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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ BIOGRAPHY

Goal: My Journey From Afghanistan

Mohammad B. Alikhail
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Soccer is considered the most popular sport in the world. For Mohammad Alikhail soccer not only provided an important refuge during his childhood in Afghanistan in the 1960s and '70s it also opened doors that lead to his life as a successful internist in South Carolina today. Alikhail first arrived in North America via Canada in 1986. He recounts with fascinating detail the story of his life beginning with his early boyhood days in Saikanda a small village and Kabul Afghanistan's capital and its largest city.

The author invites readers into an intimate world of Afghan family life where his stern chain-smoking but ultimately supportive father takes a second wife soon after he is born and the household contains up to twenty-one people. Age nine is when soccer first becomes an outlet and potential dream in Alikhail's otherwise bleak life: "…soccer was more than a game I played in my free time. It was something I thought about constantly and practiced every chance I got" he writes. Alikhail completes a formal education and attends medical school where he plays soccer for the university team. From there he makes it to the national team his ultimate ticket to freedom since he is able to seek asylum while visiting India with his team.

Alikhail presents the plight of the modern refugee who seeks escape from political brutality censorship and severe economic hardship to find refuge in the West. The journey to freedom is fraught with danger and difficulty; his first attempt ends in failure and the loss of 5000 rupees at the hands of an unscrupulous man who preys on those desperate to leave the country. Other near disasters such as getting caught with fake documents in Malaysia threaten his success but through persistence and a little luck Alikhail finally arrives in Vancouver. More challenges await as the building of a free life comes with its own share of difficulties. This story will remind readers how fortunate they are to live a Western life of comparative luxury and freedom.

Although the storyline is captivating especially when the author begins his quest to defect it is bogged down in places by flowery metaphor giving the book a purple prose cast. The following phrasing is typical: "I was hanging on to every word he spoke. They were drops of water to my dry soul…" In spite of such occasional overwriting the tone and style are crisp and formal owing perhaps to the author's facility with English as a second language.

This book offers a valuable glimpse into the ordinary lives of Afghans caught up in the political turmoil of a Soviet invasion in 1979 the rise of the Mujahideen and the subsequent deterioration of the quality of life which drives the author to seek his fortune elsewhere. It's a worthy and readable tale of triumph over steep odds.
LUISE BOLLEBER (March 13, 2009)

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