



Parviz Salimi



When Parviz Salimi was seven years old, soldiers came who killed family members and neighbors, chased everyone and demolished the houses. It was in Iran in 1979. The Salimi family are Kurds and belong to the Yari religion. The whole large family had to flee to Iraq where they were stuck in a refugee camp for 19 years. Parviz got involved with the Red Cross and the UN who worked in the camp. This was the salvation for him and his family, who became quota refugees and came to Norway in 1999. Parviz now works for the Viken Red Cross.

- ***We are Kurds and have the "wrong" religion. Our life in Khomeini's Iran was doubly difficult. And it didn't get better when we got to Iraq, says Parviz***

Then I have the pleasure of welcoming Parviz Salimi to my studio.

Thank you very much, nice.

Yes, very glad you could come. It's a long way, because you work here in Drammen, but live at Hønefoss. Parviz, I've known you for a while. It is not very often that we meet, but we have met because you are an active man in both dialogue work and within the Red Cross. Can you briefly say what you are working on right now?

First I must thank you for the conversation. I think what you have done with the different minority backgrounds was very important. As you say, my name is Parviz Salimi. I am 48 years old, and originally I am a Kurd from Iran. I was barely seven years old when Khomeini's regime burned our house and killed many of my family members. It means that I moved from Iran in 1979. The background for this is politics and religion. As you ask, I have several hats, but my workplace is at the Viken Red Cross district office and I work with migration and humanitarian work. In addition, I am active in several voluntary organisations.



I've googled a bit now before you came, and do you also know that you're active politically? I saw in Ringerike blad, where you appear in several articles and speak from SV, as far as I understand.

Just right. The reason why I thought of being somewhat active in politics in Norway is, in my experience, if you are going to solve problems, then it has to go through politics. Otherwise, I'm not that passionate about politics here in Norway. What I am passionate about is peace, dialogue and humanitarian activity.

Since you are now so specific also about the tragic reason why you are here, there were conflicts, war and even that you had to flee, I think it would be nice if you could say a little more about your hometown. What was it like when you were growing up, until you had to move?

Actually, the place that I lived in Iran, it was the Kurdish area. I was lucky, two days ago, I got a film from my birthplace, from someone I know, he was visiting here in Norway, he promised me to travel to my birthplace, and then take films, and then send me films and pictures.

Maybe we can post the movie along with that conversation?

Yes, I can ship to you.

What is it called there?

It's called Kochibashi. It was an incredible, very nice area. What I remember in that area was that my family, or my father, worked so hard to build up in my birthplace. We had a very quiet and peaceful life in my birthplace. You could say that the area in which we have lived, we owned 60% of that area. Great nature. We had everything.

How high is it in relation to the sea? Is it a mountainous area?

It is a mountainous area. Also in addition, my father had a farm. Then that means we had everything. My father deals with animals, also growing vegetables, also in addition we had a very nice farm which we have experienced with this, also in addition as we can sell things.

You were so big that you could help work on the farm?

Not. But we were twelve siblings. We have six sisters, and then six brothers. That means we have a big family. Even in the old days, the family looked after each other. That is certainly why my father intended to have a large family, because everyone can help each other.

We can talk more about that later, about cultural conditions. I think it's fun to hear about the practicalities, about the place, what it was like, how you experienced it as a little boy.

As a little boy, I cannot forget the experiences or the fun games that I had in my birthplace. With nature, with the neighborhood, with the family. What was very important to me was that I felt safe. I have also felt that it is my area. No one can take that away from me.

Was it a village?

It was a village.

How many families lived there, do you think?

Actually, as I recall, there are approximately 25 families. Each family consists of five to ten people.

Was there a school there?



Yes, in the end . I remember very well the first time, when we got a teacher at our house, and then the children from the village started to come and learn, and go to school with us. But eventually, when the whole village applied, we got a school. I myself had started in the first grade, and then it was in the middle of the first grade, when the regime of Khomeini came and burned our house, and then they killed many of my families, so we had to move from my homeland to Iraq.

This is really dramatic. First grade, that means you were seven years old?

I was barely seven years old, in the middle of first grade.

You remember this through the look, through the experience of a little boy, like you were then. We see so much war and misery around us, but if you can bear it, could you tell us a little about what happened?

As you say, I have experienced a lot of war, a lot of hatred and a lot of conflict. From my experience as a child, as an adult and who has come to a peaceful country like Norway: I don't think conflict and war solve problems. In my experience, I can say that 100 years of dialogue is better than one second of war. That is my experience. Why can I say that? Think about it, from 1979 until now, I was on the run, and then there was always war. So the war continues in the Middle East. It shows that it has not solved any problems. In addition, war always creates insecurity, and in addition it creates a number of memories, ones that I cannot forget. For example, I can't forget when the soldiers from Iran took the gun to my mother's chest and said: where is your husband? Think about this, that a child who is 7 years old, and then suddenly when you live in a peaceful area, and then soldiers come with guns, and so with everything, and burn the house, and so those things, it's hard to forget. And then another thing that I cannot forget, that me and my brother who was older than me, we have lost contact with our parents for about two weeks. Because when the war started in our area, there was chaos. We were away from our family.

You had to escape - run..

Escape, run. Because they have come along, they have attacked us with tanks, with planes, with helicopters, not planes, but helicopters. You see, it was very chaotic, and then we had to escape from there.

Running in the mountains...

I remember very well that the first time, that mother, because father, cannot be in the village, until the soldiers come, then they have been in the mountains, hiding.

Was this one, you say it was a peaceful area, but we know that the Kurdish cause, or a Kurdish nation has fought to get ... Was he critical in any way?

Think about this. Just after I grew up, and then came to Norway, I thought that, my poor father, he has a farm. So he was innocent in this. He hasn't been to school, he was illiterate, right? And then after I spoke to him in Norway, he's not that interested in politics. He wanted to have peace, and he wanted to live, and have a good future for his children. Because that means that, from my side, I believe that we were innocent. What happened to us, what happened to us, that, I don't know why it happened to us, but I think that, even that, that my father was not so political. But I know why they have come and bombed us, or they have against us because, for sure, we were Kurds. And then what is very, very dangerous is that we were not Muslims, we were another religion called Yari.

Yes exactly. So there were two things. There are two things. Both Kurdish, and another religion that is...



Yes, that was it. And then children who experience war, you, you may become stronger, but, but, stronger, how do you become stronger, that you have survived a lot. But, but, psychologically, we don't notice this, but like when I talk to you, and then I see that I, I can't forget those things, there are some things that you constantly, you remember, right, it's not good for children. It never goes away, also in addition to the fact that you experience a number of things in war such as the fact that I have been away from my parents for two weeks, it is not easy. Like seven years old, over the mountains, you don't know anything about how to go, where to go, right, ..

You were on the run, on the run alone, you and your brother.

Me and my brother, he was older than me.

What about the other siblings?

Other siblings they have been with mother. And then finally, then dad found us. But it was a very, very long story. I can send to you, if you want.

But tell me.. You ran away because of the soldiers coming, a long period in the mountains alone, before you got back together, but then you ran away together, so you went to Iraq.

Yes, that's right. The beautiful house that my father has built, with the stones from the mountains, that my mother tells us, that your father has worked so hard to build here. He has built three-storied houses with the finest stones, the best stones that are in that area. And then after the soldiers who have come, everything has burned. After we fled in the mountains, they had burned everything. Ruined all this. So we had nowhere to stay. If we had come back, then we would have gone to jail, or for sure, my father would have been executed, it's the same, because somebody has come back, and they've got a problem. That is why many of my close family have been killed or executed. Therefore we had no choice, we had to flee to Iraq.

Think about it, coming to a country where you don't know the language, everything is different. The culture, everything is different. When we got to Iraq, we had a lot of problems. What is the problem? The first problem that is a big problem for us, that is religion. They are Sunni Muslims, but we were a different religion. We must not forget, throughout the Middle East, it is Sharia that determines how you should live. It's not politics, it's Sharia that decides how you should live.

Sharia, that is, it is the religious Muslims, the leaders, who decide.

In addition to the fact that we were Kurds in Iraq, and in addition to the fact that we were Iranian. Think about it, in that period from 1979 until the war with Iraq has started, so much has happened. When we lived in Iraq, religion was a big problem. In addition to the start of war between Iran and Iraq, there is another problem. They say, OK, now you are Iranians against us. Afterwards, a little war started between Iraqis and Kurds. Kurds from Iraq, think about it. We have been deployed to a refugee camp in Ramadi, Iraq. I have not experienced my childhood and youth, because I grew up in a refugee camp in Iraq and have lived in that refugee camp for 19 years.

19 years !!.. ?.

Think about it. That is why I have experienced so much.

Because you were seven years old when you had to flee and then you fled to Iraq where you were in a refugee camp for 19 years..!

Yes, 19 years in a refugee camp. Think about this.



What kind of camp was this? Describe the camp. What did it look like there?

Actually, when we were in Iraq, we received offers from the Iraqi regime, or from the Iraqi government. There were two proposals. The first proposal said that those who cooperate with us and work with us get everything. House, money, everything.

What does collaboration mean?

Cooperation is when you are going to war against Iran? Become a soldier. They were very good. They thought that when we who lived in Iran, and feared from Iran, we know the culture, we know how...

You could become effective soldiers..

We have good experience and could become good soldiers. But what I was very happy about, that my father, and my family, for the whole Salimi family, have feared from Iran to Iraq. What I am very happy about is that they have decided not to be warriors against Iran. In addition, again, we have thought that war solves no problem. We have that experience, it is better to have dialogue with each other. It was a tough period for us in the refugee camp. But a refugee camp is not a place to live in. Think about it, the refugee camp has placed us, the Iraqi regime has placed us in the refugee camp to die. Not to live. It's a big sahara, and then they've built a metal fence around it.

What does sahara mean?

Shara, it is desert, yes. It is a kind of desert. There is nothing there. And then a wall around. They have built a metal fence.

What about houses..?

Nothing. Nothing there. Then they placed us with a lorry, and said you have to fend for yourself. Think about it. And then for sure, my father or other families, or my family has worked so hard to survive. I remember there are many children... , many families who have lost their children due to illness, lack of food, due to everything. But we were lucky when the angel came to the refugee camp. The angel was the Red Cross. That is why I am passionate about the Red Cross, and the Red Cross is always in my heart.

So the Red Cross came to the tent that you were in?

To the tent, yes. When they came right away, because when they have received information that there are a number of refugees who are placed in that camp, then the Iraqi government cannot be against us. Because the international ICRC management, the International Red Cross, has received information about this. When they came, we got a tent. And then, in addition, they immediately started a health center. They have brought us water with cars. As it means that... I call it the angels have come.

Yes, so that they could give you the basic things you needed to live. Medical help, a tent.. It could just be easy to live in a tent, right?

No, it is not. It is not

What kind of climate was there?

The climate in which I lived in the desert, one does not need to heat water. All the time it is 40-45 degrees. Think about this, I remember very well. If you crack an egg and then put it in a pan, it will cook itself.



So then the water was the main problem, then.?

Yes, that was it. Everything was a problem. Think about this, there's water, there's equipment, there's health, there's medicine, everything was...

Toilet conditions ..?

Toilet, that was a big, big problem. But in the end, when the family or father thought about how to solve this problem, they built it themselves, when they dug a hole, when we used it as a toilet.

I'm asking in a bit more detail now, because we read and see information about refugee camps. I have also been to a refugee camp in Palestine, and seen where they have built, where they have lived for many, many years, even more years than that, where it is close to each other between houses and the like. But the fact that it was just going to be... I think it's important to tell it, because we're going to get your experience, your story about what it was like growing up there. Then the Red Cross came and helped so that you got started roughly, but it was 19 years!. How did these years go? What did you do there?

Think about this. To live the 19 years in the refugee camp, you have to have hope. That is the hope we have received from the Red Cross. What was the hope when they had arrived, when they had registered us, and then when they said that we might be allowed to work and send you to a third country? Then we got a little bit of hope, that we can now get help. Otherwise, there is a big difference between the refugee camp here in Norway and in the Middle East. The only thing is maybe it's a little bit better even there is no equipment or medicine or anyone in the refugee camp in the Middle East or the refugee camp that I lived in. Mentally, you are fine. Why are you fine? Because you are with the whole family. But physically, you are not well. Therefore, it is not easy to grow up in a refugee camp. Myself, when I was a child also in Iran, I was very good at school. I remember that my mother or my family kept telling me about the teacher who was at home in Iran. He recommended to my father that I continue at school. I was very happy. I was happy at school. And I remember very well in that refugee camp when I was at school. I didn't have to study at home. I remembered everything when the teachers have told at school right away. But unfortunately, in that refugee camp you can only learn to write and read, nothing more. Because you didn't have that opportunity.

Not enough books..

There aren't enough books, there aren't schools, not like that, also there are n't...

Also many of the teachers who have fled from Iran to that refugee camp, they have not been teachers. They have only learned to write and read at home from their teachers. They have only learned from them.

Can you say that it was psychologically good because the family could be together? And then you lived in a big communal tent? Or did you live. . And how did you manage? Because you were adults, so you were with six sisters and six brothers.

It was a communal tent. We were twelve siblings and then plus parents, we were 14. We all just had the same room to sleep in. I got my first own bed on 22 September 1999 here in Hønefoss in Norway.

Think about it! First time you had your own bed?

It was my first time.

Because you were lying on the floor, on carpets?



Yes, all of them.

It is very difficult to think that it was possible to live like that for so many years.

But at the same time as it was very difficult, it was also cozy. The whole family looked after each other by being together and close to each other.

Did you tell stories? What did you do to pass the time and the days? The religious stories, was there a point? What was it that made you able to be a little lifted?

Actually, sometimes I think that 19 years of my life have passed just like that, right? Just waiting and waiting. On hold. 19 years just waiting. Even I have learned a lot. I have become stronger to live on. But I have not experienced the life that I have in Norway. I have lost 19 years of my life.

What kind of activities did you do? Because there are a lot of people at your age who probably have a big camp. How long do you think lived in that camp?

In that refugee camp, initially, there were approximately 50,000.

So a city, a big city really?

Yes, it was a big city. 50,000.

I think there were many people your age then.

Yes, yes, it was too.

Did you play sports? Did you go along..? Were there fights? Was it crime? Was it difficult being you?

Actually in the Middle East there are groupings. When you live in a refugee camp, there are groupings. It's clans, right? We had our own family, or our own group for one area. In that area, the whole family knows each other. The children know each other.

So all different families..? How many could be in an area?

Actually, it was our family, as well as cousins, us, the Salimi family. We were between 50-100 people.

So that means you pretty much kept to yourself?

Alone, together. There were different groupings. What I had a bit of a problem with, for the Kurds who were in the refugee camp, mostly 90% of them were Muslims. They had their own area. When they have their own area, it is not difficult for them to be included with each other. But it is very difficult for us, because we have not been accepted to include ourselves with them.

So in this group of 70 people, the Salimi family, who had to figure out life alone?

Alone. All alone. All alone, even that it was very sad to talk about it, that you have the same nation, they are Kurds, we were Kurds, but because of religion we got a lot of problems. Even we were not allowed, for example in the refugee camp, so many have started their own shop. So they can live, or they can sell things, but we weren't allowed. Because they think that if any of us started a shop, a grocery store, then nobody will buy from us. Then we talk about halal.

Yeah, it gets dirty, doesn't it? Yes. Haram, then, then it is impure.

Yes, unclean, yes. Even if we have to point or we have to put our finger on some food, then we have to buy it. You cannot do that, because then it becomes impure.



So then you have to buy. Yes. Because then no one else can buy it because it's unclean... It's absolutely terrible!!

Very very. In that refugee camp that I remember very well, it's hard to forget, I had a cousin. He had been in town buying meat, so he just touched the meat to see how it looked, right? They hang the whole lamb in those stores, maybe you've seen it, right? But he just said I want just that part, right? They said, no you have to buy the whole thing. And then he said I don't have the money to buy the whole lamb, because I only want that part. So he said, no you've put on, and so it's unclean now, as you have to buy the whole thing. He had no choice or he could be beaten, they pressured him to buy it. And then finally, he bought it, he has to borrow money from several people to buy the whole lamb. Such things are not easy, are they?

How did they know at the store? Because this was one, you say to the town, that is to say they entered it, it was inside the camp, but there was someone there who had a shop, a meat shop, how did he know he was a yari?

Yes, you realize it's very easy in that refugee camp, right? And they see we haven't been to the mosque, right? After the Red Cross has come, it has started a life in that refugee camp, someone has built a mosque, someone has built a shop, right? Therefore that, also they knew right away, also in yari religion, also sometimes that mustache is very important. Then they realized right away, ok, he's not a Muslim, he's from another religion.

It is tragic that it has to be this way.

Very, very, also as I said, I have two sons here in Norway, I buy a lot of toys for them. Sometimes, the wife says that, Parviz, do you buy for yourself, or for the children? I say I buy for everyone. Why? Because I didn't have any toys in that refugee camp.

You kind of lost your childhood, you lost your youth, because it was isolated. In the family group that was Yari believers.

I remember very well that, for the first time, my father was in the city, in Ramadi, because if you are going to be in the city, in Iraq, and if you travel from that refugee camp, then you have to have a permit. That permit is from five hours to ten hours. If it is a serious illness, then it may be 24 hours. They have increased this number of hours, so I remember him buying me a ball. That ball, when I came later, that I have worked with the United Nations, with the Red Crescent in Iraq, when they picked up the different balls, when they brought exactly one ball that my father bought. I remember the ball that I had in the refugee camp, then many children could borrow it from me and play with it. And sometimes, even, I think I was kind of nice and gave it to them so they can borrow from me, but sometimes I've decided who's going to play with it, or who's going to be on my team, because I was the boss, I had the ball. Also afterwards, when the Red Cross or the United Nations took the various balls to us, I immediately realized that it was not a ball for playing football, it was a basketball that my father had bought.

But, this is both very tragic and difficult to hear, - but it is very interesting to hear how someone in this family group for 19 years could survive, buy food... Did you get money from the Red Cross, how did you get the opportunity to live there ?

But, really, eventually, that the Red Cross had arrived, and then after the Red Cross came the UN, as we have received support from the Iraqi, from the Iraqi regime, or from the state. Then if you are 6, no matter if you are 12 or 6 people in a family, then you got 240 Iraqi money, or dinar as it is called. When we have received that money, then that is enough. We are fine after we get money, to buy



food, clothes and stuff, anything, even sometimes, so we can save that money. In addition to the money we have received..

How often did you get money?

We have received every month. Even we were 12 siblings, that was enough, even more than enough. We are perfectly fine with that money, and we also got food. When we got oil, skimmed milk, also tea, everything we got from it. Sometimes we have received so much that we have to sell the food we have received. But as I said, after the angel came, things started to get better.

What kind of activity did you do in the group? Who told stories? Did you have music together? Was it social or things like... Football or just ball games are not enough?

There was football, there was handball, also some fairy tales, the old people told us, or the older ones, who told us fairy tales. I think that in the old days, there are many fine.. , there are many fine people who wanted to contribute those adventures to tell to others. We had so many elderly people in the refugee camp, or in our family, or maybe visiting, or we have visited, so they could talk about this. Because there wasn't TV, there weren't any things. Not books. But eventually, the Red Cross opened a library in the refugee camp. It means that the hope we got in the refugee camp, if it wasn't for the Red Cross, when we had no hope to live. But we got hope from them.

They came and registered us, and they said that if in the first instance it was a little easier for the Red Cross to send people to third countries, to Europe. I remember that mine, from our family, Salimi, it was my cousin who registered to come to a third country, with the Red Cross. After six months he was interviewed by the Red Cross, or by the ICRC. And eventually, he received word from the Red Cross that he can travel to Norway. It was in 1987, I think, that he got... It was incredibly difficult for the whole Salimi family that he had to go to Norway. Because you see,

Strong family ties..

we thought, oh, now we're losing one. It's hard, isn't it? It's hard, isn't it? Because all the time you are together, you play together, you visit each other, and then a journey away from you, it is not easy. The whole family did not want him to go to Norway. But finally, he said, no, I've made up my mind. I can't live here, and so maybe I can travel there and see what it looks like in Norway. And then eventually, maybe I can be the door opener for the whole family. He came to Norway as the first refugee from my family, or I think he was the first refugee to come to Norway from that refugee camp, that's my cousin.

He came as a quota refugee?

Quota refugee, totally agree. Yes, yes.

I have to ask a little more. Because this is a big topic, but when a library was opened, you said you were good at school, you were good at school when you were a little boy. What could you fill your head with? How could you provide yourself with challenges? Did you read from the library? Think about education, literature, understanding the world. It's often we do it through books, right?

Actually, the first time that I started and how I, because I really wanted to study, I wanted to read, even everywhere I had to write my name. The road, the houses, even sometimes cars, and things like that, because I really liked school. When the first book that I thought to start on, they recommended us to read fairy tales. And biographies, that's what I've started with. And then as the days go by, as time goes by, and I get older, then I started reading more books, also in addition, I learned Arabic. And then eventually, the Red Cross, or ICRC, has stopped. I worked with the ICRC, or with the Red



Crescent at that health centre. I learned an incredible amount about health, and first aid, and then all this, which I have learned a lot. And then eventually, when the ICRC was going to leave the refugee camp, and the UN was going to take over, then I started working with the UN. I remember very well, there were approximately 50 people from the entire refugee camp, who were to be sent to study on behalf of the UN, to learn. It was a course, it wasn't just school, right? Out of the 50 people, only eight passed, language, practice stuff, and how to learn stuff.

Then I started working with the UN at the health center and at the library. Then, gradually, I had the opportunity to get to know many people, during the day I worked with the UN at the library, and in the evenings I worked at a pharmacy in the city, in Ramadi.

That is to say, you got a good development, you managed to establish yourself, you got that course, you got a bigger network, and your hope grew.

It grew, totally agree. It was a big network. As of today, I still have a good network in Ramadi. Even someone I got to know is the county governor in Ramadi, so we are in contact together. Consider this network I still have in that area.

OK. This has been very nice. We must move on to what happened when you came to Norway. You said that the first time you slept in your own bed, it happened in Hønefoss, and it happened in 1999, did you say that?

Yes, that's right.

How did you get there? Because your cousin was there first? More than ten years before?

Yes, when my cousin had arrived, there are many in the family, he applied first for his brother, and then gradually for father, you understand how it is in the family, the first priority is father, also own brother, own sister and own family. But after I had started working with the UN, when the war between the US and Iraq had started, I was an interpreter. And I must say that I learned English so quickly in the refugee camp. My English was very good in the refugee camp, because all the time you are communicating, talking to them. After I started working with the UN, I remember there was a lady called Cecilia, she was from Italy, and she worked with the UN, to come to the refugee camp, do an interview, and then send the case on. She said to me; Parviz, now you have to leave Iraq, it's dangerous to be here, what are you going to do? I said, you understand that there is a lot of corruption in the refugee camp, but I never asked the Red Cross or the UN to send me to a third country, because I wanted you to summon us. But we had a case number with you, but my father has never been summoned for an interview with the ICRC or the UN. I don't know what the problem is. She said, anyway Parviz, you have to think about this, it's dangerous to be here in the refugee camp. A day when we have been summoned to Baghdad, by the UN, for them to explain to us what is happening in Iraq, that we should give the information to the refugee camp, to those who live in the refugee camp.

You were called there to get the information, but you were going to pass it on?

Pass on. We had a committee from the refugee camp, so I thought, now I have to use the chance to ask about the case to my father. I wrote in English, so they understood me, so I wrote, my name is Parviz, and I have the case number of my father, or FK numbers of my father. We have lived in the refugee camp for many years, we have politics, we have a different religion, so we have not been called for interviews. Then I delivered that letter to the head of the UN there.



When we finished the meeting about the refugee camp, he said, everyone can go out, but Parviz can wait. Then he said, can you tell me, you have worked with the UN, you have worked with the ICRC, also in addition, you have been active, you have helped so many, but why are you applying only now? I said there is a lot of corruption here in the refugee camp, and it is a lot that some are sent before the others, but I told him that my goal, or my thought, is that it should be fair. If it is fair, then you can send me to a third country, if it is unfair, then I can be here. And I remember very well, he called someone who worked there, told them to go and find the case of Parviz Salimi's father. So they looked for the case, and said, we can't find that case, or that case. But my father had a lot of documents. They didn't find it. So they said Parviz, sorry, we can't find this, we don't know where it is. But I was lucky, the head of the staff at the UN, who has always come to the refugee camp, I have a good contact with him. He said that it was a few years ago, we placed a number of cases as case closed, meaning that the case is finished, there is no hope, so I was glad that he went with the others, and found the case or the case for the father my.

So they picked it up, said oh, you have a lot of families in Europe, I see they were supposed to prioritize that issue, but sorry, it hasn't been prioritized. So I was lucky, they said, ok, what do you want, do you want first place for interview, or what do you want. I said I can't decide, but if you want to help us, or we have the right to get help from you, then you decide when you want to have an interview with us. Then they said: until next week, you must be ready to have an interview with the UN. Then I came home and told my family. Nobody believed me, said no, you're kidding! Then I said, I'm not kidding, they want to help us. The whole process, they had an interview with us, with the whole family,

And the whole family means?

The whole family, except for two brothers, the twins who had married. They were not allowed to join us, but nine siblings were allowed to join. They had an interview with us, so we answered all this. They said, Sweden has quota refugees, there is room there, if you want, we can send the case to Sweden. But my father would not. He said: I have family, brothers, and they all live in Norway, I want you to send the case to Norway. But Cecilia from Italy said that if you lose that chance, and Norway says no, then it will be difficult.

So I told her, you can try. We have lived for many years to have a hope, now is the last hope, which we want. So the case was sent to Norway, and we were lucky. 22 September 1999, when we came out of the refugee camp. First, the UN drove us to Jordan, then lived for a period in Jordan, and from Jordan we traveled to France, and from France to Gardermoen. I think it was a brand new airport, and then from the airport to Hønefoss.

The whole family? Mother, father and siblings?

The whole family, mother, father. There was a lot to think about, because our two brothers were in that refugee camp, we were constantly thinking about them, what happens to them, what happens to us? Then we got to Hønefoss, we were very happy, but the problems started. So what's the problem? What we heard from the UN was that you are going to paradise. Paradise, you know what it is, you have everything, everything is in place, that's what we've heard. But the first time we came, we got a very, very old house in Hønefoss, it had three bedrooms, with a large living room. It wasn't easy to start there, you come with a lot of baggage, from a different culture, from a different climate, with a different language, so all this, it's not easy. I remember very well, it was a tough period, we had a lot of problems with the municipality, or with the apartment.



I was over.. , because I had received a message from the UN, because the UN said: that Parviz, now you will have a life of your own, I said ok, what is it? You are over 18, you will get your own apartment, things like that. But when I got to Hønefoss, it wasn't like that. I think, for a period, the first period, it was not easy. But again, also after that experience, the strength we got from the war, from the escape, I said: ok, then I have to start again. It took a long time, because you have to think positively, because you are tired, you have survived so much, then you have to start again, it is not easy. I had to think so much. I remember my brother saying: I don't want to be here in Norway. Can you send me to the refugee camp again? It was incredibly difficult for him.

Language, climate, all this..

You have problems, you have.. , I remember very well, when my mother was cooking, the fuses went off. We didn't know, where is the fuse box, what is the fuse box? I remember very well, the police station, it wasn't far from us, so I said, my English was good, we are new refugees, here in Hønefoss, we don't have electricity, can you help us? I remember them driving me in their car to the house. They couldn't find the safe, they tried everything to help us, because they knew that, but in the end, we didn't know, there is a small hole in the living room, over which we had put a carpet. Then we opened it, and went down into the basement, because the safe is in the basement. We got an incredible amount of help from them, they have helped us so much.

As I said, it's not easy, I thought about it a lot, I said, now I have to think positively, not negatively. How is the municipality? I have started everything again, the only thing I haven't gone through is kindergarten in Norway. But not easy, Ivar, guaranteed, it's not easy. tired, you have to learn the language, you have to network, and then those who are passionate about you doing something in the local community, therefore it was not easy for me, because I thought that I have to do something in the local community, because what I have learned from my father, said that the land on which you live, it is your land, you must take care of it, therefore it was difficult for me to get in touch, to do something in the local community.

And then my first thought, after I learned the language, and then got to know the local community in Ringerike, I immediately asked about the Red Cross. I said ok, where is the Red Cross, I have to find the Red Cross, because that was our angel, and I wanted to contribute. I said ok, because I have received help, I want to contribute. I remember very well, once we were many young people, at the Ringerike and Red Cross house. The first time I asked them to help us, to get my bread, to get my bread out of the refugee camp. They said, sorry, we can't help you get your brothers, but we can help you, if there's anything else. And then I said ok, I would like to contribute, as a volunteer in the Red Cross, they said ok, you have to learn a little better Norwegian, don't you. I said ok, I remember we wrote the name and then we were called. After we were called up, I wanted to continue with the Red Cross. I started and I continued, but the other young people, who were with me on the first course, organized by the Red Cross, all left, certainly because they did not understand the language, and some of them said: Parviz, what are we going to do do, just sit here and listen? The Red Cross says they don't have a job, they have nothing for us, we have to try other things. I said no, I went on and on. But, I must say, I am happy and grateful to the Red Cross, that they gave me another opportunity in Norway, to work. To get a job in Norway, it is not easy. I have received hope from the Norwegian Red Cross, to get to know many people, to get a job, to start.

And thus it has now been 22 years, 23 years, during which you completed the degrees, during which you first volunteered, you have learned the language impressively well in these years. It is not easy to learn a new language, you have learned English, first Arabic, Persian, Kurdish, yes, there are many, many, many working hours, and a lot of work behind, and now you will, when we are done with our



conversation now, then you will continue, because you have an overall responsibility, as you said at the beginning, in Viken, in the Red Cross, and will talk about, about witness..., What did you call it?

Witness support, we're going to have a topic tonight on witness support.

You are now working professionally throughout Viken, with a responsibility for the Red Cross. We've spent an hour now, so we don't get to talk about that much, we could talk about a lot more, something that's interesting, and with which I might end a bit, it's this concept of family, and how important it is becomes, to be able to stick together, to support each other, which is a lot about honour, and responsibility, which can be a huge strength, but which can also be a challenge, right? In that you are in a way locked in, and where the norms, and where the rules are so strong, that it is difficult to find your own way. What do you think about it? To be very brief about it, how do you perceive what you might call the clan, or, or, as it were, the family unit, as important?

From my experience, I think that family is very important. In the family, there is culture, and the system, right? It is also very important that you look after each other and take care of each other. Also, in addition, I say that the best medicine is man for man. Regardless of whether you have family or no family, perhaps the best medicine for you is your neighbor. No matter where he comes from. Right? It is very important that we humans help each other, and support each other, and then cooperate together. It is very important. But, even as I see in Norway, that maybe, maybe the system decides so much, that it is the system that says what you should do, how you should live. I think that we people, or we families, must be good at taking care of each other. It is very important.

I thank you very much again, for wanting to spend that time with me, and tell about your dramatic story. Then we know that it is important that we take care of each other, we know that it is important that we work actively in the local communities, to build these relationships that enable us to live safely and well together.

Thanks for that. That was nice.

The Ypsilon conversations are produced for the Church Dialogue Center in Drammen by Ivar Flaten. I am the one who has editorial responsibility and who produces the episodes. The podcast is supported by Drammen municipality, the Ministry of Children and Families and the Einar Juels Legat. We would very much like input on who might be relevant as conversation partners. Preferably also with topics for what you think might be interesting to hear about. Please let me know via e-mail to ivar@ifd.no We are heard!