



18 YEARS

LEVEL: B1+

The Man Who Lived in an Airport for 18 Years

In 1988, a man named Mehran Karimi Nasseri arrived at Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris. He was planning to travel to the United Kingdom. However, when he tried to board the plane, airport officials stopped him. His passport and documents were missing. Because of a series of political and legal problems, he had no valid papers that proved his nationality. Without them, no country would accept him. Nasseri was not allowed to enter France, but he also could not leave the airport. This strange situation marked the beginning of an unbelievable story. He would live inside the airport for the next 18 years.

Nasseri was originally from Iran. He said he had lost his documents while traveling, but later it became clear that his legal status was very complicated. Some countries considered him a refugee, others did not recognize him at all. Without official identity, he became a man without a country. The airport became the only place where he was allowed to stay. He could not cross the border into France, but he also could not return to his homeland.

At first, everyone believed that the problem would be solved quickly. Nasseri slept on a bench, used public toilets, and ate food from airport cafés. Days became weeks, and weeks became months. Slowly, he created a small life inside Terminal 1. He kept his belongings in suitcases, washed in the airport bathrooms, and spent his days reading newspapers and talking to airport staff. Some workers felt sorry for him and brought him food. Others simply accepted him as part of the building, like a piece of furniture that was always there.

As time passed, Nasseri became a familiar figure. Journalists discovered his story and wrote articles about “the man who lived in the airport.” Travelers took photos of him. Some people felt deep sympathy, while others were confused. How could a human being be trapped in a place made for short stays and quick movement?

Psychologically, the situation was very difficult. Living in a public space without privacy, silence, or real rest can slowly break a person. Nasseri had no home, no stable relationships, and no control over his future. Yet, he survived. He created routines. He woke up, shaved, read, walked around the terminal, and talked to people. Routine helped him stay sane. The airport became his world.

Several times, lawyers tried to help him. At one point, he even received documents that would allow him to leave. But after living so long in the airport, Nasseri felt afraid of change. The outside world had become unknown and dangerous. The airport, although uncomfortable, was familiar and safe. This is a common psychological effect called “institutionalization,” when people become emotionally dependent on the place that limits them.

y “case,” there is a soul that needs a place to belong.



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His story became famous worldwide and later inspired the movie *The Terminal*, starring Tom Hanks. However, the real story was less romantic and more painful. Nasseri was not a tourist waiting for a visa. He was a man whose identity had disappeared in a system of borders, laws, and bureaucracy. A small mistake with papers turned into a life sentence in a transit zone.

After 18 years, in 2006, Nasseri finally left the airport. His health had become weak, and he was taken to a hospital. Later, he was placed in a shelter in Paris. For the first time in almost two decades, he slept in a real bed and closed a door behind him. Yet freedom was not simple. The world had changed. Technology, society, and daily life were different. He had to learn how to live again.

This story shocked people because it showed how fragile human identity can be. A passport, a stamp, or a missing document can decide where a person belongs. Without them, even basic rights disappear. Nasseri's life raised serious questions: Can a human being exist outside the system? What happens when no country takes responsibility for a person?

The man who lived in an airport for 18 years became a symbol of modern displacement. In a world of borders and laws, he showed that sometimes a person can fall through the cracks and be forgotten. His story reminds us that behind every document, there is a human life, and behind ever