



**NARRATIVE
NONFICTION**
nonfiction that uses
literary techniques

I LIVE IN A REFUGEE CAMP COME INTO MY WORLD

By Kristin Lewis | Photos by Ariadne Kypriadi

As You Read What challenges do refugees face?

No one plans to become a refugee—to flee your home because your life is in danger. Yet today, there are 25.9 million refugees. That's more than the world has seen in nearly 100 years.

There are many reasons a person might become a refugee.

Maybe you live in a country torn apart by war, and your house was bombed to rubble.

Maybe you live in a place where you and your family are being attacked for your religious beliefs.

Maybe you live in a region plagued by famine, and you are facing starvation.

Or maybe you are like 15-year-old Bilan (BEE-lawn), and you were chased from your home by violence.

Not so long ago, Bilan was a typical kid. She and her family lived in a comfortable home in Mogadishu, Somalia—a country in East Africa. She went to school and had many friends. With her twinkling eyes and shy smile, Bilan seems like someone who would be your friend too.

But life in Somalia was difficult and dangerous. After years of conflict, the government collapsed in 1991. Since then, civil war has unleashed seemingly endless waves of violence. Hotels, restaurants, and homes have been bombed. Factories have been looted. Schools have been closed.

At the same time, droughts have swept across Somalia. The droughts have choked crops, killed off livestock, and made hunger a fact of life. **Famine** has killed 260,000 Somalis. It has left many more sick and starving.

Hundreds of thousands of Somalis have fled to neighboring

countries like Kenya and Ethiopia. And four years ago, Bilan became one of them.

She still remembers when her mother told her that they had to leave. Her mother said they were going to Ethiopia, where they could be safe.

Where will we live?

Bilan worried. *What will become of us?*

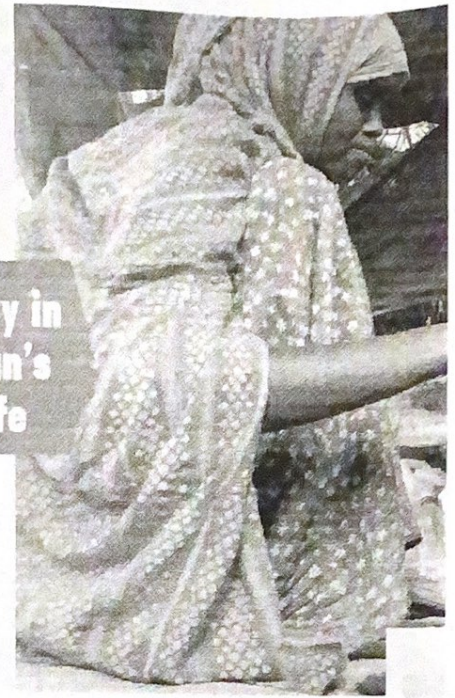
The journey out of Somalia took Bilan and her family about 10 days. So much was left behind: treasured photos, favorite clothes, beloved books. They arrived in Ethiopia with little more than the clothes they were wearing.

Crisis After Crisis

For as long as there have been humans, there have been people forced from their homelands. In the ancient world, thousands of people fled east Europe after their lands were invaded by enemy tribes.

In the 1600s, some 20,000 people made the **perilous** journey from England across the Atlantic Ocean so they could practice their Protestant faith freely in the New World. And in the 1840s, about 2 million people left Ireland because of famine.

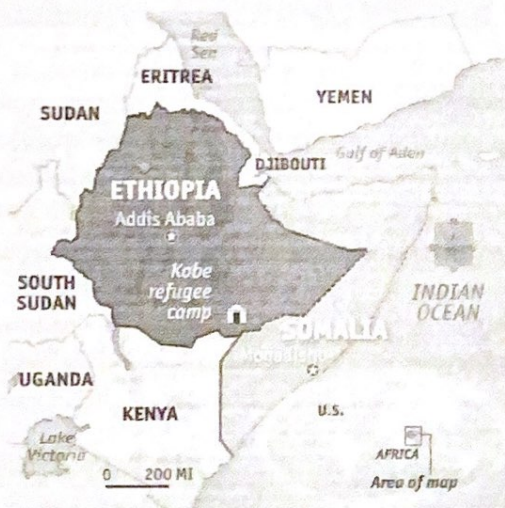
A Day in Bilan's Life



World War II brought a refugee crisis on a scale the world had never seen. When the war ended in 1945, much of Europe was a wasteland. Cities had been burned and bombed to ruins. At least 80 million people were dead. There were 40 million refugees in Europe alone.

The crisis was too big for any one country to handle on its own. And so the international community came together and formed an organization with one purpose: to help. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was meant to operate for three years, just long enough to help the refugees of World War II get back on their feet.

But in the following years came more conflicts, more wars, more famines—in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Crisis after crisis drove millions of people

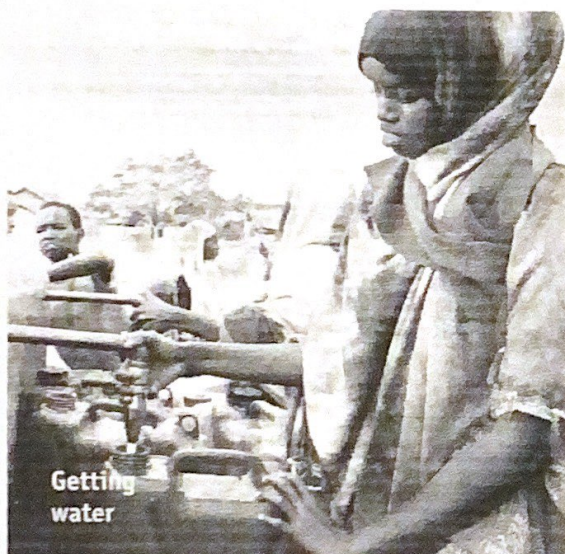




Cooking dinner



Shopping at the market



Getting water

from their home countries. It became clear that the UNHCR needed to be permanent and that other **nongovernmental organizations** needed to help too.

Today, thousands of aid workers from the UNHCR and other aid groups dedicate their lives to helping refugees like Bilan.

Life in the Camp

After Bilan and her family

crossed the border, they were taken to the Kobe refugee camp. This camp is one of five set up by the UNHCR in the southern region of Ethiopia. Together, these camps serve hundreds of thousands of refugees.

The camps are all located in a large,

remote area. But despite its isolation, the Kobe camp is full of life. Nearly 50,000 people live there. The camp is like a town, with rows of bamboo shelters separated by wide dirt streets.

Around the world, there are more than 100 refugee camps. Each one is different. Each faces its own challenges. But they all have the same basic purpose: to provide food, medicine, housing,

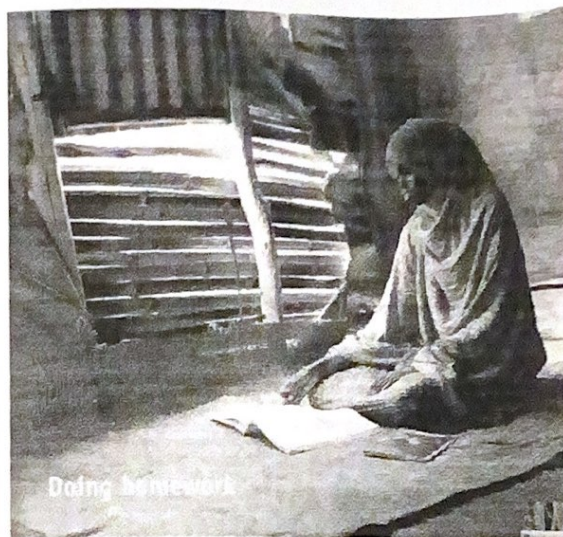
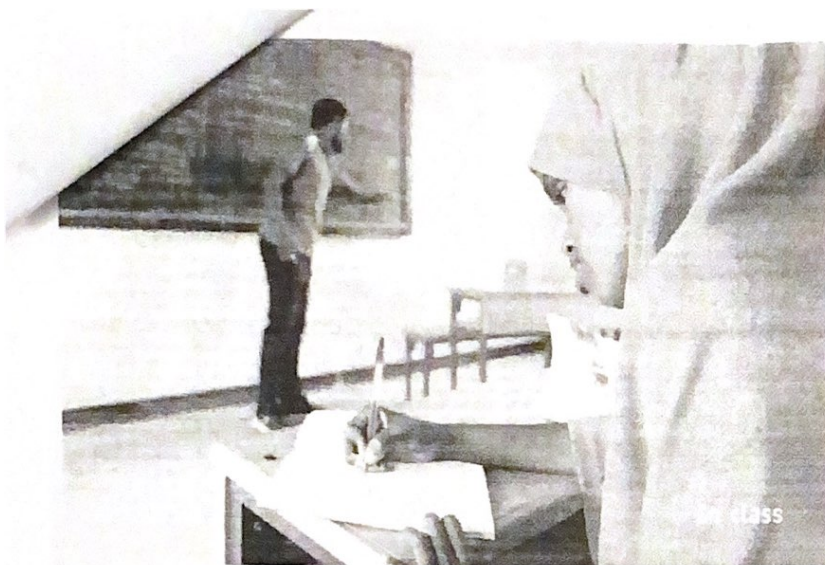
and protection to refugees.

Life in these camps can be grim. Families live in crowded tents. People boil in summer and freeze in winter. There may be shortages of food, water, and power, or **inadequate** bathroom facilities. Basic supplies, like toothpaste and shoes, may be hard to get. Not all refugee camps have schools, and those that do may not have enough teachers or books. Outbreaks of violence and disease are constant threats. Sometimes there isn't enough medicine for everyone who needs it.

A refugee camp is not a place where most people would choose to live. But the Kobe camp does have much to offer. It's clean. It's well organized. It has food, water, **durable** shelters, and a health clinic.

Six schools serve about 6,200 students. In





the market, refugees can buy everything from soaps, perfumes, and colorful fabrics to tasty samosas, goat meat, and pasta. There is also a place to get cell phones repaired.

Bilan remembers that when she first arrived at the Kobe camp, she was struck by how different her life was going to be. She would no longer live in a home in a big city. She would live in a small shelter in the middle of a desert. She would no longer have running water. Instead, she would have to lug water from the camp's well, a time-consuming and **arduous** chore. She would also have to fetch firewood for cooking, going far outside the relative safety of the camp—and that scared her. It still does.

But Bilan made a choice. She decided to accept her new life and to make the best of it.

"I had to adapt," she says.

What's Next?

Today, there are nearly 26 million refugees around

the world. That's almost the population of Texas. More than half the world's refugees are kids or teens, like Bilan.

What will happen to them?

Some will return home when it's safe for them to rebuild the lives they left behind. Often, this is a refugee's first choice. After all, most never wanted to leave their

homes in the first place.

But it can be many years before the conflict that drove them away is resolved. And so they live as strangers in foreign lands, caught between a past they can't return to and a future that is unknown.

Some will be **resettled** in countries like the United States.



Refugees, Immigrants, and Migrants: What's the Difference?

A refugee is:

a person forced to leave his or her country because of war, famine, violence, or persecution. Refugees must leave their home countries to save their lives or preserve their freedoms.

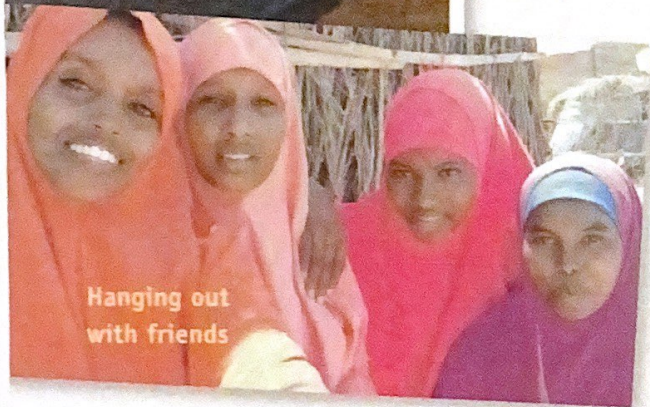
An immigrant is:

a person who chooses to move to a new country, usually seeking new opportunities, such as a job or education.

A migrant is:

a person who repeatedly moves from one place to another, often to find work. Migrant farm workers, for example, may move from one farm to another as different crops are ready to be harvested.

Photo: © iStockphoto.com/Reynolds



Australia, Germany, or Canada. In these countries, refugees are able to start new lives. They are allowed to get jobs, go to school, and live in apartments or houses alongside everyone else. Their lives may be hard, but among refugees, they are the lucky ones. Less than 1 percent of the world's refugees get resettled.

World of Uncertainty

Refugees living in camps may be stuck there for many years, trapped in a world of uncertainty. In some countries,

refugees may not be able to legally work or get the identification documents they need to rent an apartment, open a bank account, or drive a car. All they can do is wait to be resettled or to go home.

And that wait can last many months or years. Some refugees will spend the rest of their lives

in a camp.

Bilan and her family are lucky. The Ethiopian government and the UNHCR are working together to help refugees like them. A

landmark law

passed earlier this year allows refugees in Ethiopia to legally go to school and get jobs, driver's licenses, and bank accounts.

Refugees are included in many parts of Ethiopian society. They run their own businesses, selling things like clothing and jewelry that they make themselves. They work on farms just outside the Kobe camp, growing fruits and vegetables. Refugee students who complete high school can go to college in Ethiopia.

But Ethiopia is not the norm. Many countries with large refugee populations do not allow refugees to **integrate** into society. The UNHCR hopes that the Kobe camp will serve as an example of how countries can give refugees a path forward.

Vision for the Future

Bilan has lived at the Kobe camp for four years now. Life there is not easy, but she **relishes** the moments of joy. She goes to school and is a top student. She decorates the walls of her shelter with her schoolwork. And she loves shopping in the market and cracking jokes to make her mother smile.

Bilan has made friends too. She and her friends study together. In their free time, they play volleyball.

At night, Bilan studies hard. She dreams of going to college in Canada or the U.S.

She has a plan for her future. She wants to become a doctor and help her family and other refugees.

But that's not all.

"I will give health services to refugees for free," she says proudly. ●

Special thanks to Ariadne Kypriadi, Asha Abdikadir, Farhiya Ali, and Abdisalam Kuresh Jamale from the UNHCR.

Expository Writing Contest

What challenges does Bilan face as a refugee? What is being done to help refugees like her? Answer both questions in an essay. Use text evidence. Send your essay to **Refugee Contest**. Five winners will each get *Escape from Aleppo* by N. H. Senzai. See page 2 for details.

Get this activity online.