

A Refugee's Story

Sarah was 16 in 2013, and along with her three sisters, brother, Mom and Dad, received a notice, probably from the Iraqi government, that they would be killed within 48 hours. The note said leave or be dead. Several hours later they escaped carrying only their passports, and some clothes.

She spent the first three months in Turkey crying. She was very sad and angry about the radical change in her life. Later she wished that she had her high school diploma. If she had it she would have been able to go directly to college.

Prior to that day, she was on track to go to college and fulfill her dream of becoming a doctor. The family took refuge in Turkey. Her dream of going to college was put on hold while she worked as a hotel desk clerk and then as a refugee interpreter. Two years later she moved to Tucson to join her cousins in the U.S. Now she interprets and translates for the Tucson Syrian refugees who have been arriving recently. Like her they lost their entire life and abandoned their homes to escape fear and death.

There are some things she doesn't miss about Iraq. There girls can't laugh out loud or stand alone or go shopping by themselves. She had trouble being a "good girl." She didn't want to sit in the house. She had ambitions to be a doctor and help people.

One day she experienced hostility and prejudice when a guy on the street, seeing her in her hijab, said "all you Muslims will die," and he tried to grab her. But others rescued her. She no longer wears the hijab, but her Mother does. Sarah prefers to be safe.

Despite this, Sarah describes herself as a "whole human" who loves "Grey's Anatomy and "The Walking Dead." She will soon start studying science at Pima Community College, while interpreting for newly arrived refugees who also have escaped death.

She is unbroken.

When asked who inspires her, she said her Mother and Steve Farley, who, along with Kitt Leonard, began Arizona Welcomes Refugees to counter the anti-immigrant statements by some of our government leaders.

The group welcomes refugees at the airport and hosts a monthly potluck the first Thursday at 7 p.m. in McBride Hall, complete with "shopping" from donations.

When asked what her favorite spots in Tucson are, she said U of A, Saguaro Monument East, and Grace St. Paul's.