

Foreign Yet at Home

Aesha Fazli

[Madar jan (Mom)]
August 27, 1993

It was a gloomy Friday afternoon, I was in the kitchen preparing food for the family. I was making *ash* as I knew all the kids loved having warm soup on a cold rainy day. I grabbed the spatula to mix the sauteed onions on the fired-up pan when suddenly I heard the sound that reminded me of my nightmares. The sound that kept us all up at night. It was the sound of bombs exploding. Immediately after, I hear Freshta's cry and I run to the courtyard as fast as I can. As I am rushing to attend to the kids I remember that your father had just gone out to attend Jummah Prayer at the masjid. My heart dropped knowing that he had just left to go outside, and I worried for his life and prayed that he was safe wherever he was. I got to the yard and saw that the kids were running towards me with terror in their eyes. I embraced all of them and quickly gathered everyone inside. I held all the kids in one arm and grabbed you off the thoshak in my other arm. I couldn't help but think of the possible outcomes that your father would be going through as he rushes to get home safely. Having no phone, electricity, or any way of communicating, I just prayed to Allah that he would return home safely. I was so scared but I knew I needed to be strong for all of you. Amidst all these thoughts racing through my mind, we all shut our eyes out of terror, and huddled in the corner wet from the kids' soaked clothes rubbing against us. We all cried hysterically from the fear of what could happen. Amidst all the chaos, I had this sudden glimmer of hope of what it would be like to one day escape from this place. This place that I call home, this place that I was raised in, this place that will always be a huge part of my identity, this place is Afghanistan.

March 8, 2001

I remember this day like it was yesterday, a day that I had yearned for to come, a day that couldn't come any quicker. This day marked the beginning of a new life, it gave us the hope that millions of us wished we had. This hope was a life filled with peace, love, and equality. Equality for education, opportunities, jobs, safety, and the basic necessities of life. This was the day we were moving to Canada and this day was the best and worst day of my life. This new place gave us the opportunity to dream and hope for a better future for us all. A future where my kids can get equal opportunities for education and the chance to dream again. The worst because I had to digest the fact that we have to move thousands of miles across the world to a new country. Leaving our loved ones and our home and going somewhere where we had no knowledge of the language or lifestyle

wasn't going to be easy. I knew that as a woman I needed to be the glue that binds my whole family together and I also knew I had a responsibility not just for my kids but also in helping your father in building our life elsewhere. Although your father and I were very terrified of what could possibly go wrong, we knew we had no other choice but to pack our lives in a few bags and leave. It saddens me to think of the memories of when your father had to grab our bags as I held onto you and raced across a barren grassland to catch a transit bus that would take us to our plane to Canada. Your father held Arzo and Freshta in his arms and had a few bags on his back whilst looking to find anyone who could help us. Meanwhile, I held you in my arms, as my Omid held my chadar whilst Mursal and Hassina held onto your brother, Omid. We finally sat on a bus with so many children and were told if we wanted to sit on the bus due to the low number of seats as everyone was pushing and shoving each other for a spot, that we had to leave our bags behind. In the background, we heard bombs and missiles being fired so we knew we had no other choice. Despite having 2 small backpacks for a family of 8 we still had to sacrifice whatever it took to have our family safe. Finally, we arrived at the plane, and my husband and I lifted our children onto the plane and found our seats. We all sit there side by side in shock and disbelief. Arzo looks at me and says, "Madar Jan, are we safe now?" And I reply, "Yes, dukhtare gul em, you do not need to worry anymore!" In my heart, I felt at ease but still in distress of what is yet to come.

May 17, 2021

To think that it has been a little over 20 years since we have moved to Canada, is so unbelievable. It makes me immensely proud where we have come so far and where we are headed. Above all, what makes me the most proud is the values I was able to instill in my children and for future generations to come. I never want us to forget about our roots, but rather imbed it within our present and ongoing lives to be able to fully embrace and appreciate both our Afghan and Canadian identities. Even though it is very disheartening to see that our loved ones back home and similarly people in underdeveloped countries are still suffering and living in poverty, I hope that future generations like you guys can carry a change within it. Although Afghanistan's beautiful architecture, treasures, and resources have been destroyed because of the ongoing war that has taken place over the last 40 years, I look to future generations to be and create that change. This is why I share these stories so that you may remember why it is so important to work hard for your lives. I feel my identity will always be Afghan, but I also feel a sense of belongingness to identifying as Canadian. I feel a sense of freedom to be called Afghan-Canadian as I would not be the person I am today without it. I yearn to see a day where we can all have equal rights to basic necessities of life and to freedom. I hope that my kids can create change along

with many other immigrant children to pave the way for us all in bringing together our stories and making a difference.

[Me]

These are the stories of a mother who has seen both sides of the coin. A mother who has lived through the normality of war and through the so-called “freedom”. The same freedom that required her to forsake her own in order to receive the basic necessities of life and to be given the chance to live again. Something that should have been there all along but that unfortunately was not the case. These are some of the stories my mother would tell us. Growing up she always told us how Afghanistan used to be a progressive country where women wore skirts and went to school in formal attire. These women stood tall and proud of their heritage and of their people. A time where they were not afraid of being their true authentic selves. My mother was the third and youngest daughter and third in the line of eight siblings. She grew up in a household with five brothers and two sisters. My mother had gotten married at the young age of 19 as did many women at that time, and she quickly had her children. By the time we had the chance to move to Canada she had all 7 of her children and from that 7 had lost one daughter who would have been my third eldest sister right after my brother. I cannot imagine the grief she must have felt thinking about being the first person in her family to move out of Afghanistan whilst feeling the loss of a child and having to be strong for the rest of her family.

She always told me stories growing up of the loneliness and sorrow she felt when we were all young and hadn't had much emotional support from anyone really. My mother had been married at a young age and was not able to pursue a university degree and had only gotten to high school. In Afghanistan, she was an elementary teacher back home while she had already had 6 out of 7 of her children and she had done all this by the age of 29. At the time, you could teach whilst attending school as it was one of the few professional jobs women were able to do. Opportunity to complete school in Afghanistan back in the 80s was not as progressive as it once was. This occurred due to the restrictions implemented more and more by the Taliban. My mother always tells me how she wishes she could complete her education back in the day and almost feels a sense of unaccomplishment. Even though she has always been an independent woman her whole life, I can't help but feel as though school is something she will always regret because she didn't get a chance to finish it.

When my mother talks about her life back in the day I notice almost a glimmer in her eyes that shines so bright of pride and happiness. The way she narrates these stories is like no other and you can really tell how proud she is of being Afghan. The way in which she describes her relationship with her friends, family and relatives inspires me to work harder in life. The pre-war stories she

would tell us of when she would attend weddings with her girlfriends and how much fun they would have. The freedom they had to express themselves however they choose appropriate is so freeing in itself to hear. There is something beautiful about being a first generation immigrant as you get to live through the memories of your parents childhood and young adulthood experiences whilst seeing them now and almost wanting to achieve more for their sake. It is almost as if you aren't just living your life for yourself but also living theirs as well. It motivates me to pursue my dreams, not only for myself, but for my mother and family's sake who have played a huge role in my life and making me the person I am today. I aspire as a child of immigrant parents to inspire others with similar stories to mine, but also to break the glass ceiling and achieve everything that I ever dreamt of doing whilst carrying my roots.