



UN posting detailed in book

Assassination mars first days in job

She grew up on a dairy farm outside Tokoroa and her work as a human rights monitor saw her at the helm of a United Nations office in Herat, Afghanistan in 2006.

While she was leading her office, a local tribal leader was assassinated, reactivating ferocious conflict, events that are documented in her book *Zen Under Fire*.

Tokoroa author Marianne Elliott relived the moments leading up to and beyond the assassination as she sat down with the *South Waikato News* before her book launch in Tokoroa last week.

The very title of the book is an indication of the difficulties in maintaining internal peace in a war zone.

"The zen part refers to the fact that in Afghanistan I had some fairly intense experiences including missiles coming over my compound so there was a sense of which I was directly under fire and part of the challenge of my experience in Afghanistan was how to find a personal equilibrium in those kinds of circumstances," Marianne said.

She said the challenge was to stay at peace with herself when there was a lack of peace around her. "It was fairly challenging to stay calm," she said.

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author Marianne Elliott

as long as no one killed local tribal leader Amanullah Khan.

"As you know from reading the book I had just started a new job and I had been left in charge of the office, my boss had gone on holiday. I tried to prepare myself in taking control of the office and I was not entirely sure that I was ready."

Marianne constantly asked her superior if she was ready to lead the office, and he reassured her that she would be fine.

"As you know within three hours of him leaving, Amanullah Khan had been assassinated.

"His assassination was part of a larger tribal conflict and it reactivated that conflict and very quickly there was a high level of violence and conflict.

"My office was supposed to help find some kind of peaceful resolution."

Marianne said she felt out of her depth.

"I felt unprepared to be in that position."

Marianne's job also required her to interview family members who had lost a loved one in the ensuing conflict.

"I felt very torn myself. I was doing my job as a human rights monitor, which meant that it was my job to find out the details of what happened."

The former Forest View High School student said she remembers her colleagues the most, noting their strength and courage.

Zen Under Fire not only shares details of Marianne's United Nations role, but details the effects that stress had on her relationships.

The *South Waikato News* has one copy of *Zen Under Fire* to give away.

To enter, simply tell us why Marianne named the book *Zen Under Fire*, along with your name and contact details to go into the draw.

Submit your entry on the back of an envelope and post to PO Box 89, Tokoroa 3444, or email swaikato.editor@wrcn.co.nz.



ISSUES RAISED: Tokoroa-born author Marianne Elliott has documented her work in Afghanistan in her book *Zen Under Fire*. Photo: SUSANNAH CONWAY