

# Refugees

*telling their stories*



**2003 UNHCR  
Australian  
High School  
Article Writing  
Competition**



**UNHCR**

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés



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# Introduction

Late in 2003, UNHCR launched a project – the Australian High-School Article Writing Competition - aimed at raising awareness of refugee issues in the Australian community. The premise for this project was simple: encourage young Australians to reach out to a refugee in their local community, listen to their story, and write it down. By talking, communicating and attempting to understand the lives of those that are hidden from us, we hoped through this project to bring clarity to an issue often fraught with misunderstanding and ignorance. The flow-on effects from this simple act of communication were significant. Bonds were formed between young Australians and refugees that never would have existed. This contact between young Australians and refugees (and Australians who were once refugees) brought into stark contrast the differences in personal histories between interviewer and interviewee, and shed some light, for many, on how lucky we are to live in a country free of political and religious oppression. The awareness of refugees living, working and making a contribution to local communities generated by this project also helped to humanise a group of people that are often depicted as an abstract political problem.

UNHCR was delighted and impressed by the response we received to this competition: delighted by the number of students willing to take the time to write a story, impressed by the maturity and insight contained within the articles. We were also impressed and humbled by the candour and dignity shown by all those refugees who were willing to tell their story. They freely recounted some of the worst moments of their lives, moments that took place at some of the most tragic sites in history – be it Auschwitz in Nazi Germany, or the final years of the Taliban regime, or the brutalisation of civilian populations in West Africa over the past two decades – and they did so with wisdom and honesty. The students found extraordinary stories in everyday circumstances – a father, a schoolmate, a family friend; from people they may never have considered a ‘refugee’. In the words of one of the finalists: "For this article I chose my father... I never really thought of him as a refugee or as one who had suffered because he is such a strong person; but when he told me about his early life, I realised how wrong I was".

UNHCR was also impressed by the historical diversity of the stories we received. That is, from the beginning of the 20th century (Alex’s story of flight from the Russian revolution) to the end (such as Salima’s story of oppression under the Taliban) we read stories from nearly every troubled place and time in the past century. Each of these stories, though from different cultures and from different conflicts, often shared a commonality of experiences for the victims: discrimination and violence; everyday life saturated with fear, and a final, desperate flight from oppression. To juxtapose these stories is to see that victimhood is not identified by race, religion, or culture; that victims of the Taliban, or the Nazis, or of the barbaric militias of Sierra Leone, are all worthy, and may all be in need of our help. Yet, these people are not simply victims requiring sympathy, they are courageous survivors worthy of respect. These are people who had the courage to leap into the unknown, to leave nation and home, to make untold sacrifices for the wellbeing of their families. Refugees in many ways are those who refuse to be victims; they are those who risk everything in order to take control over their own destiny.

This project, though modest in its original conception, received widespread support at a grass-roots level. The United Nations Youth Association (UNYA) encouraged participation through its members and contacts in high schools throughout Australia. Anne Simpson from *Rural Australians for Refugees*, and Eva Sallis from *A Just Australia* helped put word of the competition out through their extensive membership networks. We also appreciate the assistance of *Australia for UNHCR* (UNHCR’s national association in Australia) who put UNHCR in contact with two of their goodwill ambassadors - Ian Chappell and Ouma Sananikone – and requested they be part of our judging panel. Of course, the judges themselves - who in addition to Ian and Ouma, included the Regional Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Michel Gabaudan - are also to be thanked for their time. In addition, the staff at the Public Information section of UNHCR – Ellen Hansen, Sylvana Whyte and Truc Nguyen – made this project possible through their participation and support. Finally, for the students who had the goodwill to participate in this competition, and the refugees who had the courage to tell their stories, the biggest thanks should be given to you – your efforts will only help to encourage understanding and compassion in the Australian community.

Tim Napper  
Project Manager  
Australian High School Article Writing Competition  
UNHCR Canberra

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UNHCR bringing Rwandan children home to be reunited with their families.

Kigali Airport, Rwanda  
Photo: H. J. Davies, 1977

# Salima's story

by Hallie Kent, Ramona Strang and Salima Haidari

WINNER OF THE UNHCR REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE'S SPECIAL PRIZE

My name is Salima Haidari and this is my story. I was born in Ghazni, a small town south of Kabul, Afghanistan, in December 1988. Until the age of about eight I lived a fairly normal life for a girl in Afghanistan – a usual day was cleaning, cooking and sewing. I did not go to school because the Taliban didn't allow girls to go to have an education. Occasionally I was allowed to spend time with my friend. She lived in the house joined to mine, but I could not go and see her unless my father walked with me as young girls and women were not allowed out on the streets on their own. If the Taliban soldiers found a woman out on her own they would kill her, and leave her body where her friends will see it as a warning.

I rarely got to see my father, as he had to hide from the Taliban. He hid because he did not want to fight for them. One morning he went to Kabul in his truck to sell some firewood and he never came home. The Taliban caught him and some of his friends and said they had to become soldiers. My father and his friends escaped and ran away to Pakistan – we never heard from him again until we had been in Canberra for ten

months. After he had escaped, my home was visited regularly by soldiers asking where he was.

Just after I turned seven, soldiers were starting to fill the streets in small groups; eventually they were everywhere. They all had a uniform of olive green pants, a long brown coat and big black boots. They had empty faces and they all had long, black beards. They carried guns that had a sharp knife on one end and a hard block-like object on the other. They abused anyone who didn't do what they were told or got in the way. This is why my six-year-old brother died when I was ten. He was hit in the head with the end of a soldier's gun, because the soldiers thought he was lying about where my father was. This made us feel angry and afraid that they might do the same to us. The loss of my brother filled me with doubt that our family would ever be safe.

Not long after that my other little brother died. He was only four years old. One day the soldiers came again looking for my father. When they questioned my mother, she told them, "We don't know where he is".

The soldiers began beating her viciously with their guns yelling, "You lie, you lie!" My mother was holding my brother and she dropped him on the ground when the soldiers began to hit her. My brother's nose began to bleed, and then the blood came out of his mouth as well. We could not stop the blood and then he died. The soldiers found this amusing and while laughing they told my young sister with a gun to her head that she was next. It was so frightening. Then they got my father's picture, the only thing that could remind us of him, and burned it to ashes.

After that we tried to keep on living our lives as normally as we could in such conditions. The

gunshots and screaming did not ever seem to stop and everybody was always afraid. The windows were boarded and the locks on our door were useless. At



Afghan refugees in the Shamsabad refugee settlement, Iran.

Photo: A. Hollman 1993

night the soldiers often came to our house; they would take our blankets saying, "Why are you sleeping with a blanket?" leaving us cold, sleepless and sick all the time. It made me feel helpless that my mother was always sad and she didn't want to live anymore. It was like her life had drained out of her body.

In every home there was fear and people were always crying. There was never any happiness. When the soldiers were near your door you had to be very quiet, you even had to breathe quietly. You could never trust any man in the street because he might be a soldier. It had been four years and we hadn't heard anything from our father. There are no telephones or mail – there was no way that he could contact us and we didn't know that he had escaped to Pakistan. We thought he had been killed.

One day my grandfather had had enough and he tried to convince my mother to take us and leave the country, pushing his life-savings into her hands. At first my mother did not take the money saying "I can't leave you here with nothing" and he replied "I am old. I have lived my life. Look at your children! They are always afraid and they have their whole lives ahead of them, they shouldn't die here". Then she said "But I am a woman. What will I do? Where do I go? No-one will listen to me or help me!" Then he slapped her across the face and said, "LEAVE!" and walked away. I was so angry with my grandfather because he hit my mother, but now I can see that he saved us. After my mother had stopped crying she stood up and said "We are leaving" but I still didn't feel any hope. I kept thinking my mother was crazy. What was she getting us into? We would never survive. And I asked her "Where are we going? We will never get away, maybe we should just stay." When I said this, my mother got very angry and said "No! We have to try and escape. If we just stay then we will die and we wouldn't have tried. It's easy for your brothers and father, they are already dead." After my mother said this I thought to myself – 'So what if we are women, we are the same and we can survive'.

We went home and packed only what we needed – water and bread. We walked for a whole night and day and we were exhausted. We met three other families; two of them were also missing husbands and all three, the same as us, were fleeing from our country. They had a truck. They said we could travel with them so we would not have to walk anymore. The two men were



Afghan refugees returning to Kabul.

Photo: R. LeMayne, 1996

driving but the women and children were forced to hide behind a stack of potatoes and tea. If we were discovered then we would all have been shot and the men would have been used as soldiers. We arrived in Pakistan and we stayed for three days, staying in a cheap and dirty hotel, keeping out of sight. On the fourth day a man approached us and said, "If you give me four thousand American dollars for each person then I will get you to another country that is safe for your children, but you have to be very careful that the police or security don't see you."

On the fifth day he returned and we left. We traveled by truck for three or four days. Our food was so low that we could only feed the younger children. After what seemed like forever we arrived in a place called Karachi. We stayed there overnight and the next day we were on a plane going to Indonesia. After a two hour trip, we arrived. There we stayed eleven days in a house that was very small, with a smell that was so bad I couldn't breathe. We had to share two bedrooms between four families. On the eleventh night we caught a bus – we traveled for five hours and then we boarded a boat with three hundred and sixty other people.

The boat was so crowded! We had been promised a boat that had a room for every family, toilets in every room, a swimming pool and a restaurant! But the boat we had was very dirty and it seemed like it would break apart at any time. There were three levels and I was stuck in the bottom level next to the engine; it was so loud and smelled so bad, and I felt so sick. People vomited over me, in my face and all over me. When people died they just threw the bodies into the sea. While we were in the middle of the ocean the boat broke down.

Luckily there was a man who knew a bit about mechanics and he fixed the boat – after that he was very popular! After four nights and days we arrived in Christmas Island, Australia. But even though we were in Australia there were soldiers pointing guns at us. Our boat was told to go back by the police.

Although I was afraid of the guns I knew the soldiers were not like the soldiers back home. They put us in what looked like a big gym where we had lots and lots of food. I have never eaten so much in my life! Even when I wasn't hungry anymore I still kept eating. There were clean showers and toilets, and everyone was always fighting, pulling hair, kicking and punching just to use the toilets. Even with all the fights I thought 'I have made it, we survived!' After that we were sent to the Detention Centre in Port Hedland. We stayed there for three months, and although it was safe it was a lot like a jail. We had very small rooms and the security guards were constantly checking on us, but I knew I wouldn't have to be afraid for my life.

After that we were sent to Canberra and I was so excited. I still can remember coming to Canberra at twelve o'clock at night and seeing all the lights of the city and thinking, 'Perhaps I am in heaven!' When I saw Parliament House, I thought it was made out of paper or something. Then we arrived at a hotel in Civic. It was like a palace, when I saw it I felt like a queen! It was so clean and we were not cramped anymore. When I saw the elevator I thought "What is that?" When I got in it and it started to go down, I was screaming and crying, then when it got to the kitchen I was thinking "It can read minds, WOW!", because it stopped when I reached the kitchen.

We stayed in the hotel for a couple of months, then finally moved to a house for people whose families had separated. We lived there for about 10 months and one day when we came back from a picnic and there was a phone call. I picked up the phone and a woman told me there was a man in Canberra and maybe he was my father; but she told me not to tell the others because if it wasn't my father they would be so disappointed. The next day they arranged a meeting for my family and yes! – it was our father and we were so happy because we had finally found him after five years. Now we were crying tears of joy!

After we found our father we had enough money to rent a house for our family. My first day at school was very confusing. I didn't think I would make any friends but some people were nice to me and they stuck up for me when some students called me Osama Bin Laden's daughter. I was very shocked when they called me that. Also on the first day of school a lot of boys - there was

about 11 or 12 of them - were trying to hit us with fruit. So we retaliated and pelted them with fruit. Soon I befriended three girls: Hallie, Ramona and Anne. They are good friends: they are always here for me when I need them and accept me for who I am. At the end of the year I met my teacher. My first impression of her was that she was OK, but I got to know her when school went back after the holidays - she was really nice and so I told her my story. Now whenever I feel I need to talk to someone about something I tell her because I know I can trust her.

Still we are waiting to see if we have to go back to Afghanistan. Always we are waiting and not knowing if we will stay or if we will go. It is very hard to live not knowing what will happen in your life. I have thought I will kill myself if I have to go back. I am afraid we will be all killed if we go back – the soldiers will punish us. My sister Fatima is five years old – all the time she asks me "How will the soldiers kill us when we go back?" and she cries every night. When I try to go to sleep at night I don't want to close my eyes because I see all the faces of the dead people in the water. If I can stay in Australia I want to be a doctor or a nurse. If I was a doctor or a nurse I could have saved my little brother from bleeding to death.

But my story is better than the stories of others. At least I have had some good times and I have learned how to laugh and be happy. I go to school and I have most of my family.

My name is Salima Haidari and this is my story.



Ramona Strang, Salima Haidari, and Hallie Kent

# Zia's story

by Angela Ziaei, aged 14

THIRD PLACE

For this article I chose to interview my father, Zia Ziaei. I never really thought of him as a refugee or as one who had suffered because he is such a strong person; but when he told me about his early life, I realised how wrong I was.

His story begins in his home country, Iran, with his three brothers, two sisters and his parents. Most of his childhood was spent in a big house in Isfahan. Every day he had to walk a few kilometres to the nearest school. Although he was a good student and always the top of his class, he had been expelled from several schools for one unjust reason: he and his family were Baha'is.

The Baha'is had been persecuted for more than a century, but after the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, things became even worse. Baha'i properties were confiscated, assets were set to fire, well known Baha'is imprisoned and those who did not convert to Islam were put to death.

School was often bad enough without everyone knowing he was a Baha'i, but once the teachers found out, they would go out of their way to hurt and beat him. Zia often found himself hiding in a toilet cubicle. The students were also religiously prejudiced. They would throw rocks and beat him up whenever he wasn't with his close group of friends (who didn't care



Afghan refugees in the Subzevar transit centre, Iran  
Photo: A. Billard 1985

what religion he was). Eventually, the teachers and majority of students would have their way and Zia would be expelled.

Zia wasn't the only one in his family to be discriminated against. They all suffered by losing jobs or being expelled from university. Their property was confiscated, their belongings stolen – even their marriages were not considered legal by the government and therefore births were not officially recognised. Even worse, a powerful section of the population wanted the Baha'is dead.

In 1983, when Zia was seventeen, his older brother arranged to meet a Balouch man (someone who lives on the border). The man knew the off-road tracks from Iran to Pakistan and agreed to take them there in secret. My dad's family had to sell many of their belongings to raise enough money to pay the man. They couldn't sell the house because people would be suspicious but they managed to pay 100,000 Toomans (Aus\$24 000) to take the whole family.

His family traveled in small groups. Zia went with his sister, her husband and her two little children. At first the journey was frightening and extremely risky, for if they were caught, they would have been forcefully questioned, beaten, put in jail, and maybe even killed. My father told me that some people who were caught trying to escape Iran 'were shot on the spot without questioning.'

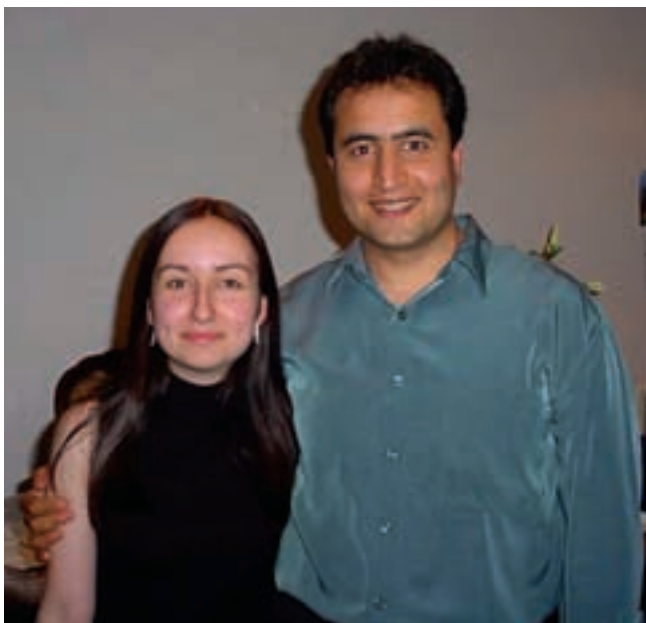
For four cruel days in the oppressive heat of summer, the escape continued. His brother-in-law lost fifteen kilograms from a combination of food poisoning, dehydration and lack of food. They could hardly walk or talk because of sunburn and dehydration. After Zia's sister became ill from malaria, things began to look desperate. However, in Pakistan, some poor yet generous people were willing to help them survive, to help them keep going.

They were interviewed by the UNHCR and were granted refugee status soon after their arrival in Pakistan. After thirteen months of waiting in Pakistan they were finally accepted to immigrate to Australia. Before arriving, Zia thought Australia would be a 'nice and tidy place', with many blue-eyed, fair-skinned people who lived comfortably. He also thought that there would be new toilets and schools with students

who were quiet and polite. Once they were in Australia, Zia and his family settled into Adelaide with the help of the Baha'i community. In particular, the youth of this community helped them to fit in by sharing stories and jokes.

One of the hardest challenges for Zia was learning English. After six months he began to 'see the light at the end of the tunnel'. School was also different and difficult, and he had to repeat year eleven because of language barriers. However, Zia persevered, and after high school went to Flinders University to study Biology. He earned a degree in Microbiology and then studied computing. After he graduated he began working at various places; he taught computing at TAFE, became a manager at Australia's Central Credit Union, and now he has his own successful business called Global TechNet.

Zia has now lived in Australia for over half of his life. He said that one of the most positive aspects of living in Australia was marrying an Australian wife and having a loving family.



Angela and Zia Ziaei

# Razia's story

by Anja Ivanovic, aged 16

She stands in the school corridor, giggling with her friends, no more distinguishable from the adolescent crowds than the next girl. Yet, the life that she has lived, the things she has seen, and how much she has suffered, distinguishes her greatly from these fellow students in a country she has only just recently begun to call home. This is her story.

"I do not have good memories of living in my country," Razia Danesh, a 16-year-old Afghani refugee, tells me. "Sometimes it was good. Mostly, it was bad."

Razia was about seven years old when the Taliban came into power. She remembers the fear they all lived in. "The Taliban were extremely religious. It was a requirement to pray a number of times a day. If men were seen clean-shaven, they were beaten. Women had

to wear the *Bourka* (a long, cloak-like garment which covers all of the body, with a small opening for the eyes) or they too would suffer at the violent hands of these soldiers. It was a most terrifying time."

The Danesh family, which consisted of Razia, her three younger siblings and her parents, lived in a small village called Ghazni. They belonged to the middle class, owning a shop two hours away from their home and a block of land for growing crops. Life was tough, but they got by.

Razia's world began to fall apart when her father was arrested in 1998. He was on his way to work and never returned home. The family was notified by local villagers five days after the disappearance; they were told that their father had been arrested by the Taliban.



Afghan refugee in Ghousabad, an urban slum in Quetta, Pakistan.  
Photo: Benatuar 2001

They were advised to pay a ransom if they ever wanted to see him again. The family obeyed the orders, and Mr. Danesh returned home shortly after.

Life resumed as normal, until tragedy struck the family once more in December 2000 - Razia's father was arrested for the second time, never to be seen again. At this point, Razia's mother had reached breaking point and wanted out. Life without her husband was extremely difficult, as women had virtually no rights or opportunities for employment in Afghanistan.

In June 2001, a man came to the home of the family and promised them a way out of Afghanistan. The family, after paying the smuggler in American dollars, boarded his jeep. They hid in the back as the jeep crossed the border. Razia was never sure what their final destination would be; all she wished for was a better place.

The family stayed in hiding for five days, until one night they boarded a plane for Jakarta. Razia remembers how frightened they all were when they realised they were in the air; they had never dreamt of such a thing. "I think about it now and I laugh. But then it was so scary. My mother panicked, however my brothers were having fun. Personally, I was excited by it all. Even though I was scared, I looked forward with excitement to the future."

When asked if Australia is the answer to her dreams, Razia states that it is all that and more. "Freedom and education are the best things. My life is so different now. It is so much better." She remembers the boat trip coming over here. "It was so cramped, so hot and dirty. But I do remember one night, looking out and seeing nothing but ocean - it was then that I began to feel truly alive."

Razia and her family spent three months at the detention centre in Port Headland, Western Australia. It was here that Razia and her siblings attended school for the first time in their lives. The worst thing about the centre was the insecurity she felt about her future, "All we wanted was freedom."

With their freedom granted in September 2001, the Danesh family now attempt to live a simple life, and are hopeful for the future, a future which might, with a little outside help, include a reunion with their father.



Afghan refugees at the Munda refugee village, Pakistan.  
Photo: A. Hollman, 1990

"I want to be a doctor," Razia tells me. "Now that I have had a taste for education, I cannot get enough." When I ask her if she is proud of her heritage, she says most definitely. "I am proud of being an Afghan. I will teach my children our customs, just as my mother has taught me. She was so brave to bring us here on her own. I am determined to make her proud."



Anja Ivanovic (Razia Danesh was not available)

# Peter's story

by Jessica Dornan, aged 16

It was midnight, the 4th of September 1961, less than a month after the secret construction of the Berlin Wall. Peter Lengefeld and his friend trudged through the dark forest, which lay on the border between East and West Germany, and also represented the

boundary of the infamous Iron Curtain. Before them lay freedom – freedom of speech, freedom of opinion, freedom of choice; behind them lay the German Democratic Republic, ruled by the oppressive Communist regime of Russia.



Their trek from their hometown had begun the previous day, with a fifty-kilometre journey by train, followed by a fifteen-kilometre walk, which was covered by the shroud of darkness and secrecy.

Seventeen-year-old Peter and his companion had only a vague direction of the path they should choose to reach their long-desired freedom. They had told no one of their departure; Peter knew his family would fear not only the landmines surrounding the border, but also the possibility that he could be caught and thrown into jail.

The border was highly protected, and only people who lived in the vicinity held the special permits necessary to gain legal access to the area. This, along with the Berlin wall, was a part of the government's plan to stop, according to Peter, the "bleeding of young

Eastern Europeans in a German refugee camp at the end of World War II.

Photo: UNHCR, 1953

people away from East Germany; they were leeching out by the thousands".

Although there was no fence to mark the border, the area was cleared, and according to the stories, planted with landmines. Peter tripped and fell in the clearing, and, as he looked up, saw, in the light of the full moon, an alarm wire, which would alert guards of anyone who dared go between the East and the West. He quickly warned his friend and they were able to pass around the alarm and safely complete their trek to freedom.

Once in West Germany, Peter experienced living in two refugee camps, the first being Giessen, the central camp for East German refugees, where he spent four weeks. After he indicated that he wanted to connect with relatives in the state of North Rhine West Phalia, he was moved to a refugee camp in the city of Paderborn. Both camps had very good living conditions and supplied the refugees with everything they needed – food, clothing and shelter.

The culture and language in both parts of Germany were the same, but the standard of living was greatly different. The East German people lived in poverty; many gave their homes away, because the house value was so low as people had no money to maintain them. The nations in the communist bloc, including East Germany, were bankrupt. Peter revealed that it was not the “workers’ paradise” we were led to believe it was. West Germany was the opposite, with healthy standards of living, and was seen as a haven for freedom by the East German youth. Despite these new-found freedoms, Peter was estranged from his homeland. Had he gone back at any time, he could have been charged for illegally leaving the country, and be thrown in jail.

Soon settled into the West German lifestyle, Peter became qualified as a ‘toolmaker’, and later joined the West German Police Force. In 1968, Peter married Rita, but in 1972, at age 28, Peter’s employment with the police force ended because of his recurring stomach ulcers. The couple then had thought they would go on a world trip, but, partially because of

assisted passage, Peter and Rita, along with their baby daughter Nicole, decided to stay in Australia after coming to the nation in 1973. Language barriers (as neither spoke much English), nearly no friends or relatives, and the heat (especially at Christmas, when they expected snow and cold) posed problems to the immigrants, but these obstacles were soon overcome.

Since settling in Australia, their second daughter Nadia was born. Peter and Rita have found that Australians are far more relaxed than German people, and the stress levels in Australia are much lower. They much prefer to live here than in the rigid lifestyle of Germany.

Peter had been a political refugee from his home country since the age of seventeen, and in 1993, Peter saw his parents for the first time in over thirty years. Even though this period of separation from his family had brought pain and loss, Peter believes his decision and the freedom it brought for his children were worthwhile, and never would have been achieved had he not made his initial daring decision to leave East Germany.



Peter Lengefeld and Jessica Dornan

# Adut's story

by Sophie Weldon, aged 14

FIRST PLACE



Sudanese refugees in the Fugnido Camp, Ethiopia.

Photo: M. Amar, 1989

"I closed my eyes and wished that it all would go away: the pain in my heart, the loss of my mother and family, and the terror of the war. Hope was a vision that riddled my dreams, dreams of happiness and love. Hope was like a burning flame inside of me. A flame that kept me going and I kept feeding to sustain. Why me? Why me? I ask. I was eight when the war broke out in my town, forcing me to flee my school as it was being bombed, without even being able to find my parents: that's when it all started. In the confusion I found my brother, and my three-year-old cousin Abuk who was wandering, scared and alone and my friend Deng.

Two months after our escape from the bombs at our school we reached the displacement camp at Torit, however the fighting overtook us again and we were told to keep moving. Keep moving I told myself; just keep moving. I grew up inside and outside. No voice of

a mother or father to guide me, only the responsibility for Abuk, and the sound of Deng's voice - only slightly older than mine - urging me on towards an unknown future. I can't remember my birthdays; one day I was nine and the next I was ten.

Like a procession of mourners, with our heads bowed low we headed for our future amidst the heat waves and landscape of the desert. Two years later we reached Kakuma camp. 946027...946027...946027... that was my new name. From now I shall be a number in a file and my name, Adut Dau Atem, shall have no meaning or significance. No longer shall I be a person but rather a number that defines who I am. The UNHCR had given us a refugee number. I was not a child anymore but a refugee.

We were in the camp for 4 years when one day, out of nowhere, my father arrived. He had been released from prison and had searched for two years on foot to find us. Three years later we were accepted into Australia as part of the offshore refugee programme. We were very



Sudanese refugees in the Fugrido Camp, Ethiopia.  
Photo: M. Amar 1989

grateful for this but I was also very sad, as I had to leave my cousin Abuk behind, to whom I had been like a mother for so long. I had to leave Abuk as she wasn't part of my immediate family. When I had to tell Abuk and say goodbye, my heart felt like it would bleed to death. I tried to speak fairly to her. 'Look, if I am going I want you not to feel bad, please try to live, concentrate on your life, never give up hope.' It was hard for her, she thought she was coming with us and then all of a sudden things changed. She was very, very upset but she did not say anything, she just stood there in silence. The day we left she was unable to talk. I'll never forget it.

I want Abuk to be back beside me again. I want her to be sharing my chance for an education and a safe life. Now she will have no one - her parents were never found. Many times I have regretted leaving her and coming to Australia without her, but I didn't have a choice. I am now 18 and I think about how I live here, in comfort and safety, and I remember not just Abuk but all the children in Kakuma who still do not have enough food to eat."

I press the stop button on the tape recorder and slide back in my chair, realising how amazingly different two lives can be. Not only the measure of pain, love,

happiness and anguish but the differences in the people that surrounded us. I can't relate to having the responsibility for caring for an orphaned child like Abuk when only eight years old, or to not know where your parents were for so long - especially in those crucial years when a child needs a mother and father's love and care and knowledge of the world. I had once tried the 40 hour famine and had raised money when I was 12, but to always be hungry and never have any choice: how would I survive if I were in her place?

I sat there with the notes of the interview in front of me

and re-read Adut's last email written in her faltering English:

"Dear Sophie, I had read the written story. Sophie you have done very well. I have no comment at all and very happy that you wrote exactly the way I would have done it. Thank you sister that you pass my message to almost every one. I love you all. Adut."

Tears roll down my cheek, but they aren't tears of sadness or tears of happiness; they mix together and somehow form tears of hope.



Sophie Weldon and Adut Dau Atem

# Shahram's story

by Nicholas Bayley, aged 17

## SECOND PLACE

The sun had long set, night wrapping itself around the building in which we sheltered. I sat clutching my suitcase, which along with the clothes on my back, were now my only personal possessions.

I was a marked man, guilty of only one thing - my faith. My future had been stolen from me just as it had begun. A revolution had occurred in my home country of Iran during my final year of schooling. We Baha'i were relentlessly persecuted, denied freedom, and given no opportunities for education or employment. The government had begun to persecute many of its citizens. They had threatened my family and after a year in hiding I finally decided that I must leave, for my own safety and that of my family. I had paid a 'human smuggler' a large amount of money to transport me safely into Pakistan.

Soon, I found myself huddled in a safe house in the border-city of Zahead, listening intently for any sound that would belie any approaching danger. We could not be caught. It was around midnight when the smugglers came for us. Eighteen of us crammed into a single Jeep Cherokee and drove through town covered, concealed from the eyes of the guards.

We left the town behind us as our jeep began to work its way through the bush. After an hour we left the vehicle behind and continued on foot. The night was long as we worked our way through the rugged terrain towards the border, hoping to cross unnoticed. It was only as the sun began to rise that we finally reached the border, where we found two utes waiting for us.



Afghan refugees trading in the Golshahr quarter, Mashhad, Iran.

Photo: A. Billard 1985

Again we piled into the cars; this time there was seven of us to each ute as we set off into the world of Pakistan. The heat of the desert was oppressive and my stomach was empty, I had not eaten for nearly two days, and between all of us there was only four litres of water. The ute frequently became bogged in the sand, whereupon we all would have to get out and push it free.

As the day drew on it became increasingly apparent that we were lost, driving aimlessly in the vast desert. The heat was unbearable, three of my companions had already passed out, whilst another sat next to me, dry retching continuously. It was then, as the sun began to descend, that the ute again became trapped in the sand. We had not eaten for so long that we did not have the strength to pull it out. Our water supplies were dangerously low. There was only one thing left to do: I prayed. I prayed that we would be spared, or that we would be granted a swift death instead of suffering the heat of the desert.

It was perhaps an hour later that we heard the noise of an engine. A car drove towards us, though it was not one our guides recognised, and as it pulled up we could see that the men were all heavily armed. They were drug smugglers. They asked us what we were doing and upon hearing that we wanted to go to Pakistan, they replied that we had become so lost we had crossed into Afghanistan. They winched our ute out of the sand and pointed us in the direction of Non Qualdi, our original destination.

It was late that night when we arrived in the city and in a few days I was able to apply for refugee status with UNHCR. From there I journeyed by train to Lahore, a tiring trip of thirty hours. My only relatives outside of Iran had been my cousins who had journeyed to Australia. In Lahore I was able to obtain their sponsorship and applied to the Australian embassy for a visa. I waited for two years. I have forgotten how many times I visited the embassy, and how many times I was denied even an interview. I lived in small rented houses near Lahore, and as time passed I grew more and more desperate.

In the end I was forced to throw myself in front of the car of an immigration official, shouting that I desperately needed to speak with him. I spoke to him

in my native Farsi, as my desperation poured from my heart. Though he could not understand a word of what I said, my story moved him to tears. I am not proud of what I did, but he was a good man, and keeping true to his word I was given an interview in two months. I was fortunate enough to be accepted and I arrived in Perth on the 31st of August 1988.

I have spent my time in this country well, initially living in Perth, before moving to rural Victoria and now to Melbourne. I have had the chance to travel and see many of the wonderful sights Australia has to offer. Australia has exceeded all of my expectations; truly it is one of the greatest countries in the world in which a man could ever live. I was lucky enough to have a chance to live in this country and it is never something I will regret. Now, when people ask me where I am from, I proudly call myself an Australian.



Nicholas Bayley



Shahram Niazian

# Halina's story

by Braden Cichinski, aged 16

On the 12th of August 1944, Halina Czaplinski found herself living a nightmare. The Warsaw uprising had failed and Halina, along with many others had been transported to Auschwitz. She was nineteen.

Life in the Nazi death camp brought many horrors. "I will never forget the dead bodies piled up, broken and discarded, arms and legs intertwined," Halina said. For an agonising two months she endured the endless hunger, fear and cold. Her eyes witnessed untold horrors.

Prolonged exposure to the harsh conditions, lack of nourishing food and shared unhygienic facilities led to illness for many prisoners. Halina was no exception, contracting typhoid. As there was no room in the camp hospital, for three days she shared a bed with a dead prisoner. Seeing the mountain of dead bodies growing outside, Halina feared the worst. "I was so young, so afraid to die," she remembers. Halina's saviour came in the guise of a German doctor, who administered three life saving injections. She survived.

As the Nazi forces were retreating, Auschwitz inmates were moved to Bergen-Belsen in Germany. It is here Halina and her fellow prisoners finally experienced freedom when the Allied Forces liberated the camp on the 5th of May 1945. When the allied forces rolled into camp, these emaciated scraps of humanity, which barely resembled humans, lifted one military vehicle right off the ground in sheer joy. She smiles, "Can you imagine it?"

Through the efforts of the Red Cross, Halina was transported to Sweden to begin the process of convalescence. She weighed only 34 kg. She remembers Sweden fondly. The people were compassionate and treated the Polish refugees with kindness and respect. After six months, Halina returned to what was left of her homeland only to find Warsaw in ruins, the townspeople eking out an existence from almost nothing, living like rats in cellars.

The destruction of her beloved homeland, the new ruling communist regime, poverty, hunger and a life with no prospects motivated Halina and her husband (she had married in the meantime) to leave their country. On the pretext of visiting Halina's brother in Austria, the Czaplinskis left their homeland. Halina knew they would never return. "I expected to be forced



Polish refugees in the Traiskirchen transit centre, Austria.

Photo: I. Guest, 1982



European refugees departing for the USA.  
Photo: UNHCR, 1951

to go back by the authorities. It wasn't till we reached Austria that I relaxed and felt safe."

On the 30th December 1948, Halina arrived in Adelaide on the Neptunia. Her lack of English caused her many difficulties. She carried a dictionary with her everywhere she went. Due to her poor English there were few job opportunities. Initially Halina cleaned homes until she was employed at Caroma, where she worked for 18 years. Halina's husband got a job as a bricklayer; they both worked hard to make ends meet. She regrets that there was no time to learn English properly, but work came first for Halina. Generally the Australians she met were kind and helpful; she did not encounter any racism. She met other Polish refugees and became a part of the emerging Polish community in Australia.

She knew very little about Australia, so each day of living here was a learning experience. She expected Australia to be similar to Europe but was pleasantly surprised at the differences, although initially she thought of the land as rather desolate and empty. It was difficult to adjust to this landscape after the very different climate of Europe. What struck her the most

was the summer heat. The first few precious Pounds she and her husband earned were spent purchasing a fan.

Halina believes there are many positives about living in Australia. She doesn't think there is a country like Australia anywhere else in the world! She believes that the medical care, especially for the aged is fantastic. Halina doesn't have to worry that she will have to go to

bed hungry anymore, and enjoys the high standard of living and political freedom Australia offers. She owns her own home, which Halina and her husband managed to build only five years after their arrival in this country.

With time, Halina's ties within the Polish community have grown strong. With her husband she supports the Polonia Soccer Club and the Polish Ex-Servicemen Association. Halina Czaplinski has no regrets. She is convinced that leaving Poland was the best decision she ever made.



Halina Czaplinski and Braden Cichinski

# Phillip's story

by Ben Horne, aged 16

## EQUAL THIRD PLACE

When Phillip Tran fled his homeland, Vietnam, at the age of twelve, he had no idea of the horrors that he would come to face over the next four years of his life. "My father asked me if I wanted to go to a better place, and I said 'yes' not knowing why or where I was going." Thus began Phillip's quest for a 'better place'.

That 'better place' was Australia. "I have received opportunities and experienced a quality of life here I would never have known anywhere else in the world." Arriving in Australia in 1982, Phillip has worked since he was 16 and overcome many obstacles, including language and cultural differences. He has raised his own family, lived successfully and sponsored relatives from Vietnam. However, before obtaining his freedom, Phillip was forced to endure the terrors of being a young, lonely refugee in volatile Southeast Asia.

The first five nights of the journey remain vivid in Phillip's memories of his childhood. On a small island off Vietnam, with eighty other refugees waiting for their boat to arrive, Phillip and his companions lived in constant fear. Sleepless nights were spent on the forest floor with snakes and rats, accompanied by the sound of gunfire.

The boat that arrived to transport them was no more than twelve metres long and four metres wide, yet was expected to accommodate almost one hundred people. Hidden from view underneath the deck, the fugitives were literally packed in. Every man, woman and child had to sit in a crouch position in the darkness, as the boat drifted into unknown waters.

After just one day's travel, they found themselves stranded in international waters. "As soon as we got out there, the engine stopped. The loud humming noise



Vietnamese boat people coming ashore in Malaysia after their small vessel sank.

Photo:K. Gaugler, 1978

from below just went, and we could hear the sounds of the waves. At this time everyone wanted to go home, so we fixed a sail to blow us wherever."

As they drifted, the lack of food and water became a problem. The refugees began to fight over the provisions. "They tried to keep the food for the children and women mostly - old people weren't allowed much at all". A week after leaving shore, they were spotted by Thai fishermen. Providing the passengers with much needed supplies, the fishermen took them in tow and set sail for an unknown destination. Suddenly, the situation became another chapter of the nightmare, "The fisherman came onto our boat armed with knives, and searched every person for money and gold, knowing that people wanting to start a new life would have what they wanted."

As these pirates left, more came. The refugees were attacked fourteen times in total by different bandits. "Each time was similar. They would take women onto their boat and rape them. If the men fought back they would be killed. We were expected to just sit still with our heads down while they did what they came to do."



Refugees from Vietnam in a camp in Malaysia

Photo: M. Flaks, date

During the last raid, five women were taken and never seen again. Phillip believes they were most likely killed or sold into prostitution in Thailand.

Finally, the refugees were towed to the coast of Thailand, and it was here that Phillip would struggle to live for the next four years of his teenage life. "Me and around one thousand other people got taken to the Songhla refugee camp for about three months, before we got moved to Ciekeuu camp, where we were locked away for three years."

Phillip and his fellow countrymen lived like prisoners, under constant watch by Thai police. Food was often scarce and of poor nutritional value. After some time, he managed to get a job in a coffee shop – although his only pay was a guarantee of meals. Phillip carried water, dozens of times daily, from a water source more than three kilometres away. Eventually sponsored by a relative in Australia, Phillip came to Sydney, and settled down to begin a new existence. "I believe this is my second life. My first life died when I left Thailand, but now I am free and I have been born again."

Phillip expected nothing upon his arrival and is grateful for everything that Australia has provided. His success is testimony to what Australia stands for – multiculturalism and equal opportunity. "I have had to

work for everything I now have. But the rewards gained from taking every chance that has come to me, makes everything more than worthwhile". "I consider myself to be Australian and I think this is very important. I also have to remember my heritage, but I am an Australian citizen and Australia has given me everything I have. I will bring my family up to believe this, and if this was done by all in this country it would be a very united, peaceful place."

Phillip's struggle has shown that people should recognise and sympathise with the plight of refugees around the world. Turmoil still exists in many countries, and without support from the western world, these people will remain helpless.



Ben Horne and Phillip Tran

# Alex's story

by Alex Leemon, aged 15

Alexander Mikailovich Savin was born in September 1920 into a landowning family in the village of Roudianka, in the Central Urals of Russia. Born at a critical time in history, on the wrong side of the Bolsheviks, he was destined to become a political pariah.

Not long after Alex's birth his father died of typhus, and his mother was exiled into China. Alex and his brother Genya lived on the Savin estate with their grandparents Yakov and Alexandra, and their uncle Stepan. Sadly when Alex was only five his grandfather died. Four years later his grandmother also died. Stepan, Genya and Alex were forced to fend for themselves.

When Alex was eleven, just after Stepan had been sent to his death in the horrifying gulag, he and Genya set off across the Trans-Siberian Railway to reunite with their mother in Harbin, a Chinese border town. However, upon arriving in Vladivostok, they found that the border was closed. In desperation their mother attempted to have them smuggled into China. The attempt ended in disaster; they were captured and sent to a local detention centre. Genya was sent to a hard labour camp, Alex to a juvenile detention house. Luckily Alex managed to escape but sadly Genya died within weeks of his arrival. Alex had to survive for several months as a street kid in Vladivostok before his mother arranged for Alex to cross the border successfully. It was a tearful reunion in Harbin. Alex's mother had remarried to another Russian, Peter Saranin; Alex then adopted the new name of Alexander Petrovich Saranin.

Alex completed his schooling and university studies in wartime Shanghai. He earned a Bachelor of Chemical Engineering and an MBA. During the last six months of the Pacific War Alex was a member of the Pao Cha, a neighbourhood rescue and security group. Alex gave first aid to shrapnel victims of Japanese anti-aircraft guns. In 1945 Alex

established the Industrial Development Company which exported Chinese raw materials and imported chemicals and machinery. In 1946 Alex married Lillian Ivanchenko, another Russian. Sadly, his mother died of cancer at the age of fifty-two.

The nightmare of history struck Alex again in 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party seized control of Mainland China. For Alex, this represented a return to the days of oppression he experienced in Russia. Alex sold his business and he, Lillian, his stepfather Peter migrated to the United States in 1950.

However, when they arrived in San Francisco they became victims of 'McCarthyist' paranoia. Alex was accused of being a KGB officer and was placed in solitary confinement and interrogated. Even after proving he was not a communist he was detained, without access to a lawyer. After having been in detention for over a year, Alex, Lillian and Peter applied for early deportation; it was granted and they departed for Hong Kong.



Russian woman in home damaged by ethnic conflict.

Photo: T. Bolsted, 1996



Former sanatorium converted into housing for displaced families, Russia.

Photo: T. Bolsted, 1996

Shortly after arriving in Hong Kong they decided to migrate to Australia. They were granted visas and boarded the SS Taiping for Sydney. Alex felt rather apprehensive, recalling previous 'promised lands.' Soon after arriving in Australia the family moved to Queensland where Alex was employed as a Bench Chemist at the Gin Gin Sugar Mill near Bundaberg. That was the start of a long and illustrious career in the sugar industry for Alex.

He received a scholarship for postgraduate study in sugar technology at the University of Queensland. On completion he became a Research Chemist, then Research Technologist at the Millaquin Sugar Company in Bundaberg. Alex developed the 'Millaquin White Rum', but it did not appeal to Australian tastes.

In 1959, Alex, selected from a million postwar migrants, was presented with the Gertrude Kumm Citizenship award by the Australian Governor General Sir William Slim. The award was presented with the following inscription, "To Alexander Peter Saranin, an Australian citizen, formerly of Russia, in recognition of his community service and valuable scientific contribution to the advancement of the sugar industry in Australia."

In 1960 Alex's son, Julian, was born, and in 1965 he had another son, Michael. Alex now had a successful

and peaceful life. He became Chief Chemist and Principal Research Officer at Millaquin. Alex has published twenty-four technical papers, three books and held four internationally patented inventions for the sugar and alcohol industries. In 1970 Alex was appointed to the prestigious Sugar Industry's Central Board, which oversaw Queensland's sugar industry. In 1986 the University of Queensland awarded Alex a doctorate in Chemical Engineering. Alex has since retired and until very recently

was consulting on sugar and ethanol processes and travelling overseas to attend conventions.

Alex Saranin was a 'seed of the revolution', a child of a generation to suffer immensely. He is one of the few Russians of his generation to survive and prosper in spite of the horrific purges of Stalin and the devastating battles of World War II. Alex has experienced some terrible tragedies, yet has come through a far stronger person, contributing countless hours back into the community of Australia and indeed the world. It is sad that now after eighty-three years Alex is suffering from cancer. The story of his life is an amazing and inspirational one.



Alex Saranin and Alex Leemon

# Redwan's story

by Jo Smith

"Our country was involved in a terrible civil war. Some guys from a neighbouring country tried to wage war on our country. They tried to overthrow the government. The fighting and bloodshed continued for at least 10 years, mostly killing innocent people who were not involved in the politics." These are the words of Redwan Conteh, a young African man who suffered the horrendous effects of a civil war in his home country, Sierra Leone.

Redwan's account begins in 1991, when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) declared war on Sierra Leone's government. The killing of thousands of innocent men, women and children went on for many years. When the fighting and bloodshed reached Redwan and his family in 1997, his brother and he fled to Guinea, a neighbouring country. There, they were placed in a refugee camp with others that had fled the conflict.

In the camp, Redwan eked out a meagre existence for three long years. At first, the conditions were not that bad. The refugees were given housing (which were, for the most part, simply tents); and supplied with clean water, food, and above all, safety. However, after some time, things started to get worse. Problems in the camp began when food rations began to decline and clean water became scarce. Soon, disease broke out and spread like wildfire through the camp.

As a result, Redwan and his brother were forced to flee. They returned to the city, where they faced having to fight for survival. However, quite by luck when they arrived, the brothers ran into some friends. "A judge tried to help us – he gave us a place to live and a chance at happiness," recalls Redwan. "It took us some time though - about three years in the refugee camp, and about that much time again in the city as well".

"Eventually, however, we had the opportunity to come to Australia. An Australian



Refugee from Sierra Leone recovering in Liberian camp.

Photo: L. Taylor, 1993



Refugees from Sierra Leone arriving in Yandehuh, Liberia.

Photo: L. Taylor, 1993

humanitarian named Paul Grant helped us. He gave us a second chance at life." Redwan says, "Australian representatives interviewed everyone. You had to have been persecuted before coming to Australia. If you had not been persecuted, or you had not suffered to loss of parents or family, they would not allow you to come over. But if there was no chance of you surviving in your home country, they would allow you to come to Australia."

When asked what he knew or expected about Australia before arriving, Redwan replied, "I was only thinking of Australia as being a Third World country; maybe it was just another country like my own. The first time I saw Australia was during the 2000 Olympics. When I saw Sydney on the television, it looked really amazing. I was very happy, and I thought: 'God bless me! I'm coming to Australia!'"

In the midst of Redwan's heart-felt tale, there are some positive aspects, though not nearly enough to outnumber the terrible events of his life. Redwan believes he was truly blessed to come to Australia, as there is no violence, loss or heartache on the scale he knew back

in Sierra Leone. Redwan enjoys life in Cairns, and also loves school. "We had school like this one. My last school was similar to St. Augustine's (a school in Cairns). It was also a Catholic school".

Although he loves his sport, Redwan's favourite subject is Business Studies, as Redwan's father was a businessman who owned his own business. Redwan feels he still has the confidence to continue studying until the end of senior school, though he does not yet know what career path he wants to take. "When I get to Year Twelve, I'll know. And compared to where I've been, that's not very far to go!"



Jo Smith and Redwan Conteh

# Excerpts from our highly commended list



Photo: B. Press 1991

altogether every day and the fact that they have more freedom than in Iran.” **Amber Cameron:** “Ms Soukchareun deserved what she got in the end after going through so much. She deserved to get her job, she really never should have gone through it but she did.” **Tom Tanhchareun:** “With twenty other refugees, Chanthanith made a difficult escape across the Mekong River, which nearly turned to disaster when the baby on board started crying and the border patrol fired on the boat.” **Jasmine Wilson:** “Amina and her family showed a courage and strength most Australian people would gain only after a lifetime of hardship and struggle, and have pulled through despite the turmoil they have suffered.” **Emmeline Agars:** “All I had heard about was stereotypical views of refugees painted by people who had drawn opinions from the media... I have now learnt it is essential to seek the truth about issues before trying to form your own opinion.” **Christos Apostolakis:** “If there was a single person who embodied the words courage, survival and forgiveness, then one must look no further than Mrs. Gusta Snyder.” **Emily Shepherd:** “Try to imagine a life far removed from your television set, your computer games and your comfortable lounge suite. A life scarred by war, terror, fear and discrimination, a life in which you have no rights, and suffer hardship after hardship. Could you survive? Angela did.” **Millicent Crowe:** “Her father was taken in the late 90’s..for three months of torture. From a very active, positive and outgoing person, he returned as a very quiet, scared and inactive individual, keeping to himself.” **Sofia Begum:** “When I speak to someone who listens to me, and who respects me, and when I can tell my story to such a person, then I feel good. I don’t feel like a zero.” **Annabel Lagrange:** “For many years, Sonia has regularly distributed Meals-On-Wheels to the elderly, played an active role in the local church, taken care of numerous neglected animals, contributed enormously to her local council, and frequently taken care of people in need, including refugee families.” **Bohan Huang:** “It was a fortunate coincidence that, after



Photo: K. Singhaseni, 1997



Photo: N. Van Praug, 1983

10 days of disproportionate bargaining between the two militaries, lives were saved.” **Libby Mowinkel:** “So many times she had nearly given up, yet so many times she had forged ahead.” **Joshua Wiesberger:** “Francis received a letter from his father asking him to help build the country that he was in.” **Jessica Fagan:** “It is often said of sports men and women that they are ‘made of stronger stuff’ and when the story of former Wallaby footballer Jules Guerassimoff and his family is revealed, few will dispute this statement.” **Nhu Le:** “Tien was calm until the second night. A storm raged upon them, thunder clashing and the rough sea splashing on them. Tien tried his best to keep the water out of the boat. Several people did the same thing while the children clung onto their mothers.” **Chau Nguyen:** “In June

Duyen returned back to Thailand to visit the refugee camp, which had been converted into an army barrack. She also had a very emotional visit back to Vietnam to see her mum, sisters and friends. After this experience Duyen has never gone on a boat and never will."

**Jacqueline Chawis:** "As George grew older he began to notice the imperfections in his beloved country."

**Jemima Amery-Gale:** "He finds it very hard, because in Afghanistan he only got a primary school education, and not only does computing have its own language, but he is still trying to master Australia's English."

**Samuel Kuhne:** "He found the camp very stressful and this is easily shown in the fact that he went in with a full head of hair and when released he was bald."

**Joe Keen:** "I don't think many people could understand what it is like to lose a member of your family."

**Haley Mattingly:** "I admire the refugees, especially the children who had to leave their home and in some cases travel alone to find a better place, a safer place to live."

**Hugh Alexander Griffiths:** "February 1997 is etched in Tun-Tun's consciousness, a metaphorical fork in the road of his life."

**Dao Tran:** "My name is Thu Van. I have witnessed it all with my own eyes: the blood, the torture, the killing, and the cries. It was calamity caused by man."

**Gina Hang:** "Candy Hang hoped she could set a good example for her children, showing that anything could be done."

**Annabelle Daniel:** "Although war is constantly happening, and always has been, being a child it was easy to think everything was at peace and everything was ok. He did not know anything else."

**Mandy Solar:** "Your dad fears for the family and asks mum to take the family away from the city, but your mum can't bear to leave your dad and says if it means dying let us die together."

**Iman Eslamizadeh:** "Mr. Darboei's explanation for his freedom is simple: the jails were getting too crowded. The government had to let a few go for others to come into jail and be taught a lesson."

**Josie Were:** "Froghi had no idea what to expect of Australia. He could only hope for a safer life than he had experienced in Afghanistan."

**Hannah Verry:** "One would be forgiven for assuming that Vahideh Hosseini would have an attitude towards life that the world owes her. She knows only too well the pain, isolation and degradation faced by many refugees. Yet she has devoted her life to giving to the community and promoting the unity of mankind."

**Lisa Last:** "They walked back to Bor, fording two swollen rivers, where many people drowned. They were welcomed home, in 1979, by famine and monsoon rains."



Photo: M. Kobayashi, 1999



Photo: R. LeMayne, 1998

# Encouragement Award

A special thanks goes to **Bonne Martinot**, who wrote four articles for the competition. Bonne explained that she had written so many because, "I feel that none of my friends' stories should go untold". Her passion and her dedication are greatly appreciated.



Photo: D. Bregnard, 1990

# About the judges

## Ouma Sananikone

Ouma is a widely respected business-woman involved with financial services. She has held senior management positions with companies including BT Financial Services, Aberdeen Asset Management, EquitiLink and Banque Nationale de Paris. She currently holds a number of directorships in the financial services area as well as a place on the Board of Governors at the Australian National University where she studied economics and politics. She holds a Master of Commerce from the University of New South Wales.

Ouma has a personal interest in refugee issues having fled her home country Laos with her family in 1975. Her distinguished working career is complemented by her interests in anthropology, arts, skiing and fluency in four languages.

## Ian Chappell

Since his cricketing debut for South Australia 40 years ago, Ian Chappell has enjoyed a memorable career as one of Australia's most admired and respected cricketers. He captained Australia from 1970 - 1975, during which time Australia never lost a series. He went on to play World Series Cricket for Australia from 1977-78 and 1978-79 and captained the team during those two seasons.

Since retiring from cricket, Ian has had extensive experience in the media as both a journalist and commentator. Ian is also an accomplished author, publishing eight books, two of which have won Gold Book Awards. Also a successful businessman, he is currently a Director of Dimension Data (a network integration company).

Ian was appointed as Special Representative for Australia for UNHCR in 2001. For the past three years he has assisted the organisation in launching public awareness campaigns and fundraising appeals. In 2001 he traveled to East Timor to observe a number of sporting projects funded by UNHCR. Most recently he launched Australia for UNHCR's 2003 Christmas Appeal, *Rebuilding For Peace*, to raise funds for UNHCR's Shelter Program in Afghanistan.

## Michel Gabaudan

A medical practitioner by training, Michel Gabaudan worked in public health in Guyana, Zambia, Rio de Janeiro and North Yemen as well as with Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine before joining UNHCR in Udon, Thailand, in 1978. His career with UNHCR includes posts in Cameroon, Pakistan, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Mexico and Geneva. Before coming as Regional Representative to Australia in September 2001, Michel Gabaudan was Head of UNHCR's Funding and Donor Relations Service.



Immigration officer interviewing Vietnamese refugees at an island camp on the East Coast of Malaysia.

Photo: W. J. Gibbons, 1978



Back Cover Photo: A young refugee mother with an official of East Hills Migrant Centre, Sydney.  
Photo: H. Cloaguen, 1981

