

THE STORIES: NILAB



First name: **NILAB**

Last name: **DOST**

Age: **37**

Country of origin: **AFGHANISTAN**

Living in **Germany** since: **1981**

SHORT SUMMARY

Nilab left her home country Afghanistan when she was a small child of less than 2 years, together with her parents and her older sister. She came to Germany, lived in a small city in the North and went to school. Her parents struggled to make Germany the new home for the family, while their children went to kinder garden and to school. Even though her story of fleeing the country is 35 years old there are still traces of feeling “different”. She comes from a very liberal family and that was something that made an imprint on her.

“THE LANGUAGE STILL SOUNDS LIKE HOME.”

LEAVING AFGHANISTAN AND ARRIVING IN GERMANY

Nilab's father was a communist and when the Taliban came into power he was a wanted person. The family had to go into hiding and it was clear that the family had to leave the country. The family had a very good living in Afghanistan, but they were in grave danger.

The aim was to go to Europe since the extended family had many contacts to Britain, France, Germany and even some relatives living in European countries. Her mother wanted to go to Spain, but the chances of getting a residence permit were the highest in Germany.

When in Germany, they first came to Frankfurt and then were brought to a small village in the North and from that to a small city in the vicinity. They were the first refugees there and the very first Muslims. Her sister and she were placed into a kindergarden, but her sister refused to speak. There was a nice woman who made a special effort to help the family with all the challenges they faced during the first months in Germany. Two couples were especially helpful and they remain good friends of the family up to now. Nilab's mother found a job very quickly because she was a nurse, her father had more problems. He learned German in the library, there were even German courses. He got a job, but compared to his position in Afghanistan (where he was a manager) it was not on his level of competence. Still, he worked his way up. Meanwhile, Nilab and her sister were in school and they were still “outside”. They did not know the rules (e.g. getting presents for Christmas) and even though her parents tried to assimilate into the German society in order to make it easier for their children, they were still “the migrants”. During festivities, like birthday parties or Christmas celebrations, all the migrants sat at one table, because the teacher thought this the best. They had nothing in common, but still this was the way it was done.

You have to go your way and don't let yourself be misled.

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BELONGING?

IT WAS DIFFICULT AND IT WAS NOT MADE EASY FOR THEM

Even though Nilab never went to Afghanistan (she wanted, but it has not come true as yet) she speaks the language. And she talks Dari with her relatives. Not many of them stayed in Afghanistan, they are all over Europe. But listening to her mother tongue still sounds like “home”.

When Nilab was 10 years old, her parents and her sister and she got the residence permit and that was the moment when the parents decided to stay in Germany. The transition was, in one way, easier than thought, because back in the 1970s, Afghanistan had a very liberal society and was open to international contacts and relations.

Being in Germany, the family each had a different speed of integration and there was no consciousness about the difficulties of integration processes, compared to today or compared to Great Britain, where the society learned to live with a multi-cultural approach earlier on.

I am
a citizen of the
world and
I do not need to
justify where
I live.

BEING A MIGRANT WORKER, STILL

When Nilab was 20 years old, she moved to Hamburg and of course life was different here. She had (and still has) many friends with a different cultural background and she feels like a citizen of the world. But on the job, she had to defend herself more than once. “Are you able to make printouts? We need that!” or “you really speak a very good German” are only the more polite answers during job interviews. She always felt like she has to explain that she is able to work in Germany ALTHOUGH she is from Afghanistan. Her strategy is to go

her way, look very closely and try not to legitimate herself, because she does not have to. That is what she tries to give to others. And not only to migrants.