

I was really free when I lived in Damascus; not in Sweida, though. All kinds of people live in Damascus. That's why I say that I am from Damascus, not from Sweida. First I lived on the university campus, then with a friend of mine, then with my sister. So we were two girls living away from our family in the city. Ultimately, I lived alone in Bab Tuma, a borough of the Old City of Damascus. But my friend's apartment was directly next to mine so I practically never lived alone.

How did we live in Aleppo? We actually lived like rats. We were not able to say a word.

So when I used to see my aunt, my mother, and my father standing with Bashar al-Assad, I was very pissed off! My father had taught us to hate Hafez [Bashar's father]. Then they stood with Bashar because the churches received money when Bashar came to power.

I've made a song for the revolution. Half of the people were defending the country for Bashar, and the other half were defending it for its own sake; I was one of those. They defend for the sake of Bashar and I defend for the sake of our country, not for the sake of anyone. Now when they say "Syria," I associate the word with Bashar, the Syria with the Egyptian flag (by the way, this is not really the Syrian flag).

I used to be scared each time I saw a picture of Hafez al-Assad; my parents taught us to hate him. That's why I started shouting out of happiness when I saw people destroying his statue.

The school was full of the Ba'ath Party. The salute to the flag and the salute to the Leader are similar to those the Nazis made to Hitler. So it is a kind of worship to Bashar al-Assad and his father Hafez, the Eternal Leader.

But people used to worship Hafez and still do until now. When Bashar came to power, he tried to change things a bit. I remember they introduced information and computers to us in schools. He came from Britain; I mean, same shit! There were changes. For example, when my turn came they abolished military training for the youth. The last year was 2003. It was still a military training. The main difference was that now they insulted us by not calling it a military training. For example, they would make us stand for hours under the sun, every day in the morning. A morning of the songs and voice of Fairuz. And if we don't have the same political opinions as Fairuz—she's pro-Assad/Hezbollah lately—it's even better. We should be able to separate her voice and her opinions. I was raised hearing her voice and got used to it.

As we were saying yesterday, we were forcibly raised by Assad; thus we speak like him, we write like him. But we're trying to become more aware.

Sarah  
Chicago, 2017

The pressure I had to endure in Lebanon concerned all Syrians in general: from arranging a residency permit to finding work, etc. Secondly, I am from Zabadani, and there was a conflict between the Hezb [Hezbollah] and the people from Zabadani. There were fierce battles there between the regime and the rebels because the region is very strategic. But because it was surrounded by Lebanese borders, the Hezb, helping the regime against the rebels, was able to win.

Zabadani and Lebanon: there's a lot of affinity between the families on both sides. Despite the battles that were going on, the people from Zabadani (most of them were living in Baalbek in Lebanon) were not treated badly—by the people I mean, not by the Hezb. So despite the battles there was a kind of solidarity between the people: between the Shiites in Baalbek and the people who fled from Zabadani.

I consider it very wrong to fight. Because fighting is happening between ourselves. Even if someone came to kill me in Islam—they say: if a Muslim comes to kill you, turn your back to him. And I would act the same whether he was a Christian, a Sunni, or a Shiite.

Actually, it is really a conspiracy and the regime is part of it. This is what happened to Syria in order to safeguard its existence and its interests as well as the interests of the powerful nations. When Russia and the US agree on a truce, there is a truce. Not one time did the fighting stop because the Syrians asked for it, be it the opposition or any other party.

I married ten days ago. It could happen only by chance. It's not a love story; there's no love. We met in a used furniture store. Some days you have to do things you don't want to. We were buying furniture from a secondhand shop for my nephew's apartment. My nephew was disassembling a table. He came to him and told him he was looking for a woman to marry.

My nephew told him, there's my aunt. I told him I didn't want to. I was against this marriage. My nephew gave him my telephone number and told him: "Convince her!" So he convinced me. We got engaged. He got me a ring. In the beginning, we kept fighting. Then we got married. There was no wedding, no party: he didn't have the means to have a party and I didn't want to do one. My hope is elsewhere. We got married with an imam [Muslim religious leader] in the mosque.

His wife had died. He's been here for forty years. His wife was German. I'm from Aleppo.

It's life. You can't be perfect all the time.

I live with my mother and father in Chicago. I'm a single Arab mom. It's hard but I've got it. My son thinks his father is dead. When he asked me what had happened to him, the social worker told me that we cannot explain to him what happened before he's fourteen years old, so that he doesn't ask me why he left me and other questions of the kind... We spoke about this last year. Monday is the Day of the Dead, so he wrote "My father is dead." His father is older than me but he was not ready to have children, so we separated. I was twenty-five when I divorced but it's alright. Other men wanted to marry me after I divorced and even as a single mom, but I refused.

I grew up in Kuwait and Jordan but I don't want to return there because our culture doesn't accept divorced women. Here you are accepted but there, once you're a divorced woman, it's as if you've become a threat, and you are marginalized. They talk behind your back and that kind of thing in all Arab countries. And even if you want to marry another time, and find someone, they don't let you. They forbid men to marry divorced women. The woman becomes suspect. I didn't fall in love afterwards... Or I did, but I no longer wanted to get married anymore. I am focused on raising my child and cultivating my skills.

I think I am a strong woman. If I wasn't like that in this world, people would have eaten me alive a long time ago.

My mom is a retired professor. She used to teach physics at the university in Jordan. She graduated in Pakistan. She studied there in the 1970s for some six or seven years. She lived there on her own.

Salma  
Chicago, 2017

I am for peaceful cohabitation and respect for the other.

One time, at the university in Damascus, we wanted to stage a strike. All my colleagues were there with me but suddenly, at the last minute, no one joined in, and I had to enter the director's office all alone. The only person who joined me was my girlfriend. And as soon as I entered his office, I felt so stupid that I had to apologize for that "strike." Since we ended up alone, it wasn't relevant anymore.

The next day they issued a decree forbidding more than two people to hang out together. And this was at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Damascus!

I've waited for a week or even two at the Qamishli airport [in Syria]. First, we stood for two days in queue in front of the office of Fly Damascus. I was with my daughter. Everything was fine and we got the tickets. Then they made us wait for ten days at the checkpoint. It belonged to the regime gangs, and it was only a few meters away from the airport entrance. And when we finally got to the airport an officer took me to the side and told me, there's no leaving without a payoff! "Either you give me a payoff or you go back to the end of the queue." Of course I understood what he wanted, but I acted dumb. I told him, "God be my witness, I don't have any penny left! They stripped us!" And indeed they had stripped us. It was during the summer and we were waiting under the sun. To no avail—we had to return and wait in the queue. We waited another seven days.

He wouldn't let us out, except in return for a sexual favor from me or my daughter! So we had to be very cautious with those regime gangsters.

One day at dawn, it was still very early and there were hardly any officers on the checkpoint. The guy whose turn it was also worked in the airport. He knew me and my daughter by heart now. And God be my witness, without taking any money he agreed to let us pass! And we passed! We finally traveled and came to Germany.

Among those benefitting the most from this war is Rami, the owner of the travel company. My God, the quantity of money that he is making today out of the war and people escaping! The cousin of Assad, yes!



It's nice to see all the buildings destroyed. As I go from one street to the next I pass directly through the middle of the building. It's a nice feeling!

I used to pray when I was a kid but when I turned twelve, I entered into the world of alcohol. My father hated the fact that both my brother and I drank. We drink Flash (XL) and Grant's, champagne, vodka. There are three shops in Kherbet al-Ward, our neighborhood.

I heard that Porsche and Mercedes are offering learning opportunities.

I had a team in Kherbet. I like to play ball. This is a picture from the team. The Peace Team: this was the name of my football team. I used to run it. It was registered with FIFA.

Now I feel completely at sea. I do want to do an *Ausbildung* [three-year degree] in Germany. I need to learn to become a mechanic. I had previously worked with furniture. Mechanics for cars, either Porsche or Mercedes.

Inan al Natifiyyah, an anarchist poet from Baghdad around the year 850, was a *jaryah*—a sort of a female slave, an odalisque. She was famous for her beauty. And she wrote poetry. Even Harun al-Rashid heard about her. And the famous poet Abu Nawas was in love with her. In a satirical poem she wrote about him, she said: “Die whenever you want, since I have mentioned you in my poetry and pull from your pride the veil thrown over your shameful tail.”

My family was in Raqqa and I suddenly lost all contact with them. The Americans wanted to bomb their town, among others, because ISIS had taken control of it. The towns were actually supposed to be evacuated so that the Americans could bomb them and attack ISIS. But in fact—and no one talked about that—ISIS forced everyone, all the remaining inhabitants, to go back to their houses. And then the American airplanes started bombing all the villages there.

It's been a week now; I have no sign from any members of my family: my eight children, my wives, my parents, and parents-in-law. I am unable to focus. I broke my leg the other day on the construction site where I work in Beirut. Why am I still alive? If I only knew whether they are already dead or not... but this uncertain situation is driving me crazy.

Our region is very rich in water, in oil, in ancient ruins! That's why everyone wants to control it and is fighting to have control there! We are at the Euphrates River, overlooking the Euphrates Valley, near the Ja'bar fortress. It is an amazing area there!

Samir  
Beirut, 2016

As we say in Arabic: “Egypt is the mother of the world.”

If you have a secret you can tell it to the Nile. The Nile has a terrible sound but at the same time you feel something tender, something that overwhelms you with love, with stories. There’s nothing as beautiful as Cairo at night. It’s a jewel of magic. It’s not the same during the daytime. At night, you can see the Nile glimmering amazingly.

There’s nothing I hate in Egypt, except the police of course.

My daughters are with me in Morocco and I also have two sons. They stayed with their mother in Baalbek, Lebanon. I am trying to bring them all to Morocco. If this happens, I'll have to set up two houses: one for my Moroccan wife with our two daughters and one for my Syrian wife with our two sons. We all lived in Syria; my first wife is Syrian and the second one is Moroccan. That's why I could escape here with her and our daughters. But my Syrian wife couldn't come, and my boys are still with her in Lebanon even now!

Ali  
Casablanca, 2015

I have been living for a year in the Netherlands; I speak Dutch pretty well now. I originally speak Arabic (Lebanese and Syrian) and English. I like dancing a lot, breakdancing especially, and to be honest, I don't like women... This made it easier for me to get my permit for the Netherlands. Because my situation is more delicate than others'. The procedure was faster.

My mother is from Chiyah, in Lebanon, and my father is from a little village situated on the border between Syria and Lebanon. My passport is Syrian and I grew up in Syria. We were in Jaramana.

I am planning to have an operation to change my sex. If I do it in the Netherlands, it will be successful hopefully. I first have to undertake hormone replacement therapy. It's a lengthy process and I will be patient.

In 2009, I wanted to go see Ziad al-Rahbani [a musician, the son of Fairuz] in Damascus, but was not able to do so. My cousins went but I couldn't join.

Sweida is even closer to Daraa. My father had olives. I used to go with him to harvest olives; no one beside me wanted to go with him. We used to love the same things. To him, olives are like a home.

I was thirteen, in the eighth grade, when he died.

The time I spent in Lebanese University was really scary— I mean traumatic. Mentally harmful, I mean, there was mental decay everywhere. In other words, male chauvinism and physical threats were constantly present. There were also threats of a political nature. You say something and you have the thugs of [Hassan] Nasrallah [Secretary General of Hezbollah] on your back.

The buildings of the university cost a lot. Their aspect is brutal. The campus is brutal.

You feel that you're in a place that wants to destroy you, but at the same time, you're not scared because you're under their influence.

The dialect I speak is the dialect of prisoners. As I spent sixteen years in jails, I have learned a special language, or a special lingo. It does not belong to some specific region in Syria, but to the country of jails there.

Yassine  
Istanbul, 2015



I was the only one who knew that my brother had defected. That Friday the Shabiha [the pro-Assad militia] came to Idlib. They used to come up from Latakia. They would show them on television and you'd see them walking in processions, like wedding processions. And they filmed them in the alleys. That's why the weapons started to spread in the city.

So how did my brother defect? There were not enough tank commanders and he was one, so the Syrian Army, which he was still part of at that time, insisted on bringing him to Idlib so they'd have some firepower there. He went to Jabal Zawiya in Idlib, to the Khan Shaykhun neighborhood. They ordered a column of tanks and armored cars to go from Damascus to Idlib and my brother was in one of the tanks.

Before going there, he made contact with the Free Army in Jabal Zawiya to arrange his defection from the Syrian Army. Jabal Zawiya is tricky for tanks because it's very steep: they can't go up there. It's even difficult on foot. There's a town at the top but they've got planes up there. So after coordinating with the Free Army brigades, and knowing they would stop a few times on their way from Damascus to Idlib, he got out of his tank with his crew during one of these halts. He walked about a kilometer and met up with the people from the Free Army. In any case, the Assad Syrian Army had condemned him to death at his trial. Afterwards they climbed up to Jabal Zawiya. He stayed there for a bit—not long, maybe a month or so. He stayed there to make sure he was safe.

I knew he had defected. But then I told him we needed to tell our mother in order to make her aware of the situation: that it was the regime killing the people. Because on the Syrian television, you only hear about terrorists who come from Afghanistan.

I am now thinking of Munira Al-Qubaysi, the source of inspiration for the Qubaysiat women. Their main characteristic: they don't like sex. They are a bit like nuns rather than Muslims, but they are in fact a feminist Muslim group, according to me. They also don't listen to music; it's *haram* (forbidden). Sometimes I feel it's as if I have parted from the Qubaysiat.

In my opinion, Greece has only one problem. It would become a paradise if only it would leave the European Union (EU). They have all four seasons and a talented population. They need to be braver. There's a very serious issue going on here: the selling of all the factories to the Germans. The Germans tricked them. The Greeks have the human resources, but Greece's problem is Germany, and Germany's problem is Greece. It is because of Germany that refugees are being held captive here. And they were the ones who turned the attention of the world to "the problem of the refugees" here in Athens.

Rabeeh  
Athens, 2016

My plan was to finish medical school and become a doctor. My father is a merchant. He had four factories. All gone, of course. Stolen, destroyed—one of the factories just took fire recently.

In the Rif of Damascus, they were moved. He used to export pajamas for men, and underwear. Silk and quality-type pajamas. Our products were exported to the whole Arab nation: Algeria, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, everywhere!

My father is in his seventies. In other words, he lost everything. He arranged for the marriages of my siblings, they were all well established, and then came the war.

What happened to the Syrian lira? The dollar was equivalent to fifty Syrian liras; now it's 550. So people also lost all the cash they had.

My husband had a barbershop. My youngest daughter had been in school in Syria for only one month. When we arrived here, she refused to attend school; she was scared. One year later, though, she ended up going.

The circumstances were not really optimal. Since we arrived in Lebanon, we have had to move a lot. We stayed one month in Wadi Al-Zeineh. Then we stayed another month in Saida, and then returned to Wadi Al-Zeineh. And they went to school in Siblin.

In Syria I used to wake up at 10:00 a.m. I would take my daughters and go to my mother's. If he was bringing a dinner with him, I would go back home, if not, I would stay at my mother's. My parents are now here and I stay with them. He smuggled himself through the sea to Germany—to Trier, on the border with France, not far from Stuttgart. My husband went away in May. He went from Lebanon back to Syria, and then from Hama to Turkey. The smuggler was a woman called Um Ahmad. Of course, he had to say that he was going to visit parents of his elsewhere, because Hama is considered to be the Islamic Brotherhood city. Finally he was able to reach Hama. Um Ahmad would tip the [regime] soldiers at the checkpoints. Everyone can be bought with money. ISIS stripped the young men to see if they had marks on their shoulders. If they did, they would take them; it means that they were in the army, so they take them. But my husband didn't have any marks, luckily. In Hama he stayed at Um Ahmad's house. He paid her one hundred dollars per night (35,000 Syrian liras) for that. He stayed there three nights, and then they went to the Syrian/Turkish borders. From then on she was no longer responsible. He took the Pullman train (with screens and air conditioning) to Izmir and from there, the rubber boat to Greece.

I'm an artist. I sing rap music in Kurdish and Arabic. I'm 1.83 meters [6 feet] tall, and I'd like to work as a top model; that was my aim when I came to Germany as a refugee. In Kurdistan, when I was still very young, we were actually living well. I was working in children's wear. Later on I opened my own shop: menswear, and I used to dress up men as I pleased. Now, I'd like to work with Zara. I don't want any other brand, and I don't want to work for expensive brands.

My mother has a six-by-six: six daughters and six sons, and I'm the youngest of all.

I have been to Baghdad as well. In fact, I studied in the petroleum program at the university in Duhok, in order to become a petroleum engineer. But I didn't complete my studies. The teachers there were all British.

Actually, Arabs and Kurds, all of us were expelled and dispersed. They spread hate among us. In general, we all need educational courses.

Leave it to God, all the Arabs are now broken peoples.

And today, while things start to work out in my professional life—all depending on my refugee status—I am temporarily working at the Syrian kebab restaurant. It has become like my second home, if not the first one.

I have been in Germany for two years, in Kassel.

I originally come from Qamishli in Syria. The resources in Qamishli were dry. The work was not abundant. So I went to Lebanon and I worked there for many years. I was running one of the restaurants in downtown Beirut. Do you remember the days of the “black shirts” there? And how they took over downtown for a couple of years? The Hezbollah guys? During this time, our business went down. Day after day, month after month. So I decided to leave.

I came to Europe with a Schengen visa; I had proof of work and I had an income. I pretended that I wanted to go to Disneyland: this is how I got my visa. But I didn't go to Disneyland. I told them I wanted to celebrate my daughter's birthday there. And we took a flight to France. But we continued soon after to Germany.

Why did I choose Germany? Because we used to hear that it had powerful industry and a powerful economy.

The Lebanese people suffered for eighteen years of war, and because of the restaurant I worked for, I know the offices of all their deputies. All of them were warlords and they are now ruling the country. But as I saw it at that time, [Rafic] Hariri, the father, used to help a lot of people. But his son [Saad Hariri, Prime Minister of Lebanon]...

Every morning I go out walking from here. It's a kind of sport. I do ten rounds, approximately four kilometers. I carry my shoes and I walk barefoot. Why? Because of the dew. The dew is the spirit of the earth.

This is a watchtower with a weathercock. That's another one. And this one here is for communication on a global level. The garden too belongs to the prison. The old edifice was built by the Germans while the actual one was built by the Dutch. Four stories high. The domes of parliaments in Arab countries are similar to the prison domes here: same-same. The way the dome was made is fantastic. Such an ancient and great nation! The Germans built this wall too. It's still standing proudly like a mountain. Nothing could defeat it, neither the ecological factors nor the two world wars. It's a great edifice with four hundred rooms on four stories. Once we get out of it, they could do anything with it—a hotel, a tourist site. Not only that, it's a really ancient monument that shows the genius of man when he is human. If you are human, you have the seed of love in you. Make it grow. Not only in you, but also in your children, for the sake of their roots and their country. Or else the children would not know what is worth being loved. They would grow up loving toys and stupid phones (tic, tac, tic)—things that are completely useless.

Every day, I see Arnhem from above, like the rulers in our countries see their own people from above.



I received a phone call from my family in Raqqa; they said that my brother had been kidnapped by ISIS and that he was probably in their jail somewhere in the desert! So I left Lebanon, where I had been working for the last fifteen years, in order to join my family in Raqqa and try to bring him back. At that time, ISIS had already taken over all the schools in our town. They had also taken my son. They wanted to teach him how to kill people and such matters. He's barely twelve.

So I went to Raqqa, and sought first to save my brother. I walked in the desert a whole afternoon. I almost fainted. I reached the jail, and then don't ask me how, I managed to get him out! He had been tortured. A few of his fingers were paralyzed and will never heal.

Anyway, I went back and I took the time to speak with my son. I had to be very careful and talk to him in a certain way. I told him, whatever you need, I will give it to you. I bought him a motorbike so he feels he's independent and I convinced him to move out of Raqqa. We made a plan and, thank God, it worked out!

On my way back to Beirut, I was stopped at one of the last Syrian Army checkpoints on the border, almost right before we entered Lebanon. They didn't want to release me because I was coming from Raqqa. They said I was a wanted terrorist. I tried to explain to them why I was in Raqqa, that I went there to liberate my son and brother from ISIS. But of course, to no avail. It was towards the beginning of Ramadan. They took all my belongings and arrested me! I stayed in jail during all the month of Ramadan. And I fasted even though I was in jail!

They first stripped me naked and asked me what my relationship with ISIS was. While I was being interrogated and tortured, I could also hear through the wall right behind me the voices of girls being tortured! Voices of women and children!

Three to four floors underground, stacked with other prisoners, you'd have bugs all over your body. Lice, bugs, really! If you happened to get sick there, a doctor would come and would give you a kick or medicine that might actually kill you instead. You'd better not get sick!

Anyway, when you enter jail, since they take all your belongings, they know how much money you have. No matter what you do they will always manage to take your money from you. Just after I was arrested, I was able to call

some people on the phone. And by a miracle, I was out only one month later. It cost me, my family members, and my employers in Lebanon not less than 8,000 US dollars to get me out of jail! If my contacts had not been strong enough, I would have disappeared from the face of the earth!

Hani  
Beirut, 2016

My left forearm is practically paralyzed. My brother assists me, and I assist him too; he ultimately decides what is to be done the next day. We live in a shack in Hamra Street in Beirut, where we work as parking guards. We charge people up to 8,000 Lebanese liras an hour (like five US dollars per hour). But all this money has to be given to the owner of the business. Some astonishing cars are parked here sometimes, from Mercedes, the latest models, to Jeeps—all cars!

We are allowed to live here for free, and we get paid a little in return for our twenty-four-hour job. The parking is open twenty-four hours a day. We don't get paid much but we are happy to have at least a job and a roof to sleep under.

We might leave by sea to Germany. If my brother decides, I will go with him. Our shack leaks in the wintertime when it rains hard. But anyway, there are some really beautiful ladies driving cars. We try to park for them so that they are not bothered.

In Syria, I worked for the Aramaic church. I can speak Aramaic; it's the language of Jesus, and it's my mother tongue. Officially, though, we speak Arabic.

We came from Iraq a long time ago. I am Assyrian. It was the French who forced us to emigrate during the conflicts in Iraq, a long time ago. Everybody knows that. It was after World War I. Assyrians live by the Khabur River in Syria. The Khabour starts in the region of Ras al-Ayn. The river goes through Al-Hasakah. We spread over twenty-two well-known villages.

I know most of their names by heart:

1. Tell Tawil
2. Abu Waqfeh
3. Umm al-Keif
4. Tell Kishi
5. Tell Jumaa
6. Tell Tamer
7. Tell Nasri
8. Tell Heffian
9. Tell Mghass
10. Tell Sass
11. Tell Jedayah
12. Tell Tebshish
13. Tell Baz
14. Lower Tell Remman
15. Upper Tell Remman
16. Um Gharqan
17. Tell Sukkara
18. Tell Talaa

Then on the other bank, you have:

19. Al-Kharita
20. Qabar Chamiiyyeh
21. Tell Omran
22. Al Balouaa
23. Tell Hermes
24. ...

In Syria we used to get hashish from Zabadani. I once tried Lebanese Bekaa [Valley] hashish. Blood dribbled from my nose. It's very strong!

First they told us one in a room. After a week, they told us we had to be two in each room. I was staying on the first floor. At some point, they took us back to Zwolle [the Netherlands] for two days, and then they moved us again to the De Koepel jail [temporary refugee camp]. I was then transferred to the third floor. The doors of the cells were open twenty-four hours a day.

When problems would come up with the guards, it was the guards who were fired. Out of the four hundred men staying there, only some thirty people were OK. After a while, we arranged many things in the jail.

After the Paris massacre, 150 men from here went demonstrating against it. We also held "Pray for Syria" banners and expressed our sorrow for what happened in France.

We changed many things, especially the way people looked at refugees. In the camp, they organized for us a small clothing donation initiative. Dutch people would come and bring stuff with them for the shop and give things away. They started having coffee and playing pool with us on a daily basis. We started doing activities with the people. Everyone in the camp who had a talent would make use of it.

I had a life in Syria, especially when I took part in the revolution. We used proxies [fake names] so that no one recognized us. When you are around a certain age, and you witness how the young people are honestly going with all their hearts against the [Assad] regime, you say to yourself, "I might die; I might be arrested in jail; but at least the next generation would live a better life." We wanted to be involved; we wanted to help!

In Damascus it was still calm. But my parents, both civil engineers, got an opportunity to work in Saudi Arabia. So they left. And I stayed with my sister since there are not many opportunities for women, we thought, in Saudi Arabia.

My grandmother has a green card [permanent residency in the United States], so we came to visit her at some point during our winter break. We had no idea this would be a one-way trip, that we wouldn't resume our life back home. So our plan was to go back to Syria. As we were preparing ourselves to go to the airport, one of our acquaintances saw us and said: "Where are you going? To the airport? There's no bird flying and no beast moving." We then realized that it wasn't possible to go back, so we unpacked our luggage and stayed here!

I was studying in Homs when the revolution started. I was living there on my own, for my parents were in Damascus. The school was once bombed while we were doing our exams. A regime tank came inside the university court and started bombing. They were bombing us, the young people, as we were doing our exams. I was studying business and economics. In Syria it's all about passing the exam. So they knew this is when most students would be present.

My middle son wants to become a policeman in Athens. He says, "I won't smoke because it smells bad and girls wouldn't want to come close to me." My children go to school every Saturday.

I'm from Ukraine. I came to Athens twelve years ago. I'm very tired; one can see this on my face. Financial problems affect my relations to my family, to my husband and three children. The eldest is sixteen, the middle one nine, and the youngest three.

We lived under the Soviet Union.

The eldest boy has problems at school. He doesn't want to read and write. But since he speaks many languages, he might do something with tourism. So far, he has studied finance and economics, so he could continue in tourism. I was working in statistics in Ukraine, but I came to join my family in Greece. In Ukraine, my husband was in construction. Here he does all kinds of jobs. He is a carpenter too. He assembles kitchens, for instance. My mother came here first, then my grandmother, my sister, my brother, and finally me.

I am from Chernivtsi, Romania/Moldovia, a six-hundred-year-old city.

Somalia became independent in the '40s or '30s. We were divided and colonized—the northern part for the UK, and the southern part for Italy. But after the 1960s the independence was gone. Somalia's government fell and the civil war started between most of Somalia's tribes. Everyone wanted to become president. But it is the people who must elect one.

I've been in Germany for five years. I am illegal here; that's why I am now hiding in this church. Here people can hide for up to three months officially. If I stay on the church premises, no one is allowed to take me. The priest gave me shelter. I'm in eleventh grade, preparing for the *Abitur* [qualification exam].

In Somalia, we usually pay twenty dollars per month for school!



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