

# My story

For myself and my family, life in Iraq became a descent into fear and privation after the 2003 U.S. invasion. The economy collapsed, and food, medicines, and other necessities were scarce. We often tried to leave, but could not find a way.

We were proud of our Muslim faith, we saw no reason to make it a source of violence against our neighbors. That put us at odds with extremists. My eldest son, Zaid, was shot in both legs while at work. My second son, Omar, was kidnapped multiple times by forces determined to keep us in line.

My husband and I realized that if we stayed in Iraq, all our boys would be kidnapped or killed. So we decided to move to Syria.

Leaving Iraq meant leaving my beloved teaching profession, as refugees are not allowed work permits in Syria. With little savings or income, all six of us were crowded into a studio apartment. Our lives were miserable.

After the first year, we applied to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and were accepted as candidates for resettlement. Zaid's gunshot wounds and my brother's graduation from the University of Oklahoma helped our case. I was proud to be an Iraqi, but protecting my children and raising them in a place of security and opportunity came first. So we eagerly accepted the opportunity to come to America.

Our first stop was New York City, but it was hard to fit in and opportunities were scarce. With the IRC's support, we chose to relocate to northern Idaho. But the remote location and even more limited opportunities led us to give New York another try.

The IRC's New York City office helped us arrange the move and found us an apartment in Woodside, Queens. They did everything for us: the refrigerator was filled with food, including the vegetables I needed; they showed us how to buy a MetroCard and use the subway and bus; and they helped us find work.

I have a part-time job as an aide in a residential facility for people with mental illnesses, where I help clients follow their daily schedule and, sometimes, feed themselves. I also volunteer at the IRC's Summer Youth Academy, which helps newly arrived students prepare for academic and social success in public schools.

My husband, Tarik, now works for a company that makes power supplies, which draws on his skills as an electrician. He is working to be certified as a master electrician.

Sometimes I am amazed at how far we've come from Baghdad's dangerous streets. The IRC is like my family. They gave me their all. It is a wonderful organization.



**Bushra Naji**

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