

Settling In

by Abbas Nazari



Abbas Nazari was only seven years old in 2001 when he and his family became **refugees**.* There was a war in Afghanistan, and the fighting was coming closer and closer to the family's village. They had to leave their home and find a new place to live. They had to leave their friends, and everything they owned, and set off on a long and very dangerous journey over deserts, mountains, and stormy oceans. Finally, they and many other refugees from Afghanistan were rescued from a sinking boat near Australia. The New Zealand government offered some of the refugees a home in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Now, twenty-one years later, Abbas tells his story.

* **refugees** – people who are forced to leave their homes because of danger



After our long journey, I was very tired. I missed all my friends from my village terribly, and I was worried about the future. I wondered if our family would fit in or if we would feel like outsiders in this foreign land.



First, we were taken to the Māngere Refugee Resettlement Centre in Auckland. At the centre, we learnt some things to help us settle in to our new life in New Zealand. For example, I needed to start learning English. I learnt the English alphabet and some simple sentences, such as “Hello, my name is Abbas.” After two months, we moved to Christchurch to live.

I was still worried. We looked a little different. My mum and sister wore headscarves. The food in my school lunch was different from what the other kids had for their lunch. And we were still learning to speak English too. I wondered if these differences meant I wouldn't be able to make new friends.

But the kids in my street were really friendly. A lot of them were about my age. They were a mix of Māori, Asian, Pacific, and Pākehā. We played rugby and football at the local park. Some weekends, we would take our bikes to the bike park and teach each other new tricks.



My favourite day of the week was Friday. That's when our school sports team would go to the big park in the city to play against other schools. I was so proud to be part of the team, all working together. I had found friends who didn't mind that I looked different or sounded different.

My English wasn't great, so I was in a special class for people who didn't speak English as their first language. But I learnt pretty quickly, and soon, I was feeling confident. I wasn't worried any more. I had found my community in the classroom, on the football field, and in our neighbourhood.



All our family were learning new things, but we also held on to the things we had brought with us from our village life. My parents made sure that we spoke our Afghan language at home to keep our **mother tongue** alive.* I liked fish and chips and sausage rolls, but Mum always cooked Afghan food so we wouldn't forget the taste. We also took part in all the Afghan cultural celebrations with the other Afghan families who lived in Christchurch.

* **mother tongue** – the first language a person learns

When I think about Afghanistan, I have many different feelings at once. I am sad and scared for the people who we left behind. I hope they are safe. I miss my village, and I miss running in the mountains and swimming in the river the way I used to do.

For a while, I had nightmares about the journey from our village to New Zealand. I dreamt about the burning hot deserts, the terrifying ocean, and the scary people who didn't seem to like us. But I don't think about those things any more. I remind myself how lucky I am to be part of a safe, loving, and caring community. I miss my village, but for now, I am happy. I have many new friends around me. There are new rivers to swim in and new mountains to climb.



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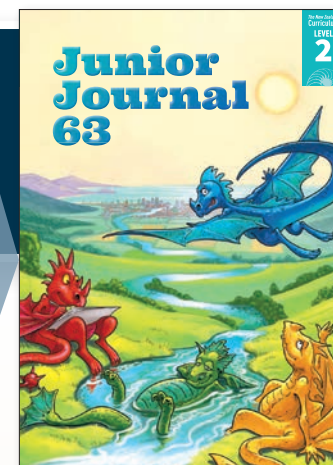
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