

I Am Alive

I'm walking slowly down a white road lined with ashes and dust. I look around me and see the crumbling buildings. The walls of rubble cascading down like waterfalls. There is black smoke waving up in the air as if was also trying to escape into the bright blue skies. The smell of gas and death linger throughout the air. The frightening melody of thundering bombs is bursting from a distance and the fireworks of bullets raining from the sky. I try to breathe as I gasp for air. I try to run as fast as I can but I'm not moving. My legs won't move. They are melting into the ground. I start panicking. I start to cry. I open my eyes and awaken. "It was just a dream, just a dream", I tell myself as I take a deep breath of relief. But I then realize, it was not a dream or a horrible nightmare. Those are the visions of my last days in Syria that haunt me to this day. My name is Amira Amon Khalid. I was 10 years old when the Syrian Civil War started. I am now 16 and I am alive.

My home was bombed and destroyed during the Syrian conflict. While trying to flee, my parents were senselessly killed by the Assad Regime. I ended up fleeing to a temporary camp on the outskirts of Aleppo and stayed there for almost 2 years. I had nothing and was full of hunger and thirst for many days and nights, but was relieved that I had escaped the terror that was engulfing the city. I had not escaped the nightmare, but had entered into another nightmare. While at the camp, a man approached me and some of the other children who had lost their parents. He told us he would take us to Lebanon, where there were families that would take care of us. I was young and naive and felt blessed that I was chosen to get out of the migrant camp to go to a new home. I was taken in a van with other women and children who had also lost everything from the conflict. After driving for hours, we arrived at a rundown building in Maamaltein, Lebanon. We were all herded like cattle into a tattered building that was adorned with bars on all of the windows. For years, I was beaten and tortured and was enslaved by my captors, forced to do the unthinkable. One day, four of the women escaped, which led to the raid and my freedom from enslavement. I was taken to Dar Al Amal, The House of Hope, which helps women and children that have been trafficked. While there, they found that I had family in the United States. They also contacted the United Nations Refugee Agency to consider me for resettlement. I was one of the fortunate ones to be chosen for resettlement. The International Rescue Committee helped me through the process and guided me through this long tiring journey.

I was sad, scared and torn apart that I would have to leave my homeland of Syria. I did not know what to expect from this land that I would make my new home. Would I be welcomed or looked down upon? Will I practice the culture that I am so proud of? At times I felt that was I being punished for everything that has happened in my life. After years of waiting, I finally arrived in the United States. The IRC brought me to Sacramento, California, where they helped me adjust to my new home.

I have had such warm welcomes from the people I have met in Sacramento. The IRC has helped me in so many ways. Once I arrived, I was given clothes, food, medical care, and I started school again. I have also started counseling to help me with the mental pain and nightmares that I can't control. They have given me the resources to start a new life. It took a few months before I was fully resettled with my Aunt and Uncle. I feel blessed that I have been given this new life. It has been very hard at times not understanding the English language that most people speak. Sometimes I feel down when people stare at me as if I don't belong here. I still have nightmares daily of the torture and persecution that I have endured. I get startled when I hear loud noises and

I find it hard to trust in another fully. But I am strong. I am a survivor. I am alive.

Wars are not made so we have something to write in the blank pages of our history books. Human trafficking is not a fictional story you watch on Netflix. There are millions of people just like me that are being trafficked every day. The International Labour Organization estimates that there are 20.9 million victims of human trafficking globally. 68% are trapped in forced labor, 26% are children and 55% are women and girls (Polaris. Pars 2). Unless we speak out and stop those that are making it a reality, more lives will be destroyed. I feel more than blessed that I am alive. I am determined to graduate from high school and then enroll in a college to get my degree as a social worker. I want to work with organizations that will fight and help the victims of human trafficking. We must embrace, offer a helping hand and spread the word of peace.

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