

Dear Reader,

My name is Mikha. Well I suppose it's my Australian name. My real name is Marichje. I chose a different name to be a bit more approachable, I suppose. And I was born in South Africa in 1996, I'm 27 now. Part of my family moved here in 2017. That included my dad and my mum and my two youngest siblings, my sister and my brother. They all moved here on the 1st of March 2017. And when I finished my studies I moved here on the 12th of March 2019. And then my last sister joined us in December 2019. And so that was the six of my immediate family all together under one roof for the first time since 2017.

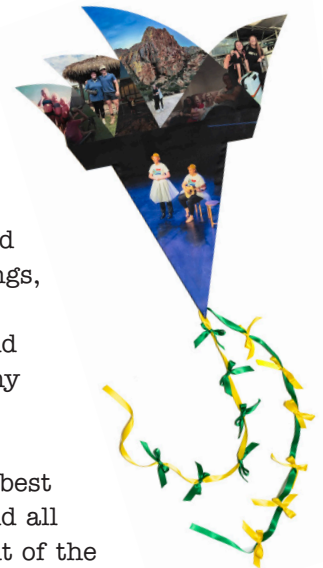
But actually my parents had previously tried to migrate in 2008. My mum's best friend moved here in 2001 and she would tell my mum how awesome it is and all of that. And I think my parents were desperate for a very long time to get out of the economic circumstances, but they were just too low on the socio-economic scale to be able to afford all of the processes. Because you kind of need a bit of money to be able to even start the processes. Plus then, you're not guaranteed. So it's really a gamble. Do we want to put in thousands? And the currency in South Africa is awful. So \$1 is 12 Rand. So if you need \$10,000, you need 120,000 Rand, which is two and a half times what my mum earned in a year.

So there were lots of things holding them back. But they really wanted to come so they started the process when I was in year six. I remember absolutely having a meltdown and saying, 'I'm never going, you can leave without me. I will call the welfare. I will not move.' But then the company that my mum was going to work for went under and there was a big flood. And my parents are quite religious, so they thought, 'Okay, this feels like maybe a sign. Maybe we'll just pack it in for now.' My dad is very religious, we're Christian, and he said, 'If the whole family is not in unity, we are not going.' I was the only one who said, 'I will not move, you will go without me.' And even as a 12 year old, for some reason, he decided to honour that. Which is admirable and weird. But I think they realised that they were not ready, that the timing was awful for them to do this.

So they restarted the process in 2016 and it went really quickly. My mum had an interview, a month later they were invited to apply and 24 hours later they had the visa. My mum got a sponsored visa to work in Brisbane, she was a registered nurse. It was comparatively, I would say, a very smooth entrance for my family because it's such a sought-after profession. So the whole family got sponsored. And the reason why my sister and I had to move in 2019, particularly me, was because you have to be under 23 years old to come on a permanent residency visa on your parent's visa and I was turning 23 that year. So I piggybacked my way in. When I arrived I was still on the 482 sponsored visa and then had to apply immediately for permanent residency and hope that I get it before October otherwise I would have had to leave and come back on my own accord. And I think with a drama degree Australia wouldn't have touched me with a pair of tongs.

Before I came I had conversations with many people, people here and people in South Africa. 'What do you guys think? I don't really want to, but I feel like I should.' And the response was unanimous. 'You have to go get citizenship at least.' I didn't want to come as, you know, you spend your whole life building a support structure around you. And I had a really difficult time making friends when I was younger so at the end of high school and in university was the first time I really started making real friends and connections and stuff. And then my career in film and theatre had just started taking off and I was so excited. I was part of some great shows at theatre festivals and I had no interest in leaving any of that.

My sister and I visited our parents here for a month in 2018, which was the first time that I flew in a plane. And up to that point I was very adamant about not moving to Australia. But my mum



is very pushy. She said, 'You have to. You have to get out. If you stay in South Africa, you will die.' She's very like that. But I would absolutely not have died. South Africa is an amazing country. It's resilient beyond measure. It's an exceptionally proud nation. I don't want to be anything else other than South African. But the problem is, it's a lot harder to do what you love and make a living there than it is here. I would have had to do something permanent to keep myself going and on the side do the things that I love, theatre and film and stuff like that. The industry is really small and not supported at all. I wanted to do the good theatre and make change and, you know, be part of the revolution, but there's no funding support for that.

So no, I definitely would not have died. I think I would have been fine. But I was living with a level of anxiety that I did not know I was living with. When I went back to South Africa last year, everything was sore because I was like real tense for three and a half weeks. There are huge safety concerns there. Especially the gender based violence and violence against queer people. All of which concern me personally.

So now I feel completely different. I definitely feel like I belong in South Africa but I don't want to live there anymore. And I think that there are external reasons for that, it's not due to a lack of belonging. Once you have been in Australia, for me personally, I could not imagine myself going back to South Africa. I will never go back. At the end of the day, I think there was a part of me that thought, it's such an opportunity to get an Australian passport. It's difficult to go anywhere with a South African passport and I've always really wanted to go places. So yeah, I think I wasn't really at an age where I was thinking ahead about the future like that. Only now do I start doing that. But my parents obviously were desperate to get out because they were getting older.

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My first impression of Australia was from the movie *Finding Nemo*. It's set on the Great Barrier Reef. And when Nemo, Marlin and Dory make the trip to Sydney, there's this scene where it's the Opera House and the music plays and they're trying to find P. Sherman, 42 Wallaby Way, Sydney. I'll never forget that address. Seeing the Opera House, it's such a striking building. And my family is very into music, opera, classical music, musicals—very theatre driven. And it's been a dream of mine to see the Opera House since I saw *Finding Nemo*. I think I was maybe year four or year five when I saw it. But that's the first idea that I had of Australia. The first image that I can think of.

In general Australia is the number one pick for South Africans. Because it's a very similar lifestyle. Even simple things like the stop signs, traffic lights, houses, streets, shops, everything, it looks the same. The weather, except for the humidity, is so similar. And the barbecue outdoor beach lifestyle—none of that interests me, but is very attractive to the standard South African.

And here I've been lucky. I've not experienced any discrimination, at all. South Africa is a very white racist country. Although it's not very white, it's just that the white people are so loud. That's one of the things I think that makes a lot of white South Africans comfortable here, that culture of racism. And even though white people are a very small minority in South Africa, they still own a large portion of the wealth. It is still very segregated. There are very clear white areas, very clear coloured areas and very clear black areas. And there's really not a lot of overlap. I did not grow up with anyone from a different race in my street. In my school there was one black girl and then there was a larger coloured population. The Western Cape, where I'm from, is more coloured than black. But that residual racism is still there from apartheid and it causes a lot of fire. I saw it very hectically at university, the clash between the races.

Obviously I haven't experienced racism the way that black people would in South Africa, and I haven't here either. Racism is the aspect of immigrating to Australia that was the easiest for me.

We talk about our experiences in terms of race quite a bit and that was a very easy assimilation for me because people don't know that I'm not from here if I don't talk. As soon as I open my mouth almost immediately people will say, 'Is that a South African accent?' But for the most part I'm considered Australian, even though it's not really a white country when we look at it for real.

And actually, Australia and South Africa have very shared circumstances. Apartheid policy was modelled on Queensland racial policy. Not just Australia, but Queensland in particular. What was happening in Queensland was the blueprint for South Africa's apartheid policy. And some of those policies literally were just based on how you looked. Even European people, if they looked too Greek or too Eastern European. It was white people, but also white appearing people that were encouraged to come here. You know, UK, Ireland, Scotland, those types of people. It was so looks based.

And it was the same in South Africa. You had people measuring your nose. And if the fork stayed in your hair, if the pencil stayed in your hair, then you're black or coloured or white or whatever. So there were coloured people who got classed as white and were then not allowed to stay with their families. Because you were not allowed to stay across the racial lines during apartheid. So yeah, very, very interesting and messed up overlaps between the racial circumstances in the two countries.

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It's easy to make money in Australia, and I know that's quite a privileged thing to say. Although we do work very hard, it does feel like we are working a lot less for a lot more money here. When I worked as an aged care worker in the kitchen I earned in one fortnight what my mum earned in a month as a registered nurse in South Africa. And now in a week of working full time in a restaurant, I can earn what my dad earned in a month as a teacher. In South Africa my dad had three jobs and my mum had two and they couldn't survive. It's not so much the rat race in South Africa, more just that what you do is not enough. So you have to have part time jobs and stuff like that. This last year it's been possible for me to do my masters and do casual work here and there and still live in a phenomenal apartment with a phenomenal view amongst just the friendliest of people and that was kind of weird at the beginning, but weird in a good way.

The sentiment from our family in South Africa is, 'You guys just have it so easy over there.' And in many ways we do, so we just say, 'Yeah.' If you work hard there are lots of opportunities. And my brother feels to me like the biggest example of that. Because he was told by everyone that he will never amount to anything and he'll probably end up in jail and not go anywhere. And he had a successful business for three years here, which he sold last year. He works so, so hard and he does well. He's like Secret Santa the whole year buying things for the whole family because he can and then he works so hard for his money. And I think that's like a success story for what's possible if you work hard in Australia.

Get on the plane and come tell this country you'll do anything. And I did that for two years. I worked in a specialised dementia unit for aggressive men. So we were being, like, smacked around and chased with dirty continence aids and stuff. But we were willing to do anything because we knew that, 'Okay, I can get \$27 an hour being chased around like this, that's fine by me.' I know I could never get 300 rand an hour anywhere in South Africa. The minimum wage is 240 per day, which is about \$20 a day. So, yeah, love this country.

Mikha