

Arami, a 24 year old Somali refugee woman living in Cairo

Arami had a dream childhood in Somalia. She lived in a lovely villa with a small garden where she used to run around with her young friends. It was her mother's passion to look after the garden.

School lessons were held each day in a large sheltered courtyard until midday, but Fridays were taken up with visits to her grandmother who lived by the sea-side. There, the family dined on cakes and delicacies.

Her Italian-educated father worked as a trader in a company in Mogadishu. Arami misses the delicious Italian food he would often serve up to his family. He was killed during one of the too frequent massacres that has wracked Somalia during its long civil war.

"It was awful," recalls Arami. "We ran away leaving everything behind... we were in our pyjamas...we couldn't even think of taking anything with us."

Arami and her family stayed for a few months with relatives in Afgooye, a town 30 kilometres south of Mogadishu. Somehow, Arami's mother was able to arrange passports for her children and her own mother, and the family travelled to Kenya and then to Egypt.

In Cairo, Arami has rebuilt her life. She was able to go to a private secondary school. She studied hard and received a scholarship to study chemistry at Egypt's Ain Shams University. Arami graduated in 2001.

She enjoys her new life in Cairo. "I have lots of Egyptian friends. My Arabic is very good and my friends say I am pure Egyptian as I am so involved in their day-to-day life. I also have a few Somali friends, colleagues from work. On weekends, we either stay at home to chat together, or we go out to Internet cafes or to the movies. I used to go to a club to dance but not anymore since I put on the veil."

But there are times when Arami feels homesick and dreams of a future when she is no longer a refugee. "If I could, I would like to receive another scholarship and pursue my education further. I feel I have lots of potential and the ability to give. I want to build myself a good and successful future. It is the dream of every refugee to be resettled in a third country. I would like to resettle in the US as my older brother lives there. But if there is an opportunity for a real future at home, I will definitely go back. As they say: 'There is no place like home.' "