



FAHIM & ADIBA

“ It was as if we were the owners of the house, and they were the guests.

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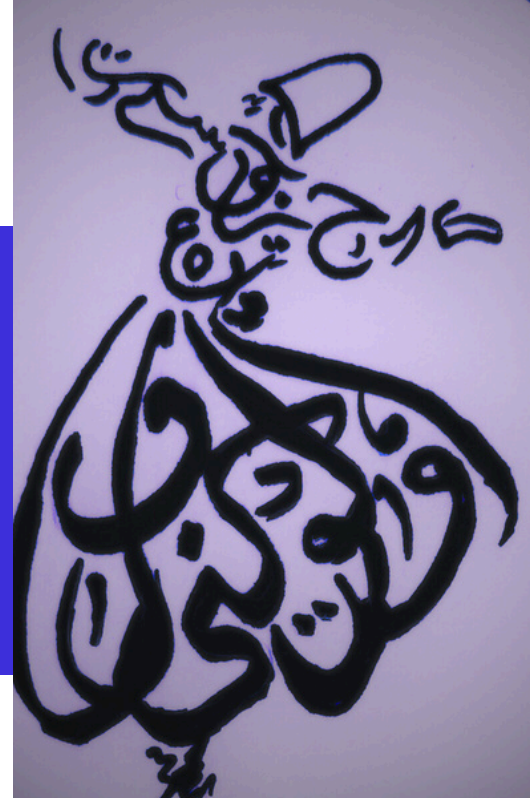
ARRIVAL

We could not bring anything that belonged to us when we got out from Afghanistan. I [Fahim] could [not] even bring my laptop.

I [Fahim] am a calligrapher myself. I have worked as a calligrapher in Afghanistan but don't have anything at hand at the moment.

Of course, when we first came, it was a very stressful time; we were under pressure in every way. It was really hard in the first days when they said that you don't have more than four hundred and fifty [dollars] since we were far away from our home, from our family. At that time, the college stepped in and promised “we will give you a house.”

The only people that we got help from were the college and the friends that we found in the college. If we knew them in our first days, we would never have experienced those bad days. We were in the hotel for two months. It was very hard for us.



Hosted by:

RUSSELL SAGE COLLEGE



Interviewed in Dari by:

ZAKIA ANWAR

With the informed consent of participants, interview transcripts have been adapted here in narrative form for clarity and efficiency with a commitment to retaining the intended meaning.

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SUPPORT ON CAMPUS

When we [first] came here [to the US], the things that happened to us in the camp were [with] [American] military soldiers -- because they were all soldiers.

When you get out, it's not like a camp. The things they said to us in the camp were based on fear, that if we go outside the camp and I [Fahim] don't know the language properly, we will get into trouble or someone will fight with us, but when we got to know this college, they introduced us to the teachers and students. Each of them called us separately and came to our house. Then we realized that the things that we heard in the military camp were not true.

We were given a kind of hope and encouragement; all the disappointment and stress, all of this disappeared.

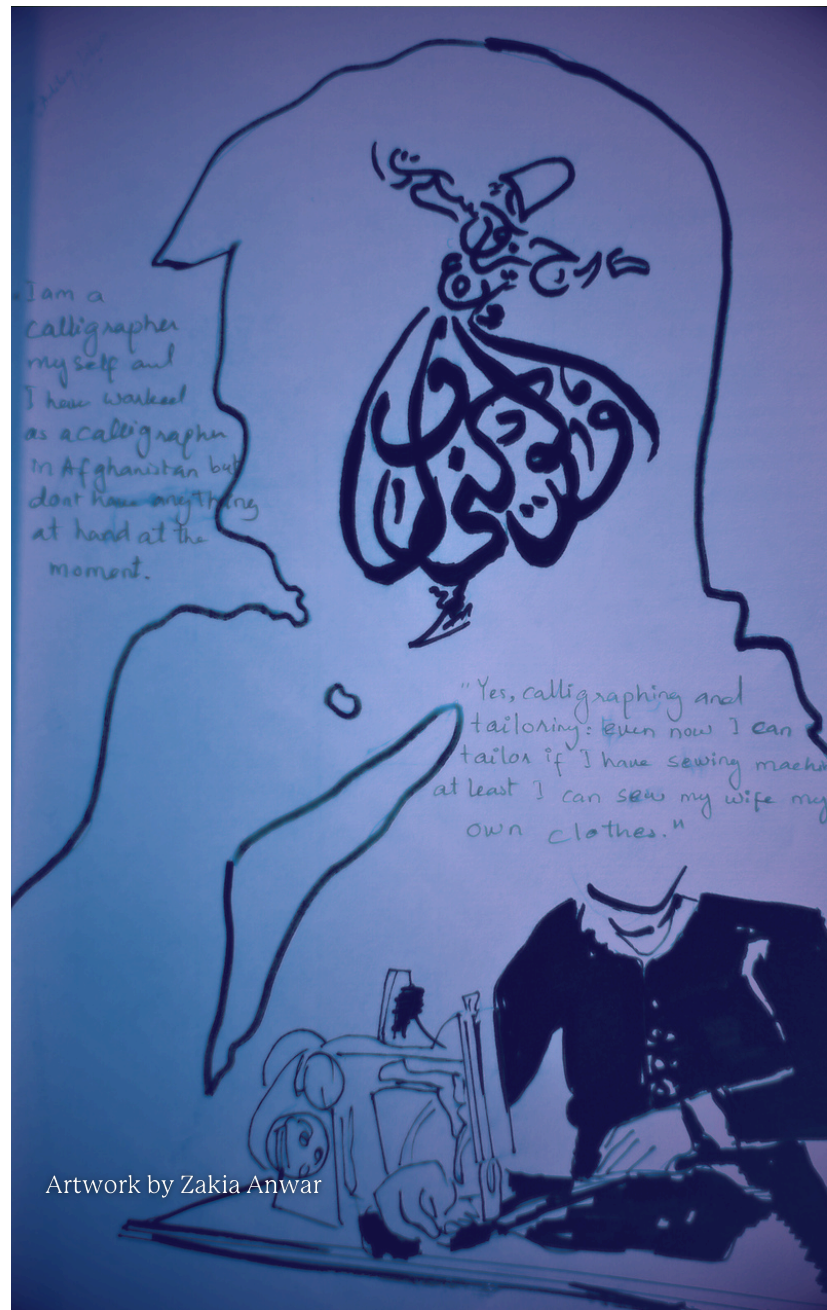
A few days after they took us to the college and to the classes, they registered us in English learning classes. They paid 11 months of our rent (almost one year). Fahim did not have any job and they helped us.

I [Fahim] was introduced to the professors and some of the students who were in the psychology department . . . and they helped me to find a job by preparing a CV for me. They applied online. They even took me to the job fairs in person. They would bring a car to our house, and they would pick me up and take me to the job fairs. They would say [at the job fairs]: "they are new people who have come here."

Professor Ali [would take us] to some communities that help the immigrants, for example, food packages, or for example household items, or things like that. The best experience was when [Professor] Ali introduced us to everyone. She would come to our house as a teacher in some way; for example, she wanted to help us, encourage us to live, or take us away from stress and depression! They said that you are not alone here, we are here with you, if it is paperwork, or if you need a car, or if you have a problem, they will invite you to their house, they even said that we will bring you halal food.

They insisted on taking us to their home. Even to distant cities like Saratoga, which is 45 minutes away from Albany; they came to our house, they took us for lunch there, and then they brought us back.

Then we got introduced to several teachers and students, and it gives us hope. They told us that you both can come on Thursday, we have English learning classes, and we took some English learning classes.



Artwork by Zakia Anwar

NOT WITHOUT ITS CHALLENGES

We wanted to continue our studies. Of course, the same university currently has options for continuing education, but it didn't really have the fields that me and my wife wanted. For example, I [Fahim] wanted the IT department, and my wife wanted the mathematics department, because she was a math teacher in Afghanistan.

My wife has a bachelor's degree and I [Fahim] have a master's degree. At first, wherever we applied, we were not even shortlisted. When we went to communities or other places, they told us that if you want to be hired for a good job you should have at least one document or certificate from the US or this state; this will help a lot for an immigrant who comes here and [wants] to get a good job he prefers. That will help a lot, both financially and socially.

CREATING LASTING COMMUNITY

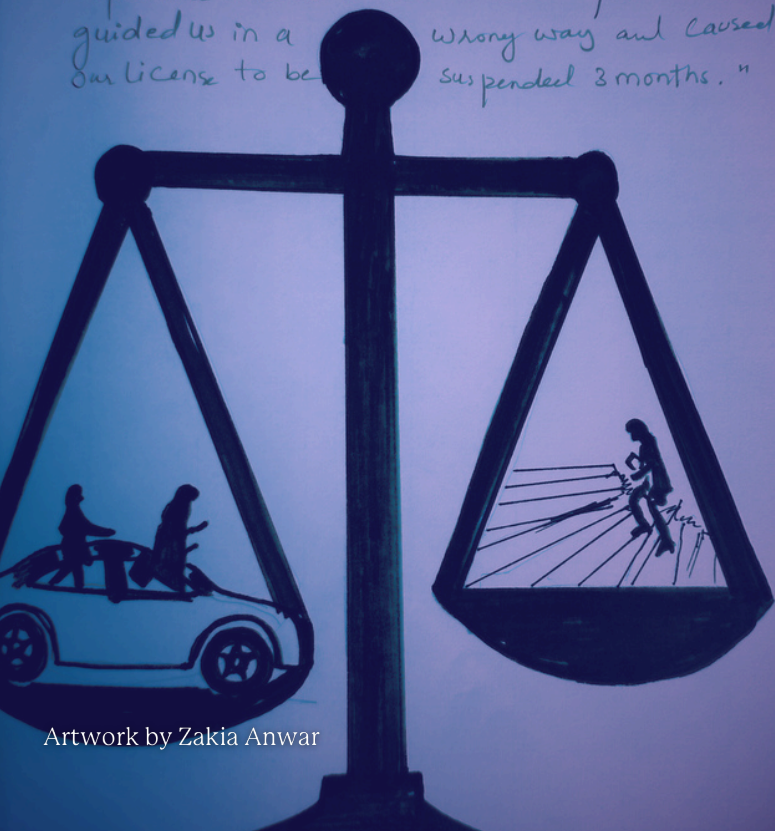
[Professor] Ali introduced us to our neighbors and our friends at the community garden, and we actively continued to communicate with a library that belongs to the same area. The Community Garden, which I [Fahim] am a big fan of, they have given us a piece of land from the government. When we come from work, we do farming there. For example, we plant vegetables and plants such as curry trees and fruits.

We all have the experience that it is very difficult to leave the country, family, and everything at once, so that all of these things, we sometimes thought that they are like or part of our family, and they treated us in the same way [as if] each of them had a [similar] experience before. They understood us in a special way. They welcomed us a lot.

We were at all the parties; we were at Easter yesterday and Thanksgiving. They were giving us gifts. Even today, our relationship is the same and we have our visits, especially during these special days in America.

Everything here was friendly, and it was as if we were the owners of the house, and they were the guests. That is how they treated us.

"papers, emails, and the same mails we were receiving and we could n't answer. We did n't understand. Eg: a problem that the two of us encountered, my license was suspended for 3 month. for example from someone who had no experience like us. He did n't have experience, he guided us in a wrong way and caused our license to be suspended 3 months."



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