

In partnership with



BritishRedCross

OVER UNDER SIDEWAYS DOWN

Ebrahim's story by Karrie Fransman



Refugee
Week





Ebrahim didn't choose to be a refugee.

When he was 15, he found himself alone, thousands of miles from home and uncertain of whether he would survive.

But he did survive. Ebrahim and I talked for hours about his experience – the acute sadness, the fear of the future and the determination to take every opportunity to make a life in this country.

During my research for the comic, I had read much about the resilience of people fleeing conflict and persecution. Imagine fighting for your life in a warzone, losing everything you love and having the ability not only to cope with that but also with the feelings of loneliness and desolation that swell when you are forced to start again. That takes a certain type of strength and to me, Ebrahim embodies that.

It is impossible to fully capture the horror of a journey like Ebrahim's or the overwhelming pain of leaving behind your family, your friends, your home and your identity. But I hope *Over Under Sideways Down* reflects Ebrahim's character and gives a glimpse of the challenges and triumphs of arriving in the UK as an asylum seeker and making a home in this country – a country that should be proud of providing protection to people who need it.

**Ebrahim didn't choose to be a refugee.
Nobody does.**




*Ebrahim is a teenage refugee.
He did not choose to leave Iran,
He did not choose to bid farewell
to his mother for the last time
and he certainly did not choose
to take the long journey to be
granted asylum in the UK.*

This is his story

On the day Ebrahim was
exiled from his home he had
no idea where he was heading
or the long and dangerous
road ahead of him.

But he did know what he was
fleeing.





Ebrahim, a
Kurdish Iranian
from Piranshahr,
doesn't have
much to show
for his
childhood
in Iran.

Just memories
of a lonely life
ostracised from
the community
due to his
dad's political
activity,

a single
string
of tasbeeh
beads,

and a scar
on his foot.

He touches his leg
and says he was shot.
Aged just 6 years old.

Ebrahim has blanked
the incident from
his memory.



It was the same shower of bullets
that killed his father for his
political beliefs.



His mother eventually remarried and they moved to Ghazvin. Ebrahim's step-father agreed to fund his education if he worked for him- picking fruit in the summer, working at his mechanic store and distributing political flyers.



Even
as a
teenager

Ebrahim
knew the
value of
schooling and
worked hard
for a better
future.

But on the day he
went to collect
his exam results
his life changed
forever.



He received a call from his step-father demanding that he return home immediately.

His step-father had heard that Ebrahim was in danger due to handing out the political flyers.

And he feared for his own safety if Ebrahim was arrested and interrogated.



His step-father wanted the problem, and Ebrahim, gone.





'I refused to leave



but my mum said



I had to go'.

Forced into exile at just 15,
Ebrahim left his house there and
then, with nothing but a bag of
clothes and the precious tasbeeh
beads his mother had given him.



He stepped out the door
and into an unknown and
hostile world.

He was sent to Piranshahr for 2 days, and then passed to agents who took him across the mountains into Turkey.



They walked in groups of 20 all night in silence.



The agents would beat anyone who was too slow



and rape the women in front of their children.



'They were like animals... I wanted to go back. I had no options. I was crying all the time'

After a day the group ran out of water.
Ebrahim's mouth was too dry to swallow food.



After what seemed like an eternity they discovered a
dirty trough and Ebrahim fell to his knees to drink.



In Turkey the agents took away
everyone's ID cards, watches and
mobile phones so they could not be identified.



Little did Ebrahim realise



that as his ID vanished, so did proof of his identity.





He was put
on a lorry
with several
others.

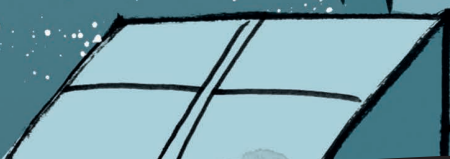
With no
watches, They
did not know
if it was
night or day.




They had
been given
tablets to
stop them
urinating



and were
under strict
orders not
to talk.





A black and white illustration of a man standing in a city park. He is wearing a dark suit and has a surprised expression with three lines above his head. He is standing in front of a low fence and two large, leafy trees. In the background, there are several tall, modern buildings with many windows. The scene is set in a city environment.

With nothing
but the clothes
on his back
Ebrahim was
now alone in a
cold and alien
world.



He saw cars
driving on the
left-hand side
and realised it
must be the UK.



He had always
imagined the UK
as clean and
mechanical:
'like how you see
it on the TV and
in the movies'



'Like everything
works by
machine. You
want water and
press a button
and it appears'



Desperately he ran from person to person until a man pointed him in the direction of the police station.



He had to wait a gruelling half an hour until the police station opened its doors.

And when they did he was ecstatic. Finally, he thought, he had found safety and his journey was over.

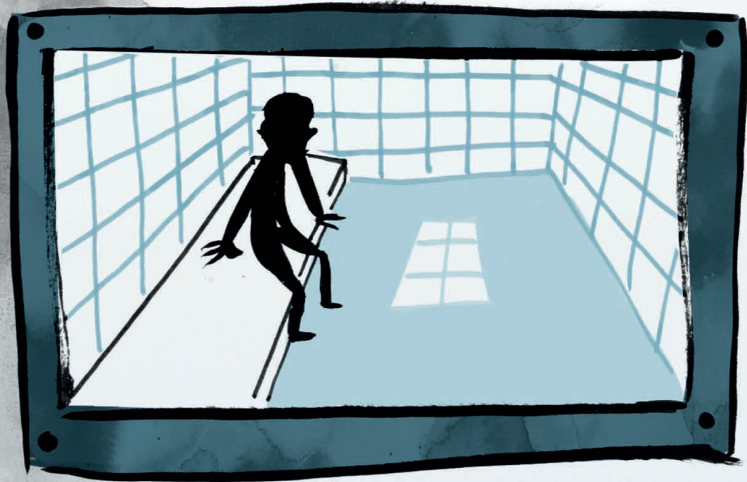


But in fact his journey had only just begun

*'That was only one part
of the journey-
the hardest part
was here'*

*Once inside the police
station the police
removed his belt
and tried to take
away his precious
tasbeeh beads.*





It was hours until anyone came.

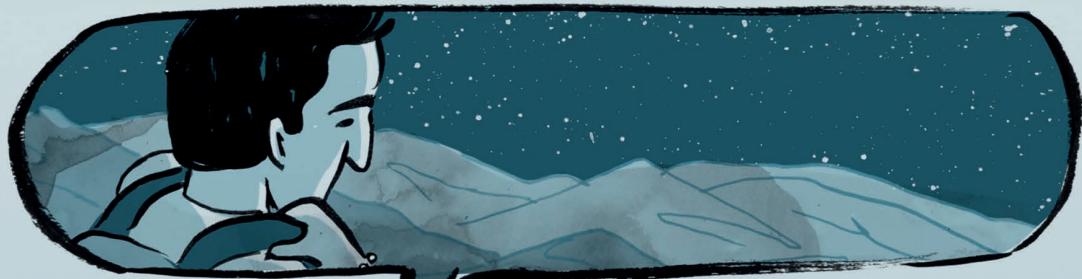


Scared and confused he asked why he had been put in a cell because he hadn't done anything wrong.



They asked him if he wanted to claim asylum but he did not understand what they meant.

Then the interviews started



Interviews that would colour the next 4 years of his life in the UK.



Forcing the vivid colours and raw emotions of his Odyssey into facts, bureaucratic tick-boxes,



and evidence in courts of law.



Ebrahim was sent to a hostel for adults in Croydon where the interviews continued.

'I had no idea what was happening. I couldn't sleep until the morning. I was crying'.



The agents had taken Ebrahim's ID from him. Without this evidence, the task of proving his whole identity to the British authorities began.

AGE

NATIONALITY



'They ask you for evidence. But you can't provide evidence and you don't have a strong case'.

'They didn't believe I was 15... you don't count until they believe what you're saying'.

But having survived such a harrowing experience, there was little child left in Ebrahim.



'I was 15.

They accepted me as 17.

I turned 18

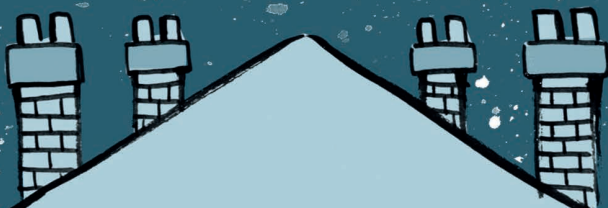
and they accepted me as 16.'



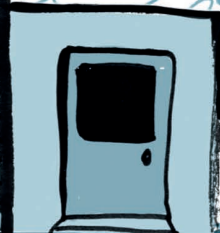
'I had too many ages'.



Ebrahim had to face the humiliation of being examined, naked, by a doctor, before the authorities finally accepted he was 15.



He was moved into shared accommodation, with a flatmate and was relieved to be safe. 'It was a very nice house. I couldn't believe I was living in that house'.





And then, 6 months
after he arrived, he
got to go to school.

'I love education. That's
what kept me going'.

But he missed his mother terribly.

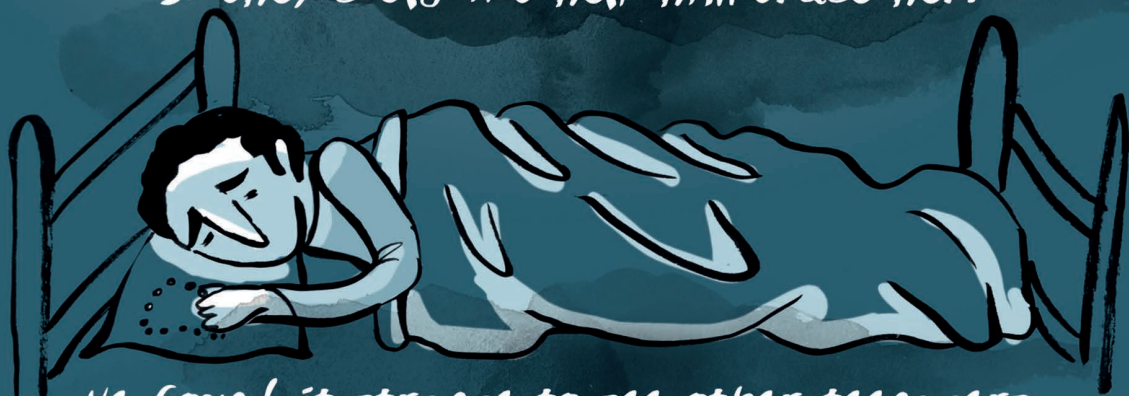


He was put in touch with the Red Cross
family tracing service by his solicitor

'They were so friendly and nice'.



But he didn't have any pictures of his mother and they used to move house frequently to avoid danger, so they could not help him trace her.



He found it strange to see other teenagers complaining about their parents.



The next
four years
passed by

in a blur of
bureaucracy,
interviews and
form-filling

as he and his
solicitor battled

for him to
be granted

leave to remain.



The threat of being returned to a hostile land
hung over him constantly.

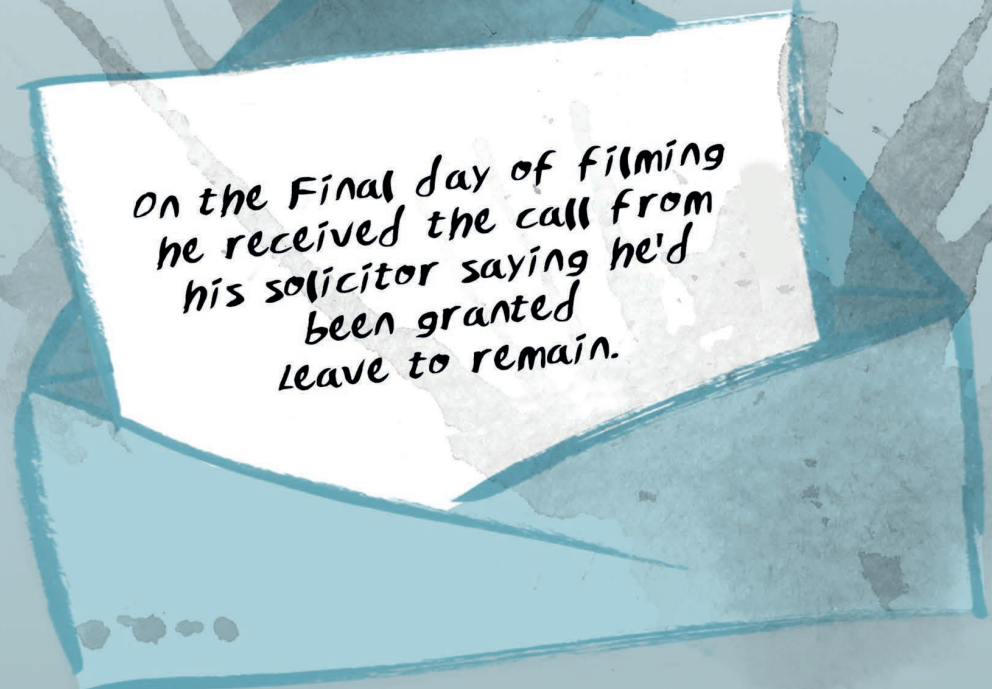
Ebrahim was aware of so many young people going through the same difficult asylum process in the UK. He decided to volunteer for the Red Cross befriending projects, and as a translator with the Red Cross and the Refugee Council.



It gave him the chance to make friends and share memories of home with Kurdish Iranians.



Then, In 2012 he was chosen to act in a film called 'Leave to Remain' by Bafta winner Bruce Goodison, based on the real stories of teenagers seeking asylum in the UK.



On the Final day of filming
he received the call from
his solicitor saying he'd
been granted
leave to remain.

The cast threw a party to celebrate the news.



Being granted leave to remain has meant so much to him.



'No one's going to force you to go back or take away all you have achieved so far'

Ebrahim is studying International Business at Hammersmith college and is due to start at Brunel University later this year.

London is the land of opportunities if you want to study and in terms of education... I know how to use these opportunities because I know where I came from. I didn't get these opportunities'



Ebrahim is a young man who has survived an epic journey away from his loved ones over mountains and across foreign lands, and has battled a sea of bureaucracy to finally come to a place where he is safe.



"I wouldn't leave my country if I didn't have to. I didn't come here to have fun."

No matter how harrowing his story, Ebrahim knows he was just one of many children all over the world fleeing danger, war and persecution to find a place of safety in the UK.

There are over **10 million** refugees
in the world, and more than
38 million people displaced by conflict.

No one chooses to be a refugee.

Many child refugees have witnessed
the **murder** or **abduction**
of one or both of their parents.

Last year, **almost half** of the world's
refugees were children.

The British Red Cross helps **10,000**
refugees and asylum seekers every
year in **48** locations across the UK.

In 2013 we reunited **509** people
separated from their loved ones by war,
conflict and persecution.

At the British Red Cross
we offer our support to those
who are seeking sanctuary.

At the British Red Cross we
refuse to ignore people in crisis.

Refugee
Week



Where we are:

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