

MY NAME IS REZ

as told to Toby Morris



HOW ARE YOU?

UH ... MY NAME IS REZ.

SHE'S LIKE A ROBOT!
"MY NAME IS REZ.
MY NAME IS REZ."

THAT'S ME IN THE MIDDLE. WHY ARE THOSE OTHER KIDS LAUGHING AT ME? WELL, IT'S KIND OF A LONG STORY. LET ME EXPLAIN.

MY FAMILY IS KURDISH. WE COME FROM KURDISTAN. THIS ISN'T A COUNTRY YOU'LL FIND ON A MAP. IT'S A REGION WHERE THE KURDS HAVE ALWAYS LIVED.

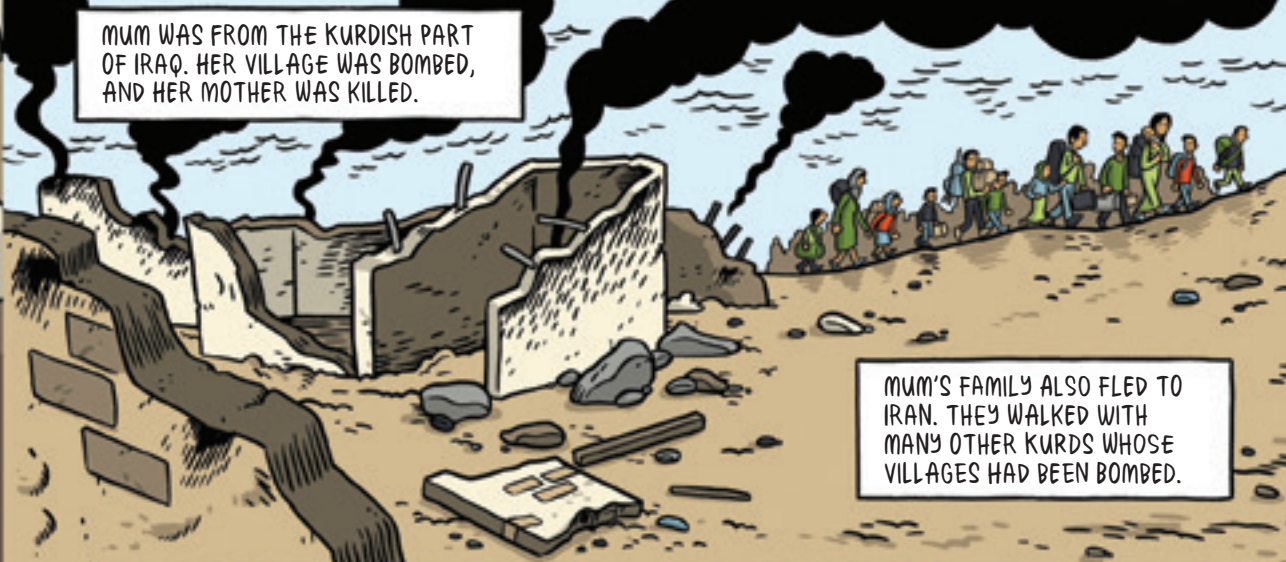


WE'VE NEVER HAD OUR OWN HOMELAND. THIS HAS MADE LIFE TOUGH FOR US.

MY DAD GREW UP IN THE KURDISH PART OF TURKEY. HIS PEOPLE WANTED INDEPENDENCE, AND THERE WAS FIGHTING. AS PUNISHMENT, IT BECAME ILLEGAL TO HAVE A KURDISH NAME OR TO SPEAK KURDISH IN PUBLIC. IT WAS ILLEGAL TO PLAY KURDISH MUSIC ... EVERYTHING KURDISH WAS BANNED!



MUM WAS FROM THE KURDISH PART OF IRAQ. HER VILLAGE WAS BOMBED, AND HER MOTHER WAS KILLED.



THINGS GOT SO BAD THAT MY DAD HAD TO ESCAPE INTO IRAN.



MUM'S FAMILY ALSO FLED TO IRAN. THEY WALKED WITH MANY OTHER KURDS WHOSE VILLAGES HAD BEEN BOMBED.

SO THAT'S WHERE MY PARENTS MET, IN IRAN. THEY GOT MARRIED AND HAD TWO KIDS. THEY ALSO BEGAN TO PROTEST FOR KURDISH RIGHTS.



THEN LIFE BECAME TOO DANGEROUS FOR MY PARENTS IN IRAN, SO THEY CRAMMED INTO THE BACK OF A TRUCK WITH THEIR CHILDREN AND CROSSED THE BORDER INTO PAKISTAN. THEY DECLARED THEMSELVES REFUGEES.



THEY WERE TOLD IT WOULD TAKE SIX MONTHS BEFORE THEY WERE RESETTLED.

A COUPLE OF YEARS LATER, I WAS BORN. SIX FAMILIES LIVED TOGETHER IN ONE TENT.



THE CAMP WAS NEVER MEANT TO BE PERMANENT, AND IT WAS OVERCROWDED. THERE WEREN'T ENOUGH TOILETS OR PLACES TO COOK, AND THERE WERE NO SCHOOLS.

THERE WAS A LOT OF DISEASE. CHILDREN GOT SICK, AND PEOPLE DIED. WE PROTESTED ABOUT THIS ALL THE TIME.



EVENTUALLY THE CHILDREN IN THE CAMP WERE ALLOWED TO GO TO A LOCAL SCHOOL. MY MEMORIES OF THAT TIME ARE HORRIBLE.



IN THE CAMP, PEOPLE SPOKE KURDISH, AND MY FAMILY SPOKE FARSI TOO. BUT EVERYONE AT THE NEARBY SCHOOL SPOKE URDU. I WAS ONLY FIVE, AND NOW I HAD A THIRD LANGUAGE TO LEARN.



I WAS PUNISHED WHEN I MADE MISTAKES. ONE TIME, I SPENT THE ENTIRE DAY HIDING UNDER MY BROTHER'S DESK.



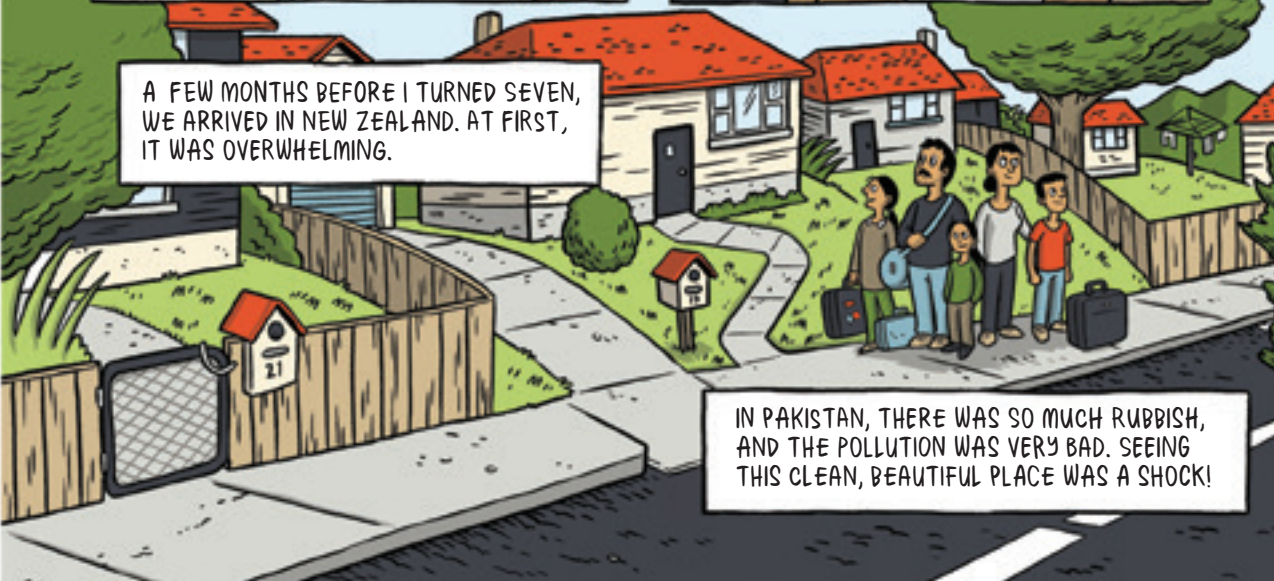
ONE DAY, AFTER NINE YEARS IN THE CAMP, MY PARENTS WERE TOLD WE WERE FINALLY BEING RESETTLED. WE WENT OUT FOR DINNER TO CELEBRATE. I ATE A BURGER AND DRANK COKE FOR THE FIRST TIME.



WE DIDN'T GET TO CHOOSE WHERE WE WERE SENT. WE HAD NO IDEA WHAT NEW ZEALAND WAS GOING TO BE LIKE, BUT ANYTHING WOULD BE BETTER THAN THE CAMP.

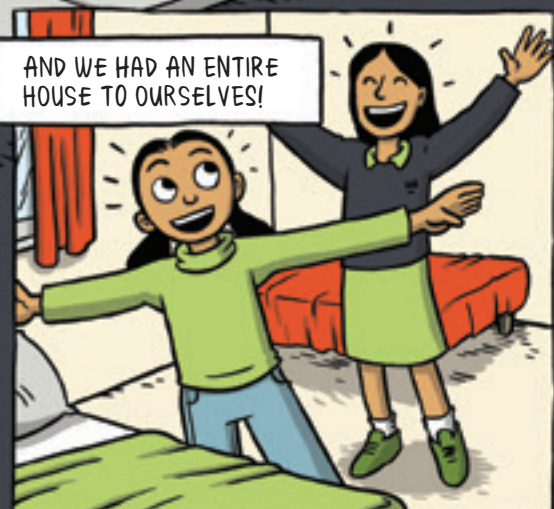


A FEW MONTHS BEFORE I TURNED SEVEN, WE ARRIVED IN NEW ZEALAND. AT FIRST, IT WAS OVERWHELMING.



IN PAKISTAN, THERE WAS SO MUCH RUBBISH, AND THE POLLUTION WAS VERY BAD. SEEING THIS CLEAN, BEAUTIFUL PLACE WAS A SHOCK!

AND WE HAD AN ENTIRE HOUSE TO OURSELVES!



IN THE BEGINNING, IT WAS SO EXCITING TO BE HERE AND SO POSITIVE - BUT THERE WERE ALSO CHALLENGES. MEETING PEOPLE AND ADJUSTING TO LIFE IN NEW ZEALAND WAS TRICKY.



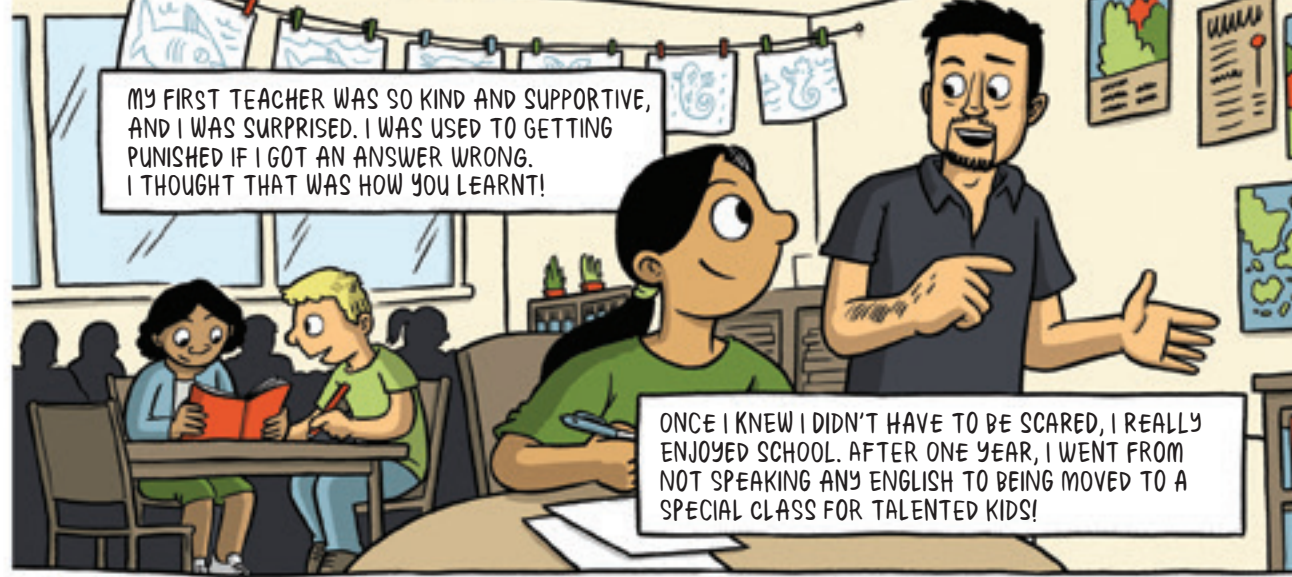
AND OF COURSE I HAD TO START AT ANOTHER NEW SCHOOL AND LEARN MY FOURTH LANGUAGE!



I DIDN'T SPEAK ANY ENGLISH, AND I DIDN'T KNOW ANY KIDS. IT WAS REALLY INTIMIDATING.



MY FIRST TEACHER WAS SO KIND AND SUPPORTIVE, AND I WAS SURPRISED. I WAS USED TO GETTING PUNISHED IF I GOT AN ANSWER WRONG. I THOUGHT THAT WAS HOW YOU LEARNT!



ONCE I KNEW I DIDN'T HAVE TO BE SCARED, I REALLY ENJOYED SCHOOL. AFTER ONE YEAR, I WENT FROM NOT SPEAKING ANY ENGLISH TO BEING MOVED TO A SPECIAL CLASS FOR TALENTED KIDS!

IN THE CAMP, I'D LEARNT TO SAY ONE THING IN ENGLISH: "MY NAME IS REZ." SO WHEN PEOPLE ASKED, "HOW ARE YOU?" I WOULD REPLY, "MY NAME IS REZ." KIDS TEASED ME SO BADLY BECAUSE OF THAT!



SOMETIMES WHEN ONE PERSON TEASED ME, OTHERS WOULD LAUGH AND JOIN IN.

AND SOON I FOUND OTHER WAYS TO ACCESS KIWI CULTURE, LIKE JOINING THE SCHOOL KAPA HAKA GROUP.



IT TURNED OUT THAT MĀORI CULTURE WAS SIMILAR TO KURDISH CULTURE. MY FRIENDS SOMETIMES TOOK ME TO THEIR MARAE, AND I LOVED IT.



I DON'T THINK KIDS KNEW HOW MEAN THEY WERE BEING, BUT THE TEASING MADE IT REALLY HARD FOR ME TO FIT IN.



IT WASN'T ALL BAD. I SOON REALISED THAT SCHOOL IN NEW ZEALAND COULD BE DIFFERENT IN A GOOD WAY.



I MADE A FRIEND UP THE ROAD WHO GOT ME INTO PLAYING NETBALL. THAT WAS SO GREAT FOR ME - GIRLS DIDN'T PLAY SPORT IN PAKISTAN.



NETBALL WAS AWESOME FOR MY MUM TOO. IN PAKISTAN, SHE'D ORGANISE PROTESTS ON THE WEEKENDS. NOW SHE WATCHED ME PLAY SPORT. IT WAS SO NICE FOR HER.



SINCE THEN, I'VE GROWN UP AND BEEN PRETTY BUSY. I'VE BEEN A YOUTH ADVISOR FOR THE RED CROSS, I'VE WORKED TO HELP OTHER REFUGEES, AND I'VE EVEN REPRESENTED NEW ZEALAND AT CONFERENCES ALL AROUND THE WORLD.



NOW I'M A LAWYER AT A BIG LAW FIRM IN AUCKLAND. I STARTED A PROGRAMME TO HELP YOUNG REFUGEES, AND IN 2017, I WAS NAMED YOUNG NEW ZEALANDER OF THE YEAR.



I STILL THINK ABOUT THE KIDS WHO TEASED ME WHEN I WAS YOUNGER ...

WHAT WOULD I SAY TO THEM NOW?

EVEN IF YOU DON'T SPEAK THE SAME LANGUAGE, PEOPLE CAN STILL COMMUNICATE. THERE ARE LOTS OF DIFFERENT WAYS. PLAYING TOGETHER IS A GOOD START ...



WE ALL LIKE TO HAVE FUN. WE LAUGH AT A LOT OF THE SAME STUFF. WE GO TO SCHOOL AND LEARN TOGETHER. WE ALL HAVE PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.



IN THE END, WE'RE ALL PRETTY MUCH THE SAME.

My Name Is Rez

As told to Toby Morris by Rez Gardi

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