



# Give Forever

The Life and Philosophy of Zuhaib Abbas Bangash

by Anna Bracewell-Worrall

**Zuhaib Abbas Bangash knows what it's like to be hungry. That's why, every Sunday, the food at his kebab shop in Glen Eden is free for anyone who can't pay. Zuhaib says it's simple. "These people need food, and I have it."**

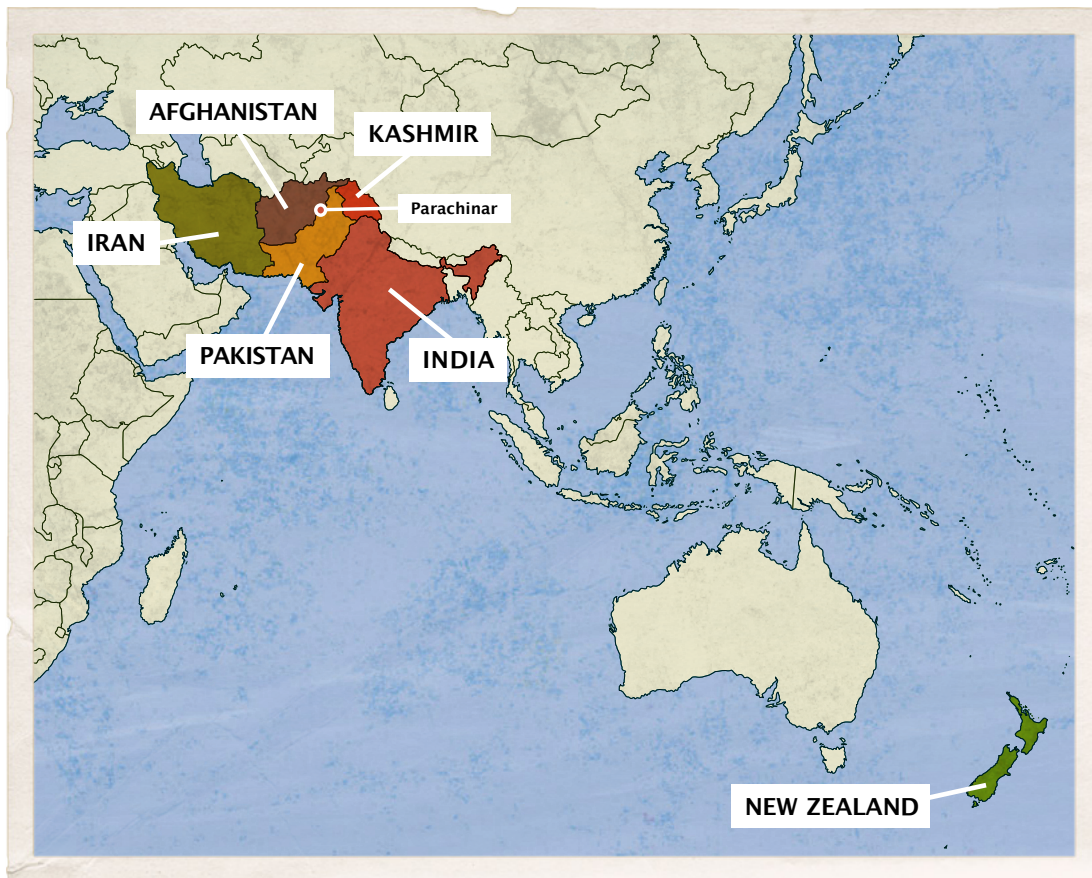
It started when a man came into the shop and asked for something to eat. Zuhaib said yes. The man came back. Other people came, too. Word spread that Zuhaib gave food to anyone who couldn't afford it. Eventually, he decided to make it a regular thing and help anyone who asked. He began to post on social media – and that's when a few local shop owners complained.

"They weren't happy with what I was doing," Zuhaib remembers. "They worried all the homeless people in Auckland would come, and they didn't want that. They thought their businesses might suffer." The story was all over the news, but Zuhaib didn't want to stop. He couldn't see how giving away food was bad for the local business community. "Hungry people aren't bad people," he says.

## JUST MONEY

Zuhaib is a Shia Muslim. Helping others is an important part of his religion. Zuhaib doesn't see the point in hanging on to his money. "It's just money," he says, "and life is short. We don't know what tomorrow will bring. I give to people so they can have happiness now."

Zuhaib has always done things for other people. That's what he did in Pakistan, and it's why he had to flee, leaving his family behind. Zuhaib comes from Parachinar, a small town in a mountain valley on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It's a beautiful place but also dangerous. Taliban soldiers used the mountain pass to hide out. The pass is also an important route between the two countries.



The Taliban targeted tribal groups like Zuhaib's. Most of them were Shia Muslim, a minority in Pakistan. Zuhaib saw some terrible things, and he spoke out. He tried to help people who'd lost their homes. This work put him in danger. "They tried to kidnap me and kill me." Zuhaib had to move around. Then his wife died. Eventually, in 2013, he ran out of places to hide, so he left his five children with their grandmother and came to New Zealand. He wanted to see if it was a good place to bring his family.

## CHIPS AT THE MALL

When Zuhaib arrived in Auckland, he had very little money. He slept in a park. It was winter and very cold. During the day, he kept warm in a mall. There was a kebab shop, where a man from Pakistan worked. "I would buy chips," Zuhaib says. "They were \$3 – I still remember because I only had \$20 left. Most days, I ate only chips and drank water from a tap."

A security guard working at the mall noticed Zuhaib hanging around and asked him to leave. Zuhaib tried to explain he needed help, but the man didn't listen. The man at the kebab shop did listen. He told Zuhaib about a mosque in South Auckland where he could sleep at night. Zuhaib was so happy to be out of the park. Then another life-changing thing happened. A lawyer helped Zuhaib bring his family to New Zealand. They could start a new life together, safe from harm.



Masjid Ayesha mosque in South Auckland

## WORK

It was difficult for Zuhaib to find work. Eventually he got a job at the kebab shop in the mall. He'd never made kebabs before. There was a lot to learn. Zuhaib had a family to support. He put in long hours, making kebabs during the day and working as a security guard at night. After a couple of years, he'd saved enough money to buy his own kebab shop. Now he has three shops: two in Auckland and one in Pakistan.

Zuhaib's favourite dish on the menu is chicken and chips, and when he has a kebab, the sauces he likes are hot chilli, satay, and garlic mayo. "And always go for the hummus too," he advises. It's this food, kebabs, that Zuhaib gives away to those in need.

## MANY NEW FACES

It's hard to know exactly how many people in Auckland are homeless. The best estimate, based on research from 2018, is around five hundred. Many of these people sleep under bridges and in parks. Thousands more sleep in garages and on the couches of family and friends.

Not all of the people who come to Zuhaib's shop for food are homeless. Affordable housing in Auckland is hard to find. "It's expensive to buy a house and expensive to rent," Zuhaib says. "Some of the people I help have jobs, but they don't always have enough money left over for food."

Since Covid, the cost of living has gone up even more. "I've seen many new faces in my shop," Zuhaib says. Although it costs him around \$2,000 a week to feed these people, Zuhaib believes it's important to serve anyone who asks. For rough sleepers especially, it can be hard to get a balanced meal with meat and vegetables. Zuhaib says a lot of people rely on cheap things like two-minute noodles, bread, and chips. Enjoying a hot, freshly cooked meal at one of his shops can help ease the stress of life on the street. Providing the food makes Zuhaib feel good, too.



## MORE THAN KEBABS

Giving away kebabs isn't enough for Zuhaib. To reach even more people, he started a charity that supports families in Auckland. During the recent pandemic, the charity gave out hand sanitiser and face masks. Sometimes Zuhaib even lends people his car so they can get around.

Although the Auckland community is important to Zuhaib, his heart's still in the mountains of Pakistan. There he provides yet more free food from his shop in Parachinar. He also helped get an internet connection to his village. All of this work takes time. So why does Zuhaib feel the need to go the extra mile?

"My life in Pakistan was full of danger," he says. "Every day, I faced challenges and risked my life." Now that he lives in a safe country, he feels deeply that he should dedicate his life to others. This includes taking a stand against injustice and speaking on behalf of those who don't have a voice. Most of all, Zuhaib hopes his work means other people will experience a little more peace.



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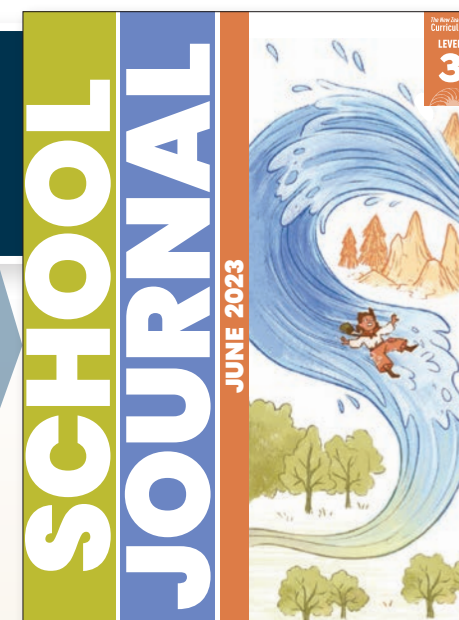
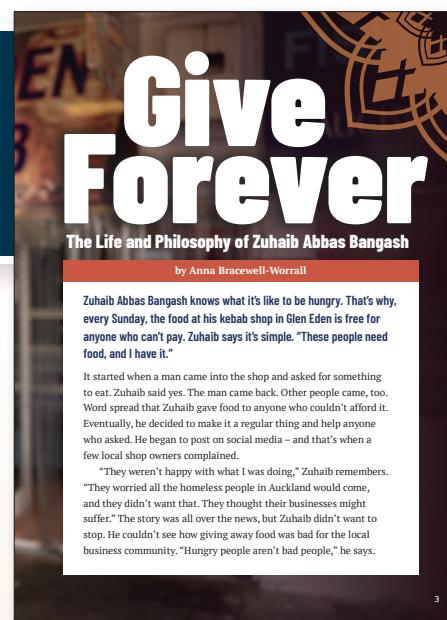
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