

# REFUGEES: TELLING THEIR STORIES 2005

UNHCR HIGH SCHOOL WRITING COMPETITION



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

The background of the page features a light beige color with a faint, repeating pattern of cursive script. Overlaid on this is a large, stylized silhouette of an olive branch with several leaves, positioned on the left side and extending towards the center.

**LISTENING WITH  
COMPASSION**

**WRITING WITH  
RESPECT**

A large, stylized olive branch graphic in a golden-brown color, positioned on the right side of the page and extending from the top to the bottom. The leaves are simple, elongated shapes.

# INTRODUCTION

In its third year, the Australian High School Writing Competition – *Refugees: Telling Their Stories* expanded in 2005 to include three categories: the traditional interview category from previous year’s competitions; an essay category on the World Refugee Day theme *It takes courage to be a refugee*; and a personal story category for refugee students themselves.

The competition began in 2003 with the aim of encouraging Australian high school students to make contacts with refugees living among them in their communities and listen to their stories. The idea of listening with compassion and writing with respect soon emerged as a strong theme, with the competition forging some strong friendships, and many positive spin-offs. The inaugural winners Sophie Weldon and Adut Dau Atem (a former refugee from Sudan) have gone on to become special youth representatives for our national association Australia for UNHCR. We wanted to keep the interview category, which has proved such a good catalyst for dialogue and understanding, but also to broaden the scope of the competition to allow students to do their own web-based research and reflect on what they had learned. Finally, we felt it very important to provide a category for refugees to write their own compelling tales in their own voice, unmediated by others. The result was a record number of very good entries on a diverse range of refugee lives that have been rebuilt in Australia.

First, second and third places have been awarded in each category, and (where the judges scores were very close) we’ve awarded highly commended awards. We also include the story of Rose Bol, in memorium, a former refugee from Sudan who died tragically in a car accident in October 2004. Her classmates from St Ursula’s College QLD submitted her own story in memory of their loyal friend and diligent student.

UNHCR would like to thank the competition judges: Tom Dusevic, Time Magazine’s Editor-at-Large in the South Pacific; Ian Chappell, former Australian cricket captain and Special Representative for Australia for UNHCR since 2001; and UNHCR’s External Relations Officer Ariane Rummery. Many thanks are also due to UNHCR’s interns Emily Tannock, Dagny Margrete Fosen and Luke Easey for managing the project and to Jamie Wilson for his help with the graphic design. We are highly appreciative of Penguin Group and Gleebooks for donating the prizes for each category.

Finally, we thank all the students around Australia who took part in the competition and the refugees themselves for their courage and generosity in sharing their stories.

*Disclaimer – The views expressed are those of the authors and not held by UNHCR.*



# CONTENTS

## *Introduction*

### **Personal Story Category Winners**

Athieng's Story	6
David's Story	8
Grace's Story	10
Nada's Story	12
Emmanuel's Story	14
Medina's Story	16

### **Interview Category Winners**

Jasmina's Story told by Angela	18
Ruza's Story told by Sophie	20
Charlie's Story told by Joanne	22
Danny's Story told by Alexander	24
Ernest's Story told by April	26

### **Essay Category Winners**

Tania's Essay	28
Aisha's Essay	30
Emma's Essay	32
Hannah's Essay	34

<i>In Memory of Rose</i>	36
--------------------------	----

<i>Excerpts</i>	38
-----------------	----



## ATHIENG'S STORY

# “A DEEP PAINFUL MEMORY”

I was a refugee for almost 12 years, from 1992 – 2003 in Kenya. Being a refugee is very hard and living in another country is difficult. It is especially hard to live in refugee camps where you don't have any parents or a person who loves you to take care of you. But I was lucky to have my sister and brother with me.

Before I went to Kenya I was in Ethiopia for about 2 years. I was four years old. I lived with my sister and brother. The problems in Sudan were the reason why we left our homeland and went to Ethiopia. After some months people escaped out of Ethiopia because Ethiopia itself had problems. That was in 1991. Everything was turning into a nightmare for us and groups of people were running with us to escape. On the way to Kenya, before we reached the border we met a group of robbers. At the time a lot of people were walking together. There were no buses or trains to take people across the border.

**“I was terrified because the robbers were shooting at and killing innocent people. They raped some of the young people, including my cousin. She was only about ten years old at the time. I felt very scared for my own life when I saw what happened to my cousin.”**

The government organised some soldiers to travel with us on the journey to Kenya to protect us. But the robbers fought with them too. They beat the soldiers, killing them and killing other people who tried to stop the fighting. This included my uncle and some of my relatives and friends. I saw this all with my own eyes. It was an experience that is difficult to describe. Whenever I think back to it I feel like I'm going through it again. People were running in different directions, including my sister and brother. The robbers took everything we had, all our food and clothes.

We continued the journey and thank God, after some months we crossed the border to safety. We had reached Kenya, but I did not know where my sister and brother were.

I had to run with just the clothes I wore, not knowing where the rest of my family were or what had happened to them at the Ethiopian border. Everybody was separated during the fighting. Some people ran to the Ugandan border and some ran to the Kenyan border, including me. That was where my sister and brother were separated from me. I never gave up hope that I would one day find them.

## PERSONAL STORY CATEGORY WINNERS



Athieng

After we arrived in Kenya, we stayed at Kakuma refugee camp. Things got a little bit better, because at least here we had shelter, food and clothing. I was just a six-year old girl. It was 1992. I could not believe I had walked all those months, but I made it!

One afternoon, in 1999, I went to look for water. It was a dark day. I had never seen such a dark, rainy and windy day in my life. But that was the day my life changed forever. When I came back from the well, I saw two young men. They asked me my name. I was afraid because it was very rare to see white people and I was not sure who they were or what they wanted from me. They told me they were from Red Cross and they reunite relatives and friends who had been separated. It was the happiest day of my life because they told me my sister and brother were safe in Uganda. After some weeks they bought them to Kenya where we were reunited. I still remember that day very well.

**“I believe being a refugee is very hard. Living in refugee camps, which are unsafe is difficult because of the threat everyday of dying, due to the weather conditions, theft, hunger and the fear of being raped or killed.”**

We were so scared of the Trukana’s – they ran the camp but didn’t care too much about us. They were also desperate people who didn’t have anything. They didn’t

even have clothing and would walk around naked, so we were not surprised that they would steal our food and clothes. Sometimes at night when we would sleep, people would go missing and never return to the camp. I was always scared I would be next to be kidnapped. It is hard to start a new life, especially when there is little food and poor shelter. We stayed in tents for the 12 years and spent most of our time outside, because inside the tents it was too hot. You could in fact, cook bread from the rays of the sun. If you left bread out in the morning, the sun would cook it in about four hours.

Becoming a refugee involves saying goodbye to all that you know, like relatives and friends who you care for most. It is often a sudden decision made amid fear and chaos. What follows is rarely easy or straightforward. Fleeing to safety can involve great hardship, suffering and uncertainty – not knowing when you will reach and cross your country’s border to seek refuge on the other side.

Now I live happily and have no more insecurity. I am living with my sister in Melbourne. My brother was with us, but now he has returned to Africa to search for my father. We have spoken to him twice on the phone. He is now in Sudan. He works for the Department of Education there. My mother will be reunited with us also. She was found in Uganda and is now living in Kenya. I can’t wait to see her again soon. I haven’t seen my mother since I was two years old.

## DAVID'S STORY

# “MY STORY”

In my country there is a long history of conflict between the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Islamic people. In 1986 I was born in a small village in Torit, Southern Sudan. Soon after I was born the civil war erupted again and our village was attacked. The SPLA soldiers were arresting men in our village to go to war. The fighting between the soldiers and the villagers lasted for three hours. My dad was arrested and taken to their barracks. The rest of my family and I hid in the bush. When the fighting stopped thousands and thousands of people had been killed and everything had been destroyed. The community centres, schools, hospitals and the houses had been burned.

Many people fled from Sudan but my family and I moved to Juba, a large town in Southern Sudan. The journey there was very dangerous. My dad escaped from the barracks and met us with a car. We drove very slowly through the forest on a muddy road. We could hear gunshots and bombs but we could not see the soldiers hiding in the bush. Even though we were scared and had nothing to eat or drink, it was a great day because we were so lucky to pass through that terrible war.

While we were in Juba we were very weak and my parents became sick. They went to the hospital but when they got there they were arrested by Arab soldiers who said they had been collaborating with the SPLA. They didn't come back home that day and life became very difficult. We had no one to protect or look after us so we started to do everything for ourselves.

One day when my sister and I went into the bush we were captured by SPLA soldiers. They walked us to the

big SPLA barrack Kaji-Kaji. I was selected to be a toilet cleaner, shoes cleaner and clothes washer. My sister was taken by one of the commanders as a wife. It was a difficult time as we didn't have anything to eat and my sister and I were not allowed to see or talk to each other very often. My sister, who was pregnant, and I managed to escape one day. We went during the day while the soldiers were sleeping. We walked, night and day, through the forest until we met a man called Amos in a small village called Malakal. He took us to his house. After a while he got angry with my young nephew because he cried when he was hungry, and my sister and I were sick. Our legs were so swollen that we couldn't walk. We had to roll over on the ground. The sickness lasted for a month. The hospital had been destroyed, and there was no transport. People were dying everywhere.

One day, Amos asked my sister to bring him some drinking water. When she brought the water he pointed a gun at her and ordered her to have sex with him. My

### WE WERE LOST CHILDREN WITHOUT OUR PARENTS OR RELATIVES.

sister accepted because she was scared. He warned my sister that if she told anyone he would kill us. The next day the Kaji-Kaji commander arrived at Amos's house with his soldiers looking for my sister. My nephew and I hid but my sister was caught and asked to tell who lived in the house. The commander wanted to shoot my sister so Amos shouted, "No! Don't kill her! The house belongs to me." The commander and Amos argued and the commander shot Amos. A big conflict started and the commander was shot. My sister then ran to meet us.

**“We ran a long way in the bush and then relaxed at night. The war was really serious and we had no food so we ate the leaves of plants. We walked to Kenya and when we arrived we had only the clothes on our back.”**

We went to a place where refugees are registered and got food from the UNHCR and WFP in Lokichogio. We were given a registration form to fill out and waited to be interviewed. When our names were read out we were taken to a camp called Kakuma Refugee Camp. While we were in the camp we still had many problems. The relatives of Amos were there, and wanted to kill us. The relatives of the dead commander also wanted to kill us. We all argued. We couldn't sleep well at night because no one was protecting us. We were lost children without our parents or relatives.

My sister and I made alcohol and sold it to make money. One day a man talked to us about his brother in Australia

who had sent a form for him to fill out. He sold it to us because he didn't want to go to Australia. It cost 4,500 Kenyan Shillings but my sister only had 2,000 Kenyan Shillings. He said we could pay the other half later. My sister had help filling it in, and posted it to the embassy in Nairobi. We waited about three months before getting an interview. The process to come to Australia took about two years. During this time there was frequent conflict between the Sudanese and Turkana (Kenyan citizens) in the camp. Life was difficult and we were frightened.

We were so happy when our names appeared on the board for a flight to Australia. We were given an approval letter and travel document to go to Nairobi for the flight to Australia. When we arrived I was very tired but I could not sleep because I could see many interesting things that I had not seen in my country. From the airport we were picked up by one of the social workers and taken to a flat in Balga. One of the social workers, Hammad, was sent to look after us and give us more information about how Australian people live. Hammad did a good job helping us settle into Australia. He introduced us to friends, showed us places in the city, took us to Centrelink, school, and our new house. After three weeks I was registered at Cyril Jackson Senior Campus. When I first joined the school I started to learn many new things and make many new friends. Sometimes I get homesick because I am always thinking about my family in Africa. These are the problems I am now facing in Australia because I know they are suffering a lot. For me my happiness is my family. But I feel very lucky. I have a lot of knowledge, speak English and have a part time job. I am looking after my sister and her children. We are safe.

## “GRACE’S STORY”

My name is Grace Jook and I come from Kakuma Refugee Camp, a small camp in North Kenya, East Africa. Before coming to Australia I never knew that there was a better world where I could not see horrific things again.

My life and my past experiences left me with bad memories and a bad temper. When I was three years old, there was a lot of fighting going on in my country, Sudan. During the war, my mother had to run day and night hoping to find protection for my little brother and I. Every time the bombs blasted, she lay us down and she covered us up with her own body. She always said it was better if she died and we survived.

Everyday we woke, we found everything the same as the day before. No food, no water and no blankets and clothes. Our mother used to spit into our mouths when we were thirsty. We went almost three days in the forest seeking help. My mum used to cry when we were asleep to make sure we didn't know what she was going through. If we found her crying we would also cry.

Finally we found our uncle who was our father's younger brother. My mother decided that he should

take us with him because he was stronger to look after us. We tried to hold onto our mother but she bent down to take a close look at our faces and said that she would see us after a day. She promised that she was going to be back soon.

Even though I was convinced, I couldn't let go of her hand. She smiled and kissed my head, kissed my brother and walked away. Our uncle took good care of us as if we were his own children. He told us bedtime stories even though there were no beds in the forest. Every afternoon we played in the forest, holding human bones and skulls as if they were toys. We never knew what they were until our uncle told us to never touch them again.

I never knew what was happening to us; there was no one to talk to. I almost forgot my name because no one was calling for me. Our life continued in the bush eating mangoes and drinking dirty water. After a month we moved to Kakuma Refugee Camp where we found people who we knew and some who we didn't.

## PERSONAL STORY CATEGORY WINNERS



Grace

We were accommodated in tents before we could build our house. We always had to wait for the UNHCR to bring food. I almost overcame my stress and worries because I had friends who always entertained me. Kakuma became a place where I called home before coming to Australia.

Now that I am a little older, I take care of myself, but I am less happy than before coming to Australia. Being in war was better than leaving my mother in that situation. I look like a normal seventeen year old girl but not from the inside. My memories leave me with a big hole inside my heart. I feel empty while people my age go on picnics with their mothers. The only thing I can feel now is the kiss that my mother gave me and the touch of her hands.

I keep asking friends and family about her but results I get rip my heart into pieces. I tried my best to see her again but whenever I send her a visa application, the Australian Immigration won't let her come. They are happy people with their own families who don't know the pain other people go through.

I feel ashamed I can't help my own mother. When I had to leave my country, I knew that I would never see my mother again. She always sends messages through people on the phone. I wish I could pay her back for the many things she has done for me.

All I can do is to imagine how she looks now. I cry every single night because my tears make me feel better. I feel hopeless. I feel abnormal, just like a human being with no feelings at all. Sometimes I wish I wasn't born. I wish my mother could taste a bit of life in Australia. The big question I ask myself is "Why me?" Why do I have to go through all of this?

I pray that someone could hear me and feel my pain. And I can't wait to be united with my mother.

## A REFUGEE LIFE STORY

I live here in Australia my new home where I found kind people who are extremely concerned and considerate about the human rights and the refugees. Generally there are many reasons that force the person to leave his / her country. One of them is when you find yourself not protected in the country that you believe its yours, and your freedom and your life are threatened just because you hold different views to the government.

In my story all these reasons were applied. I left my home country with my family for the reasons I mentioned to them above and there were another reasons involving the ethnic minorities and the existing local government. In Sudan the population is made up from diverse ethnic groups and they are divided into tribes. Each group has its own traditions and social customs, the problem was that some of these groups were not respected and they got discriminated against by the government. Our tribe was one of them and my father was a senior politician who had contributed in establishing a political party which aimed to get equal rights and opportunities for the Baja's tribe. That certainly wasn't accepted by the government and he was under constant supervision and he was frequently arrested. As time went on things got worse because my father wasn't that sort of person who gives up easily. So when he was asked to stop his political activities and not to get involved any more he refused to do so. As a result of that in 1998 the government soldiers broke into our house and I still recall the whole incident, despite being young.

It was midnight and they knocked on the house loudly. In the end they destroyed the house door to get in. We were sleeping and were woken by their noise. They treated my father in a very aggressive way. They punched, kicked and briefly they abused him. When my mother interfered to stop them from assaulting him, they throw her away she begged them not to hurt him, but no one had paid her any attention. They carried on and they searched every corner in the house. It was unbelievable what they had done they turned the house up and down and they claimed that they are looking for my father's documents which convict him. It was

clear that they were given strict instructions to arrest my father and to take him away with them. After that we spent all the night crying and we were incredibly terrified and in shock as well. My mother was badly hurt and after a few days she recovered and she went to the police station several times to ask about my father, she wanted to know why he was arrested. Sadly, she wasn't given any relevant answers to her questions instead she was humiliated and kicked out of the police station. When my mother got home she burst into tears and she was exceedingly devastated. Things settled down for a while, however my mother had continuous nightmares about the soldiers breaking into the house and taking my father away that really has left a bad impact on her until now even we are secure and safe here but I can sense that through her out loud muttering in her dreams. Three months had passed and we were living on our own without my father for the first time. It was really such a terrible feeling not having your father with you. My mother during our ordeal she didn't surrender but always she was trying to make us happy and she didn't think of anything except in our studies. So she took the risk of going out and working in a small shop which was owned by my father. It was very dangerous for the woman to work at that time because of the unstable circumstances and war conditions, however my mother she didn't care and she took my elder brother with her. We started to cope with our lives and try to move on, but things got worse again when my mother went to the local authorities for the second time and requested about my father and where he had been taken to. The officials talked to her in an inappropriate way and she was warned if she comes and ask about her husband again she will face the same punishment. On the following day two police officers broke into my father's shop where my mother was working and they arrested my mother because they found suspicious documents in a suitcase which was hidden among the goods. The issue was that what was written on them was considered to be illegal and incredibly serious. In order to make my mother get out of the shop she was dragged by arm and forced to go with the policemen,

## PERSONAL STORY CATEGORY WINNERS

my elder brother who was accompanying my mother he was eleven years old at the time and he didn't like to see my mother to be mistreated in front of him. So when he wanted to defend her he was beaten badly and was left behind without anybody to take care of his injuries. A few minutes later my mother was taken away to the police office and she was facing several charges, she was convicted of being participating in unacceptable political activities they were including running weekly meetings and breaking the country's law. In addition, they claimed that she was encouraging the Baja's women to revolt against the government policies. The reality was that my mother didn't take part in such alleged activities. When she tried to tell them and explain herself she wasn't given the chance to do. During the absence of my mother my grandparents looked after us but it wasn't an easy task to do particularly because they were quite old and they were not capable to take care of seven children. After a few days my mothers was released and she had changed a lot she couldn't talk to anybody even to her parents who were enormously concerned about her, she became more paranoid and fearful and she was crucially ill and had injuries all over her body. My mother didn't have time to recover from her injuries all she thought of is how to run away to more secure place. The motive behind my mother's decision was that she was released on conditions. These conditions were that she had to give the government a report on a daily basis so that the government will be informed about all her activities, and they restricted our resident. So we were not allowed to travel out of the country otherwise, we will be taken from her. Besides, our assets were confiscated such and we had nowhere to go to. There weren't any options and the only resolution to the problem seemed to be abandoning our town to place where we could be more secure and safe. Also after we had left the town my mother was strongly wanted and her name was in what it was known as a black list. Consequently, my mother arranged for our travel to Egypt. She managed to afford the travel costs for all of us from the money that she used to save for the hardship times. At first the idea of leaving our country didn't quite pleased either me or my sisters and brothers. However, gradually we had a positive attitude about that idea. Particularly, when we've grown up and became more capable to understand the difficulty of the situation that my mother had to deal with. In addition, we realised how significant it was for my mother to make that decision. We

lived in Egypt for four years and a half and the first year was the most disappointed and devastated one for us because we spent it at home. Besides, we didn't have the opportunity to go to school because of the lack of the money. In the second year my mother got a job and she worked really hard in order to be able to get us into schools, and to afford the living expenses which were excessive. The load was beyond mother's ability, because she had the responsibility of seven children and she had to protect them and provide them with their basic needs. In the beginning we found some difficulty in coping with the locals there, the reason was that we came from a completely different culture. Every six months we had to renew our resident because we were considered foreigners and we had to give the immigration department over there a reasonable justification for our staying in the country. But once we were accepted in the UNCHR as refugees and we were waiting for the resettlement to be done for us, we had the protection and the authority to stay there without having any restrictions. The disadvantage of the resettlement program is it takes a long time to be determined where you are going to be resettled. In addition, what made it hard for us to wait for long that my mother's work the only resource to get the money from, however we my mother worked hard till the time of the resettlement date came. Through the different and difficult experiences I have came across as a refugee I have learnt that life is a combination of sadness and happiness and we have to taste both of them. Besides, my mother's ongoing sacrifices and her strong determination have given me motivation to do my best to help the refugees who are miserable and powerless. Now I have a full understanding to the importance of the humanitarian organisations and their great international role in assisting the people who are less fortunate and disadvantaged due to economic, political or social reasons. I believe that there is a lot of efforts have to done in order to resolve the refugees' issues. Because my experience as a refugee had taught how it does feel like when you are a refugee, and when you are homeless without shelter or protection. Words can't express about my deep and sincere appreciation to everyone who helped me and my family to overcome our problems as refugees. Also my truthful thanks to Australia to this great country which opens its arm and heart to all the refugees and where everybody is welcomed to have a chance to assimilate to this egalitarian society.

## MY LIFE – FORCED TO FLEE

I was born on the 1st January 1988, in a town call Yei in the southern Sudan. In my life, I have experienced both happy and miserable times. I would like to talk about the main significant events that have happened in my life. My country has never had what is called peace since it got independence in 1956 from it colonial masters the British. In other words, Sudan has never had a recognised government from the time of gaining independence. Since then war has become the routine of Sudanese people, war associated with religious and tribal issues. Each tribe claims to be recognised as the superior to all the other tribes, everyone believes the same thing, that their religion is the best, which causes conflict and war leading to the displacement of thousands living in exile or refugee camps and millions being killed in civil wars.

As a boy, born and growing up in war time, I know I felt how hard life is in terms of getting basic human needs such as food, clothing, shelter and water. The main event that I will not forget in my life was the 1992 civil war that broke out in my own hometown when I was about four.

The next events were extraordinary. Between May and July, some of the largest mass movements of any population in history took place in my town. By the end of June there were all sorts of public meetings telling everyone to go to Uganda. The chief was telling people that everybody living in that city had to go. They were given a deadline by which we must be in Uganda. We were told that whoever did

not leave by the deadline, would be swept away by the rebels. They had no mercy for innocent civilians. Government officials were moving around with loud speakers, urging people to flee towards the border with Uganda. Soldiers were shooting in the air, making us stampede even more urgently. In one day alone in August, 2,500,000 Sudanese crossed into Uganda to form the largest refugee camp ever to be recorded in the history of the world.

I saw people moving with their belongings, to the sound of guns, but I could not exactly understand what was wrong. I had to move with my family with many others all the way from southern Sudan to cross the border to Uganda. I was shattered by the

## PERSONAL STORY CATEGORY WINNERS

war in the northern Uganda. My feet were swollen from walking long distances through the east African jungles to safety. For three years, I lived a beggar's life with my family in displaced people's camps, unable to till the soils, dependent on emergency relief for survival. I have never had a childhood of playing, singing and listening to history from my grandparents. Instead we have been running away in fear of being abducted, looking for food and shelter and travelling at night on sore and tired feet.

**All those years, I blamed my parents for not taking me to school until I understood the fact that our being in displacement camps was because our country was unstable. I had no right to go to school as a normal kid until the age of 7. My childhood had been interrupted by wars. To me camp life is not different to prison. The two are inter-related because one has no freedom of speech. All you need to do is to see fellow humans dying from hunger to understand.**

However, all my mates the same age as me who survived the hunger were those whose parents managed to get approved immigrations visas for

travelling overseas. In 1996, I went to school for the first time. I remember we learned to write on the ground under a big shadow tree with a stick in the sand. It was not easy to get book to write in. I only saw one teacher with a book in his hands and not a single student had a book.

All you could do is learn and memorise everything. This is something that I expect should not happen in people's lives ever because we learn from our weakness and mistake. In 1997, I was able learn to read. In the middle of 2000, I was able to join a very recognised private school that gave me experience and skill in writing and speaking English. In 2002, my brother applied for immigration and got approved for a humanitarian visa. On the 9th of November, I left Africa. On 10th November 2004, I arrived in Australia. This ends my miserable life, all that I experienced in the camp to my arrival in the modernized world of Australia.

On the 1st February 2005, I enrolled to Mirrabooka Senior High School. These are the main events that I have experienced during my life so far and what a journey it has been. I love the feel of the paper in my books and I actually have a bike to ride. I am indeed a fortunate man.

## PERSONAL STORY

Most of us wouldn't ever realize many of our neighbours, friends and relatives have more than Australian Idol to talk about. Being in such a unique atmosphere, uncommon in most parts of the world, we do not recognize the history our country and its people are steeped in. From the direct descendants of the first fleet to your next door neighbour not one Australian has the same story. Personally, my earliest memories are of my house in Melbourne, Humphrey B. Bear and my grade prep teacher Ms. Hadley, but like many other Australian citizens time did not begin there.

Born two years prior to the destruction and disintegration of former Yugoslavia I, like many other survivors was too young to remember what turned colleagues and neighbours into competitors of war. Taking that into consideration what I do know, risking cliché sends shivers up my spine.

Residing as the minority of Bosanska Dubica-a place I have to this day only visited once and never plan to revisit-my family of three was separated leaving my mother and I to fend and find a way out for ourselves with no hope but to try and reach Croatia. Though the Croatians were reluctant, it was as if fate stepped in the way, saving us.

To this day my mother stresses the importance of education and with good reason as that is what had revived our hopes. The sheer fact she had studied in Zagreb, Croatia's capital, and had contacts within it, was a deciding factor in the outcome of our lives. Armed with these skills we were able to find refuge when her former university land lady offered us a place to stay, that is until I became uncontrollably ill.

Stuck with food poisoning which worsened by the minute, I became very ill, while my mother grew greyer. Only when humanitarian aid in the form of the Red Cross reached us did the full extent of my illness become infinite. Once again, fate stepping in, the Red Cross news report

managed to reach my aunt in Slovenia who saw my aging mother and her sickened child on the television.

This news prompted her to act which also played a part in my father finding out whether we were alive or not. With the intention of breathing life back into our shattered dreams of normality my aunt and uncle embarked on journey to Croatia to find us. With a bittersweet sigh of relief, their eyes lit up with hope which was shortly stomped on by the looming task of crossing the border, another difficult addition to an already epic tale. But as luck would have it, once again fate took its turn in ensuring our safety. When at the border of Croatia and what seemed like freedom we were asked to have our passports checked. Very honourably my uncle handed up his, my aunties and my mother's passport while in a friendly manner talking to the soldier about the weather. By chance the soldier's attention became diverted as he forgot to check my mother's passport and waved goodbye. Though he did not know it, this soldier played a great part in the salvation and medical attention I received in Slovenia, for which I will always be indebted.

When we arrived in Slovenj Gradac, a small Slovenian city, untouched by war, I was immediately rushed to hospital in urgent need of medical attention. With all but strength, my limp, two year old body began to recuperate in the 15 days I spent in intensive care. When I was fit and well again the doctors who nurtured my

## PERSONAL STORY CATEGORY WINNERS

fragile body released me, with all but one caution, that my shrivelled stomach would never be the same again.

Now happily growing while war raged on in my mother country I spent nine months in Slovenj Gradac, ideally grateful to be alive. Although I cannot remember what seemed like eternity without my father I was surrounded by new friends and neighbours as well as demure grandparents who genuinely cared for me and to this day still remember me though I have forgotten all but one outing with my now deceased grandfather who took me to town and bought me sherbet love heart lollies, my first taste of luxury. But as many would say the good times would keep coming when my mother and I were at last reunited by my grief-stricken father and the rest of our family in Austria. As if the greatest gift had been bestowed upon me, my family reunion lead to Australia's acceptance of us as one of their first refugees.

From Austria's Vienna airport we boarded a Qantas plane which I can still vividly picture with its red and white tail. Seated in between my mother and father in the middle of the plane I can still taste the sterility of the air as we arrived at Melbourne International Airport. With luggage in tow, our first site of Australia consisted of a gathering of a wide array of people who I had never seen before but whose compassion I will definitely never see again.

I can still feel their smiles radiating my skin, proudly lifting me up as if I were their own. I can recall being showered with attention even when I managed to spill coffee on myself. However one of the strongest and most significant memories of my newly Australian childhood could be summed up with the experience of playing by myself while my dad tried not to burn toast. Though my joy to most would seem simplistic these were the moments that impacted on my character most and will forever be engraved in my mind.



Medina Hajdarevic

Looking back on the moments of my joy I come to realise that I was of one of the fortunate ones, spared by the virtue of democracy and man's capability to care; I see that I am one of only few. While I sat comfortably in Australia saved by democracies empathy others burned at the stake of man's ability to hate and be vengeful. Though a child of only three, my elation in some ways managed to selfishly mock those who weren't as fortunate. But children are selfish on their own terms never really comprehending the truth which can only be seen by those who lived through those horrendous times.

The only pure reflection of my own experience comes through my return to my birth place and what I witnessed there. Though I was fortunate enough to be a passing visitor every cursory glimps of the past and the supremacy war placed on it is a constant reminder of the hardships endured by the innocent.

Though the memories of what occurred in the darkest period of Yugoslavian history stay buried within my mind the effects of the war are still felt to this day. Every time an old song is played, war stories are narrated and anniversaries revisit us I, along with millions of others, are turned back to an event I barely lived through and now because of Australia, hopefully will never relive again.

Some might argue that a two year old is incapable of remembering traumatic events such as the ones we endured. Though now I live comfortably basking in the delights of education and tolerance my new environment is still a constant reminder of the earlier years of my life which shall always be a part of my very existence and can never be divorced from who I am today.

## JASMINA'S STORY

# “COURAGE UNDER FIRE”



Angela

Boundary Street on a Saturday morning: it's a busy place and as I walk into the coffee shop where I've arranged to meet twenty-one year old Bosnian refugee, Jasmina Joldic, I can't help but feel a little apprehensive. After surveying the terrace I make my way towards a group of women wearing hijabs and prepare to introduce myself. Before I can do so however, a girl appears from the bustling crowd and confidently introduces herself as Jasmina. Beaming, she gestures for me to take a seat and all my preconceptions seem instantly laughable.

The Muslim girl, with short cropped hair is wearing shorts and a bright orange singlet. As we take our seats, Jasmina leans over to close a notebook lying on the table in front of her. I can't help noticing the notebook is jam-packed with lines of messy inky scrawl and ferocious highlighting. But what really intrigues me is the map of Bosnia and Herzegovina glued to the inside cover. I had thought that this girl would want to erase the memories, the atrocious images, and the pain. However the map is neat, clinical, and simple; it reveals nothing of the bloody conflict which tore the area it represents apart.

Despite her tiny frame, Jasmina is not lost against the lounge chair she so gracefully seats herself in. "Well, where do we begin?" she asks. This sociology and criminology student at the University of Queensland is hardly one to waste time. In her twenty-one years Jasmina has experienced what most people could not possibly hope to achieve or dread to suffer in an entire lifetime.

Growing up in the south east of Bosnia, Jasmina lead a "normal good life." She enjoyed playing with other children in the street and even admits, rather sheepishly, that school "wasn't too bad". But then, she adds with a grin, "That was where I met my friends." An aspiring lawyer from an early age, Jasmina, like most children, felt invincible.

Her childhood, however, came to an abrupt halt when war broke out in the Balkans.

It is hard to imagine that the confident smiling girl sitting in front of me was forced to flee at age ten from what has been described as one of the worst cases of genocide since the Second World War. With a small shift in her chair, the only sign of discomfort, Jasmina describes how she felt when her father was arrested by Serbians and detained in a concentration camp: "I was very close to my Dad and when they took him it was a horrible experience. Part of you is not there. I didn't even recognise him when he came out."

Her tough façade does not waver, though I get a sense that the foundations are about to crumble from within. Yet, she does not crave revenge and sees no sense in the perpetuation of ancient hatreds. Instead, the ever stoic Jasmina has channelled her painful memories into a dream of justice. A budding lawyer, she hopes to one day to return to Bosnia and take part in proceedings at Hague, prosecuting those responsible for war crimes. With intensity, she looks me straight in the eye and says, "That would be a way to help my people. That would be a way to get some justice."

## INTERVIEW CATEGORY WINNERS

Even now Jasmina finds it difficult to understand how religion could tear her home apart. She says to me with anything but humour, “It’s really funny. At that age I didn’t even know different religions existed. We were all the same.” When conflict in Slovenia and Croatia intensified in 1991, a still innocent and optimistic Jasmina thought, “Nothing’s going to happen to us because we haven’t done anything wrong.” If only this child’s sense of justice and morality had been prophetic.

As violence escalated in 1992, Jasmina’s family realised that to stay in Bosnia was to risk death; escape was the only choice. “It was the second time I didn’t know whether my parents and uncle would survive,” she says. Although she and her brother could flee Bosnia with their Orthodox aunt, Jasmina’s parents and uncle were forced to take a far more dangerous route. After crossing a river in the dead of the night they met up with the children and began a difficult and frightening journey, departing the familiar for an unknown destination. The family arrived in Germany with nothing and later travelled to Australia.

However, many others did not live to tell their harrowing tales. Jasmina confides in me her disappointment with the international community’s response to the conflict. She says with conviction: “There was every reason for someone to act. They just didn’t. They had the power but they waited too long.” Grappling for words of consolation, I realise that nothing will ever replace what this girl and thousands like her have lost. Nothing will ever erase the memories, which haunt refugees for the rest of their lives.

Despite the gratitude Jasmina feels for the generosity and warmth shown to her by many Australians, she tells me that accepting Bosnia is in the past has been difficult; “It was pretty hard. Especially when you realise that that is it. You left and can’t go back to where you came from.” After returning to her homeland for a holiday recently she discovered that she no longer identified herself as Bosnian; uprooted by brutal conflict, she no longer possessed a national identity. Jasmina says softly and with perhaps the first hint of sadness I have seen in her eyes,

**“You don’t identify yourself as anything. You’ve lived everywhere and anywhere.”**

Jasmina’s sadness lifts, however, when I ask her what her first impressions of Australia were. With characteristic enthusiasm, Jasmina tells me the move was “something new and adventurous” for her. She admits to me laughing, “The only thing I knew about Australia was what I learnt in school, that there were more sheep than people.” Always up for a challenge, Jasmina describes her senior year as “difficult but



Jasmina

a nice experience.” While most struggle to juggle the pressures of school work, extra curricular activities and their social lives, Jasmina achieved it all in a foreign language.

However, her positive attitude towards Australia has changed somewhat in recent years. She tells me, “I was really shocked when September 11 happened. The Australian government became so involved in Iraq. Why would you want to create conflict when you don’t have to?... Haven’t people learnt anything from things that have happened before?” The wave of Islamic suspicion which followed has disappointed Jasmina. Now she is often wary of revealing she is Muslim: “We left Bosnia because we couldn’t be who we were and now this is happening in a totally new country.”

This intelligent and bright eyed young woman sits on the edge of her seat, as she discusses her opinion on Australia’s current immigration policies. “It’s not fair,” she says shaking her head, “It’s not human, not considered on a case to case basis.”

Jasmina remains undaunted in the face of all this. There is absolutely nothing half-hearted about her. An honours student in linguistics, she is in the final year of her sociology/criminology course and intends to study law next year but has considered taking time off to work in Europe. Taking a deep breath, she continues to list her current interests. Fluent in German, English, French and various Balkan dialects, Jasmina works part time as a translator with social workers and somehow finds the time to play beach volleyball and organise her busy social life. It is hard to imagine anything this girl couldn’t handle.

Having encountered so many experiences in her first twenty-one years of life I am left wondering what Jasmina intends to do with the rest of her life. She laughs, her eyes sparkling, and answers, “Something exciting.” I leave the interview thinking the world will be an interesting place indeed, when the unstoppable Jasmina Joldic goes looking for excitement.

## RUZA'S STORY

# “WATCHING OVER RUZA”

“I settled in nicely in Australia, there is not too much prejudice and racism; it is such a nice and welcoming country.”

She sat on one of the many crowded seats on the train. She didn't talk, just sat staring. Her name was Ruza Bulovan and she was only fourteen years old. Occasionally her mother, Marija, asked her something but Marija received no reply. I doubt there are many people in this world who knew what was going through her head. People, seated either side of her, were doing the same thing, fleeing. The Germans had attacked Ruza's home town of Celje in Northern Yugoslavia and her father, Ilija Bulovan, who was a military chaplain, had gone to join his unit. They were travelling to her mother's native town of Kistanje, in a region called Dalmatia, for their own protection. They moved into her grandmother's house and tried to resume a normal life. As they settled into the house they formed a daily routine. It was important to know what everyone was doing, for their own safety. The day was disturbed by a sudden flurry of bangs on the door.

**“Into Baka's wardrobe, now Ruza”  
Mama ordered. I scrambled into  
the wardrobe in Baka's tiny room.  
“Goodness it is smelly and damp in  
here” I thought scrunching up my  
nose. I waited for the inevitable  
gun shots.**

It wasn't the Germans; it was Ruza's father, Ilija. The region where they were living was connected to Germany's then ally Italy, so her father had been released from a Prisoner of War camp he was placed in

and was allowed to rejoin his family. The family heard a lot of news about the war from friends of Ruza's father. Yugoslavia was fast becoming a very confused battleground where the invading forces, Germany and Italy, were opposed by two resistance groups, the Royal Yugoslav Army and the Liberation Army led by the Communist Party. The resistance groups then started to fight each other because they each had very different ideas about plans for post-war life. Kistanje was affected in many ways and the routine that had kept Ruza's family together was soon falling apart. Kistanje was overrun with occupiers and one or the other of the resistance forces. Something would have to be done and soon the answer came for Ruza and her family.

It was September 1943 when the Italian Army surrendered, to the Allied Forces, and its forces withdrew. More and more resistance forces entered Kistanje. Germany's aircraft bombarded the town before recapturing it. During one raid Ruza's life changed forever.

“Where is Pape ?” I called out to Mama.

“He just went out to Dinka's...” Mama's eyes suddenly went very wide and she turned white, like a ghost.

“What...” I started. But Mama motioned to me to be quiet. Suddenly I heard the noise. It was the faint buzzing of an aeroplane engine in the distance. The buzzing grew louder and louder until it was almost deafening and the ground was shaking. “It is right above us Mama!” I cried. My face is very wet now from all my tears. Mama and I sat huddled together hugging on the kitchen floor. “I will never forget you, I love you, I love you and Pape so

much!" I whispered to Mama. Mama just nodded as if she dared not speak. The buzzing hadn't died down and I was shaking with fear. BANG! Something bounced, once, off our roof and crashed through onto the living room floor. I didn't make any sound. Slowly I opened my eyes and realised. I wasn't dead. "It is alright, we aren't dead, and it didn't go off!" I screamed, I am crying again but this time from happiness and relief.

**After that Ruza wasn't frightened of war anymore and she had a feeling that, maybe, someone was watching over her.**

It soon became obvious that the communist-led forces would triumph and as her parent's sympathies were with the Yugoslav Royal family and the Western democracies, they undertook the long, difficult and dangerous journey westward. They abandoned all their possessions and travelled by whatever means they could: trains, ox-driven wagons, occasional long spells of walking and finally, after several months they, together with friends and neighbours, made it to Northern Italy and sought asylum with the British armed forces. The British took this group of refugees and placed them in improvised campsites. For a few months Ruza and her family lived on a football field in a small Italian town called Cesena. Women and children, who were accommodated on the grandstand, were separated from the men who were in tents on the field. Little did Ruza know that on the field below her was someone who would play a very important role in her life later on.

"It has been four years since we fled here. This is something like the fifth refugee camp, isn't it?" I asked. Mama nodded solemnly, obviously thinking about something else. I sighed. "I wonder how Pape is going in the British Army camp as their chaplain" I asked to no one in particular resting my head on my hand.

**"Come on, Ruza, it is school time" Marina yelled gesturing for me to come over. "Why did they have to set up temporary schools in this place, I can understand churches and sporting activities but schools?" I thought and went to follow Marina.**



Sophie and Ruza

The International Refugee Organisation who set up the camps also arranged permanent settlement for the refugees. Australia, in the post-war years, needed a workforce that could contribute to the development of the country after the war. As her parents were too old to come out as labouring immigrants, Ruza and her brother, who had joined the family in one of the camps, were the real immigrants and were accompanied by their parents.

"I settled in nicely in Australia. There is not too much prejudice and racism; it is such a nice and welcoming country. I have learnt English from my first job as a mother's helper in a suburb called Turrumurra. Now I work at David Jones and it is very interesting" I explained, to an old friend, in a letter. "There are so many new things to do here. Tonight I am going to a dance in a migrant club. It should be fun, and I wish you were here. Much love, Ruza."

That night, at the club, she started talking to a young Dunlop Rubber Company worker, who intended going to university, and who had also migrated from Yugoslavia. She thought she vaguely remembered him from her time spent on a football field in Italy but brushed the thought off. She smiled and wondered, as she often did, if someone was watching over her. Maybe someone is.

## CHARLIE'S STORY

The Pol Pot regime that took control of Cambodia in the year 1975 was like a crime scene replaying over and over again. Many souls were lost and many suffered from what they witnessed. Charlie was one of them. Although today he always has a smile on his face, he is still wounded by the excruciating memories of his childhood.

When Charlie was just nine years old, a civil war broke in his country of Cambodia. "Everything happened at once. I saw a soldier telling my family to leave our house for three days. My uncle disagreed with them and they shot him. I was very scared so we packed a small amount of supplies and left. A soldier was leading us to a place I didn't know. There were approximately 250,000 people walking in a group to reach the same destination."

During their journey, many people died due to sicknesses such as malaria. When they reached their destination they were to build their own houses. "My father and I started cutting bamboo leaves and putting them together. We were very proud of our construction, but our location was horrible. There were many diseases and sickness spreading in our

village. I fell sick myself. Fortunately, I lived. However many people of our community died."

After four months of horror, Charlie's uncle sponsored them to a safer place just 60km away from their old village. They stayed at the new village for one year. In 1979, the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia. The Pol Pot regime was overrun by the Vietnamese and Pol Pot now only had control of part of Cambodia. Charlie's family soon returned home for one year but still were tormented by the war, so they decided to escape.

"The war was devastating. Everywhere was a dead corpse. The smell was spreading and making people sick. My mum and dad decided to escape, which was one of the hardest things they had done, as there were many guards."

We were travelling to Thailand and paid people who guided us. It took us one month to arrive in Thailand by foot. When we were there, we stayed at a refugee camp for two weeks. Due to political reasons, the Thai government forced everyone from the refugee camp back into Cambodia, even if they weren't Cambodian. There were roughly sixty buses full of refugees."

## INTERVIEW CATEGORY WINNERS



Joanne and her father Charlie.

The buses had to travel around Thailand before arriving at the Cambodian border. The soldiers told the refugees to head off to Phnom Penh to find shelter. The refugees then had to journey through a mine field, in which they also had to spend the night. "I was very frightened. Many people were bombed by the mines in the field during that night. I couldn't lie down as there were many mines surrounding me. I had to sleep sitting down, just centimetres away from a mine. We gathered water by a nearby stream. A man was leaning to take a drink when he was blown up by a mine. We used the corpse to alert us where there were mines whilst we collected the fresh water. That was the most frightening moment of my life. I will never forget that moment."

Half way through the journey, the refugees had to stop to rest for one month due to the war. They made shelter and planted food. After the war had settled, they headed off again to Phnom Penh. It only took them 15 days to reach the capital. When the war was nearing to its end, Charlie tried a second time to escape, this time individually. "I decided to escape again, without my family. I thought it would be a better chance, not to get caught. I took the same route as before and arrived at the same refugee camp. I stayed at the camp for three years whilst studying English and Chinese."

**In 1983, the Australian government sponsored Charlie.**

**"I was overwhelmed by the opportunity Australia has given me. I arrived the same year they sponsored me by plane. It was a relaxing trip; however I was very devastated when I flew past my country. I saw many figures on the ground and when I asked someone what they were, they said that they were corpses. I was very disgusted by the way my government had treated my people."**

When Charlie arrived in Australia, he was sent to a hostel in Sydney, where he stayed for two weeks. Charlie's uncle was living in Australia, so he took responsibility for Charlie. Charlie lived with his uncle in Melbourne for three years. During this time, he became an Australian Citizen, got married and had two kids. He then moved to the Gold Coast, due to the cold weather in Melbourne. "I believe that anyone can make it through, under worse circumstances or not, as I have done. I have been living in Australia for over twenty-two wonderful years. Australia has given me the opportunity to restart my life and a chance for freedom. I now call Australia my home."

## DANNY'S STORY

I chose to interview how Danny Fanayan came to live in Australia. Danny is one of my father's good friends and workmates. He escaped from Iran to live in Australia. His story highlights just how lucky we are to be living in a democracy.

His main reason for escaping from Iran was due to the Baha'i religion, that he follows, was under persecution by the Iran's Islamic government. The Baha'is were previously protected to some degree by the Shah (king). This protection was lost after the Islamic revolution commenced in Iran in 1979. They imprisoned, tortured and killed the Baha'i followers. 250 were already killed while he was still living in Iran. The government confiscated their properties, bulldozed their cemeteries, sacked them from government jobs, demolished their holy places and they were deprived from education (no university entries). It was becoming a very hard life for the Baha'is, so he made his difficult decision and was determined to leave all this horror for a better future, leaving his parents and siblings behind.

His family had its fair share of troubles from the government. His house was burnt and damaged by Molotov cocktails thrown into it while his family were asleep, when he was a teenager. His father was very badly tortured and his sister was put in solitary confinement.

When he was aged twenty, he paid a huge amount of money, about 80,000 Iranian Toman (approximately three year's pay in those days), to smugglers to smuggle him out of Iran. His friend knew these smugglers, as he

had already got his family out of Iran. So when Danny was 20 he went to the smugglers house with his friend. These smugglers let them stay in their house for a few days while they set up and got supplies. When they were finished they paid them, then they gave him and his friend a car and told them where their first checkpoint was. The smugglers told him that they should not carry any cash with them and should pass everything to the smugglers to carry it for them. So Danny and his friend gave about 30,000 Toman of cash that they had to the smugglers in the hope of getting it back at the destination. They also told them that if anyone asks what they are doing they should say that they are visiting someone in the neighbouring city.

At the first checkpoint a 4WD came and picked them up, it then drove all day through a rough rocky area. As it became night the road ahead became too rocky to drive on so the smugglers gave them camels. These camels were also carrying other goods that they were smuggling out, this meant that they had to spread their legs doing the splits on the large pile of goods, this was very uncomfortable for them. They had been travelling for many days now and were a little sleep deprived, so they found it very hard keeping their eyes open. When he did get some sleep he didn't remember how he got off the camel and woke up lying on a rock the size of a fist. That morning they ate canned food that was provided by the smugglers.

They then travelled another whole day by camel and the smugglers insisted that they stayed on the camels until they got to the mountains then they got off and walked. That night they met the next set of smugglers who took the camels away, because they had reached the border line where they had to cross to the other country, Pakistan. The smugglers said they had to run for their life

## INTERVIEW CATEGORY WINNERS

for about a kilometre through sand across the border before they were safe. There were moving security spotlights that shone across the border, but the smugglers said that there were no people there with them, because the government were too scared of smugglers because the smugglers were a strong group of people and were very heavily armed. They both ran through the border and under barbed wire, which was very hard because they had to run through sand and avoid the being picked up by the lights. When they crossed the border they were received by another set of Pakistani smugglers. The Pakistanis across the border gave them a ride in a 4WD until about 5am, when they had a rest. Then they drove them again at night at 100 km/hr without the 4WD lights on, in order to avoid being spotted. At the destination they were given back only 20,000 Toman of cash given to the smugglers. Since there were so many changes of hand it was not clear where the other 10,000 Toman is gone.

Finally they reached the city of Quetta, where the UN (United Nations) had an office. When it opened in the morning, he went in and introduced himself to the UN and lodged a refugee form. They gave him a quick interview, some questions on the Baha'i faith were asked and were provided with some papers that offered them some low level protection by the UN. They then travelled by train to Lahor where all the Baha'is were asked to reside while they are under refugee status. The UN later conducted another interview with him in the capital city of Pakistan, Islamabad. They also checked if he was a listed Baha'i, then the UN accepted him as a refugee. The Baha'i status verification is normally done via the local Baha'i community or by the Baha'i headquarters (The Universal House of Justice, Haifa, Israel). This process took almost six months. He got paid



Alexander Kennedy with Danny Fanayan.

some regular survival money by the UN. The UN lodged his application with the Australian Embassy in Islamabad. He waited another 1 year before he was granted a visa. His main case for gaining a visa was on grounds of study, as the Iranian government no longer allowed Baha'i followers to go to university. He already had two brothers in Australia, who sponsored him. With his recently granted visa, he departed from Pakistan and flew to Australia.

He already had learnt some English language in Iran, learnt some more English in Pakistan, while he awaited his visa approval, and he was provided with English language classes when he arrived in Australia. After arriving in Australia, he stayed six months in a hostel where all food and English classes were provided. He commented that "the government was very good back then". Although he knew a fair amount of English before arriving in Australia, the language was the biggest barrier for him. He also found the culture a big shock, mainly through the interactions with other people. For example, in Iran you would know everyone in your own street, but in Australia you may not even interact with your next-door neighbour.

He faced many hard challenges on the way but he is not regretful and is glad he did it. He is glad that he had a tertiary education. He is also glad that he is working and feels in a sense a useful human being. He has learnt practically what one of the Baha'i principals meant and that is "Unity in Diversity", every culture, every nation is different you just need to adapt and accept the differences and enjoy it.

## ERNEST'S STORY

**My grandfather, Ernest Istvan Gerzabek, (who I am very proud to tell the story of) was a refugee from Hungary. Ernest was 18 years old when he became a refugee.**

It all started in 1956 when the Soviet army severely crushed Hungary and the Hungarian people. As an outcome thousands of freedom fighters and civilians were killed.

Like 200,000 Hungarians, Ernest decided to leave his beloved country in search of freedom, along with his parents and his younger brother. Secretly they left, leaving their small flat and all of their belongings behind. Crossing the border was challenging, constantly alert for danger on the way. There were armed border guards who either shot or arrested and imprisoned anyone who was caught. Ernest recalls, "Our hearts were pounding, it seemed like eternity." He and his family walked for tiring kilometres in the dark.

After walking the long, tiring distances he was relieved to hear the voices of Austrian border guards welcoming the Hungarians. The guards helpfully escorted them all to a school hall. Ernest says, "In hindsight I often wondered how we dared to undertake such a journey into the great unknown without any money, property or support from relatives. I could not speak any other language besides Hungarian," he told me. It makes you realize how desperate a refugee must be before he or she leaves their whole life behind in their beloved country of birth.

"It was so easy for FAT CAT politicians in their cozy offices to accuse refugees of being illegals and lock them up behind razor wires and treating them like they

were undesirable sub-humans!" Ernest said. All Hungarian refugees were accepted by the Austrian Government. "We were treated with sympathy, given food, clothes and the basic necessities for survival, we were even given accommodation!" he says.

They were housed in dormitories with bunk beds, each dorm accommodating at least 40 other strangers. There was not a lot of privacy living with so many people, so later on families received a room in an old army barrack with communal bathrooms. Ernest explains, "We were free, poor, but free to roam the streets and meet and become friends with the locals."

They were helped to apply for immigration to countries that willingly accepted refugees. "My family wanted to move away from the frequent war and the conflicts of Europe, so we applied to distant countries like U.S.A, Canada and Australia." He explained.

**English and German languages were provided at the camp, so eagerly Ernest started to study both languages.**

Waiting for the acceptance became very drawn out and painful, with hope fading away every single day. They waited two long years before receiving a final answer. "As I remember, the uncertainty was practically unbearable, I was depressed and hated being stuck in a seemingly endless limbo!" he explained. Finally being accepted by Australia gave him the hope to start a new life. "I was so grateful and still am after 47 years," Ernest says thankfully.

He packed his belongings and left for Australia in an old Italian converted ship. It was no luxury cruiser! It took six

## INTERVIEW CATEGORY WINNERS



April Seymour grandparents (Ernest and Ruth Gerzabek).

weeks to get to Melbourne. There were dormitories again, separated by male and female. It was very hot and crowded. Plenty of food was given, "We were even given wine with our dinner," says Ernest.

From Melbourne they were taken to Bonegilla Migrant Camp. At the camp there were all sorts of nationalities, and oven hot barracks for families in need of a job. Ernest, his parents and his 14 year old brother managed to get a job so that they could save money. "We put all of our savings together and within a few years bought a modest home unit, furnished it and joined the human race."

**Slowly he overcame his difficulties with the English language, improving enough to communicate.**

He then felt confident enough to enroll in university to study architecture part-time. "I found the going very hard, having to use a Hungarian/English dictionary at all times, other than mathematics, design and drawing subjects," Ernest explains. Some of the lectures were spoken too fast for him to comprehend so he would study during any free time he had to catch up on the work.

He finished his seven year course and became an architect in 1965. He then became a proud Australian citizen and during his 25 year career he constructed at least ten public schools, five high schools plus whole building blocks in major projects like Westmead Hospital.

Ernest then retired and became an artist. To date he has had 16 solo exhibitions in Sydney and Melbourne, and he also participated in countless group shows in Australia, the US and Canada.

**"I always felt proud of being a refugee, of being brave enough to do it and finally having succeeded against countless odds and disadvantages. However, I felt hurt when in the early days, in Australia we were called and treated like "bloody new Australians" by some locals. Luckily only the most ignorant and uneducated people did so, people who never learnt any languages, had never seen the world and envied the successes of hard working migrants" he expressed.**

My grandfather, whom I am very proud of, is a happily married man with loving grandchildren, children and other relatives to support him and his successful career. What an inspiration! Ernst states, "Based on my personal experience I believe illegal refugees can become useful members of society, given the CHANCE."

## TANIA'S ESSAY

**It takes courage to be a refugee. When I first read this statement I felt confident and ready to write an article on the topic of refugees; I mean it seems pretty straight forward or at least I thought so.**

As I sat down at my computer and started to write I asked myself: "do I even possess a full understanding of the term refugee?" Of course not! I have found that during my lifetime I have never been confronted with that kind of issue. I have never had the opportunity to place myself in their position and really think; really understand. I asked myself these questions; how do you become a refugee? What problems do they face? What do they think? What do they fear? Could someone like me ever become a refugee?

So before I even start thinking about the term courage the word that I must focus on and understand is refugee. I

decided to do some research and try to understand this word in depth, understand what these people deal with, what they face every day of their lives. Therefore my aim is not any different to that of the UNHCR 2005 High School Writing Competition as I quote: "...help generate knowledge and understanding of refugee issues...". This is what I plan to achieve through this competition. My aim is not that of winning but that of learning. I hope that through my writing not only will I personally benefit but so will the community and anybody who wishes to read my work.

I believe that many young people would most likely not know much about refugees. Most students coming from a similar background to mine, going to a great school like Kincoppal Rose-Bay and receiving different opportunities, wouldn't know much about refugees. I was part of that group of students before I entered this competition and I have since then expanded my knowledge. I am glad as this is not a topic which I believe today's society should ignore.



Sierra Leone: Voluntary repatriation from Liberia. UNHCR/E. Kanelstein



Afghanistan. UNHCR/N. Behring

What is a refugee? A refugee can fall under any of the following statements which I choose from a number of different dictionaries. A refugee is:

- An exile who flees for safety
- Someone who has left his or her homeland because of fear of persecution.
- A person who has been forced to leave his/her home and has crossed an international border.
- One who flees in search of refuge, as in times of war, political oppression, environmental destruction, or religious persecution.
- A refugee is a person who has left, or has been forced to leave, his state and move to another state because of a well-founded fear for his/her safety. A person who has voluntarily left his state for better economic opportunities in another state is an immigrant, not a refugee.

I have read different recounts and stories written by a number of different refugees and there were parts of sentences which stood out in each story:

**“...all I wanted was freedom.”,**  
**“I wanted to be happy”,**  
**“I wanted a choice...”**,  
**“I wanted opportunities!”**,  
**“I didn’t want to run...”**,  
**“I had to leave...”**, **“I was scared,”**  
**and “...I needed a home.”**

I had never realised how lucky we are to have things that we take for granted each day. I have never feared for my safety simply because I was from a different background

or religion. I have never been forced to leave my home. I have rights and freedom. This is a lot more than many people have all around the world. It scares me just to think of how it would feel to be threatened for just being me. I feel afraid for the people who go through pain because of social differences. Compared to them I am extremely safe in my sheltered life. Just being able to face another day not knowing what it will bring or going to school knowing that you will come back with a black eye is more than brave. These people face danger, pain and fear each day, yet they fight on and keep on going.

Some of these families have had to leave everything they own and travel to a whole new country. Hundreds of people stuck on a small hot boat for days with nothing but the clothes on their backs. They are the true battlers of 2005, the true fighters and for this they are truly brave. Bravery is the strength to face danger or take on challenges, feeling no fear, courage and determination in meeting danger or difficulty a virtue that few people possess.

It takes great courage and determination to survive within a group of people who are stripped of these basic rights, who are considered outcasts, and are seen as people who weigh down present society development. Today’s youth must not be misled to believe that refugees are a burden to our society and should understand that a community cannot truly grow unless all people are included. If social justice is sought not only for oneself but for everyone we can make a difference.

## AISHA'S ESSAY

**“I made a sudden realisation that these innocent people who are being put through these times of unbearable hardship are very courageous.**

Sitting amidst my bedcovers watching the tiny slivers of moonlight dance about my curtains I can't help but let the tears flow freely down my cheeks. They taste salty. At the sudden thought, a blurred vision of a narrow, overcrowded fishing boat on a rough sea passes my closed eyes. As it becomes clear I see men trying to protect their families from falling overboard, the bags heavy under their eyelids from lack of sleep. Women's faces clouded over with grief and distress, they seem so brittle standing there close together with kids hanging onto their clothing. The majority of the children are little. Most of them are too little to understand their situation but are crying from exhaustion, hunger and lack of sleep. I see their young eyes hardened from the tiring journey and my own eyes jolt open. I glance at my alarm clock. It's only 11 o'clock. I don't feel like sleeping, so I go into the kitchen to get myself a drink. My tummy makes a low grumbling sound. It's been six hours since I last ate.

As I walk into the kitchen, I fumble for the light switch. Its brightness hurts my eyes. I open the fridge and reach out for the jam and bread but stop myself. I see the children again with small, frail arms and legs. They've been without food for days. Not knowing why, I forget the grumbles of my stomach and withdraw my arm. Feeling sulky I return to my room with no intention of sleep. Whilst turning on my bedside lamp, I pull out a folio of papers from my drawer. I hesitate before opening the page where I left off and read on. It was a personal

story about a young girl by the name of Najeeba whose family and herself were smuggled out of Afghanistan. She spoke about losing her two best friends and waiting a very long time before being granted a permanent visa. Another spoke about a young girl called Mina who lost her father while fleeing her homeland of Bosnia with her brothers and mother, Rukija. I read more accounts before closing the folio and replacing it in the open drawer. All this information has me sitting still against my bead head. These peoples' stories had gotten to me and it wasn't a nice feeling.

Growing up in Australia I had little knowledge about the experiences of refugees. The only thing I knew was what was shown on T.V. They were the images of 'illegal immigrants' arriving on the shores of Australia. These immigrants were then either put into a detention centre or sent to some island on the outskirts of Australia. Never did I imagine their life to be so hard or reflect on why they were in these positions. While reading all those personal accounts and stories I made a sudden realisation that these innocent people who are being put through these times of unbearable hardship are very courageous. They develop the ability to face the danger, difficulty and pain at times when they are afraid. They rake their pockets dry in a desperate attempt to save their families from the traumatic events and establish the hope in their hearts that there is something more out there. They leave their war torn countries with only the clothes on their back, the faith and optimism in their heads and a story of great courage and bravery in their hearts.



Vietnamese Refugees, 1978. *UNHCR/K. Gaugler*

## EMMA'S ESSAY

It takes courage to be a refugee: these peoples lives are interrupted unexpectedly, their daily routines changed dramatically and their daily lives are put on hold. These people handle more fear daily than what we encounter in our entire lives. They flee their country of birth in hope of a better life – but as they do this they are putting the two things they are fighting for, their lives and freedom, at risk.

“Courage; the ability to face danger, difficulty or pain (mental or physical) even though you are afraid; bravery”

This is the dictionary meaning to courage, but to everyone courage means something different. I am 14 years old and live in a small town called Streaky Bay.

What I assume to be courage may well be different to what a child living in a refugee camp thinks it is. I consider courage to be having enough guts to jump off the jetty, or feeling brave enough to try and catch a big wave, or even just getting over your nerves and asking the person you like to go to the formal with you. A refugee may consider courage to be standing up for human rights, or fleeing the village or having the stamina to walk for days on end.

**If you were told you had to leave your country immediately never to return what would you take with you? Food, water, clothing, bedding, mobile phone, photographs?**

Without warning these people have no time to think, they would have to grab the first thing that comes into

their head, what they don't think to take gets left behind and forgotten forever. They take only what they can carry and only what they need.

Refugees lose things in their lives like their homes, clothes, photos, memories and sometimes even family members in their desperate search to find safety. Sometimes these things which are most precious to them are never seen again.

To leave your country of birth, the place you spent all if not most of your life, would be a heart-wrenching decision. Although a lot of the time the refugees do not get to make the choice. They are either forced to leave by rebel groups and armies, or simply decide their country, the place they call home is no longer the paradise it once was. It may have been torn apart by war, or had its heart ripped out by a natural disaster. Whatever the reason these refugees come to Australia, it was in desperate hope of a better life.

Refugees arrive in Australia hoping to start afresh only to (in most cases) be issued a Temporary Protection Visa (TPV). This legally allows you to stay in Australia for 36 months. Although when the 36 months is over and if you haven't applied for a permanent visa you will be sent straight back to where you came from, back to the nightmare you temporarily escaped, back to endless days

in refugee camps, the long nights in hiding, red raw feet from continuous walking from town to town. This would be like placed in limbo; they aren't in danger but they aren't in a permanently safe position either. To be issued a TPV would be like being told you aren't wanted, like you don't deserve protection. Even though for the moment they would be safe, in the back of their minds the thought of returning to a country that has been war torn, or a country with few human rights would be slowly killing them.

**Even the children show unimaginable feats of courage – even though in their short lives all they have experienced is pain, bad luck, unfair rules and lack of human rights, the children still believe there are people in the world worse off than they are. Each**

**and every one of them shows courage in a world that expects them to simply sit back and obey the outrageous rules that have been set for them to blindly follow.**

The story of Massoud, a 12 year old boy who lived in Iraq, his parents only just made enough money to get by each day, so when he asked for a soda and was told a blank no he decided to take matters in to his own hands. He took a job selling goods on a busy highway, where each time a car or truck would pass he would stop the vehicle and attempt to sell his goods. Although one day a truck failed to stop, instantly killing Massoud. He showed courage in the way that although he knew it was dangerous, he took the job anyway just to help his family .

In our lives we all must show courage, we all get the chance to, no matter big or small the situation may be we should all be brave enough to rise to the occasion.



Rwandan Refugees in the Kisangani Region of Zaire, 1997. *UNHCR/ R. Chalsani*

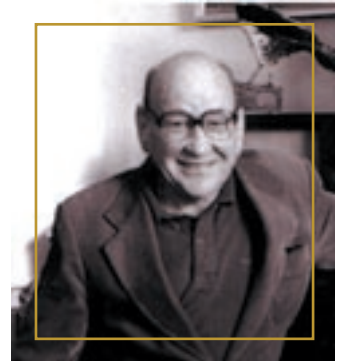
# IT TAKES COURAGE TO BE A REFUGEE

Shattered glass spreads across the ground like fallen leaves, forming a carpet of a thousand pieces. Moonlight catches the shards, they glitter. Boys' footsteps thunder away. Laughter. Ernie looks at the bare window frame, empty. Next to him, his brother sleeps. It is August 1938, Krystalnacht in Berlin. The Fascist youth group of Germany rage through the streets, smashing Jewish windows into crystals.

Ernie's father, Dr. Ernst Salomon is shaken by the destruction that covers his bedroom floor. Ernst fears what is yet to come. He drifts back to sleep and is filled with dreams of breaking furniture, shouting and movement. It is the Jews who are running, their cries piercing the street.

A few suburbs away from Ernie's house, his mother and her new family consider their future. Her husband, Dr. Golzen lost an arm fighting for Germany in World War One. However under Hitler's Germany he is not considered a German. Adolf Hitler claims that a person within four generations of the Jewish Faith, is a Jew. Considered disgusting, dirty and inhumane. Hitler breeds only blue-eyed babies, covered in soft golden hair; Arian. His displeasure echoes throughout the whole country. Dr. Golzen is three generations removed, a Jew, inferior. Hitler breeds hatred.

Dr. Golzen is a doctor of Lutheran Theology and knows of the underground Lutheran Movement Group, formed to



Ernie Salomon

remove young Jewish men from Berlin. He promises his wife Elizabet that he will send her sons to three different places in the world, in the hope that they will begin again and create new lives for themselves. He knows the coming years don't hold much joy. Only misery.

Ernie and his two brothers stand side by side. They carry their language and their love for each other, abandoning their home, their possessions, and their future. Venturing into the unknown, they rely on self-belief. They must summon their strength and courage to flee familiarity, routine and comfort and traverse into uncertainty. All around the brothers, other young men are gathered, with the same shrouded future. There is only silence and fear. They are refugees, fleeing Germany because it is the only choice.

The brothers are sent to three different countries, all neutral in the war. Gerd goes to Denmark, Horst to America and Ernie to Australia. They make a pact. In six years time they will meet again. They know of a place in Southern Australia called Hahndorf. Germany has a strong alliance with this small town near Adelaide. It is decided that they will meet in Adelaide, at the Town Hall. They fix a date and the brothers, lifetime companions, depart for their separate destinations. In 1945, Ernie, Horst and Gerd will reunite.

He sits on the steps of the Adelaide Town Hall. The rest of the city sleeps. It is five thirty in the morning, the 12th November, 1945. Ernie's face is a reflection of the years

## ESSAY CATEGORY WINNERS



Hannah

spent in hope and wonder, in sorrow and joy, waiting. As the city begins to wake, and hints of pink begin to emerge out of the navy sky, Ernie sits and waits.

He waits. Around him the rest of the world continues to move. Buses collect along the side of the footpath. Men in dull business suits walk by briskly, their square suitcases hanging from their arms like treasure boxes, filled with matters of importance. The sound of heels seems to echo around the streets. Every sound, movement and colour is heightened by his anticipation.

Gerd's face is like a tired angel. Ernie cannot move. He breathes. The air that rushes through him causes tears to form. He is overcome. Six years later his brother's face looks worn and weathered, but flushed with life. He has aged too quickly, a young man filled with concern and sadness. But Gerd's smile is still intact. In this moment of recognition, Ernie crumbles. The two young men, made old by their experiences, strangers from a distance, now embrace. In this reunification the brothers know there is much to overcome, but there is also much to learn, to love and to share.

The two of them sit down to wait for the arrival of their brother, Horst. It is not yet eleven o'clock. They sit in silence. Contented in each other's presence. Ten minutes to eleven. The brothers don't know where to begin their conversation. Eleven o'clock. Horst hasn't arrived. Ernie and Gerd know of the possibilities, but they try to forget. Horst is always late. Their strength comes from their conviction.

Eleven thirty. Ernie and his brother are filled with uncertainty. They know there is still a chance, but they are overwhelmed with possible truths. Ernie remembers a moment of his childhood, before anything happened. He draws courage from the days of peace. He and Gerd are in the street, playing, creating, imagining. The dark cobbled old streets provide an enchanting set for their game. Around them the sound of other children fills the street, their laughter and shouting creating music against the dark background. The small collection of Jewish children have no idea what their future holds. The two innocent boys are immersed in their game like two old men playing chess, completely oblivious to the surrounding world.

Gerd reaches for Ernie's hand and the two of them stare at the approaching figure. He looks just like the young boy, who had left Germany six years ago. Ernie and Gerd don't run to greet their brother. They stand and watch him coming towards them. They savour this moment of reunification. They share the same blood, an eternal connection. The three of them stand together. The power of their embrace is forever etched in their memories.

Now Ernie can appreciate the azure blue southern skies and their drifting white cottony clouds. The sun's warmth gives him a feeling of hope, of new life and the courage for new beginnings. This time there is also warmth within himself.

Ernie Salomon's story was told to me by his daughter, Lisa. Ernie died in Adelaide in 2001. He worked hard all of his life and never lost his passion and love for Germany.

## “IN MEMORY OF ROSE”

Hello my name is Rose; I am a girl who is rather short not tall with a slim body. I am a little bit dark in colour and brown eyes too. I have long straight black hair. I like eating lots of junk food, staying with small kids and friends, being in a place where everyone is happy, singing, dancing, swimming, going shopping with my sisters. I don't like being in a place where I don't know people or no body needs me around. I don't like hanging around with boys all the time just because they are stubborn not because I hate them.



From left to right: Rose Bol, Yom Malual, Nyandit Kuot, Nyanyai Deng, Amou Chol, Kuany Keer, Achal Thiik, Achan Ayuel and Achol Bol, at "Learn to Swim" St Ursula's Pool.

The good points about me are: I am polite to people, small and grown-up, so that they can be polite to me, patient, honest, obedient and respectful. The only bad point about me is that, when I found one of my relatives or someone I know is fighting or quarreling with somebody else whom I don't know, I just start defending him/her without asking first to know who started the fight or whose mistake or fault it was. I am trying hard to avoid that but I can't.

I was born in Thiad in Tonj town in Sudan where I was living with all my family members and relatives no matter that the war was already on. I didn't have to do anything only to eat and play because I was small and my mum couldn't allow me to go to school like the eldest kids for she kept worrying about bombing or attacking by the Militia. I used to remain at home with my aunts and two grandmothers while mum went to work and other children went to school.

By that time I never knew anything about the war except when we were attacked at night by the militia. I got separated from my mum, relatives, brothers and one grandma got killed when trying to help my uncle (her son). I've never seen my mum since that time and my grandma kept moving with us until we came to Australia.

**My life is very good here in Australia but it hurts me sometimes when finding myself with no mother around as if I wasn't coming out from a woman like others.**

The only thing I can remember is my first memory when I was about three years old. I fell inside the well near my aunt's house playing with my eldest brother. The well was very deep but I was lucky that there was no water in it. I spent three hours while people were looking for a way to get me out. My wrist and leg joints were dislocated but they weren't broken.

In Sudanese culture or society, boys don't have to do anything with the kitchen work and girls have to be taught by their mothers how to cook and behave in the community. In moving from childhood to adult, boys have initiation by putting lines/ marks on their forehead with a knife and circumcision. Women don't wear trousers; they wear long dresses and long shirts. Two to six or even more people share food together from the same plate or bowl.

*We submit her writing in memory of a loyal friend and diligent student.*

*Rose (Nyidhour ) Bol died tragically as a result of a car accident on the 23 October 2004.*

# EXCERPTS

---

## From Interviews

*Cathrine Nguyen (14), Kincoppal Rose Bay Secondary, NSW:*

"You wouldn't expect that the man sitting in front of me has escaped his country in a boat holding 3,500 people, landed in an army camp in Hong Kong, and now lives in Australia. He is a refugee."

*Samantha Collins (12), Orange High School, NSW:*

"In response to the slogan 'It takes courage to be a refugee', Mr. Daniel New said 'I think that word sums up everything, COURAGE'."

*Emma Warwick (14), Upper Coomera State College, QLD:*

"Jadek had a tough life, he had many problems due to the war and the effects of losing his family took his toll on him. He drank way too much and carried a lot of sadness. Unfortunately he didn't receive any help, or counselling."

*Medina Civic (14), Weerribe Islamic College, VIC:*

"Sometimes the past is good to forget but how will future generations learn of what terrible tragedies took place. Every person deserves to know the truth and until that day where that truth will be told there will be no peace in those who have suffered so much."

## From Essays

*Claire Hibbit (16), Annesley College, SA:*

"...instead of spreading propaganda and stereotyping refugees, believing that they are people who have come to our country illegally to live a better life when they were not in danger in their home land or were affluent people who wanted to jump the queue of legitimate immigrants by pleading refugee status, we should accept them for who they say they are, support them while their case is promptly dealt with, and all the time honour their courage for doing what they have done."

*Rachel Hudson, Kincoppal Rose Bay, NSW:*

"Refugees seem to be treated as the issue, when really they should be treated as people with an issue."

*Renee Bullen, Ingham State High School, QLD:*

"Maybe you could sit back and look at your life and say, 'It's not easy, I have a million assignments to get done, exams to study for, I'm arguing with my mum, my little sister won't stay out of my room, I have hundreds of pimples and I'm just not getting the marks I want in my classes.' Are these things really important, however, in the grand scheme of things?"

*Rebecca Davidson, Upper Coomera State College, QLD:*

"You can't fully understand what someone's been through until you have been in their shoes. Reading what refugees go through made me want to appreciate the freedom we have to speak and do what we want where we want. Refugees are often seen as an object of fear and this isn't right. They are not something to be scared of."

## From Personal Stories

*Anna Youl (16), Greystanes High School, NSW:*

"Life seemed pointless when I heard guns being shot every single minute as the war intensified."

*Mary Adhar Ring Mabil (21), Guildford Young College, TAS:*

"I only went to school for a short time when I was a refugee in Kenya. The children in the refugee camp had very little. We had to sit on the ground outside and write with our fingers in the dirt and there was no lunch for the students. After the United Nations came to our area, we had porridge for lunch, some paper and pencils, chairs and a table. We were very happy then."

*Alier Juuk (18), Windsor Gardens Vocational College, SA:*

"I was orphaned at three years old and had no family to look after me. I had to look for my own food. People in the village helped me."

*Ngor Chengkon (18), Cyril Jackson Senior Campus, WA:*

"After we were reunited we went straight to my town but I knew there would be a lot of relatives missing. I wasn't comfortable on my way because the path was full of dead people. I was smelly so I didn't check for people I missed because that was the place we had been attacked. As a result of war I had lost my dad."

*Julien Rashidi, Cyril Jackson Senior Campus, WA:*

"We arrived in Western Australia on 28.10.2003. I remember the first day I arrived and the first person I talked to, a man called Hammed. That man, from an Arabic country could speak French and English as well as Arabic languages. At that time I couldn't speak English and I couldn't go anywhere. I couldn't even get on the bus so I just stayed at home. The only person who helped me was this man, Hammed."

*Nega Tilahun Gonfa (17), Cyril Jackson Senior Campus, WA:*

"Nothing is uglier than being a refugee."

*Thant Zaw Aye (17), Mirrabooka S.H.S, WA:*

"Now that I am in Australia I'm planning to donate money to the camp to support the people because I know how tough it is to be there, live there, and to grow up there. Hopefully I can come back to your refugee camp and support your people in the camp. I will never forget you because of what I saw and learned while I was there – nobody should have to live like that."

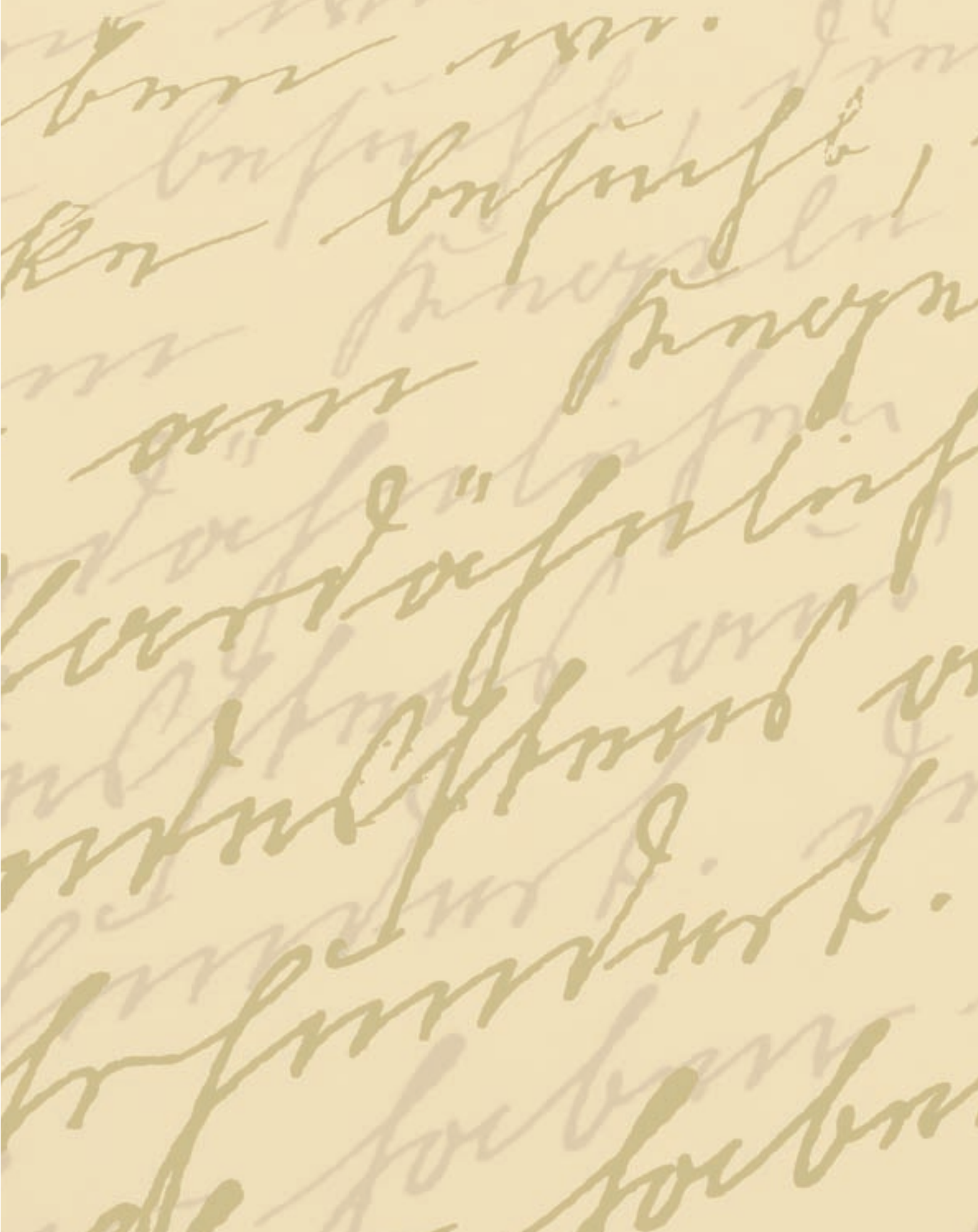
*Salam Abdulraham (16), Keebra Park State High School, QLD:*

"I was born in Baghdad, Iraq. As a child I was scared of Saddam Hussein. My cousin was a policeman in Saddam Hussein's regime. One day Saddam Hussein's men ordered my cousin to do something that he believed was wrong. They came to our house while my whole family was eating lunch together and shot my cousin. My father put his hands over my eyes but I saw the bullets hit my cousin in the shoulder and chest."

*Hussain Ali (19), Sacred Heart College, VIC:*

"My family consists of three brothers and one sister. I am the third youngest in my family and my sister Zanab and Hassan are both older than me. My younger brother's name is Abbas. I do not know how he is or how tall he is now. When we were at home he was small. He was very naughty but everyone liked him. We lived happily together with our parents in our village. But at the moment I have no news about my family. I don't know where they are right now but I hope they are safe."





**UNHCR** 15 Hunter Street, Yarralumla ACT 2606 Australia  
**TEL:** 02 6120 1108 **FAX:** 02 6273 6822 **EMAIL:** [aulca@unhcr.org](mailto:aulca@unhcr.org)