

## My Own Home at Last

After searching for four months I finally found a two-room rental apartment where we can live on our own. My husband's family was not happy, however: they were hoping that we would live with them.

My husband's family is very different from mine. They have always lived in a village in the Maidan Wardak Province and only moved to Kabul a few years ago. They cannot understand me. Nor can they understand that I want to have a life of my own away from them.

We now live in our own apartment away from my husband's family, but we visit them often and pay their expenses.

I consider myself lucky, because I do have a life of my own. Many of my friends would also like to lead an independent life after they get married, but they are unable to do so.

I have a friend who, while happily married, would also like to have a home of her own so as not to have to live with her husband's family. But she cannot voice her thoughts on this for fear that her husband and his family would take offence.

Some time ago I met another friend at a wedding. She told me that, after three years of difficulties and problems, she had finally moved to a home of her own away from her husband's family. She had saved her money for three years and had finally sold all her gold jewellery. It had been enough to buy a small house for her family – herself, her husband and their children.

I too have promised to work and help my husband pay the rent and other family expenses. One person cannot support two families. That is one reason why I am writing these stories to you in Finland: with the money I earn I can help my husband pay the rent.

My daughter, Nargis, is now in part-time daycare. It gives me time for myself so that I can write these columns, for example. Becoming a mother has not meant that I would have to give up everything else – something I used to be afraid of before.

Many women in Afghanistan are unable to continue working or studying after they have children. Those who live with their in-laws must ask for permission to go to work, a permission they are often denied. If they do get it, however, they can leave their child in the care of the mother-in-law and aunts.

Those who live on their own have no alternative but to put their child in daycare. But that is not always possible: there are only a few daycare centres in Kabul, run by the government. Some private centres do exist, which are better equipped, but they are also more expensive.

I am lucky that my daughter got a place in daycare. I believe that if the staff looks after the children properly, daycare is good for their development. My daughter

used to be quite shy, but now she has become more outgoing and she even likes to be with unfamiliar people. Just a few hours in daycare is enough to do that.

With Nargis in daycare, I have time for myself. That is important too. One of the things it allows me to do is go to the gym. These days, when the situation in Afghanistan is very bad and people have many problems and difficulties and everyone is afraid of the future, exercise gives you strength. It is good for both body and soul.

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