



SALAM LAYLA'S STORY

Salam

Layla's story

Keiron Galloway and Layla

Keiron gratefully acknowledges the support of 26TEN and TCAL



First published: Tasmanian Council for Adult Literacy 2014

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National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry:

Authors: Keiron Galloway, with Layla

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Title: Salam - Layla's story.

ISBN: 978-0-9924881-2-3

Publication date: May 2014

Subjects: Adult Learning. Adult Literacy, Refugee Stories, Biography.

Cover image and graphics: Keiron Galloway.

Cover design: Isabel Galloway and Matthew Dunn

Book design: Keiron Galloway and Steve Cooke.

Printing by NewPrint, Kingston.

The views expressed in this book are those of the authors and creators and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of Tasmanian Council for Adult Literacy nor of any of the institutions and agencies cited in this publication.

Salam

Layla's story

I never, never shall forget
My sad departure far away,
Until the sun of life is set,
And leaves behind no beam of day.

George Moses Horton - "*The Southern Refugee* "

Dear Layla - may you and your family be safe and
happy in your new home.



Layla

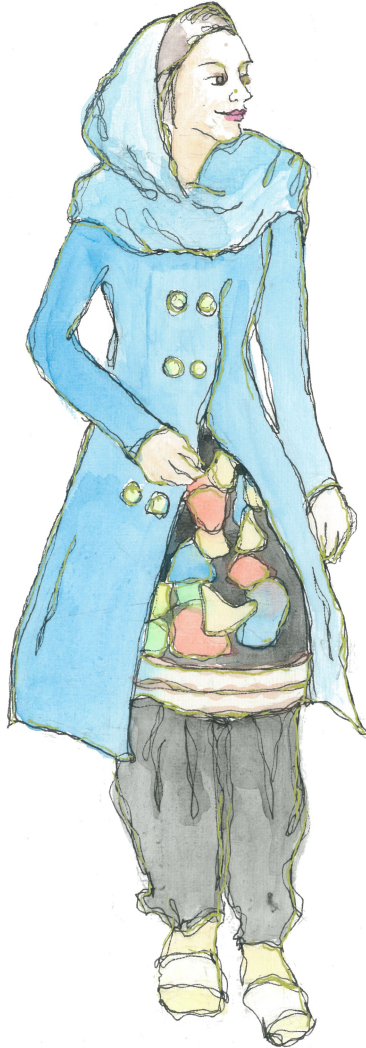
Salam. My name is Layla and my homeland is Afghanistan. I was born in Ghazni, which is a city of around 140,000 people in the central-east of the country. When I was very young my family were forced to flee to Pakistan and Iran because of the Taliban insurgence.

I now live in Australia. On Australia Day 2014 I proudly received my citizenship certificate. My friends, volunteers, and some of the people who have helped me since my arrival came to the ceremony and helped me celebrate.

I arrived in Australia in October 2009. I travelled from Iran with my family. I live with my mother and my two younger sisters and brother in Australia. I am twenty five years old. I am the caretaker of the family. I make sure that everyone is safe and happy and that everything runs smoothly.

Life in the Middle East

My family left Afghanistan when I was very young because of the fighting. It was not safe for us to stay and we fled to Pakistan.



*Layla was born in **Ghazni, Afghanistan**, and now lives in **Hobart***

We lived in Pakistan for nine years before we moved again to Iran. We lived in Iran for around ten years.

Life was very hard in Iran and a lot of my family members died. My father and older brother died in a car accident. My older sister, her husband, their three children and my brother were killed when a building collapsed during an earthquake. There are a lot of earthquakes in Iran. Many other relatives also died.

We were refugees in Pakistan and in Iran. We had no papers and no citizenship. As refugees, we could not go to school, have a business, own a house or work for the government. Life was very hard. I had no schooling until I settled in Australia. In Iran, I paid a lot of money for my younger sister to go to school but they would not let her sit exams and they would not give her a certificate.

After my father and brother were killed life was very difficult. My mother had to work every day to support the family. She had to go out of town to a bakery, collect bread and then sell it.



*Layla and her family come from **Ghazni, Afghanistan**. This is the old quarter of the city. Photo - Creative Commons from Wikipedia*

One day my mother had a lot of bread to carry. A family friend with a motorcycle offered to drive her with her bread.

They had an accident and my mother broke her leg very badly. She had to have two operations. The first time she stayed in the hospital for one month. The second time she was there for two weeks. This cost a lot of money. I had to borrow the money from a neighbour to pay for the hospital. Then I had to work very hard to pay it back.

I had to support the family after my mother's accident. I worked as a manager in an orchard. I supervised people picking and packing fruit. I liked this work and I did a good job. My neighbours in Iran criticised me for working outside the home. In my culture, once a girl turns eight she should stay inside the house and cook and clean. If she goes outside people gossip and say she is a bad girl.

I had to work to earn money. I had to pay for food for my family, rent, my sisters' schooling and my mother's medical expenses.



Layla's mum collected and delivered bread to make a living to support her family

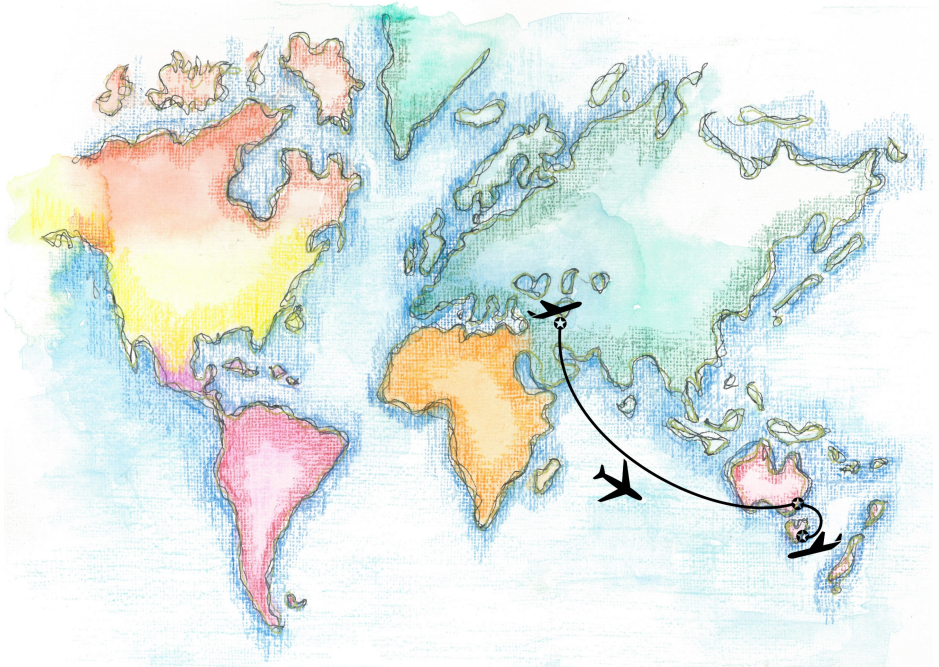
I also worked cleaning peoples' houses. My shoulders and knees are very painful now from this work.

From Iran to Australia

Three years after our father died we applied to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) for third country resettlement. We applied for any country. Six months later the IOM called to tell us that Australia was accepting refugees and to go to the Embassy.

At the Embassy we were interviewed. We had to wait eighteen months for a visa. Then we had to have medical assessments and I had to borrow a lot of money to pay for them. When I reached Australia I repaid the money.

When my family arrived at Sydney airport in 2009 we were very scared and confused. Two interpreters met us but they did not help us very much. My sisters and my mother were worried and they cried all the way to Hobart. I could not speak English but could say 'Tasmania'. I asked for help and people were friendly and assisted us to find our plane to Hobart. When we arrived in Hobart things improved. We



*In 2009 Layla traveled with her family from **Iran** to **Hobart***

were met by two interpreters, some Afghani families and our case worker.

The Afghani families had cooked familiar food for us and took us to the temporary home that had been prepared by Centrecare.

We lived in this house for four months before we found the house that we live in now. We have now lived in this house for four years and we are very happy because we have friendly, helpful neighbours. They always talk to us and ask us how we are. Talking with them every day has helped us to learn English and to enjoy conversation. Our house is close to bus stops, my sisters' school and shops.

I understand and speak English quite well now. Learning English has not been so easy for my mum. She understands and speaks a little English. My younger sisters speak very good English.

After I had been in Australia for about a year I became unwell. I still suffer from headaches and I don't sleep well. My mum has pain in her shoulder and is also not well.



Layla and her family were forced to flee from **Ghazni** in **Afghanistan** to **Quetta** in **Pakistan**. Later they settled as refugees in **Kerman** in **Iran**

I volunteer to work each week at the Red Cross and with Centrecare. This helps to improve my English and gives me work experience. It also helps me to meet new friends.

In the future I would like to train and work as a nurse or aged carer. I know the course will be difficult for me because I could not read or write before I came to Australia and I still have difficulty with spelling.

Life in Australia

Life and culture in Australia is very different from the countries I grew up in. In Iran I could not buy or drive a car. Here in Australia, the Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) has helped me to learn to drive and buy a car. This has given me a lot of freedom. In Australia I can do things that I could never do as a woman in Iran, Pakistan or Afghanistan. I can drive a car, buy a house, go to school and do any job. In Australia men and women are equal.

I had to work in the house from when I was eight years old. Sometimes I feel angry that my sisters do not have to work hard, but I am not angry for long.



In the countries that Layla grew up in women could not drive. In Australia, the Migrant Resource Centre helped Layla learn to drive. Driving provides Layla with freedom and opportunities

I feel strongly that my family needs to adopt the culture of Australia where possible. But sometimes this is not possible and I explain the reasons to people and hope it will increase their understanding.

The climate in Iran is very hot and sometimes in Tasmania I feel very cold. My mother often feels cold. But here I also feel safe and I feel happy. Friends and volunteers who have helped me for the past four years are like members of my family.

My family are Muslim. We have customs that Australians don't always understand. In Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan we are expected to cover our hair with a scarf and wear modest clothes that cover our arms and legs. The only meat we eat is Halal. We remove our shoes before entering our homes because our homes are used for prayer. Women do not shake hands with men who are not their husbands.

Sometimes the customs that are important to our faith cause confusion or embarrassment. My mother and my sisters are often embarrassed and get upset. I always try to explain our customs to people and build their understanding.



Layla and her family enjoy living in their new home. Their neighbours are friendly and helpful

Once a friend invited my family for dinner and they served pizza. My mum was very upset because there was non-Halal meat on the pizza. My sister was embarrassed. Now I usually tell people that I am vegetarian because that is easier. Then they are surprised when I invite them to eat and I serve chicken! Then I explain.

When I first arrived in Tasmania men would introduce themselves and hold out their hand. I would shake their hand but then feel bad. My mum still feels bad. I tell people that we have to make some changes to fit in with our new country. We cannot hold on to all of our customs. When our customs are important to us we need to talk with people and explain why they are important.

I wear a scarf to cover my hair when I go outside the home. Some people say horrible things to me for wearing the scarf. On one trip, the bus driver was very rude. They think that all Muslims are terrorists.

The future

After I had lived in Australia for one year I returned to Iran to marry. I stayed for three months before returning to



Layla and her family enjoy living in Hobart. They are looking forward to a future of making new friends and living a good life

Tasmania. My husband now lives in Pakistan and we are applying for him to join me here. It is very difficult and it may take a long time. We stay in touch using Skype.

I am very happy in Tasmania. We are safe and we have enough money to live a good life. We have lots of friends and people who help us. My sisters and brother have the opportunity to do whatever they want. My youngest sister is good at maths and she wants to go to university. I would like to do paid work.

We will continue to follow our Muslim faith. I will also continue to make new friends and try to help people to understand the differences in our cultures.

Resource list

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

www.iom.int

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

www.unhcr.org

Tasmanian Council for Adult Literacy (TCAL)

www.tcal.org.au

The Department of Education Tasmania

www.education.tas.gov.au

TasTAFE

www.tastafe.tas.edu.au

26TEN

www.26ten.tas.gov.au

Migrant Resource Centre

www.mrchobart.org.au

Refugee Council of Australia

www.refugeecouncil.org.au

Layla's Story is the third book
in the Namaste Book Series.

This book tells Layla's story
of her journey from Afghanistan to Australia.

