



resilience

When Hwvar Khoshnow was four, her home region was torn by war.

Her small family of four had to make the difficult and dangerous decision to flee. Trekking through mountains, snowy terrain, bunking with strangers, hiding in attics and getting help from secret guerrilla forces – their journey to Australia was no easy feat.

Kurdistan is where I'm from and it's an area of the world that is split between four countries – Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran. It was a time when Saddam Hussein was in power and he was systemically wiping out people just because they were Kurdish. The Kurdish people naturally started to fight back.

My dad was part of the uprising that was against Hussein. He was a journalist and musician, so he wrote songs and articles that protested the regime. It was our own version of propaganda to inspire people to have hope.

Dad was part of a group who would go into the cities and towns distributing his work to the people. Eventually, it caught wind and more and more people started to fight back.

Soon after I was born, they arrested Dad in the middle of the night in our home. He was having a secret meeting with members of the uprising, so he wasn't the only one taken. Apparently, when they captured him, it was the first time I said, "Ab" which means Dad in Arabic. When he escaped prison two years later, he wrote about the night he was seized as a way to boost people's morale. I still have that article today. It was the only thing we kept when we fled Kurdistan.

Dad was only one of a few who escaped prison that night. He knocked on our door and said, "We have to leave." So, we did. I remember having a donkey with us for some of the way. My mum even dressed up like a man to cross the Iranian border. Sometimes I wonder, "Do I actually remember these things?" or is it just because I know it happened? But I do recall instances – I remember being smuggled, so I know we were helped across the border. We were up in the mountains and it was snowing, so it was very cold.

After escaping Iraq, we arrived in Iran at a United Nations Refugee Camp. We lived in a tent for two years on the camp's outskirts. My mum gave birth to my little brother in that tent. We had to be careful about who we interacted with because my dad was an escapee. Anyone could have been an informant for the regime if they were paid money. We were liaising with the United Nations the whole time, until they gave us political asylum and flew us to Australia. We were very, very lucky. A lot of the people who were with us in the refugee camp didn't even survive.

It was our first time ever seeing a plane, let alone being in one, and it was flying in horrific conditions – it felt like we were going to crash. But, we landed safely in Australia. And for that, I am so grateful.

From all of this, I've learnt resilience is powerful. I think my parents are absolute heroes. It's a quick process to tell a story, but this took years and years and years – for them to overcome their challenges, survive and get us over the line. It really taught me how much people are capable

of, and how far kindness goes. It can literally save lives.

People would shelter us in their basements, give us food, and hide us from the soldiers when they would come. I will never meet those people. I will never know their names. But they played a part to make sure my family and I are alive today.

When we made it to Australia, Dad delivered newspapers to provide for us. My parents believed a strong household always had a parent present, so Dad gave up his job so my mum could work after she finished her degree.

Dad is now working for *Festival Australia* and Mum is a gynaecologist and obstetrician. In 2017 she travelled around Iraq and Kurdistan consulting in hospitals, teaching life-saving procedures for women, babies and pregnant women, while also educating people on female anatomy.

I did a theology degree a couple of years ago. I have just finished my Bachelor of Social Work and I'm currently doing my Masters. I will probably continue to study after this – I really like university! I'm 24 now, and I work with kids in and out of home care, and I'm a crisis responder for youth workers. I enjoy it. It's challenging and confronting, it keeps me on my toes. It's what I've been trained to do.

I love living in Australia. I am gifted with a beautiful life and I will never take that for granted.