They fled Nigeria in 2017. “We didn’t carry that much with us,” Tani recalls. “We just left for a new life.”

The family arrived in New York City six months later. They had little more than the clothes on their backs. Though Tani’s parents got jobs, they couldn’t afford to rent an apartment. They had no choice but to move into a homeless shelter.

Tani shared a room with his older brother, Austin. They were on a different floor than their parents. They didn’t have a TV to watch or a fridge filled with snacks. “It was rough,” Tani says.

Game Changer

As Tani adjusted to a new country and learned a new

He couldn’t believe it. Last March, Tani Adewumi won a New York State chess championship. He’d just learned how to play chess about a year earlier. And he was competing against players who had more experience. No one expected him to win.

Tani didn’t realize it at the time, but that victory would change his life.

Escaping Danger

Less than two years earlier, Tani and his family had been living in Nigeria. That’s a country in Africa. Tani was born in the war-torn nation.

Terrorists in the country have been launching deadly attacks for more than 10 years.

The family was constantly afraid for their lives. They knew they had to escape the danger.

What Tani Wants You to Know

People were generous to my family. We’re giving back by helping others. Everyone needs help sometimes.

Don’t give up on your goals. The first tournament I played in didn’t go well. But I never stopped trying.

Talent alone won’t get you far. You might get lucky once in a while, but it takes hard work to succeed.
language, he also started a new school. He didn’t know anyone. Then he found a group to connect with: the chess club.

The chess club met every Thursday for two hours. Every night after he finished his homework, Tani would lie on the floor of the shelter and practice for three more hours. All that hard work paid off. He took home the trophy at the tournament last year.

“It was so big, I couldn’t carry it” Tani remembers.

A New Home

Tani wound up with more than just a trophy. His quick rise from novice to champ caught the attention of a reporter from The New York Times. That’s one of the biggest newspapers in the country. When his story appeared in the news, people around the world donated more than $200,000 to help the Adewumis.

But the family didn’t keep any of it. Instead, Tani’s parents used the money to set up an organization to help other refugees like them. Someone who was inspired by Tani’s story even offered to pay the rent on an apartment for a year. Tani finally had a place to call his own!

Now the fourth-grader has a kitchen where his mom cooks his favorite meals. And he has a laptop for practicing chess. He has his sights set on this year’s state championship. Though last year’s tournament will be pretty hard to top.

“It completely changed my life,” Tani says.

—by Tricia Culligan

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT . . .

Refugees and Immigrants

More than 1 million people from around the world resettle in the U.S. each year. But they don’t all come here for the same reason.

Refugees, like Tani, are forced to leave their country to escape danger, such as war or gang violence. They leave behind their homes, family, and most of their belongings. Most will never return home because it is too unsafe.

Immigrants choose to leave their homes to settle in a different country with more opportunities, like better jobs or schools. Unlike refugees, they usually have time to plan their travel, pack, and say goodbye to friends and family.

WORDS TO KNOW

terrorists noun, plural. people who violently attack innocent people to accomplish a goal

novice noun. a person who has just started learning or doing something