



The Rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif

Najaf Mazari, Robert Hillman

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This book traces an Afghan refugee's extraordinary journey - from his early life as a shepherd boy in the mountains of Northern Afghanistan to his forced exile after being captured and tortured by the Taliban, to incarceration in an Australian detention centre... and finally to freedom. A poignant and powerful, often humorous, story of suffering, injustice and survival that explores the resilience of the human spirit.

"An extraordinary account of an epic journey to freedom, told with great intelligence, humour, poetry and integrity. Even in his darkest hours of despair, Najaf clings to hope and his deep love of life and people." - Arnold Zable - Writer and refugee advocate

Najaf donates all royalties from the sale of this book to the Masawat Development Fund which he founded to raise funds to support health and education programs in Mazar-e-Sharif and surrounding villages.

Beautifully captured and penned by award-winning biographer Robert Hillman, this is a compelling story of an exceptional yet 'ordinary' man whose generous spirit, natural leadership and desire for peace transcends enormous danger and heartbreak.

The Rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif follows the extraordinary journey of Najaf Mazari from the despair of Afghanistan under the Taliban regime to the flowering of a new life in Australia. Unaware of the fragility of innocence in a country torn by civil war, Najaf describes his childhood working as a shepherd, an apprentice welder and, finally, finding his calling as an apprentice rugmaker.

"After a few months I was weaving simple quality rugs without assistance... but then came the more difficult tasks - learning to repair rugs, to stretch rugs, to match colours, make colours, create a design that does justice to fine yarns... It was during my initiation into the deeper mysteries of my craft that I began to understand how a world can exist within a single room. For when my concentration was at its greatest, it felt that the world lived in the yarns, in the colours and in the skills of rugmaking."

Family joy soon turns to tragedy as the war between the Russian forces and the Mujahedin violently thrusts its way into Najaf's life - first his elder brother is killed by a sniper, then his family home is destroyed by a stray rocket, killing both his younger brother and brother-in-law. Najaf, too, is badly wounded and is reduced to selling crocheted socks on a street corner while his injuries slowly heal. Eventually returning to

rugmaking, Najaf trains himself not to think too far into the future.

In 2001, the adult Najaf is captured and tortured by the Taliban. He is forced to flee Afghanistan, leaving his wife and child behind to place his life in the hands of people-smugglers, bound for an unknown destination. Half way across the world in south-east Asia, Najaf and almost a hundred other refugees learn for the first time that they are bound for a country at the bottom of the world called 'Australia'...

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