

ESOL VOICES: Student Spotlight

Dilan Aziz

Dilan Aziz is an ESOL student from Syria who began taking classes at MCC last fall. Dilan and her family were the first refugee family from Syria to be resettled in Rochester. Dilan is currently in the school of Health Sciences and Physical Wellness at MCC. In this story, Dilan writes about how the war stole her dreams. She shared this story with MCC faculty and staff at the HGHRP's annual January workshop.



Photo courtesy of Google Images, 2017

Lost Dreams in the War

Life cannot completely be as we want, but we can change its shape to a better one. Life can also be not fair, hard to understand and disappointing, but there is always a shining light that can be seen if you look for it. Every one of us has memories from this life that make them either upset when they remember or make them smile.

One of those things that can't be forgotten for me is a day in 2011. It was unforgettable not only for me, but also my friends and some neighbors who shared a scary event.

My friends and I were in a different city than our families. The city was called Deir Al-Zor in Syria. We were there to attend Al-Furat University. I was there to study English literature. After twelve years of studying, I finally found what I was looking for which was English literature. I was in the 6th grade when I started to love this language because of my English teacher who was following a perfect way of teaching.

In Deir Al-Zor, I rented an apartment with four of my friends and I was the youngest. It was my first year of university. When we enrolled, the Syrian War just started.

On that dark day, everything had started normally. We woke up in the morning, ate breakfast together, and went to the University. It seemed like every day because there was nothing that interrupted life. At night, I was studying with two of my friends on the balcony of our apartment. At the same time, hundreds of people were down on the street at 11:30 p.m. It was a demonstration. They were cheering, "Long live the revolution" and "We want freedom!" and holding candles. Those people were against the Syrian government, and a group of people who named themselves "The Free Army" was supporting the demonstrations. They were singing revolutionary songs.

In that city, it seemed like whatever the father was doing, the kids would be doing the same thing. There were parents with their kids in the street. They were so loud that you could hear them even if you were five miles away. They were well organized and lined up like they were praying. Women were watching from their houses. I also noticed on one of the balconies, a neighbor and his wife were drinking coffee and watching, and their little boy was playing

around them and laughing like that was the most enjoyable part of his day.

Suddenly, a strong voice shook the entire neighborhood, and silence was all I could hear for a moment. I couldn't think where the noise came from and what it was for. At the same moment, I looked in front of me, but I couldn't see anything because of the dust. The only thing I could see was the little boy who was playing around his parents flew from the balcony down where I couldn't see him anymore. Old and young people were all crying and shouting, "We got bombed!" I ran into the apartment in a shock, but I went back to watch what was happening. My friends were so scared. Though I was the youngest, I was the only one who wasn't crying. I didn't know why I had no reaction like everyone else.

While I was trying to understand what was happening, I saw women crying and looking all around for their kids. The street looked like it was washed with blood. The shooting noises were louder than the scared voices. I didn't know where the shooting was coming from, but focused on the street. It looked like

everyone was lost. More than a hundred cars came in to take the wounded people to the hospital in a few minutes. Those people who came in for help were leaving some wounded people on the ground. I couldn't understand why they were doing that, so I whispered to my friend in a scared and shaking voice, "Why don't they take everyone? No one is preferred more than the other."

My friend's answer crossed my ears as lightning and disappointed me. She said, "It is probably because they died."

The scene was getting a little bit clearer and we noticed that the building across from our building was completely destroyed and became rubble. While we were watching, the landlord of our apartment came with his wife to ask us to go and hide with them and their kids because it was dangerous to stay.

After going to their apartment, the landlord's brother-in-law came to explain what happened. He told us that 35 people were killed and 130 people were wounded. He didn't know who did that. We spent the whole night packing our stuff to be ready to leave at any time.

At 5:30 a.m., I received a call from my father. He told me he was going to try to find a way to escape. My father called me again after 10 minutes and told me that he talked to a bus owner who could help us if we could get to the transit center. I tried to look outside to see if the street was getting safer for us to leave, but when I looked through the window, a member of the Free Army tried to shoot me. I didn't really understand why he did that, but I thought it was like a message telling everyone to stay home or to be killed. I had no other choice than stepping back and

sitting scared.

When it was finally a good time to leave the neighborhood, a taxi stopped and took us to the transit center. Luckily, we left before fighting got started again. It took us 5 hours to get to our city when it usually takes less than 3 hours because we were stopped by many security blocks on our way.

Finally, I met my family that was waiting and praying for me to be safe. My mother shared with the neighbors her happiness by sending them candy. I escaped but my books and pens didn't. They preferred to stay dreams and not to become a truth. Twelve years of hard studying were gone in few minutes. I couldn't help my dreams and keep them safe because they were hurt with the rest of the wounded people, but I promised to rebuild them again, and that is what I'm doing now.