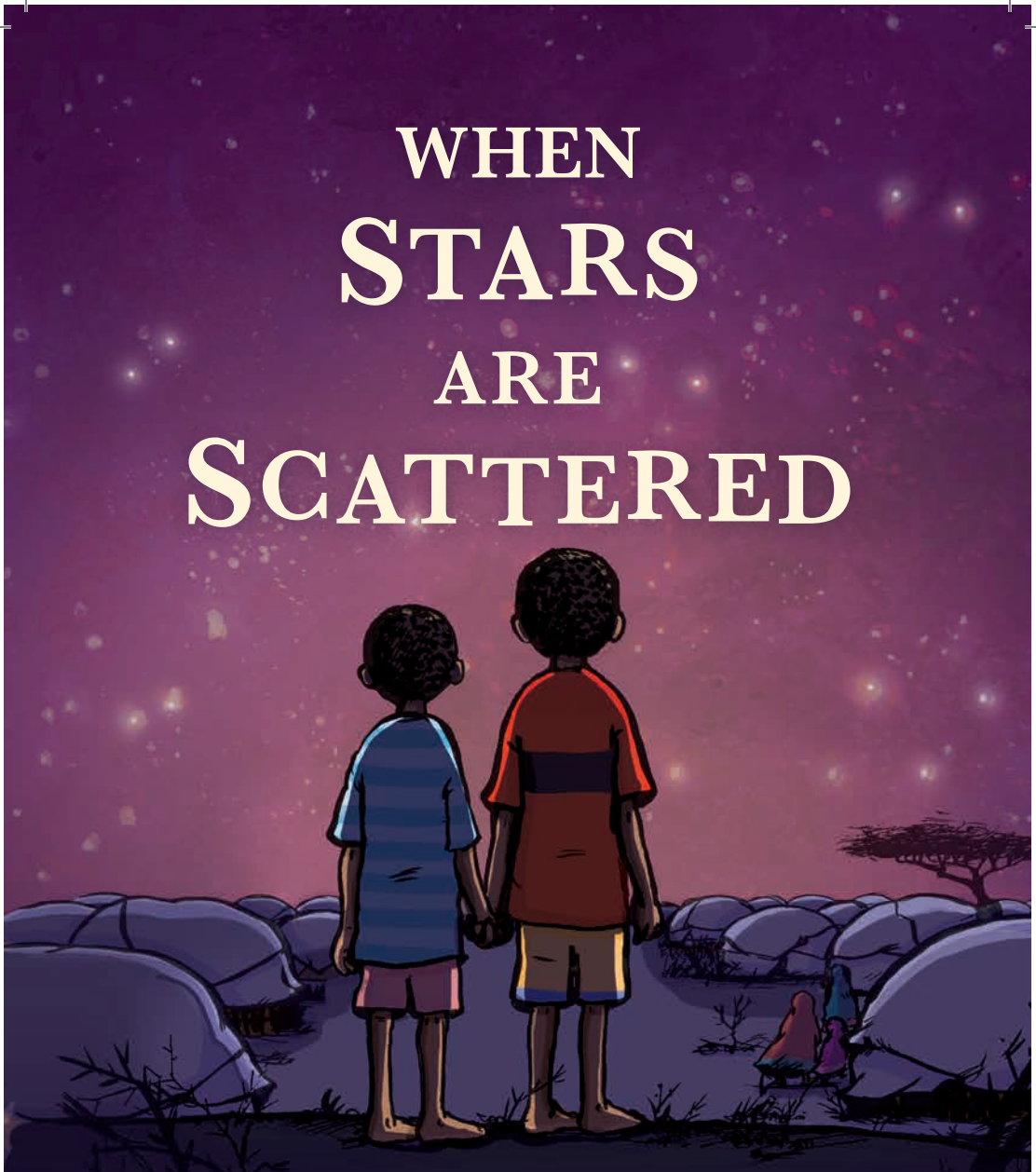
WHEN STARS ARE SCATTERED



VICTORIA JAMIESON
AND OMAR MOHAMED
COLOUR BY IMAN GEDDY

faber

For the international staff
who leave their loved ones behind
and work to help others
–O.M.

For Herminio and Oscar,
my world
–V.J.

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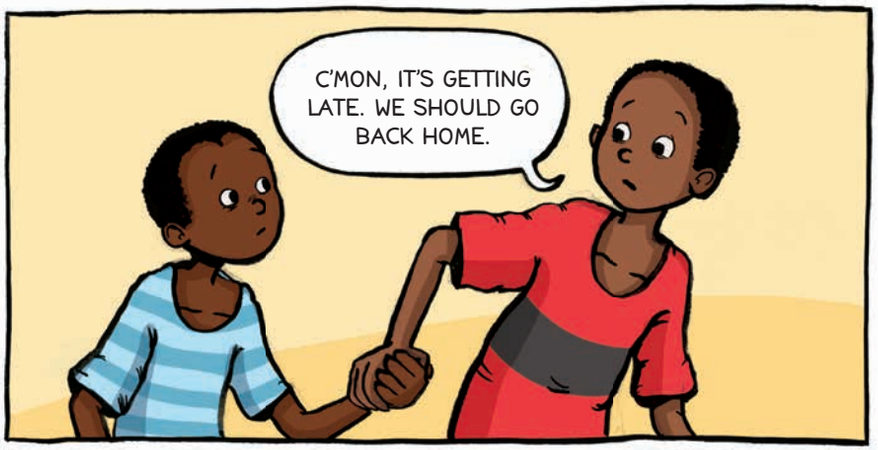
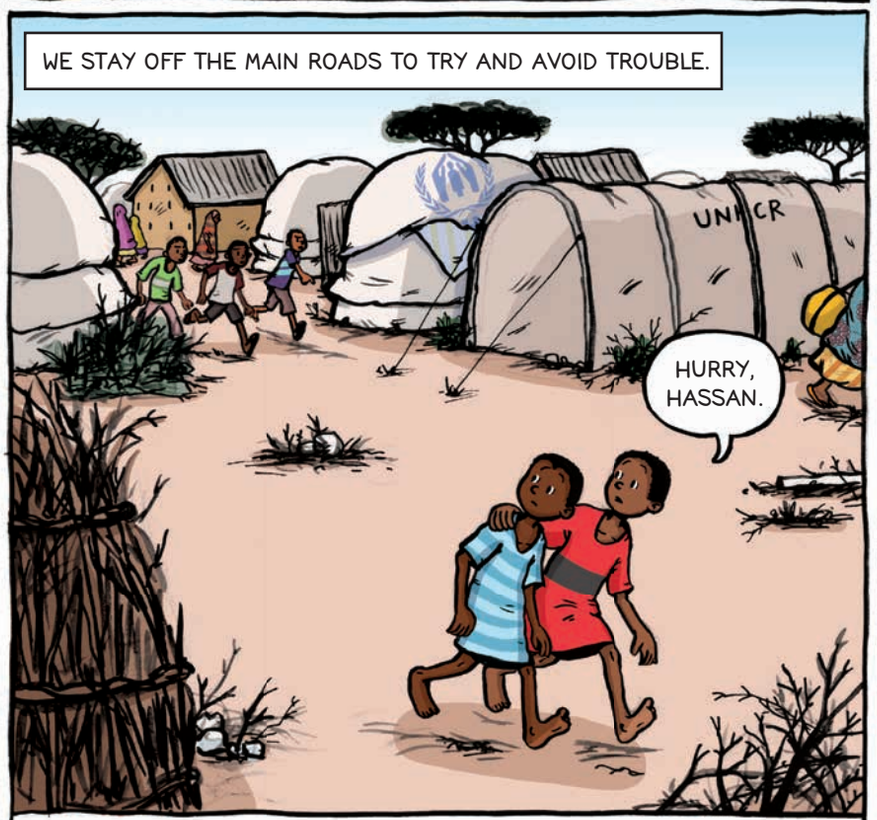
This book is a work of fiction based on true events. It reflects the author's present recollections of experiences over time. Some names and characteristics have been changed or invented, some events have been compressed, and dialogue has been re-created.

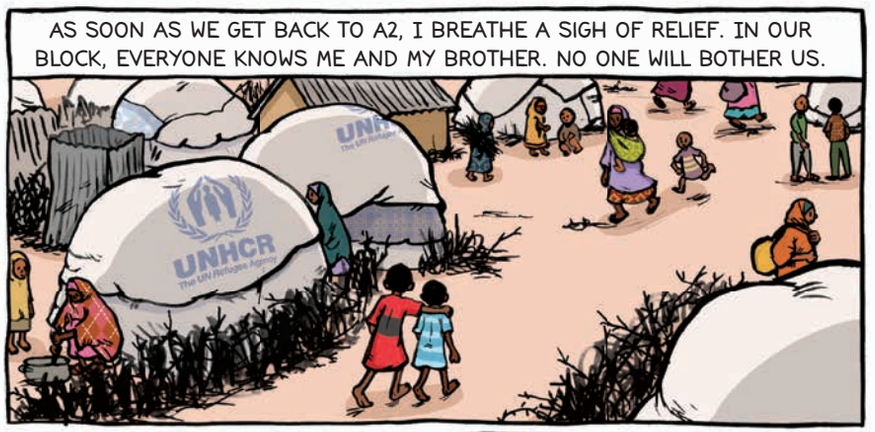
FOR ME, THE FIRST YEARS ARE LOST.

NOW, IN A PLACE AS CROWDED AS THIS, I'M AFRAID WE'LL NEVER BE FOUND.
I DON'T SEE HER, HASSAN.
HOOYO.

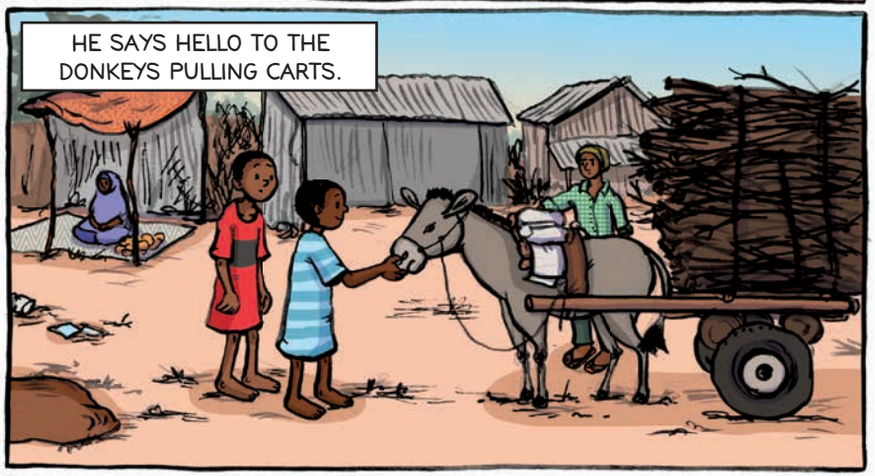




RIGHT NOW, WE'RE RIGHT SMACK DAB IN THE MIDDLE OF **A3** BLOCK, AND HASSAN AND I LIVE IN BLOCK **A2**. LET'S JUST SAY IT'S NOT A GOOD IDEA TO BE CAUGHT IN ANOTHER BLOCK ALL ALONE. THAT'S HOW A GROUP OF KIDS STOLE OUR SHOES AND TROUSERS LAST WEEK.

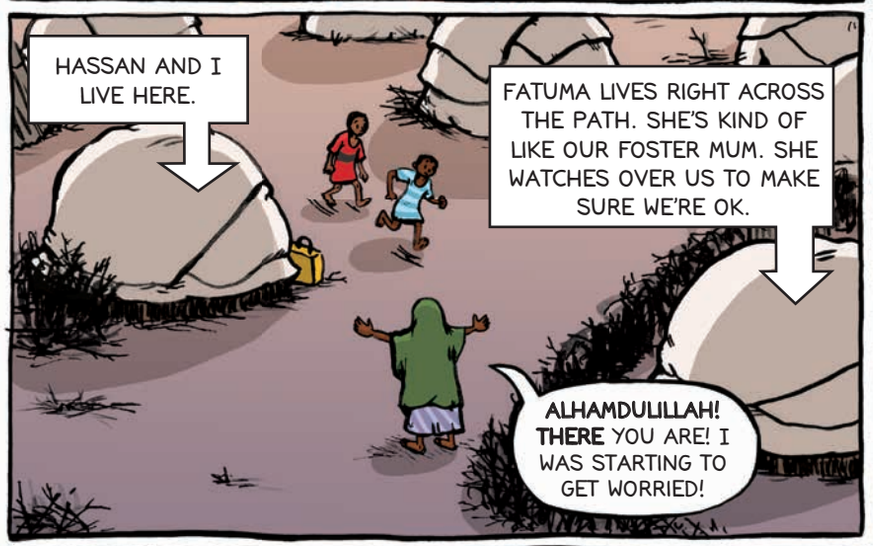


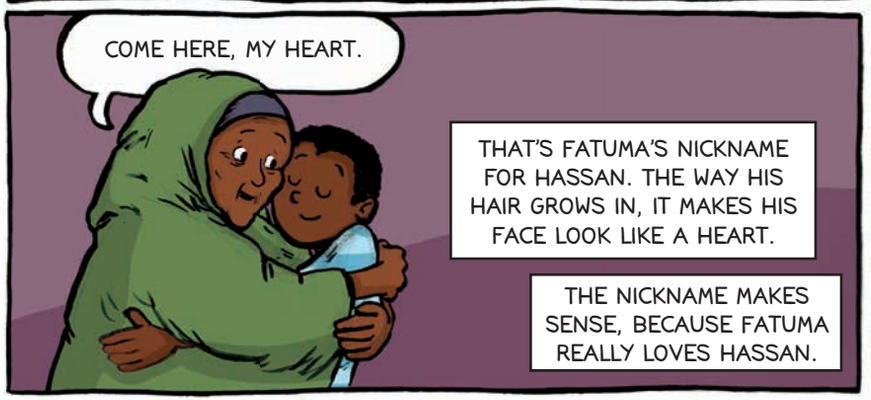
IF HE SEES SOMEONE PUSHING A WHEELBARROW, HE LIKES TO HELP OUT.

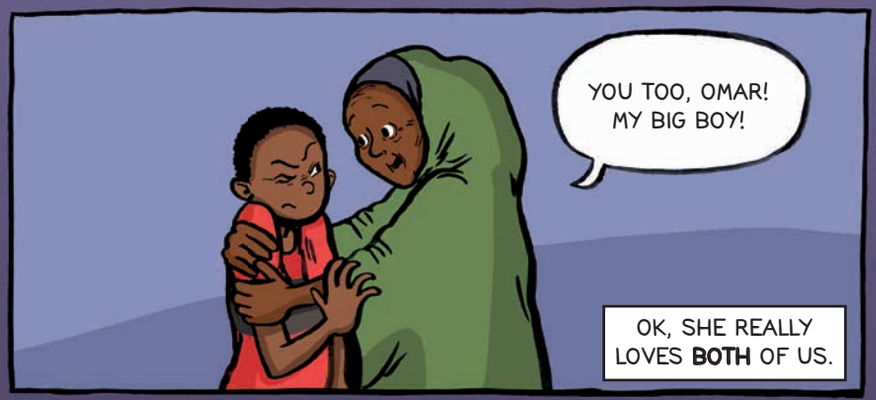

HE SAYS HELLO TO THE DONKEYS PULLING CARTS.

HE COLLECTS FRUIT TO HAND OUT TO ALL THE NEIGHBOURHOOD GOATS.

BY THE TIME WE GET HOME, IT'S NEARLY NIGHTTIME. FATUMA DOESN'T LIKE US TO WALK AROUND WHEN IT'S DARK.


HASSAN AND I LIVE HERE.
FATUMA LIVES RIGHT ACROSS THE PATH. SHE'S KIND OF LIKE OUR FOSTER MUM. SHE WATCHES OVER US TO MAKE SURE WE'RE OK.
ALHAMDULILLAH! THERE YOU ARE! I WAS STARTING TO GET WORRIED!


COME HERE, MY HEART.
THAT'S FATUMA'S NICKNAME FOR HASSAN. THE WAY HIS HAIR GROWS IN, IT MAKES HIS FACE LOOK LIKE A HEART.
THE NICKNAME MAKES SENSE, BECAUSE FATUMA REALLY LOVES HASSAN.



HASSAN AND I SLEEP IN OUR OWN TENT. AFTER ALL, FATUMA IS NOT OUR **REAL** MUM, SO WE'RE STILL ASSIGNED DIFFERENT TENTS.

HASSAN DOESN'T SLEEP VERY WELL, AND I DON'T EITHER. I USUALLY TELL STORIES ABOUT OUR HOME IN SOMALIA TO HELP US BOTH FALL ASLEEP.

JUDGING BY THE SOUNDS ALL AROUND US, I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE WITH BAD DREAMS.

PHOTO © EMILY CINTORA

2008, BEFORE LEAVING DADAAB.
FATUMA, HASSAN, OMAR

PHOTO © EMILY CINTORA

2008, BEFORE LEAVING DADAAB.
HASSAN, OMAR

GRADUATION,
UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

OMAR ON A RECENT TRIP BACK TO DADAAB.
OMAR, HASSAN, THEIR MOTHER, AND
TWO OF OMAR'S CHILDREN

DISTRIBUTING SUPPLIES TO STUDENTS IN DADAAB WITH REFUGEE STRONG

AFTERWORD

Omar and Hassan left Dadaab and arrived in the United States in January 2009. They were resettled in Tucson, Arizona, where they lived in a one-bedroom apartment together. The streets in Tucson were quiet and empty, and it was unsettling not seeing anybody walking around outside. After four months, Omar got his first job; he was a pool attendant at a fancy resort. The pool had water slides and a floating basketball net, and guests to the hotel included Tiger Woods and President Bush. Such luxury was so strange to see after living in Dadaab.

Doctors in the US were able to give Hassan medication to better control his seizures and to help him sleep at night. He began attending classes at an adult care center in Tucson. Omar, too, continued his education; after a year, Omar went to college at the University of Arizona. He majored in International Development, with an emphasis on development in Africa. He graduated in 2014, the same year he and Hassan became citizens of the United States.

During this time, Omar had kept in touch with an old friend from Dadaab: Sarura. Her family had taken care of Hassan when he ran away to Dagahaley camp. Sarura's family had also been resettled to the United States, in Pennsylvania. Sarura moved to Arizona, and she and Omar were married and began a family. In 2015, Omar accepted a position as a resettlement case manager at Church World Service in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, to be closer to Sarura's family. Omar was finally a social worker, just as he'd always dreamed. Hassan lives with Omar and Sarura in Pennsylvania and helps care for their five young children.

Throughout this time, Omar had not given up on what seemed to be an impossible dream: to find their mother. When civil war broke out in Somalia in 1991, it was not unusual for families to become separated. Children and grown-ups alike were forced to drop everything and run, whether they were at work, school, or the market. It could take months or years for families to reunite, often through word-of-mouth. Through his work as a resettlement case manager, Omar met many new arrivals from Dadaab and other refugee camps in Kenya. He asked every new

arrival if they had any information on a woman from Mareerey who had lost her husband and two boys.

In 2014, a woman named Hawa Ali arrived in Ifo camp. She was looking for her two sons. She had been told years ago that the boys had passed away, but she had never stopped searching. Neighbors directed her to Fatuma's tent. Fatuma showed Hawa a photograph of Omar and Hassan. Hawa was able to see her sons for the first time in twenty-three years.

In 2017, Omar and Hassan were able to make the journey back to Kenya to reunite with their mother. Hawa still lives in Dadaab and various refugee camps around Kenya. Omar is working to secure papers to allow her to join her sons in the United States. The current (2019) travel restrictions against people born in Somalia means that their mother can't join them now. But this family is used to waiting, and they are hopeful for the future.

The United Nations estimates that in 2019, there are nearly 71 million people who have been forcibly displaced from their homes worldwide. Most of the people displaced from their homes come from developing countries. You can visit www.unhcr.org to learn more about the worldwide refugee crisis. Many towns and cities in the United States have nonprofits and organizations to help new arrivals to the US settle into their new homes. You can often donate clothing, school supplies, and home goods to refugee families right in your own community.

Omar is the founder of a project called Refugee Strong. He organizes volunteer trips to Dadaab once or twice a year. With the funds he raises throughout the year, he delivers books, pencils, and lamps to students. Refugee Strong also focuses on helping girls continue their studies by delivering menstrual hygeine products and building restrooms for girls—two major stumbling blocks that keep girls from attending classes.

If you would like to get involved, please visit
WWW.REFUGEESTRONG.ORG to learn more.

AUTHOR'S NOTE
OMAR MOHAMED

Born in Somalia, I fled with my brother, Hassan, to Dadaab Refugee Camp in Kenya at age four, and then spent the next fifteen years there. Dadaab is referred to as an "Open Prison" by the refugees living there because they are not allowed to leave the camp. Despite the difficulties of life at the camp, I completed primary and secondary school in Dadaab.

I cannot talk about my time in the camp without mentioning the one person who had the most influence on my life. Her name is Susana Martinez, and she worked with UNHCR in the Community Service Program. Susana never stopped watching over my brother and me; she would always look for us when she visited the camp. Hassan and I were very disappointed when we heard the news that Susana had been transferred to Bangladesh. When she got to Bangladesh, Susana asked the resettlement agency in Dadaab to follow up with us, and that was when they finally reached out. I fully believe that she shaped me into the person I am today. Without her, I may not have been resettled or have even completed high school. I thank Susana for her kindness, and I will always continue to help others and provide support like Susana did for me and Hassan.

My wife, Sarura, and I still live near Lancaster, Pennsylvania, with our five children, in a community that is home to many other resettled refugees from Dadaab. Hassan also lives with us and helps take care of the children. He still attends adult education classes, and the medical care he receives in the United States helps control his seizures and helps him sleep better at night. We are regularly in touch with our mother and Fatuma, and other friends and loved ones who still live in Dadaab, and visit whenever we can.

I have always wanted to write a book to educate others about my experience as a refugee. I had already started drafting my story when I met Victoria. The minute I first met with Vicki, I had confidence in sharing my story with her. I am impressed by her commitment and determination to work with me despite my busy daily life, which necessitates contacting me during my work lunch breaks, coming

to my home late in the evening or early mornings, and using texts, calls, Facebook, and other creative communication techniques.

In my current role with Church World Service, I work with refugees from the first day they arrive in the US, helping them to reach self-sufficiency within the guidelines of the State Department. I am always motivated and encouraged by the success of those whom I have helped to resettle.

I am also the founder of a project called Refugee Strong, which focuses on improving and making education available to all children in refugee camps. Twice in the last few years, I have returned to Dadaab to volunteer in the schools as a mentor. With the help of CWS-Lancaster and the greater Lancaster community, Refugee Strong was able to deliver school supplies to the students who are unable to afford them. Having grown up in Dadaab, I am a constant advocate for those who continue living in any refugee camp around the world.

Empowering and supporting refugees is key to helping them succeed not only in the camps but also in their new communities. No one chooses to be a refugee, to leave their home, country, and family. The last thing I wanted in this world was to be a refugee. I have worked hard to overcome my challenges as a refugee, but I would not have been able to do it without the staff of UNHCR, Save the Children, World Food Programme, Care International, Church World Service, the Islamic Community Center of Lancaster, PACRI, and the DSAK Foundation. I would also like to thank Dawna Foster, my mentor at the University of Arizona. I am grateful to the Garver family, who became very close with me and my family. Thank you to all of the individuals and organizations who have helped and supported me along the way.

I want to thank my wife, Sarura, for all her support. She is a very patient and caring mother and wife. The way she loves and cares for Hassan has created a remarkable bond between the two of them, and this is an additional blessing to me.

Please take away from the reading of this book an understanding that you should never give up hope. In the camp, we were given courage by our faith to always be patient and to never lose hope. Things may seem impossible, but if you keep working hard and believe in yourself, you can overcome anything in your path. I hope that my story will inspire you to always persevere.

AUTHOR'S NOTE
VICTORIA JAMIESON

The seeds for *When Stars Are Scattered* were first planted in my life in 2016. The world around me seemed to be growing increasingly chaotic, and the news was filled with stories of Syrian refugees fleeing their homes. I wanted to gain a better understanding of the issue, so I began volunteering with a nonprofit in my community, greeting arriving refugee families at the airport, and later working as a cultural liaison.

I began to wonder if there might be a way I could put my background as a graphic novelist to use. I love graphic novels because they are such an intimate reading experience. What would it be like to read a graphic novel about one person's life as a refugee? When I met Omar through his work at Church World Service, he was already working on a memoir geared toward adults and was looking for a coauthor. I told him that adult books were not my area of expertise, and asked if he had ever considered writing his story as a children's book. We sat down to talk about what that might look like; *When Stars Are Scattered* is the answer.

This is Omar's story, and I tried to change as little as possible as I adapted it into a graphic novel. My first priority, in every step of the process, was making sure I was being true to his memories and experiences. To write this book, Omar and I would meet every few weeks, and he would tell me another chapter of his life story. I would write it up, send it to him, and we'd meet again to discuss the details. Eventually, I began adding sketches and setting the story in a graphic novel format. When I had to invent characters, like Nimo and Maryam, I based them on Omar's memories and my own research. I am incredibly grateful to Omar for his bravery and willingness to share his story with young readers. I am humbled and honored that he trusted me with this project. The greatest privilege of working on this book has been getting to know Omar and his family, as well as our colorist, Iman Geddy. As a graphic novelist, I am used to telling stories; working on this book with Omar and Iman has taught me it is equally important to listen to stories.

I am also grateful for you, young readers, for picking up this book and reading about the experiences of someone else. Maybe Omar's

story is similar to your story, the story of someone in your family, someone in your town, or maybe he is like no one you've ever met before. I wanted to write this book for you because I know that young people have the most compassionate, open hearts, and that you have the energy to truly make a difference. I hope that you'll look at Omar's website and think of ways your school or community can participate in empowering the thousands of kids who still live and go to school in refugee camps, or new refugee families right in your own town. Lastly, I hope that you will be inspired to talk with someone new. Maybe there's a new kid at your school or a new family in your neighborhood. Maybe there's a kid you've seen for years but have never spoken to. Try it. Talk to them. Ask them their name, where they're from, what kind of food they like to eat, what TV shows they like to watch. You hear some amazing stories when you talk to someone new.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people contributed their time and energy to the creation of this book. To our many beta readers who gave feedback on early versions of this story, we thank you. Your knowledge, expertise, and experiences helped shape this book, and we couldn't have done it without you.

To the staff of Church World Service in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, thank you for your support and enthusiasm for this project. Thank you to Emily Cintora for providing photographs from Dadaab.

Our publishing team at Dial Books for Young Readers worked tirelessly to make this book the very best it could be. Our editor, Kate Harrison, publisher Lauri Hornik, and art director Jason Henry were with us every step of the way. To everyone at Dial: Ellen Cormier, Nancy Mercado, Lily Malcolm, Regina Castillo, Rachel Wease, Carmela Iaria, Vanessa Carson, Trevor Ingerson, Summer Ogata, Elyse Marshall, Christina Colangelo, Emily Romero, and the rest of the gang—thank you for the amazing work you do. Thank you to Paul Rodeen, agent extraordinaire. Iman Geddy supplied the amazing colors (and amazing encouragement!) that saw this project across the finish line.

To our families, thank you for the support and love during the long process of making a graphic novel.

Lastly, thank you to all new immigrants to the US—for sharing their stories with us, and for making this country a richer place to live.

OMAR MOHAMED & VICTORIA JAMIESON