

ISLAM ALHASHHEL



AUTHOR : TREVOR R. GETZ
ARTIST: LIZ CLARKE

ISLAM ALHASHHEL (BORN 2003?) IS A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT IN CLEVELAND, OHIO. SHE IS ALSO A SYRIAN REFUGEE.

HER STORY IS A STORY OF A PERSON IN MOTION - UNIQUE, BUT CONNECTED TO 300 MILLION OTHER HUMANS IN THE WORLD TODAY WHO ARE LIVING OUTSIDE OF THE COUNTRY OF THEIR BIRTH. IT IS ALSO A STORY THAT SHOWS BOTH THE POSSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES OF GLOBALIZATION.

WHEN I FIRST SPOKE TO ISLAM ALHASHHEL, THERE WERE FOUR OTHER PEOPLE ON THE LINE, ALL CONCERNED FOR HER WELL-BEING.

Julia A. Shearson,
Council on American
Islamic Relations
of Ohio

Islam Zaïem,
Council on
American Islamic
Relations

Islam Alhashhel

Bob Regan,
Gates
Ventures

Me (Trevor Getz,
a historian)

Islam's dad

THEY NEEDN'T HAVE WORRIED TOO MUCH. ISLAM KNEW HOW TO TELL HER OWN STORY - AND WANTED TO.

SHE HAD BEEN BORN IN DARAA, SYRIA, WHERE SHE WAS LIVING WITH HER PARENTS AND SIX SIBLINGS WHEN AN UPRISING BROKE OUT AGAINST THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT.

THESE EVENTS WERE PART OF THE ARAB SPRING, A SERIES OF PROTESTS AGAINST CORRUPT, OPPRESSIVE REGIMES AND ECONOMIC SUFFERING.



BUT EVENTS IN SYRIA SOON BECAME A GLOBAL CONFLICT WITH REGIONAL AND GLOBAL POWERS - TURKEY, IRAN, SAUDI ARABIA, ISRAEL, RUSSIA, AND THE UNITED STATES - ALL INVOLVED.

WITH ALMOST A MILLION PEOPLE KILLED, THIS BLOODY CONFLICT HAS ALSO PRODUCED MORE THAN 13 MILLION REFUGEES, INCLUDING ISLAM AND HER FAMILY. THEY LEFT AFTER ISLAM'S SISTER BARELY SURVIVED A BOMBING AT HER SCHOOL.

ISLAM AND HER FAMILY FOUND REFUGE IN AL AZRAQ, A REFUGEE CAMP IN JORDAN. FROM THERE, THEY WENT THROUGH THE VERY DIFFICULT TASK OF APPLYING FOR REFUGE IN A THIRD COUNTRY - THE UNITED STATES. ONLY A VERY FEW REFUGEES ARE ADMITTED, AND THEY ARE CAREFULLY INVESTIGATED.

ONCE THEY ARRIVED, ISLAM'S FAMILY RECEIVED SHORT-TERM OFFICIAL HELP, BUT THEN HAD TO MAKE THEIR OWN LIVES WITH ASSISTANCE FROM THEIR NEW NEIGHBORS. ISLAM HAD BOTH GOOD EXPERIENCES, AND SOME DIFFICULT ONES AS SHE ENTERED THE LIFE OF AN AMERICAN TEENAGER.

I FELT THAT I WAS REALLY SAFE BECAUSE THERE WAS NO SOUND OF BOMBS OR GUNS.

THE MOST DIFFICULT THING WAS LEARNING A NEW LANGUAGE. IT'S ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT CHALLENGES I HAVE EVER FACED.

ONE TIME I WAS COMING BACK FROM SCHOOL AND THERE WAS A WOMAN WITH HER SON. WHEN SHE SAW ME SHE HUGGED HER SON AS IF SOMEONE WAS GOING TO SHOOT OR BOMB THEM.



CLEVELAND