



*A letter to Jess, Mariam and Jacqueline in response to
“Mothers who move:
Traversing refugee experience, overcoming shame
and reclaiming motherhood” by Jess Baker*

from Zahra Stanikzai

To Jess, Mariam and Jacqueline,

Thanks so much for sharing such beautiful stories of two brave mothers, Mariam and Jacqueline. When my husband read out your letters and conversations to me in my language, Pashto, I found your stories quite painful, and at the same time quite hopeful and powerful. Your stories touch my entire life, especially my life since I left my mother, siblings and childhood places and came to rebuild a new home in Australia where I have had to search for mental and physical peace, find new friends and families, and new hopes.

When I came to Australia, I found it quite hard to keep going and have a normal life as expected. I had no social connections, not even basic English and no driver's licence. I experienced my first encounters with racism. I missed my family, especially my mom, and so much more. These all had significant effects on my mental and physical health.

Your stories touched my life and reminded me of an experience I went through earlier on in Australia.

Just a few months after we arrived in Adelaide, before we had much social connection, I had a miscarriage. When I heard the news from the sonographer and then from the Women's and Children's Hospital doctor, who called us in and confirmed the bad news, I was too stressed out and so sad. A few days later, I was called for a procedure called a D&C and had to take anaesthesia. After the procedure, I was taken to the ward. I was feeling very hopeless, stressed out and exhausted due to amount of blood I had lost. Although my husband was there all the time for me, I was missing my mom and sisters and wishing they were by my side at this time. In such situations back in Afghanistan, my mom and sisters would have been with me throughout my recovery; they would prepare special traditional foods and would not let me even stand up and do any work.

I then remember a nurse coming into my room and telling me that I'd been calling my mom's name in the operating theatre. I hadn't known that I was calling anyone's name, but sometimes I could see my mom, like in my dreams. This nurse said she would be happy to talk to me if I wanted to. She was very kind, and I could feel her sympathy in my

heart. She sat with me, and we talked about my childhood, family, siblings and much more. During our discussions, I forgot about the miscarriage, pain, stress, being alone, etc. She took me to my childhood, to the times when my mom and sisters were all there for me. She also brought me a warm cup of tea. Such conversation and comfort I hadn't seen for a very long time since I left Afghanistan. That discussion eased so much of the stress and pressure from my shoulders at that time.

Gradually, here in Adelaide, I found other families from my same background and culture, and now I feel like I've found my village and close family members here again.

From that point onward, I learnt that if I am ever stressed, I call my best friends and talk to them for a long time, as I have many friends here now whom I can trust and talk to.

Mariam, I really hope and pray that you have been reunited with your children and that your asylum has been granted/accepted.

May Allah help and protect you and your kids,

Zahra

Zahra Stanikzai is a wife and a mother to five beautiful kids. She was a primary school teacher back in Afghanistan. She is now a volunteer teacher in an ethnic school here in Adelaide. She attends TAFE for English classes. She is a wonderful professional clothing tailor and cook/chef. She loves to help and contribute to the community. She loves to read books, especially books about people's lived experiences. She is always eager to learn new things. Finally, she loves her family.

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