

The following is Yousef's story in his own words. His story is translated with assistance from an Arabic interpreter. The story outlines his exit from his home country Syria as the Civil War between military factions began to escalate in 2011. We have changed his name to protect his family.

"The Civil War in Syria began in 2011. Before the war, I lived with my parents in a small city in northwest Syria. My family home was large and we had a good life. I went to school and completed grade 9 and received my diploma. I worked every summer when school was closed and got very interested in learning a trade. After I got my diploma, I stopped my formal education and began to learn my trade on a full time basis. I developed my skills over a three year period. I was fully trained and skilled by age eighteen. I then opened my own auto repair shop and began my own business in my home town.

In 2010, I met my future wife at a large family event. We eventually married in 2012. We lived together in one side of my family home while my parents lived in the other side.

In 2011, the War was going on in different parts of Syria and it expanded in 2012. The bombings had started and it was unsafe to go anywhere. One day in 2012, I needed to get food for my family so even though there were planes flying around, I decided to take the risk and go to buy food. On my way home, I heard some bombs exploding not far from my family home. I ran as fast as I could to see if my family was safe. I heard the sound of a bomb near me. I woke up in the hospital with lots of shrapnel injuries on one side of my body and I had lost a lot of blood. I did not know anything about my family or remember what had happened to me. The doctors were not able to remove all the shrapnel so some is still in my body. After five days, I left the hospital and went immediately to my home.

I cried when I saw my house. The side that I used to live in with my wife had been bombed. I went to the side my parents lived in and found my wife with them to my great relief. She had been visiting with them when the bomb hit our home. We stayed together with my parents until I could recover from my bomb blast injuries which took about three months. Then, we moved out to stay at a friend's house nearby. It became clear to us that with the escalating military action, we needed to make a plan and decide whether to stay or move to a safer place. We decided to move out of the danger zone to a town where a school had been converted to temporarily house 200 hundred people who were now fleeing. We stayed here until I learned through an uncle and friends of a house under construction not too far away that we could stay in. We lived here for three months with no electricity, no water and no doors. We lived day by day. When we heard things had improved a bit in my home town we decided to go back and rescue some of our things. We stayed at an uncle's house when we returned.

My parents were the first to leave Syria for a neighbouring country on Dec. 26, 2012. My wife did not want to leave her family who also lived in my home town so we delayed leaving. The militia started bombing again and we finally decided to leave Syria on March 30, 2013 for a neighbouring country. We were able to buy bus tickets to cross the border. There were about 50 of us making the bus trip. We only needed Syrian National Identity papers to cross the border and we both had these. As we were getting close to the border, we could see the Syrian army had set up a Checkpoint on the road ahead.

When our bus driver arrived at the Checkpoint, the soldiers told us we would need to pay \$200US in order to pass through the Checkpoint. A Syrian soldier recognized me as a Muslim Sunni and told me I would be sent to the front lines to fight. He hit me physically. I was very afraid. I paid the \$200US bribe. He told me my name would go on a list the military were keeping but he allowed us to pass through the Checkpoint. I know if I were ever to be sent back to Syria. I would be jailed or sent to the front lines or worse. I am not able to return to Syria safely and I live in fear knowing I could be sent back.

We have no legal status in the country we are currently living in. I could in fact be sent back to Syria at any time if the Government chose to do so.. It is not safe to go out at night where we are now living. There are robbers and kidnappers who steal your organs to sell. We live under constant threat of being deported if we do not follow all the Government rules. I cannot afford the cost of a work permit but because I am skilled at my trade, I am able to get work from employers who do not require me to have a permit. I am always afraid I will be turned in. I try to keep my residency permit up to date but we live in constant fear. I am responsible for my family.

Since we left Syria, we have had two young children born to us. I try to find whatever work I can in order to be able to live and provide food for my family. We have a small apartment which only has electricity for two hours every day. If I cannot make enough money for our basic needs, I borrow from the grocer and from friends, then I pay them back as soon as I am able to get more work. I am willing to take any job I can find to support my family. We live day by day not knowing what the next day will bring. Will I find work? Will we have food? Life is very difficult and our living conditions are poor.

I registered with the UNHCR in 2014 after we departed from Syria. Because we now have two small children, we receive a monthly benefit from UNHCR of \$13US monthly per person. We are now a family of four so we receive \$52US per month. We must re-qualify for this every year. We qualified one year then we were cut off for two years and then we qualified again for one year. We never know when this money will stop. There is no certainty we will qualify again next time. Everything is getting much more expensive.

My eldest son was to start school for the first time this year. It is a school run by UNHCR for displaced families. Unfortunately, the start of school has been delayed. I want my children to be able to go to school but even this is uncertain. I worry a lot about the future of my children and our family. I have not gone back to Syria and I am too afraid to return knowing I will be picked up by the Syrian army. I have lost everything I had in Syria. I have no property, no business in Syria anymore and no work. I am a Muslim Sunni Syrian. Where we now live, the people in our host country do not like Syrians coming to their country and "taking their jobs". Muslim Shia do not like Muslim Sunni, so it is difficult for us to practice our religion in this country.

I never give up thinking of going to a country that my family and I will feel safe living in. My sister and her family came to Canada as refugees a few years ago.

I am hoping to move my family to Canada where my sister is now living. I hope the Canadian Government will accept my application for my family to come to Canada so we can make a new life."