

## This Blows

He felt his heart ripping out of his chest. Each explosion sent a new wave of fear pulsing through his body. He buried his head in his pillow, and prayed he could sleep through the night.

Ahmad was eight years old. He lived in Darayya, Syria, a town just outside Damascus. In 2012, Darayya became a hotspot for anti-government protests. On August 25, 2012, an estimated 270 people were killed there by government forces. This event became known as the Darayya Massacre. This conflict in Darayya, as well as the rest of Syria, led to the Syrian Civil War, where Darayya continued to experience heavy combat.

Ahmad awoke in a panic. The deafening eruption of a bomb detonating signaled how near it was. He threw his covers over his head and cried. Silence followed, only interrupted by the sobs of he and his siblings. *“Perhaps the bombing was over.”* As if on cue, another bomb went into their garage. The house shattered.

His eyes betrayed him. The intense dust clouds blocked his vision. He attempted to call out to his family but could only muster a cough. The explosion left a lingering ring in his ears, preventing him from hearing his family’s own calls. Time cleared the dust, dimmed the ringing in his ears, and eased his throat. He found his siblings bloody and covered in broken glass, but seemingly okay. His mother rushed into the room, frantically checking on each of her five children. She stopped on Ahmad’s younger brother. He laid still. His mother slapped him on the cheek and he abruptly popped up. They all lived.

Ahmad’s parents understood that they could no longer live safely in Darayya. They applied for refugee status and relocated to a camp in Jordan. His family’s stay in the camp was short-lived, they were promptly transferred to Russayfah, Jordan. This city presented his greatest struggles.

The people of Jordan did not accept the refugees. Ahmad knew not to go outside at night, else he and his fellow immigrants risked beatings or murder by the angry locals. School in Jordan offered no relief. Ahmad and his fellow immigrants became victims of bullying and defended themselves from physical attacks on a regular basis. Still, his family remained hopeful. They awaited their turn to be permanently moved to a safer country.

Three years after Ahmad’s family fled Syria, they received their long-awaited call. They would be moved to Portland, Oregon, in the United States of America. His family escaped the turmoil of his home country and the abuse they experienced in Jordan, but their struggles followed them to America.

His family did not speak a word of English. Ahmad typed documents and phrases into Google translate to assist his parents. Ahmad was enrolled at Cedar Park Middle School in Cedar Mill. Through constant interaction with his teachers and fellow students, he began to get a grasp on English. With new communication skills, Ahmad began to experience the kindness of his neighbors, peers, and instructors. He could not believe how many people were ready and eager to help him and his family.

Ahmad did not know of the “American Dream” in Syria, but he learned that his family achieved it. His tribulations in both Syria and Jordan were about as ugly as things can get, but they In America they became spared from the constant burden of being afraid for their lives. On top of physical security his family obtained a future. Ahmad and his siblings were given an education and a safe place to explore their interests and hobbies. Ahmad’s life story is not complete, and because he had the opportunity to immigrate his story is just beginning.