by police.

Masih managed to escape his labour again and attend a school for former child slaves. He became an advocate for other child slaves, campaigning to end the practice in Pakistan where some six million boys and girls are similarly employed in bonded labour. Often families are so poor they have no choice but to send their children into this virtual slavery.

In 1994 Masih received the Reebok Human Rights Award. He returned to Pakistan to attend school with the hopes of becoming a lawyer, so that he could help others in a similar predicament. Sadly, he was killed at age twelve while riding home on his bicycle. The official report stated that the killing was an accident, though some disagree and cite the Carpet Manufacture Mafia as being behind it.

**Arfa Kareem 2 February 1995 – 14 January 2012**

Arfa Kareem was the world’s youngest Microsoft professional at the age of nine. When her father bought her a computer as a child so that she could send emails, little did he know what a technical whizz Kareem would become. To become a Microsoft Certified Professional, individuals need to display technical proficiency in a number of areas including .Net and Windows Server 2003. Becoming qualified meant Kareem got to visit Bill Gates himself, who praised her highly.

Few people in the world have qualified at such a young age, and Kareem was determined to go into a career in technology, with dreams of studying at Harvard. In an incredibly sad turn, Kareem suffered a cardiac arrest in 2012 at the age of sixteen while studying for her A Levels in Lahore. While she received the best of medical care, she passed away shortly after.

**Aisha Esbhani Thirteen years’ old**

When a twelve-year old Esbhani realised that most of the books on her shelf were by North American and British authors, she knew something had to change. It was then that this avid young reader decided to set herself a challenge: to read a book from every country on the world. A true child of the digital age, Esbhani reached out over Facebook asking for recommendations. The Facebook page quickly caught in with people recommending – and sending – books from all over the world. Now aged thirteen, Esbhani has read books from eighty countries, far more than the average teenager but still a long way off her target of 197. Esbhani is a truly inspiring figure: despite being a shy child, her challenge has helped her grow in confidence, and her passion for literature has been infectious for other children.

**Malala Yousafzai**

At barely 25 years old, Malala is already known around the world for her bravery and her advocacy of education for girls. Malala is the youngest ever Nobel Prize laureate and has inspired millions of people worldwide. As a young girl living in Swat Valley in northwest Pakistan, Malala and her father, who ran a school, were passionate about providing education for all. As young as twelve years old, Malala became an activist, working with BBC Urdu to write a blog about daily life under the Taliban.At a time where women were being prevented from going shopping and where television and music were outlawed, Malala and her father continued to speak up. Hundreds of girls’ schools were blown up and a ban on girls going to school was put in place in 2009.

By 2011, at only fourteen years old, Malala had gained international recognition thanks to work with the BBC, a documentary about her, and her public campaigning. She then received Pakistan’s first National Youth Peace Prize. This is when Taliban voters agreed to have her killed as she was too popular and influential. In October 2012, Malala was on the bus to school when she was attacked: she was shot once, with the bullet going through her head, neck and shoulder. Thankfully, Malala survived and was brought to the UK for medical treatment, with her family soon following. The murder attempt prompted international outrage and saw an outpouring of support for Malala. In Pakistan, protests were held against the shooting and the events also brought about the Right to Education Bill, after more than two million people signed a petition. Now that she is fully recovered, Malala travels the world fighting for girls to have the right to education, she has started the Malala Fund, wrote a best-selling book ‘I am Malala’, and inspires people wherever she goes.