



By Mert Korkusuz, aged 12

Coming to Australia by boat and living in a detention centre had an impact on Mert Kokucuz's life. Here is his story

It was cold, very cold. The waves splashed on my face and the misty air tightened its icy grip around me. Our small boat was very crowded with the people I had known all my life. It was terrible. But we had no choice.

We all had a small bag each, half full with our belongings. I had one spare shirt and pants but no warm clothes. I took my one and only book along with a picture of my brother who had recently died in the war. My parents looked many years older overnight when the dreaded news was given to them. Their smiles were wiped off their faces. I no longer see my mother's beautiful smile.

We are escaping from the war. War is terrifying. Young men and women, children die. People lose their loved ones. Innocent blood is spilt. What is the point of war? Why go to war? There is no victorious side in a war. Everyone loses. Some lose their lives, some their dignity. Some lose their hopes for their future, some their humanity. What is the point?

Ali... My best friend. Short but solid, fast and courageous. Nobody could catch him. Best runner in the whole neighbourhood. I miss him already. We spent every day together. We had so much fun in the old days. Poor Ali! He wanted to come with us. But how could we

take him? Both of his parents were killed in a bomb attack. My parents couldn't take him. Everyone was trying to save himself. Tears in his eyes as I left him forever are still fresh in my mind, in my heart... My best buddy. Forgive me! Forgive me for leaving you behind. What could I have done? Maybe I could have hidden him somewhere in the boat. I feel so hopeless, so hopeless... What sort of a friend am I? Help me God; help me to come to terms with our misfortunes. I didn't want to leave you, Ali. I didn't want to leave any one of you. We would spend hours along the muddy creek with a hope of finding a little round stone. We would play

hide and seek in the good old days. But things were different after the war started. We were not allowed to leave home. How would my poor brother Hassan know that it was for his own sake to stay indoors? Sneaking out one day cost him his life. I wonder how my friends are? How is life treating them? Are they all right? I sure hope so...

My home, the one I was born in, is destroyed. I lived there for all my life. Twelve years ... We had so much hope for the future. I was going to work really hard and become a teacher like Mr Rahmi. Teach children how to read and write. Teach them everything there is to know. I didn't want to be a farmer like my parents. I was going to be the first teacher from my village. Was it all a dream? Am I really going away from home? Where am I going?

I feel like screaming. I feel like diving into the water and turning into a fish. I feel like crying my eyes out. But I have to be quiet. I look at the sky and pray to God that there will be sunshine in our lives once again. I pray that the thick clouds over our lives will disappear.

I wonder how the new place will be. I overhear people talking about it. They say it is nice. There is no war. Plenty of food and lots and lots of space. The place is called Australia. Very different from my home village, mum says. They say there are lots and lots of trees in some parts. Some very unusual animals. Animals that hop and carry their babies in their pouches. I wonder if the people are nice. Are they friendly? Are they going to hurt us? Am I going to like it? I wonder if I will be able to have friends. No no! No place could be as good as my

home. I want to go back home ... But I know it is impossible. Merciless consequences of war.

My mother woke me up this morning with a gently kiss. 'Our new home' – she pointed out the distant land to me. I jumped out of my seat hoping to see every little detail. 'Calm down', she whispered. 'There are still hours before we can get there.' All I could see was a piece of land. I could feel the butterflies in my stomach. What if I don't like our new home? I was tired I wanted to sleep ...

Hours felt like years. Finally we could see the trees and buildings. Everyone on the boat was quiet. Awfully quiet. I didn't know what to think. At least I knew I was going to be out of this vessel soon. Maybe there would be some food. The motor was slowing down. We were approaching the pier. Who were these men in some sort of uniforms, looking at us? I held onto my mum's hand firmly. Someone from our boat was talking to the men. Not a word I could understand. The man from our boat showed some papers to the men in uniform. They looked at the papers very carefully. Everyone was quiet. The men from the boat told us to come out and follow the man in uniform. We did as we were told. My legs were hurting as I walked. Where were they taking us? Finally we made it to the room full of chairs. More talks, more looking. When can we eat? When can we sleep? I was running out of energy. The room was turning around and around.

I opened my eyes. Where was I? Terrible smell ... 'He is alright thank God,' one woman hurried towards mum. Why was mum crying? She held my hand and

whispered, 'Please don't leave us, please get better.' Doctors, nurses ... What was going on? They told me to relax and try to sleep. 'Exhaustion,' the doctor said. Not enough food, not enough sleep and cold nights ... My body couldn't take it any more.

For days I was in this little room. But at least I was given plenty of food. I felt better by the day. 'You can take him to your room,' our translator told mum and dad. I saw them smiling for the first time since Hassan left us. Maybe our new life wasn't going to be so bad after all.

'Is this our home? I asked mum. 'But why are these tall wire fences all around here? Can't we go out?'

'We have to stay here for a while,' said mum. 'Listen,' she said, 'listen carefully. Can you hear any shotguns? Can you hear explosions? This is peace. We must be thankful to God for what we have. We have peace; we have food, clean water, somewhere to sleep. We have each other and we have hope for the future. Let's not worry about not being able to leave this place for a while. I promise you it won't be long before we have our own little home again. I promise you that, you will go to school and become a teacher as you always dreamed. I promise you we will never have war again.'

I wish Ali was with me. Good night Ali. Hope that one day you can come too...



Edited by Eva Sallis and Heather Miller. Published by Australians Against Racism Inc