

## Biography for the Novel Club - Khaled Hosseini

Catherine LaCroix, October 2021

(Note: No claim to original content here; everything is straight from the internet, mostly Hosseini's own website and the ubiquitous Wikipedia.)

Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1965, the eldest of five children. His father, Nasser, worked as a diplomat for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kabul while his mother worked as a Persian language teacher at a girls' high school. Both were from Herat. Regarding his ethnicity, Hosseini has stated, "I'm not pure anything. There's a Pashtun part of me, a Tajik part of me."

Hosseini describes his upbringing as privileged. He spent eight years of his childhood in the upper class Wazir Akbar Khan neighborhood in Kabul. Hosseini does not recall his sister, Raya, ever suffering discrimination for being a female, and he remembers Kabul as "a growing, thriving, cosmopolitan city", where he regularly flew kites with his cousins.

In 1970, Hosseini and his family moved to Iran, where his father worked for the Embassy of Afghanistan in Tehran. In 1973, Hosseini's family returned to Kabul, and Hosseini's youngest brother was born in July of that year.

In 1976, when Hosseini was 11 years old, his father secured a job in Paris and moved the family to France. They were unable to return to Afghanistan because of the April 1978 communist coup in which the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan seized power. In 1980, shortly after the start of the Soviet-Afghan war, they sought political asylum in the United States and made their residence in San Jose, California. Hosseini, then aged 15, did not speak English when he first arrived in the United States. He describes the experience as "a culture shock" and "very alienating".

Despite their distance from the country's turmoil, the family was aware of the situations faced by a number of their friends and relatives. Hosseini explained:

"We had a lot of family and friends in Kabul. And the communist coup, as opposed to the coup that happened in '73, was actually very violent. A lot of people rounded up and executed, a lot of people were imprisoned. Virtually anybody [who] was affiliated or associated with the previous regime or the royal family was persecuted, imprisoned, killed, rounded up, or disappeared. And so we would hear news of friends and acquaintances and occasionally family members to whom that had happened, [who] were either in prison or worse, had just disappeared and nobody knew where they were, and some of them never turned up. My wife's uncle was a very famous singer and composer in Kabul who had been quite vocal about his dislike for the communists and so on, and he disappeared. And to this day, we have no idea what happened to him. So that sort of thing, we began to hear news over in Europe of mass executions and really just horror stories. So it was surreal, and it also really kind of hit home in a very real way."

Hosseini graduated from high school in 1984 and enrolled at Santa Clara University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in biology in 1988. The following year he entered the University of California, San Diego, School of Medicine, where he earned a medical degree in 1993. He completed his residency at Cedars-Sinai medical center in Los Angeles and was a practicing internist between 1996 and 2004.

Hosseini did not return to Afghanistan until 2003, when he was 38, an experience similar to that of the protagonist in *The Kite Runner*. In later interviews, Hosseini admitted to feeling survivor's guilt at having been out of the country during years of war and turmoil.

In March 2001, while practicing medicine, Hosseini began writing his first novel, *The Kite Runner*, which was published by Riverhead Books in 2003. The success of *The Kite Runner* meant he was able to retire from medicine in order to write full-time. His three novels have all reached various levels of critical and commercial success. *The Kite Runner* spent 101 weeks on the New York Times best seller list, including three weeks at number one. His second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), spent 103 weeks on the chart, including 15 at number one, while his third novel, *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013), remained on the chart for 33 weeks.

In 2006 Khaled was appointed a Goodwill Ambassador for UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency. Inspired by a trip he made to Afghanistan with the UNHCR, he later established the Khaled Hosseini Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that provides humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

He lives in Northern California with his wife and two children.