

ABBOUDI

“ We kind of see it from our point of view as home.

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ARRIVAL

My dad gave [the keychain] to me. He knew I'd like this team for my entire life. It has the Real Madrid logo. When we moved here, that's how I started conversations with other people, by asking them. . . soccer questions and “do you like this team or no?” That's what really got me into making friends at first. It's very special. I don't want to lose it.

My grandmother got me a wallet. And that wallet, I've never changed it. Every time I see a new wallet, and it looks nice, I'm like, no, I can't buy a new one. It's different. It has my name on it too. I remember that exact same day that she bought it for me. And it just holds a special place in my heart. It's kind of getting worn out. So I was thinking I could just hang it on a wall because I just. . . I can't give it up. Maybe buy a new one and use it, but this one I will never throw away.

I was still in elementary. . . [at school] we didn't really learn the world maps, so I basically didn't know where I was going. And it was my first time going on a plane, so I didn't know which way was the US. . . I didn't know how the US looked like. I didn't know how American people looked like because when we hear about American people from our past experiences, we. . . think of them as the soldiers. . . that was pretty much the whole stereotype.



Hosted by:

**GUILFORD
COLLEGE**



Interviewed in English by:

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With the informed consent of participants, interview transcripts have been adapted here in narrative form for clarity and efficiency with a commitment to retaining the intended meaning.

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I had this idea of us on the plane. I thought we would get off and. . . the government would just give us a house and [say] “go work.” That's what it was in my head. It was very different. I didn't know it was a campus when I first got there [to Guilford's campus]. I didn't even know what it was, because I've never seen a college before. It was very big. And I really liked it. I thought it was a resettlement agency. . . and all the people that were there weren't college students and they were just refugees.

It was very fun seeing different people because we grew up seeing just Iraqi people. We never knew so many people come from different backgrounds and ethnicities. It was a new thing to see. . . [a] very clean college campus. . . filled with people that always smile at you because we don't really see that back home. So you walk around and you see people smiling. [The] college students were 10-20 years older than us.

We thought everybody was supposed to come to a college refugee campus, but it was not the case. We were one of the few lucky people. It was like a lucky chance; it's one in a million.

When I first came, I thought people would actually have more different opinions on stuff. You don't know their culture. And and so we thought, in my head, it was like, they weren't like us. . . it was like they were the aliens. But when I learned that people actually over here watch soccer, play soccer, and then do biking. . . it kind of got more memories back from when I first had my bike in Iraq, and when I played soccer with my friends. . . to actually see people who love the same thing.

SUPPORT ON CAMPUS

We got what you [would] call a starter pack. . . like a jumpstart or a head start in life because you're creating a new life here. You left everything behind and you come here. . . you got someone to lead you, teaches you everything. It was a new beginning. You know how some people say you're reborn when you die? So this was exactly like it. You kind of left your old life behind, but then you came back and you started life. It was like being reborn, but at a different age. And I think that if it wasn't for ECAR, we would have definitely gone back. It was just like a visit to America, but ECAR got us a home, and we call it home because. . . we felt hopeful, we felt relieved.

I remember two volunteers came in to play soccer with me from ECAR. They were volunteers and they came, knocked on our door and they [said] “Hey, we're college students,” and they had a soccer ball. . . that was a thing that got me back [to soccer] because I left my friends that actually play soccer.

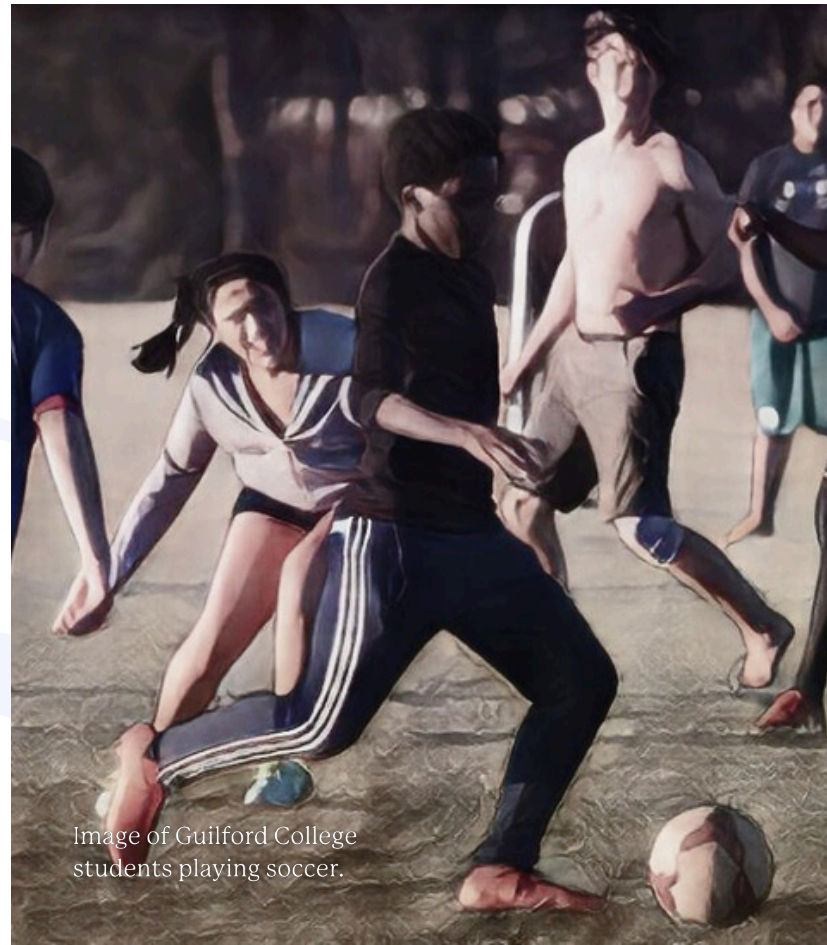


Image of Guilford College students playing soccer.

Walid was more like an uncle to us. We thought he was a teacher. . . always teaches me stuff. . . And just like uncles do. . . he would just spend money out of his pocket and never worry about it. It reminded me of my uncle back home [be]cause he would do the same thing. He would take us out to places, buy us some food, and then it's very fun with him.

The best experience was when me and my brothers got our bikes, and we finally got out of the house because it was kind of depressing inside the house. . . the bikes really got us started because other volunteers or other students had bikes, and so we did biking around campus, and that got us more familiar with how the campus looked like. It was very, very big. I've never seen a campus before so it was kind of like a nervous feeling.

[Another best experience was] when we first saw snow on campus, and we saw other people playing, and we saw college students playing.

NOT WITHOUT ITS CHALLENGES

As the oldest child, I had to take responsibility for my brothers. It was kind of a mixed feeling because my brothers were happy. We got lots – they got lots of toys. They got a home to live in; they got to sleep, eat. But when I look[ed] at my mother and my dad, they were kind of stressed out; they didn't know what to do. So I was kind of in between feeling happy and feeling stressed at the same time.

CREATING A LASTING COMMUNITY

The relationships we, I, formed with the . . . volunteers . . . they're like long friends. We've been friends for a while now. And even though we've gotten to the point where we live our lives, and we don't live over there anymore, it's just that they're friends. . . They're just friends in our everyday lives.

[Creating an ECAR Chapter at the university where he is currently a student] would . . . be a win-win situation for both the students at the college and also the refugee. The refugee would benefit from getting started in life, getting advice and getting the resources they need to survive. And also the students would get . . . service hours. . . they [would] create a big impact on the refugee because they'll create memories with them. It's a win-win situation for both students and refugee. . .

I would love to be. . . involved in these things because I would definitely know how it felt for my first day coming to [the] US. I would love to help people get started and reassure them because I feel like a lot of refugees come with a feeling of anxiety and stress. . . kids shouldn't feel depressed or feeling stressed out because it's . . . bad for them. It's just really, really bad because as a kid, I didn't really feel stressed. I did feel a little stressed, but not as much as other people who resettled with the agencies of the US. So it was definitely a good start to our lives because it really set us on the right path.

We do go back [to campus]. We kind of see it from our point of view as home. You don't really move on, you don't leave a community, you just make new ones because you get to know more people.

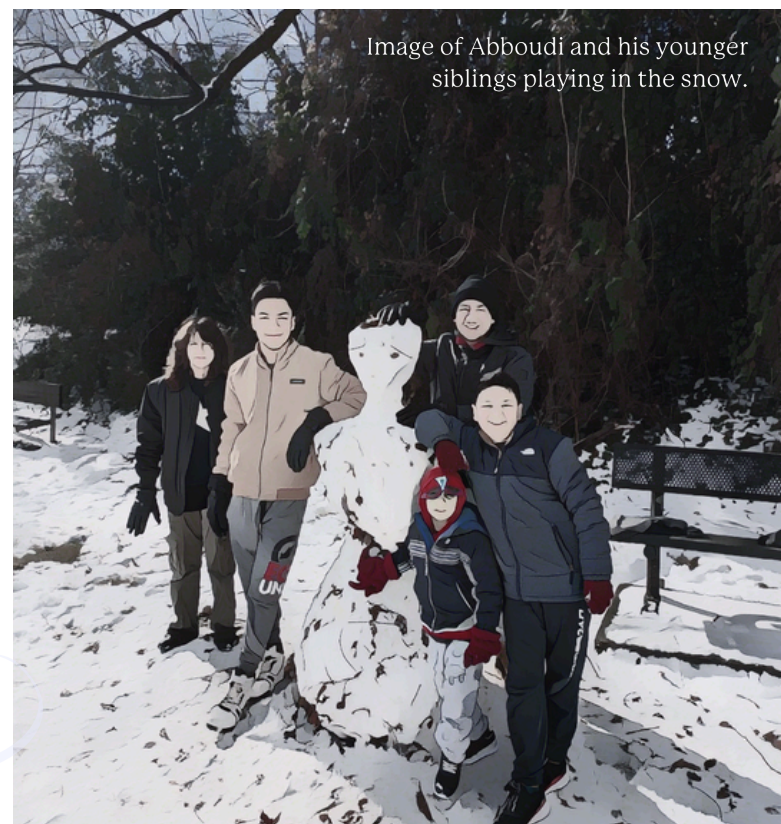


Image of Abboudi and his younger siblings playing in the snow.