

## READING CHALLENGE

# The Boy Who Lived in an Airport

*He slept on a bench. He ate at a fast food restaurant. His home was an airport.*

<b>Level</b>	A1 (Beginner)
<b>Age Group</b>	Teens (11-16)
<b>Topic</b>	Everyday Stories
<b>Duration</b>	~12 minutes
<b>Skill</b>	Reading

This is a strange but true story. A man lived in an **airport** for eighteen years. He did not work there. He was not waiting for a **flight**. He lived there. He slept there. He ate there. The **airport** was his home. His name was Mehran Karimi Nasseri. This is his story.

## Who Was Mehran?

Mehran was born in Iran in 1946. When he was a young man, he left Iran. He wanted a new life in Europe. But life was not easy for him. He went to many countries. He went to Belgium. He went to the United Kingdom. He went to France. He went to Germany. But he had a big problem. He did not have the right documents. Without the right papers, it is very hard to live in a new country.

In 1986, Belgium gave Mehran **refugee** papers. These papers said he could stay in Belgium. But Mehran did not want to stay in Belgium. He wanted to go to the United Kingdom. So he bought a plane ticket to London. He was going to fly from Paris.

## The Lost Briefcase

This is where the problems started. On his way to Paris, something terrible happened. Mehran lost his briefcase. His **passport** was in the briefcase. His **refugee** papers were in the briefcase. All his important documents were gone.

Mehran arrived at Charles de Gaulle **Airport** in Paris. He wanted to fly to London. But at the **border** control, the officers said: "Where is your **passport**?" Mehran did not have it. "Where are your papers?" He did not have them. Without papers, he could not get on the plane to London.

Okay, he thought. I will go back to Belgium. But there was another problem. Belgium said: "You left our country. Your **refugee** papers are not valid now. You cannot come back." France said: "You do not have papers. You cannot enter France." He was **stuck**.

## Stuck in the Middle

Think about this. Mehran was inside the **airport**. But the **airport** is a special place. When you are in the **terminal** but you have not passed **border** control, you are not really "in" the country. You are in a space between countries. Mehran was in France, but he was not in France. He could not go forward. He could not go back. He was **stuck** in the middle.

The French police did not know what to do with him. He was not doing anything wrong. He was not a criminal. He was just a man without papers. They could not send him anywhere because no country would take him. So they left him in the **airport**.

## Life in Terminal 1

Mehran found a red **bench** in **Terminal** 1. This **bench** became his bed. He put his **luggage** next to it. He made a small area for himself. This was his home now.

Every day was the same. He woke up early. He went to the bathroom to wash his face and brush his teeth. He got dressed. He was always very clean. His clothes were always neat. Then he sat on his **bench**. He read the newspaper. He read many books. He wrote in his diary. He wrote the story of his life.

For food, Mehran ate at the **airport** restaurants. **Airport** workers and kind strangers often bought food for him. He ate at Burger King almost every day. The Burger King workers knew him very well. They liked him. Many people at the **airport** liked him. He was quiet and polite.

## The Years Go By

One year passed. Then two years. Then five years. Then ten years. Mehran was still in the **airport**. Every day, thousands of passengers walked past him. They were going to exciting places. They were going home to their families. Mehran watched them all. He was always on his **bench**. He was always reading. He was always waiting.

Was he **lonely**? Sometimes. He did not have a family to visit him. He did not have a home to go to. But Mehran said he was okay. He said: "I am waiting. One day, my situation will change." He was a patient man. He waited for years and years.

The **airport** became his world. He knew every shop. He knew every restaurant. He knew the cleaners, the police officers, the shop workers. Some of them became his friends. They talked to him every day. They brought him things he needed. But at night, the **airport** got quiet. The shops closed. The passengers went away. And Mehran was alone on his red **bench**.

## Mehran Becomes Famous

In the 1990s, newspapers started to write about Mehran. His story was incredible. A man living in an **airport**! Journalists came from all over the world to interview him. They took photos of him on his red **bench**. They filmed him reading his books. Mehran became **famous**.

Then, in 2004, a big Hollywood movie came out. It was called "The **Terminal**." It starred the actor Tom Hanks. In the movie, a man gets **stuck** in a New York **airport** because of problems with his papers. The movie was based on Mehran's story! Mehran received some money from the movie company. But he was still in the **airport**.

## Why Did He Stay So Long?

This is the question everyone asks. Over the years, some countries offered to let Mehran in. France said he could live in France. Belgium said he could come back. But Mehran said no. He wanted to go to the United Kingdom. That was his dream. He did not want to go anywhere

else.

Some people think Mehran was afraid to leave. The **airport** was safe. He knew the **airport**. He had a routine. Outside the **airport**, everything was different. Outside was scary. Inside was familiar. After so many years, the **airport** was the only home he knew.

## Leaving the Airport

In 2006, after eighteen years, Mehran finally left the **airport**. He was sick. He needed to go to a hospital. An ambulance came and took him away. It was the first time in eighteen years that he was outside the **airport**.

After the hospital, Mehran lived in a shelter in Paris. A shelter is a place where people without homes can sleep and eat. He lived there for many years. He was quiet. He did not talk to many people. He missed his **bench**. He missed his **airport**.

## The End of the Story

Mehran Karimi Nasserri died on 12 November 2022. He was 76 years old. And where did he die? At Charles de Gaulle **Airport**. He had gone back to the **airport**. The place where he spent eighteen years of his life. The place that was his home.

His story is sad, but it is also important. It makes us think about **freedom**. Most of us can travel anywhere. We have a **passport**. We have a home. We have a country. But some people do not have these things. Some people are **stuck**. Like Mehran on his red **bench**, they wait for someone to help them.

## What Can We Learn?

Mehran's story teaches us something simple but important. A **passport** is just a small book. But without it, you cannot go anywhere. We often forget how lucky we are. We can go to school. We can go home. We can visit other countries. Mehran could not do any of these things. He sat on a **bench** for eighteen years.

His story also shows us that people can survive very hard situations. Mehran lived in an **airport** for almost two decades. He stayed clean. He stayed polite. He read books. He wrote his diary. He did not give up. Even when life was very, very difficult, he kept going. That is something we can all learn from — the man who lived in an **airport**.

# Vocabulary

Term	Definition
<b>airport</b>	a place where planes take off and land
<b>passport</b>	a small book with your photo that you need to travel to other countries
<b>bench</b>	a long seat for two or more people, often in a park or station
<b>luggage</b>	the bags and suitcases you carry when you travel
<b>passenger</b>	a person who travels in a plane, train, bus, or car
<b>refugee</b>	a person who leaves their country because it is not safe
<b>flight</b>	a journey in a plane from one place to another
<b>terminal</b>	a big building at an airport where passengers go to catch their planes
<b>stuck</b>	not able to move or go anywhere
<b>border</b>	the line between two countries
<b>document</b>	an important paper, like a passport or ID card
<b>stranger</b>	a person you do not know
<b>lonely</b>	feeling sad because you are alone
<b>famous</b>	known by many people
<b>freedom</b>	being able to go where you want and do what you want

# Comprehension Quiz

## 1. Where did Mehran Nasserri live for 18 years?

- A) In a hotel in Paris
- B) In Charles de Gaulle Airport
- C) In a train station in London
- D) In a park in Belgium

## 2. Why could Mehran not leave the airport?

- A) He was afraid of flying
- B) He liked the airport food
- C) He did not have the right documents to enter any country
- D) He was working at the airport

## 3. Where did Mehran sleep every night?

- A) In a bed in a hotel room
- B) On the floor near the shops
- C) On a red bench in Terminal 1
- D) In a plane

## 4. What movie was based on Mehran's story?

- A) Home Alone
- B) The Terminal
- C) Cast Away
- D) The Airport Man

## 5. When did Mehran finally leave the airport?

- A) In 1995
- B) In 2000
- C) In 2006
- D) In 2010

# Answer Key

#	Answer	Question
1	<b>B</b>	1. Where did Mehran Nasserli live for 18 years?
2	<b>C</b>	2. Why could Mehran not leave the airport?
3	<b>C</b>	3. Where did Mehran sleep every night?
4	<b>B</b>	4. What movie was based on Mehran's story?
5	<b>C</b>	5. When did Mehran finally leave the airport?