

Part 1

Throughout my life, it's been extremely rare for me to meet other people who are Muslim like me. Aside from my immediate family members, I have no family here in America - they all live through various countries in the Middle East. Though, that was supposed to change a couple of years ago. An uncle of mine and his family, were applying for their visas to immigrate from Iran into the United States and were planning on coming to live in San Antonio as well. I was extremely ready to finally have cousins around my age to become friends with. Me and my siblings were already planning on what to do with our family when they finally move into the U.S., until we heard the news.

The year was 2017, and as my uncle was busy applying for visas for his family to be able to come to the U.S., Donald Trump enacted a series of executive orders to ban immigrants from several Middle Eastern countries from the United States, Iran included. Needless to say, my whole family was devastated. My dad spent days at a time trying to find a way to help his brother move his family to the U.S., though nothing worked. This was the first time that I actually realized how my family and I being Muslim is impacted directly by the government. While living in a right-leaning state my whole life did open up many opportunities to come face-to-face with racism, I never expected the president of the country I was born in to disregard the wellbeing of both mine and millions of other families who wished to form a better life in America, simply to figure out "what the hell is going on" in Muslim-dominant countries (comment made by then Republican Presidential Candidate Donald Trump on December 7, 2015). After this moment, I became more aware of examples of racism towards Muslims both by my own government and by the people I would see in my everyday life, whether being the blatant slurs that were thrown my way for years now, or the small microaggressions I didn't notice before. Trump's ban on Muslim immigrants not only caused me and many other families to go through the pain of seeing the chances of our family members living better lives outside of the Middle East crash in front of our faces, but also caused me to form resentment towards my own government for the unfair treatment of Muslim people.

However, history is made every day. Just today, on the Inauguration Day of President Joe Biden, President Biden reversed the executive order made by Donald Trump that banned immigration from certain Middle Eastern countries, giving millions of people the chance to create a better life for themselves outside of the Middle East. While this action alone does not account for the decades of mistreatment Muslim-dominant countries have received from more advanced countries, I do feel it's a step in the right direction towards bettering the situation of the Middle East, and hopefully it leads to me trusting in my own government again.

Part 2

While I only had to experience the disappointment of a family member not being able to immigrate to America, my father has had to deal with being one of those individuals who had to push through the obstacles to get the chance to come to the country. At the age of 18, his father passed away, leaving my father as the main source of income for a family of 6 others in war-torn Afghanistan. He had to put a pause on his education and put all his efforts into providing enough money to ensure his 5 younger siblings were able to attend school, along with producing enough money to take care of his mother, who was sickened at the time.

My father was able to deal with all this and eventually had the opportunity to continue his education in medicine. He was even informed of an opportunity in America to further pursue his medical degree in a safer environment. The downside, though, was that he did not have enough money to take any of his family or my mother, his fiancé at the time, with him. Furthermore, there was no source of travel to America from Afghanistan itself, so he instead had to traverse through literal warzones in Afghanistan into Pakistan to finally get on a plane to America. All these struggles alone are enough to break most people and make them turn their back on their dream, though my dad never gave up. Not even when he almost failed to get a visa to America, almost missing the entrance exam to the medical school he would be attending, did he even think of going back to his family without being a doctor. Eventually, through days-long struggles with immigration officials, my father was finally able to get himself to Nebraska, where he met up with his friend who told him of the opportunity. Through the next few years, my father was able to finish medical school at the top of his class, and finally bring my mother to America to live with him, leading him to providing the privileged life he has gave me and my siblings for our whole lives, which we are forever grateful for.

Every time we talk about my dad immigrating to America in our household, he never looks back at the process like the hell I may have described it to be. Instead, he always appears thankful for all the opportunities he was given to be able to come and provide an amazing life for his family. Even without being able to bring his siblings to America, he still regularly sends money to them, helping them also live a wonderful life back in Afghanistan and through other parts in the Middle East. He never “brags” about living through the experience either, but instead uses it to motivate others, such as his kids, to try their hardest to reach their goals. While I had to live through seeing my family members be denied asylum in America, I’m still thankful that at least my father was able to be granted access into living in America before I was born. Without that, my life would be incredibly more difficult than it is now.

While I wish to be able to provide a picture of my father through his travels to America, many have been lost or destroyed. Those that remain are with our family in Afghanistan at my father’s childhood home.