

TELL YOUR STORY

A refugee story of faith
and hope, told in words
and art.

Sara's Story



Tell Your Story celebrates the journey of participants from CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) refugee backgrounds – including those currently seeking asylum. The aim is to both encourage hope and healing in participants, and to inspire faith, hope and understanding in others.

With training provided by experienced Salvation Army coaches, and with prompts/ questions provided, participants (looking through the lens of faith) use both their words and art forms to tell their stories. These are shared online and in booklet form.



My story – Sara

Growing up in Iran in a Muslim family, I pursued education and built a successful career. In 2018, I moved to Australia, where my faith journey led me to Christianity. While I have faced many challenges, I have experienced the faithfulness of God in many ways, and I am thankful for the blessings and opportunities I have been given.

I was born in a small city called Mashhad in Iran. My family is Muslim, so I grew up learning Muslim beliefs. I was blessed to grow up in a wonderful family of five as a middle child between two brothers. When I was 13, we moved to the capital city of Tehran, and there were many challenges for the whole family, but somehow, we survived and settled.

I have been very blessed in my life.



Below: I find Tehran a place with such blessings in nature.

OUR PARENTS DID EVERYTHING TO THE BEST OF THEIR ABILITY TO EDUCATE US, AND THAT IS SOMETHING I AM ALWAYS THANKFUL TO GOD FOR.

I studied for a Bachelor of Accounting before marrying at 23. I divorced at 28. After that, I started working as an assistant accountant while studying for a Master of Finance. By the time I left Iran, I was a financial manager, on the right path professionally, and happy with my life.

By the time I turned 34, I was a successful, independent woman who had experienced much in life except motherhood. I met my fiancé five months before I travelled to Australia in 2018, but we haven't been able to see each other since.

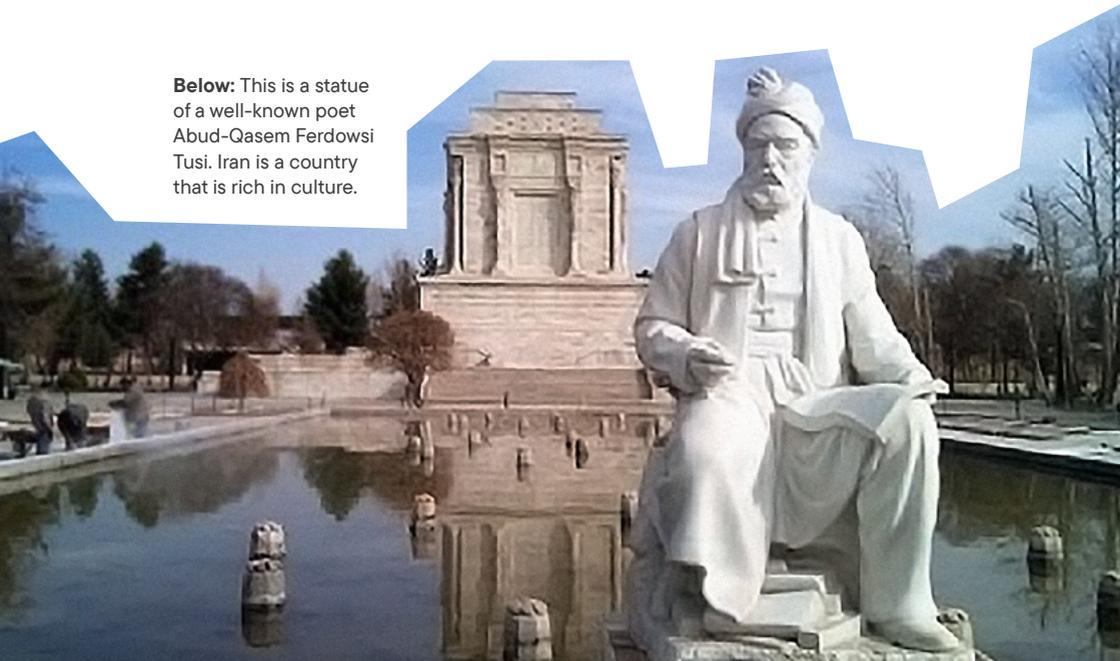
A journey in faith

I have travelled to many countries in Europe and Asia and had the chance to visit Australia in 2018 as my elder brother had migrated here in 2011. My brother and his partner were having a baby, and I took the opportunity to stay longer so I could help them. That was a gateway for me to interact with people other than Iranians and Muslims.

My faith journey started as a child, in Muslim religious schools in Iran. I never doubted God's existence, but there were many questions in my head that Islam couldn't answer. I always had a curious heart and mind about God; I wanted to know him.

I believe that when you seek God, God will reveal himself, often through other people and in unexpected ways. I know this because God put beautiful people in my life to light my path to him, and none of them were Christian: a Muslim

Below: This is a statue of a well-known poet Abud-Qasem Ferdowsi Tusi. Iran is a country that is rich in culture.





All Bible verses are from The New International Version (NIV)

religious teacher, an atheist friend and strong Muslim parents.

I remember at one stage, my father quoting Luke 6:31 from the Bible: “Do to others as you would have them do to you,” without knowing the source. Or my atheist friend comparing Khadija (Mohammad’s first wife) and Jesus as two powerful people in different ways.

Arriving in Australia, I already had these experiences in my background and a thirst for knowing more about God.

Path to God and Jesus

God had given me the opportunity to seek, and as he says, he will be found. I found myself going to my first Christian Sunday service (May 2019) ever in a Salvation Army Farsi Corps (church). The following two months, as

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I was taught about Christianity, were so exciting, and all the missing links in my mind about God were found.

The turning point came when I found the answer to one of my life’s questions: “How am I going to be saved by my good deeds?” and the answer was Ephesians 2:8–9: “*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*”

I will never forget the moment I said “yes” to Jesus. I was set free of all the guilt, all the shame, all the sins of my past. I was born spiritually again. And my life was transformed from that moment.

The Sharia Law in Iran dictates that any conversion from Islam is a sin against Islam’s God, and the punishment is death for men and a life sentence for women. I had no other option except seeking asylum in Australia because there is no turning back from my faith. My family never supported my decision. Only my fiancé.

A New Life

Matthew 11:28–30 reads: *“Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”* All my worries of life have been taken care of by God, including a job, the visa process, and even his assurance that I will reunite with my fiancé.

I found a new agenda: growing in faith and doing God’s labour in his kingdom. Matthew 22:36–40 reads: *“Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*

My wonderful Jesus has truly become my king, and I surrender my life to his hand. Since I surrendered my life to him, I have never lacked anything. All his promises have come true in my life.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

Matthew 22:36



Inspiration from the Bible

There are different characters in the Bible that I can relate to, and based on my situation and circumstances in life, they are inspirational to me. This is one of the ways the Lord speaks to me. Moses, as he was interceding for his nation (Exodus 32), or the Samaritan woman at the well, when Jesus transformed her life (John 4), or even the woman who anointed Jesus (Luke 7).

My journey

I was born in Iran, but I live in Australia. I see both nations suffering in their sin. My heart hears their cries. This is when the Lord reminds me of Moses and what he did in Exodus 32:9–14 when he interceded with God for his people. That is when I go on my knees to pray for Australians or Iranians.

God often reminds me of two scriptures: “Yet if there is an angel at their side, a messenger, one out of a thousand, sent to tell them how to be upright, and he is gracious to that person and says to God, ‘Spare them from going down to the pit; I have



found a ransom for them” (Job 33:23–26), and “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners” (Isaiah 61:1).

I see prayer for the nations I am connected to as part of my responsibility in life and service.



Women who met Jesus

I also see myself in the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. I relate to her as we both were considered ‘gentiles’ or ‘unbelievers’ in the eyes of others, but the Lord sees lost souls. We both had broken hearts and were outcasts, facing social pressures as divorced women.

We both left our cities to attend to our own business, but Jesus approached us to save us and minister to us. Both of our lives were transformed by Jesus and the living water he offers. As Jesus said, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:13–14).

My prayer is that, just as she was able to help her people discover Jesus and find deliverance from sin, God would use me to help deliver my people. The same living water Jesus gave her 2,000 years ago is also flowing like a spring in my heart, and I want to share that with others.

Jesus said of another woman who had also sinned much, and who had anointed his feet with precious perfume and wiped them with her tears: “Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little” (Luke 7:47). Then he confirmed it, saying to her in verse 50: “Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (Luke 7:50).

My life before Christ was full of sin, and I need to remember what Jesus has done for me. By remembering these women and their responses to Jesus, I humble myself in his presence and remember what he has done for me.

Encouragement

My encouragement to people reading my story is to seek God in your life, and you will find his peace.

No matter what is happening in this world, if there are storms in our lives, God is the one who can calm them. We are at peace with God through Jesus, who said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him" (John 14:6–7).



My story through clay

This is an image in clay that represents “life”.

It is an angel with a bowl of living water.

God’s response to the dryness of this world is the living water that he may bring by human angels or angels.

Blue represents purity and life, and that is how the Lord brings salvation, hope and love in our lives.



My story through cards

Card storytelling is an activity where participants use image cards to represent and share their life story.



The Lord gives us insights as we grow in our faith.

He moves the mountains in our path so that his name is lifted high and glorified.

My story through stamps

Stamp storytelling is an activity where participants carve soft wood to create images that represent their life stories.

I carved images to represent verses in the Bible that have meant a great deal to me in my life.



“The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned” (Matthew 4:16).



“And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:19).



“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (John 14:6).



“For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” (Acts 13:47).



BELIEVE IN GOOD