

Excursion to Manly

Grand Designs

On a fine Sydney summer day I took two siblings, Ibado and Abdi-Shakur on an excursion. I was their mother's English Language home tutor. They had lived lives that no child should be experiencing war, starvation, and deprivation firsthand.

They had walked with their mother and many older siblings from a refugee camp in Kenya all the way to Ethiopia; the journey taking many months of sleeping and eating rough along the way. Their mother Maryam never gave up – in fact she craved a brighter future for her children!

We went by train and bus to Balmoral Beach then made our way to the Spit Bridge to do the bush-walk to Manly. The children were overcome by the beauty of Australia's beaches and bushland with its various small creatures, trickling streams, and the sound of birdsong from high in the trees. They ran into the water, giggled along with me, and behaved like carefree children.

Ibado, a teenaged girl who now cared for all of her family who had made it to Australia while also attending high school, pointed to the many palatial homes dotted across the hillsides and stated, "They must indeed have very large families in those places!" All I could answer was that some might only have a couple of adults and perhaps a few children at the most and watch the incredulity evident on her face.

In my mind I walked through those multi-storey edifices with their spectacular views, award-winning gardens, backyard pools, huge rooms abounding with bespoke furniture, time-saving gadgets, and mod-cons. Then I pictured the small housing department home in Granville that her family treated like a palace, where they lived each day to the full, studied relentlessly, and where the children never stopped praising their mother for her vision and sacrifice. And they always expressed gratitude to Australia for taking them in.

Morag Sutton -- 2016