

What is it like to be a **refugee**?



One that flees to a
foreign country or
nation to escape
danger or
persecution

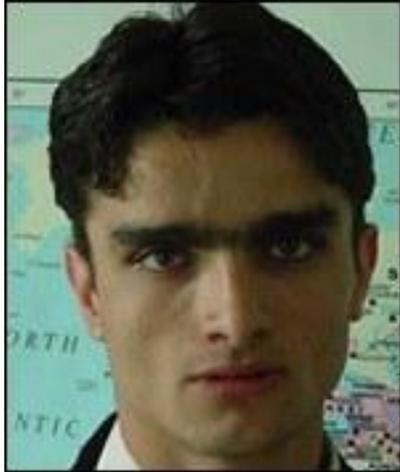
Refugee Experiences

- The United States resettles more of these refugees than any other country in the world. In 2001, the majority of refugees came from **Afghanistan**, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Angola, Sudan and Congo.
- Many refugees see **America as a haven**, but fleeing from their own country can be dangerous and strenuous.

*When we were in Afghanistan my father always wished that we were **educated**. I wasn't in school for very long in Afghanistan. After the conditions got worse, all the schools closed and there was nowhere that you could go to every day. It wasn't safe, there were so many risks, you wouldn't just go outside, **you might get shot**.*

-Waheed Safi,
18, Afghan refugee,
admitted to Oxford
University





*I am from Afghanistan. It's a very **beautiful** country in the heart of Asia. It has very nice, peaceful, hospitable, brave, innocent, war-threatened and poor **people**.*

*I am from Ningarhar, the border province of Afghanistan and Pakistan. We were living a **peaceful** life. Everyone was **happy**, everything was **OK**. Suddenly a plan was made by the Russians and they invaded our homeland. A **war started**, a holy war against the Russians.*

-Farid Ahmad, 16, Afghan refugee who fled to London leaving family behind

- **Don't Call Me "Refugee"**
My Name is Lamiya

by **Betty Blair**

"Refugee! Refugee! You're a refugee!" The kids on the playground started calling names and teasing the new girl in their school. Lamiya Safarova [pronounced lah-ME-yah sa-fa-ROH-vah] looked up at them and started to cry.

It wasn't her fault that bombs and missiles had been aimed at her little village of Jabrayil (pronounced ja-brah-YIL) in Azerbaijan and that her family had been afraid that one might explode on their house. It wasn't her fault that the neighboring village, Khalafli, had already been burned to the ground or that enemy soldiers had threatened to kill everybody who didn't leave, or that kids were being kidnapped and held hostage until their parents could pay huge sums of ransom money to get them back.

It wasn't her fault that her family had barely been able to bring anything from their home when they fled, or that she was poor now and didn't have pretty clothes to wear or that she was new at this school and didn't have many friends.

Lamiya often found herself daydreaming about her old village where tulips grew in the springtime, hugging the high mountains of the Caucasus. She often wondered what had happened to the friends she had left behind. Were they still alive and if so, where were they living now? Would she ever see them again? And what about the house that her father had just built? Was it still standing? Had everything inside been looted and destroyed? Or had it been burned to the ground like so many others houses?

It wasn't her fault that there was a war with Armenians who were trying to push the Azer-baijanis off their land, and that nearly a million people like herself had had to flee their homes and find a new place to live, new friends, new schools, new jobs. So when the kids called her "refugee", it hurt her very deeply.

In English, "refugee" means a person who is searching for protection and safety-a shelter from danger. The same word, "gachgin" [pronounced gotch-GIN], in the Azeri language also carries with it the idea of "runner," meaning a person who has run away from something-a person who isn't brave and didn't try to fight but just ran away. But Lamiya knew that wasn't true. And that's why she started crying when they called her "refugee, refugee". She also knew that the kids wouldn't understand what she had lived through. It was too different from their own lives. Baku was too far away from Jabrayil. It would take you five or six hours to drive there by car. How could kids really understand the war that was going on over there?

That night, Lamiya went home and started writing a poem. She knew that she would burst inside if she didn't write it down. She called the poem, "Don't Call Me Refugee." She was nine years old at the time.

- ***Don't Call Me Refugee***

- My life, my *destiny*

Has been so *painful*, so don't call me **refugee**.

My heart aches, my *eyes cry*,

I beg of you, please don't call me "**refugee**".

- It feels like I don't even *exist* in the world,
As if I'm a migrant bird far away from my land
Turning back to look at my village.

I beg of you, *please* don't call me "**refugee**".

- Oh, the things I've *seen* during these painful years,
The most *beautiful days* I've seen in my land,
I've dreamed only about our house.
I beg of you, please don't call me
"refugee".
- The reason why I write these sad things
Is that living a *meaningless life* is like **hell**.
What I really want to say is:
I beg of you, *please* don't call me
"refugee".

Comparing to the book

- How do these refugees' *perspectives compare* to that of Baba and Amir?
- What does being from a *privileged background* mean for them in this experience?
- How are *they treated*? How do *they treat* fellow refugees?
- What differences between *father and son* are presented as they flee their country, as they acclimate to the U.S.?

How would *you* feel?



Write in your journal on ONE topic:

- If you were **moving to Afghanistan today**, what would you look forward to? What would you not look forward to?
- How have you felt **when you have moved homes** or cities? What did you do?
- What did you think when you first spent **time in an uncomfortable setting** (away from family or your home)?