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"I escaped the Taliban."

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When Nargis Alizadeh remembers her childhood in Afghanistan, she remembers fear. Life was dangerous for her family under the **Taliban** government. They banned TV, radio, and photographs. Women weren't allowed to attend school or even go outside without a man. Those who didn't obey were jailed--or killed. "They took away our happiness," Nargis says. "They put fear in people's hearts so they wouldn't disobey the rules."

After the **Taliban** found out that Nargis's father had been teaching women, the family knew he had to escape Afghanistan immediately. A year and a half later, Nargis, her younger sister and brother, and their mother also made the break for the border between Afghanistan and Iran--and for freedom. "**I** was really scared," Nargis says. "If we were caught, we would be killed,"

They left in darkness, carrying only two blankets and a few clothes. Anything else might attract thieves. The next night, they struggled through the rain on a three-hour journey across muddy trails. "Those three hours felt as long as three days," she says. "Our feet were numb because it was so cold."

They walked in silence--and fear. At any moment the family could face wolves, wild dogs, or worse: soldiers who would arrest them. After crossing a swift, swollen river and paying guards \$5,000 to let them into Iran, Nargis and her family finally made it across the border.

Reunited with her father, Nargis and her family now live in San Diego, California. And she's grateful for the journey she made eight years ago. "**I** appreciate everything **I** have in the United States," says Nargis. "**I** have the freedom to go to school, practice my religion, and make my dreams come true."

WORLD REFUGEE DAY draws attention to the more than 17 million refugees worldwide who, like Nargis, have been forced to leave their homes to escape war and oppression. This year's celebration on June 20 focuses on basic human rights, such as food, water, shelter, and safety. For more information, go online. refugees.org

Rattini, Kristin **Baird**

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