



Nassim was born in 1976 in Tehran, Iran. In 1987 she fled with her mom and her stepfather from the Iran/Iraq war. Their hope - to find liberty, opportunity, peace, luck and justice. Their goal was clear. They wanted to start a new life in the place of unlimited possibilities - the USA. Unfortunately, fate had other plans for them. They ended up in Swit-

zerland. However, instead of salvation, a long and arduous journey lay ahead for them.

They found themselves fighting against discrimination and bureaucracy. They were stymied at every turn by a system that seeks to marginalize refugees - including those who want to become productive, tax-paying members of society. Switzerland, a rich country which presents itself to the outside world as accepting, democratic and tolerant, has been a golden cage for these two brave ladies ...

With this book, Nassim shares her asylum experiences and life as a foreigner in Switzerland in order to affect change for young refugees all over the world. For further information check out: www.lookingforfreedom.com.



Published by Fultus Corporation
www.fultus.com



Looking for Freedom



Nassim



Looking for Freedom

by Nassim





LookinG for Freedom

by

Nassim

ISBN 1-59682-049-7

Copyright © 2005 by Nassim

All rights reserved.



<http://www.nassima-design.com>



Published by Fultus Corporation

Corporate Web Site: *<http://www.fultus.com>*

Fultus eLibrary: *<http://elibrary.fultus.com>*

Online Book Superstore: *<http://store.fultus.com>*

Writer Web Site *<http://writers.fultus.com/nassim/>*



No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in reviews and critical articles.

The author and publisher have made every effort in the preparation of this book to ensure the accuracy of the information. However, the information contained in this book is offered without warranty, either express or implied. Neither the author nor the publisher nor any dealer or distributor will be held liable for any damages caused or alleged to be caused either directly or indirectly by this book.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Preface	11
Chapter 2. My Parents	13
Chapter 3.1. 1976: My Childhood in Tehran.....	15
Chapter 3.2. 1979: The Revolution in Iran.....	18
Chapter 4. 1980: A Journey that Changed our Lives.....	19
Chapter 5. 1981: A New Start in the USA?	24
Chapter 6. My 'Daddy', My Genitor!	26
Chapter 7. The Two of Us Starting Over - And a New Regime in Iran	28
Chapter 8. 1986: The New Papa!	32
Chapter 9. 1986: The War Getting Worse	34
Chapter 10.1. 1987: Escape to Freedom!.....	36
Chapter 10.2. Switzerland - Our New Home?	43
Chapter 10.3. Become part of the Swiss people!	51
Chapter 11. 1988/89: The Cheater and Psychopath!	57
Chapter 12. 1990: Starting Over Just the Two of Us	66
Chapter 13. 1993/94: Trapped in a Gilded Cage - The Stupid F- Permit!.....	75
Chapter 14. My Idol, My Hero: My ray of hope in the darkness! <i>Dedicated to David Hasselhoff</i>	86

Chapter 15. 1995: A Two-Faced World – The Music Business in Europe!	94
Chapter 16. 1996: Fortune or Misfortune?	104
Chapter 17.1. 1997: Heart or Mind?.....	111
Chapter 17.2. What a Start!	118
Chapter 17.3. The Beginning of the End!.....	126
Chapter 18.1. From the End of 1997 to 2001: The Toughest Years. Fighting to Survive!	147
Chapter 18.2. Step by Step! One Breath after the Other!	158
Chapter 18.3. Fighting for our Lives!	168
Chapter 19. 2002: Finally Free! Returning to Iran after 15 Years!.....	181
Chapter 20. 2003: California, Here We Come!	192
Chapter 21. Conclusion: Will We Ever Find Freedom? When will the sun shine on Us?.....	197
Once a Refugee, Always a Refugee? Once a Foreigner, Always a Foreigner?	201
The famous Statue of the "Black Madonna"	205
Looking for Freedom Foundation	206
Pictures	207

I dedicate this work to the sunshine of my life, my Mom, Sima.
Without her devoted love, strength, positive thinking, faith, patience,
understanding and empathy,
I never would have been able to make it through the past years.
You are the sweetest person I know and I am so proud to call you my mom.
You are the best thing in my life.
I love you so much.

I also would like to dedicate this book to my grandparents.
Where ever you are, we think of you daily.
You will always be in our hearts.

Gratitude and Appreciation to:

- To God!
- My Mom, the sunshine of my life. I never would have been able to finish this book without your support, encouragement and Love. I love you so much.
- My good friend Eric Lewis, who was a big support in proofreading the original text in German. You have been an amazing, faithful and supporting friend to me, during the last years. I appreciate your friendship very much. We miss you!
- I would also like to thank Dana Frei for her excellent job on doing the translation from German to English. You've done an amazing and professional job. Well-done and good luck with all your future projects.
- And last but not least, Fultus Corporation for their wonderful and professional customer care, even with the nine hours time difference.

Each one of you made this Book possible.

You all deserve a biiig Hug!

Thank you so much & God bless you all!

*"We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal;
that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights;
that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness ..."*

Thomas Jefferson
President of the United States from 1801 to 1809

Declaration:

This book is based on true events. All described persons exist in real life. In order to protect their privacy, some of the names have been changed.

Chapter 1.

Preface

Our story once more proves how family's lives and fates can be destroyed by greed for power and money, inane wars, and disregard of human rights and democracy.

It is 1987. Iran and Iraq are at a bloody war against each other. The daily bomb attacks in Tehran are becoming increasingly unbearable. I am only ten years old and terrified of dying. Out of fear of death and desperation, my mother and I leave our house, family and existence. We run for our lives and future! We are hoping to find freedom and a future filled with inner calm, harmony, happiness and justice. Guided by fortune, we unintentionally arrive in Switzerland. Still, a long and hard way lies before us. In the coming years, we are forced to learn to live with prejudice, injustice, bureaucracy, and discrimination of fugitives and foreigners. Or rather: we must learn to survive in such an environment. Again and again, we have to prove ourselves anew and fight against disappointments and frustration - in our private environment, in our partnerships as well as in our professional lives. An endless search for freedom, love and security begins. Switzerland, a country which eagerly presents itself to the rest of the world as anti-racist and cosmopolitan, becomes our gilded cage. We are robbed of a chance for a happy, dignified and healthy life. Often, we find ourselves at the verge of desperation, fighting against fears of existence and feeling completely power- and helpless!

Today, I am 28 years old. After 18 long and difficult years in Switzerland, I now ask myself: "Who on earth has the right to decide people's destinies - the right to destroy their dreams, wishes and life goals?" Especially when the only thing differentiating these people is their nationality and status as foreigners. "Is this fair? And who can

actually keep a clear conscience under such circumstances?" It is exactly for this reason that I now tell you our story - hoping that something will change in the future! I believe that every human being, regardless of nationality, skin color, race or religion, has the right to freedom and self-determination.

I have to admit that I struggle when writing our story because for many years we have tried hard to suppress various painful memories and never to give up hope. Today, however, I consider it my duty to tell you, my readers, about our lives. My mother and I often ask ourselves: "What if?" "What if Iran had never been at war?" "What if we had never come to Switzerland?" "What if we had reached our actual goal in the first place, namely to begin a new life in America, the land of infinite possibilities?" We cannot know what would have happened! Only one thing is certain; we probably would have had a much simpler life spared of many painful experiences. Nevertheless, we truly believe in destiny and are convinced that we did not have to go through all of this for no reason. I know that there are many refugee families and single mothers all over the world who have experienced a similar fate. Most of them, however, try to accept it and do nothing against it, out of fear, desperation, ignorance or mere lack of power. Nevertheless, there are many women and families who have the same fate still ahead of them. They are the reason I write my book - to fight for them. I am determined to try everything within my power to spare other refugees - world-wide - what we had to go through. It is a very high goal, of course, but maybe this book will be a start. I truly hope that you, my readers, will help and support us in our fight!

Chapter 10.1.

1987: Escape to Freedom!

It took about another half year. After much information gathering, mom found out that Iranians didn't need a visa to go to Singapore. It was obvious that we would have to focus on Singapore from now on if we ever wanted to get an American visa. It was now or never!

Mom began to sell everything we owned in order to save up money for the plane tickets and any problems we might encounter. It was very difficult for her to give up her home and belongings – she wasn't selling just material things but giving up her past and memories. It was very difficult for me too to sell all my personal stuff such as my toys and puppets. We knew, however, that we had to do it – we weren't going to come back and we couldn't take too much along with us. It was much harder to say goodbye to Taji jun and Babasi, though, and to leave our home. Sometimes, I ran around the house for hours trying to remember every detail about it. The smells and the atmosphere of every single room. The oil paintings of Babasi – just everything. Our apartment got emptier with every passing day and the look of it was really sad for us. After a while, there were only our beds and suitcases left. Mom bought us a whole new wardrobe for our trip. She had thought of everything.

At last, the moment arrived. It was 20th February 1987. We had been waiting for this day for so long. It was early in the morning when we left and I still remember my mixed feelings. On the one hand, we were excited about the new beginning. On the other hand, we were scared of what was to come. Also, we were heartbroken about leaving Taji jun and Babasi. They, too, were confused and didn't know how to behave. They were happy for us but sad to see us go at the same time. At the last moment, right before leaving for the

Looking for Freedom

airport of Tehran, I took a last round through the house and tried to memorize everything. I was hoping the memory of every detail would bring me closer to Taji jun and Babasi when I wasn't around them anymore.

My grandparents and our neighbor Soheila accompanied us to the airport. We only had three suitcases and \$ 8,000 on us - which may not seem like a lot, but it was considering the exchange rate. The airport was strictly controlled. Even our underwear was searched through. The way we were treated was aggressive and intimidating. But we were used to that kind of treatment from our experiences with the pasdars. They treated humans like animals and showed neither respect nor any decency. The only thing we could do was try to stay calm and not let them see our anger.

Saying goodbye to my grandparents was really tough. They looked so helpless and fragile. The memory of this picture still hurts me. They both cried and waved at us. Probably, at this moment, they were thinking the same as we were: Will we ever see each other again? And if so, when and where?

Finally, we sat in the airport on our way to Singapore without any idea of what was coming. When the plane left off, I looked back one more time and said goodbye to Tehran. It was astonishing how peaceful the city looked from above. The flight seemed to take forever. We were very tired and hardly spoke a word. After a few hours, we stopped over at Bombay, and after about seven hours we finally arrived in Singapore. It was noon and I had a good first impression. The airport was very beautiful. There was a waterfall in the middle of the entrance hall, which was surrounded by wonderful plants and flowers. It was a magnificent sight and the sun was shining. It felt like a warm welcome.

The first thing we did was to find a hotel and lay down for a while. It was a hot summer night and we were exhausted. And for the first time in years, I didn't get a goodnight kiss from my grandparents.

The next day, right after breakfast, we went to the American Consulate, hoping for the best. Our future now lay in the hands of the Americans. They were to decide about what was going to happen to us. We didn't have to wait very long to be rejected. Even though we

were very disappointed, we tried to hide our feelings. What else could we have done? It was our last chance and we realized that we would have to find another solution.

The next morning, we went to the Canadian Consulate. We didn't know that, as opposed to the American consulate, this application took at least four weeks to be handled. But as Singapore is an island, we weren't allowed to stay longer than three weeks. We would have had to leave the country and return again to get their decision. We didn't have time for that, though, and really didn't want to return to Tehran. We had to find another destination. By chance, we met some Iranians, one of whom studied in Singapore and knew a lot about flights and visas. He advised us to take a flight to Yugoslavia, which included a stop-over in Zurich, Switzerland. Fortunately, a visa was not required for the transit through Switzerland. Mom had already lived in Zurich for a few months and so decided to take a chance. We were hoping to be able to apply for a visa at the Canadian Consulate in Zurich. Another Persian, his name was Karim and he was a carpet salesman, advised us not to take our money along with us because the public authority could take it away from us. So, we checked out our possibilities and made inquiries as to opening a bank account in Singapore. The problem was that we would have had to pick up the money later in person. We didn't know anyone to whom we could have sent the money either. Papa said that we should trust Karim and mom consented reluctantly. She entrusted Karim with \$ 4,000 and he promised to send us the money as soon as we found a place to stay. There was also a written agreement, which he signed without hesitation. Needless to say, we never saw our money again!

After a week, we took the next flight to Yugoslavia, again, uncertain of what would happen to us. At that time, however, we had no choice. Anything but returning to Iran and the war. Now, a very long flight and a difficult task lay before us. We had been advised beforehand about how to behave in Switzerland and what to do. There were several strategies. Some had advised us not to make any political statements about the regime in Iran when explaining why we fled. It would only cause additional trouble and we could even land in prison because of it. We heard so many opinions about that - one more dramatic than the next. Mom couldn't think straight anymore with all the different advise she got. We were confused and scared.

Looking for Freedom

Wasn't the truth reason enough to leave such a country? We just didn't want to return to a country where we had to fear for our lives because of the war. We didn't want to live in a country without human rights and freedom. Apparently, we had to make up another reason for our escape. Mom realized what had to be done: We had to destroy our passports. That way, they wouldn't be able to send us back. Once the decision had been made, the lead up to actually destroying the passports was torture – and we didn't really know if it was the right thing to do. But the fear of having to go back to Tehran and possibly even going to prison was much worse, so we decided to go through with it. On the flight, mom went to the bathroom and destroyed our passports. She flushed them down the toilet and returned to her seat quietly. We looked at each other and knew: This was the point of no return! It was done and we would have to face the consequences.

After thirteen hours, we arrived at Zurich airport on 28th February 1987. It was a Friday in the late afternoon. I looked out of the window and saw nothing but snow and cold. We became nervous. The only person who stayed calm was my mom. We waited in the transit area of the airport until our plane left for Yugoslavia. Those were the most intensive, long and agonizing moments. We heard our names being called from the loudspeakers several times and waited nervously. Then, we waited another few minutes – it felt like hours! We were so scared of how the airport police would react and treat us. I was holding on to mom and trembling. Papa stood next to us pale as snow. Mom took all of her courage and approached a police officer. She said to him in English: “We are Iranians and we are seeking asylum.”

He acted typically Swiss. He was calm, distanced and without apparent emotions. He asked us to wait a minute. After a short while, papa was called into a room and was forced to take off his clothes. He was searched for weapons and drugs. After that, we waited again. After some time, we were taken to another area of the airport. My mom was questioned until late at night – it must have taken about eight hours. As mom was the only one of us who spoke English, she had to translate everything and answer the same questions over and over. It was difficult for her to concentrate and stay calm because of her fatigue and fear.

Nassim

By that time, our suitcases had arrived and the police had searched through all our stuff. Every piece of clothing was searched and checked thoroughly. They looked for weapons and drugs - in vain of course. I have to admit that we were very impressed by their thorough search and got the impression that there were no drugs or crime in Switzerland. The police also found mom's old passport (from the time of the Shah) and saw all of her visas and stamps from other countries. As they saw that mom had been to Germany several times, they figured that she probably spoke German too and switched to German immediately. Mom told them right away that it wasn't our intention to stay in Switzerland but wanted to go on to America or Canada instead.

After the long flight and interrogation, we were very tired and hungry. But the uncertainty and fear of what was to come was worse. After many hours, the police finished questioning us - I suppose, they got tired as well and wanted to go home. They took all of our documents, mom's passport and birth certificate and told us to wait until Monday. So, we had to pay for a room for the weekend at an airport hotel - and wait. We were still watched carefully and were not allowed to leave the airport. We didn't care anyway. All we wanted to do was sleep.

The next day, we didn't do anything but watch passengers and look at boutiques. We were monitored at all times. We were quite worried and could hardly wait for Monday.

Two unbearably long days full of worry and fear passed. It was March 3rd, 1987 and we were awakened urgently by two airport police officers. They waited in front of our door until we were dressed. We came out of our room and saw four armed officers. They were armed with machine guns! Two of them walked in front of us, and two behind us, as if we were dangerous criminals. They scared me a lot and reminded me of the pasdars in Iran. They were just as cold and unfriendly. Pale, plain, expressionless faces stared at us. A cold shiver went down my spine. They took our suitcases and we walked along a long, empty corridor without any knowledge of where we were going. The officers didn't say a word to us. Then, something unexpected happened: One of the officers came towards us and gave a stewardess three plane tickets. Mom saw that they said: Zurich >

Looking for Freedom

Singapore > Iran > Bandar Abbas (a seaport town in the south of Iran on the Persian Gulf). It was our death sentence and we panicked. Even mom who had mastered her nerves so well started to tremble and had trouble controlling herself. We didn't make a scene, though. We tried to stay calm and asked the police: "What is going on? Why are you sending us back? You can't do that to us! They will send us to prison!"

But the police didn't care. The officers had their orders and forced us to step into the plane. I cried, trembled and became hysterical. "Not back to Iran! No more bombs!!!" I thought. I didn't want to die or end up being tortured in prison. I held on to my mom very tight. Papa was in a state of shock. I will never forget that moment! The police stayed very calm and tried not to attract attention. None of the passengers really noticed anything but it was, nevertheless, an embarrassing and humiliating experience. Mom begged the police to keep us in Switzerland. I cried like crazy. But they pushed us into the plane and forced us into our seats. Those were horrible minutes. But only a few minutes before the plane was to lift off, a man approached mom. He was not wearing a uniform, seemed very nice and had light blue eyes. He took mom to the side and said in German: "Don't be afraid. You will come back!" Mom answered: "But our ticket says Singapore > Bandar Abbas", and he answered with a soft, calm voice: "Don't worry. I will wait here for you!"

Still, it was impossible to calm down. A stewardess even brought me toys, trying to calm me down, but no toy on earth helps against fear of death. I was still a child, but I was not stupid! We tried to keep calm and prayed. We prayed to God for help - and a miracle!

Again, we were at the beginning of stressful long flight to Singapore - this time without any passports. What would happen to us? How would we go on? So many questions tortured us for hours.

Completely exhausted and scared, we arrived back in Singapore. The police already awaited us. But as opposed to the officers in Switzerland, the ones here were very nice to us. They were very friendly, compassionate and humane and treated us with respect. Especially to me, they were very nice. After so many days, we were finally treated like humans again - and not like criminals. I truly enjoyed seeing so many nice faces smiling at me - no more pale,

expressionless, ice-cold looks. They asked my mom: "What do you want? What should we do with you?" She answered: "We cannot go back to Iran - we fear for our lives!" And the officer answered: "I will pray for you. I will go to church and light a candle for you."

What happened next, you ask? Well, they sent us back to Zurich with the next flight. Yes, that's right: We had yet another thirteen hours of flying ahead of us! I guess I don't have to mention that, since then, we don't really enjoy flying anymore. Just imagine! Within one week, we flew from Tehran to Singapore, from there to Zurich, from Zurich back to Singapore and from there back to Zurich again. It was more than 46 hours of flying!

Before returning to Switzerland, mom wanted to cheer me up. She bought me a teddy bear, which I have kept to this day. This teddy bear has accompanied me through all of these years and has gone through everything with me. Since that day, he has been my close friend. The man who had promised mom that he would wait for us in Zurich - the one with the light blue eyes - was true to his word. He met us when we got off the plane and said: "Don't be afraid anymore. You are safe now. No one can send you back anymore!"

That was exactly what we needed to hear. Surprisingly, we never saw that man again. We tried to find him at some point to thank him for his support, but nobody could tell us who he was. Today, mom is absolutely convinced that this man was an angel!

All formalities had already been taken care of and we were escorted out of the airport with our suitcases. After so many days, we finally left the airports behind! For the first time in days, we breathed fresh air. It was amazing! I know it sounds funny, considering we had spent the last 46 hours in the air - but it was a wonderful feeling to be on ground and (somewhat) free. It was ice-cold and there was snow everywhere. We were escorted to the police station and there the interrogations started anew. This is normal, I know, but we could hardly walk anymore. We were exhausted! And they expected us to talk for hours more!

LookinG for Freedom Foundation

The plight of child refugees will be a particular focus of LFF. Denying children proper access to education and opportunity is not only morally unsound but also counter-productive to society as a whole. Instead of encouraging young people to become productive members of society, discrimination and restrictions foster frustration and helplessness, resulting in more pressure being put on welfare systems, and in extreme cases to encouraging criminal activity.

Educational opportunities are few and far between for child refugees who stay in their adopted countries but want to continue with their education. Without any money, there is limited or no access to post-secondary education, whether it's private or state-sponsored. We believe that education should be available to all those who seek it. With education, young people can develop and unlock their potential. Instead of becoming a burden on the system, they can be encouraged to learn life skills and find employment. Our goal is to assist child refugees with their pursuit of education.

LookinG for Freedom will give training and scholarships to refugees who otherwise would have little opportunity. It will allow people to have some control of their own lives. It will help give them dignity.

There are many charity programs that help people in the third world. However, it is easy to forget about the hundreds of thousands of refugees in the European countries. They also need support. Let's not forget about the plight of people in our own backyards. The goal of LFF is to establish a voice for the displaced and disenfranchised. The Foundation tries to reach its goals via private donations, sponsorship and contributions from private organizations. The time for change is now and I hope you will support us, because: **Education means independence and independence means liberty!**

For further information please check out the website:

<http://www.lookingforfreedom.com>