

By Khun Myo

My Side Story

The definition of a refugee is “one who flees in search of refuge, as in times of war, political oppression, or religious persecution.” My life started as a refugee boy dwelling in a fragile shelter made of leaves and bamboo sticks. Many have asked, what is it like to be a refugee? Yet, not a lot have the experience. As a refugee boy, I would like to share my experience of what it’s like to be in the camp, compared to living in America. Hopefully, this will give a good understanding to those who seeks to know.

My parents fled Myanmar into the wilderness in fear of government persecution. The wilderness lead us to a refugee camp where my family and I lived in exile. I hate to say it, but I think I was born at the wrong time. Anyways, we lived in a small shelter; the size of a hut made of bamboo. Many bamboo huts made up the camp, and when all the huts are packed together, it formed a village. The life of a refugee wasn’t so pleasant. Food was scarce, and the freshest water came from the muddy river. Each day was all about survival. No one ever comes and serve free food. The only way to survive was to hunt what the nature provide. When stormy season came around; the dark gloomy sky covered the land, and all hell broke loose. The wind became a violent razor hurricane. Thunders began to roar. Then came the rain; pouring down in rage. The roofs made of leaves flew into the sky, and the branches from the trees fell onto the huts. When the storm calms, the village was nearly destroyed. Some huts endured and survived; others collapsed. The huts, the village, and the people had to face this crisis every year. After six years of miseries and despair, our family was finally eligible to immigrate to the United States.

My family and I settled in Saint Paul, Minnesota. The city was huge and full of surprises. Since there was a sudden change in the environment, it was very difficult for me to get adapted to the surroundings. As a boy who came from the wild, I have never seen city lights, cars, and skyscrapers. What happened to the trees? What happened to the jungle? What happened to my cows and chickens? These are the type of questions I asked when I first arrived. However, growing up in a new place wasn't bad at all. I've gained opportunities that I couldn't get back in the refugee camp. Here I was granted free educations, which got me into schools and that impacted my life. My first time being in a school with different people speaking different language gave me the understanding of diversity. Becoming friends with different people with their unique background also made me a wise and a knowledgeable person.

I am a refugee boy that had faced many challenges and obstacles. I know what it's like to be hungry, poor, and to live in an unsafe environment. Getting out of the misery life and coming to the United States was a life changing moment for me. I was given opportunities that I couldn't get back in the camp. Hence from knowing my experience, I hope it gives a good understanding of what is like to be a refugee and what it means for us to be in the land of the free.