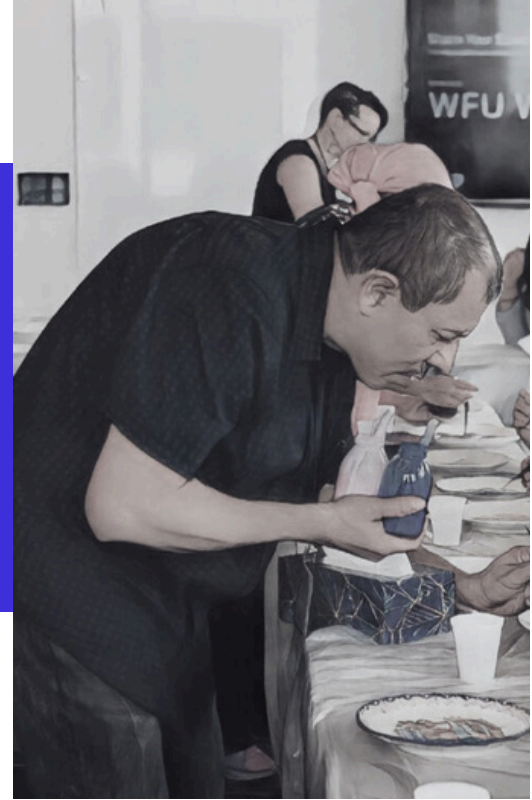




# ALI

“ When we entered the university, [it is] like a person who felt safe entering his own home.

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## ARRIVAL

[I brought with me] a book. It is near to my heart because it contains memories. . . of someone I lost in my life, who is my beloved father. Written by my father, he talks in this book about the city in which he lived and was born. The name of the book is Baqubah, City and History. [It] carr[ies] his memory of the sweet days and the memories of the people who lived in this simple, small city, which is the city of Baqubah. I was a contributor to the preparation of this book. He wrote a simple statement [a dedication], thanking [me for] my contribution to the completion of this book because it was an important part in his life as well. I loved that my father . . .remained attached to the land in which he grew up and lived.

When a person is born and grows and gets attached to the place in which he grew up and lived. . . even when life forced him to leave this place by virtue of work. . . they are ready to sacrifice anything for this land.

I hope to be like these people, or like my father, or like any person who loves his land and loves his country of origin.

The wedding picture [of] my wife and I was hanging in my room. I made sure to bring it, so I pulled it from the frame, wrapped it, brought it here, made a new frame for it, and put it in our room, just as it was before, in the same place.



Hosted by:

**GUILFORD COLLEGE**



Interviewed in Arabic by:

**NOOR GHAZI**

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.

[everycampusarefuge.org](http://everycampusarefuge.org)

I brought with me Arabic calligraphy tools. Some of these tools were originally owned by my father in the days when he used them in Arabic calligraphy. I made sure to collect them all and bring them with me in order to continue practicing the profession of Arabic calligraphy and art.

Safety – this is what any refugee who comes to a strange country other than his own for the first time needs. It means that there was a certain feeling of fear. Fear is present in the heart and what is the unknown future that awaits us?

In the first couple of days, my wife and I in particular would not pass beyond the college's fence by foot because we were afraid. When we would leave the apartment we were in at the university and walk, we would only get to the traffic light, and then we would feel afraid to pass it because the outside world is unknown to us. We didn't know the roads around us or the city. Thus, we wouldn't risk it and would just return directly to the College campus where we felt safer; especially if we needed any help, no one at the college would hesitate to help us.

## SUPPORT ON CAMPUS

When we entered the university [Guilford College], it was like a person who felt safe entering his own home. When you feel that you have a father, mother, and brothers, you wouldn't have any kind of fear or kind of confusion or kind of hesitation in doing a certain thing inside his house because his family is there, and if he needs something, there is a father, mother, or brother who helps you.

*Aside from the basic services that they offered us . . . housing and food, and other external services, they also tried to provide us with other services to include my family in terms of entertainment; for example, if there was any occasion or events on campus, or something like that, they would invite us to see the place and enjoy it with the students there -- for example, if there was a dinner or games. My kids would enjoy the time with students there. Sometimes they needed vaccinations, they needed to follow through with schools and registration. These are all done by ECAR.*

We came to a very wonderful, beautiful and clean place. They provided us with something that meant a lot, especially for a refugee who in the beginning needs a moral boost. Our morale was frankly exhausted and tired, but what made it easier for us in this exile and after we left our families is what we have found here as soon as we arrived. We found people who welcomed us. We found people who smiled at us. *Instantly, we had an internal feeling that the future would be beautiful for us.*

We remember some of the places where my children used to go -- around the lake, for example, by bicycle, or sometimes they played in these places near the golf course located at the university.



Image of Ali's children and their friends on biking on Guilford College's campus.



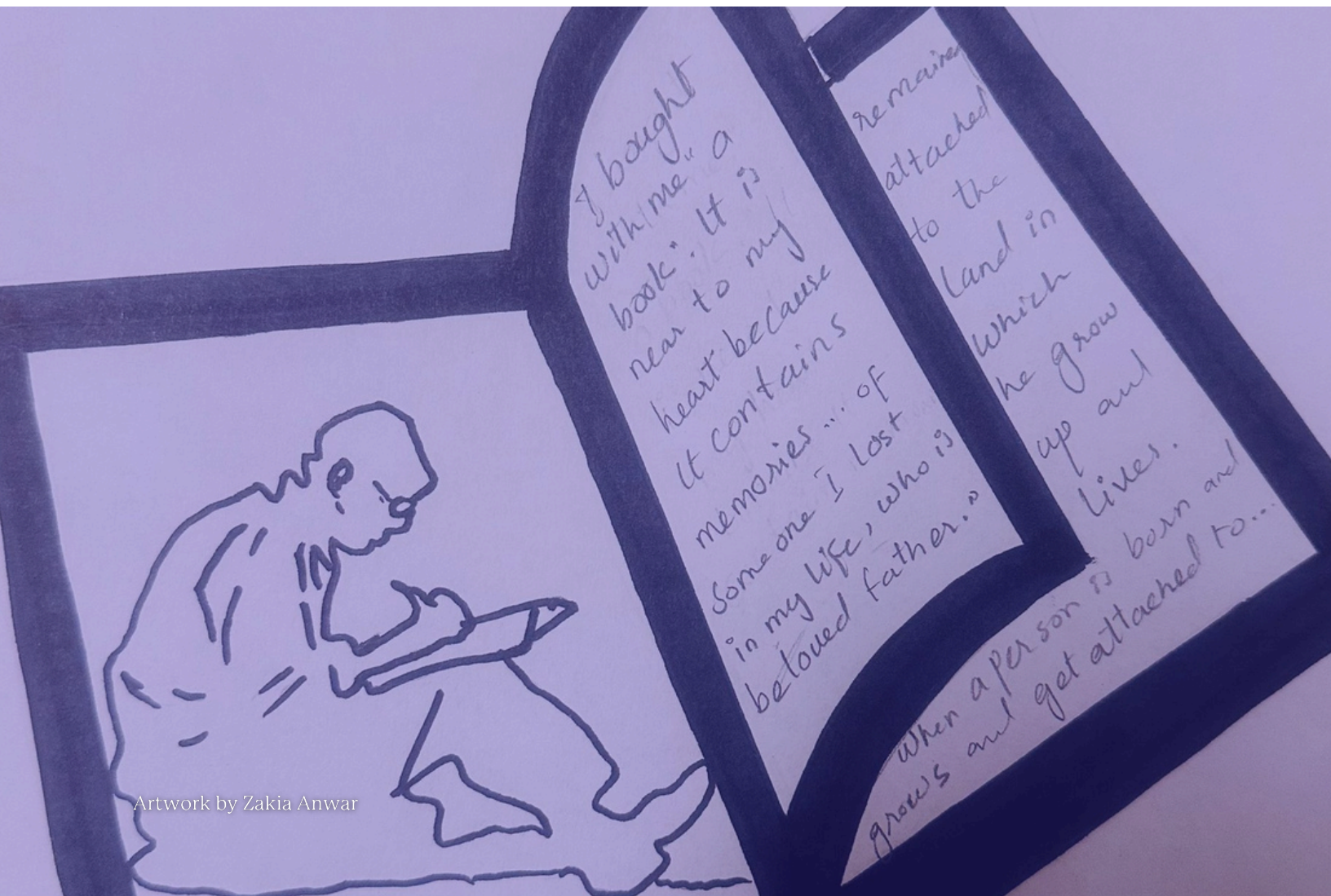
The thing I appreciate is the effort they provide, for a family, especially if it is a large family. I appreciate. . . that this program can provide services to families who come, especially families consisting of a father, a mother and children in particular, because children have a special upbringing, and special care is needed for them.

At some point, the college began bringing us some of these products [from the college farm], including eggs from their chicken and vegetables.

After the college learned that I was an artist, and I have this profession of Arabic calligraphy, they tried to help me in using this idea on campus by allowing me to provide Arabic calligraphy workshops for the students and professors on campus. They provided me with a special hall for attendees. They also contributed by introducing me to people . . . including introducing me to teachers and students.

I think the best experience is the [ECAR Gathering] event that happened at the College in September, two years ago. This was a very interesting event and for the first time ECAR gave me a big role, which is the teacher's role in this - event]. The event was for two days. I had approximately 50 students for two days. Each day I had 25 students. I was given the opportunity to practice the profession of the teacher who teaches students how to draw with glass colors on the plates made of porcelain [and] ceramic. It was a very enjoyable and beautiful event through which I got to know people. *Many people got to know me, welcomed me and loved the idea that I have and the art that I have. It was a very beautiful and enjoyable event that I will never forget.*

Prior to this event, Guilford College gave me a chance before this to display my artwork through the College. My calligraphy artwork stayed up on campus [in a gallery] . . . These paintings remained available for almost several days, and the university students viewed them.



Artwork by Zakia Anwar

## NOT WITHOUT ITS CHALLENGES

The first difficulty for me personally is the difficulty of the language. This was frankly the most difficult problem for us, which is the language of dealing with the new society in which we are. My family also had difficulty with the language because my children were still beginning to speak English as their language was limited to what they had learned in elementary school -- meaning that at a simple level they could understand some vocabulary (yes and no), but they had difficulty understanding teachers and understanding outside people.

We were very careful . . . when possible, to converse with the students, faculty members and people on campus. We conversed with them even with simple terms that helped us to strengthen our language, for example, "Good Morning" "How are you?" "How are you today," "How do you feel today?" etc. Simple words and phrases that helped us to practice our language and at the same time to be involved and integrated in this society.

The challenge [of moving off campus] is like a person who is eighteen years old and lives in his father's house. And his father is telling him that you are now old enough and should live your life. Guilford didn't give up on us. *They even helped us when we left campus; they helped us find the appropriate housing, apartment for me and my family to make sure that we are in the right place.*

There were people who came and helped [with the move], with their kids, picking things up by hand. . . someone brought his son with him, and this son was autistic. Despite that, his son was keen to provide assistance on a voluntary basis. This left a positive impact on us that we will not forget.



Image of Ali's wife, Marwa, and his sons in front of their new house.



## CREATING LASTING COMMUNITY

Some people that we met at the college and still up to this minute are as friends. They have become a family to us. These people are the ones who welcomed us, me and my family at the airport from the first day. They are still friends up to this moment. For example, I recall the name of brother Walid; he was amongst the people who welcomed us at the airport. Madame Diya in particular. She became a family friend, and we got to know her family, and it became like a family relationship. And we came to know that her weak point is the food. She loves Iraqi food, especially the *dolma*. We would go out and go places with some of her family members and my family; and beyond that, she shares our special occasions with us, and we share her special occasions, which are, for example, birthdays.

Halloween and Easter... we did not know [about] those occasions . . . now, honestly it has become a part of our lives. *I do not deny that we must coexist with this country, meaning for us to be able to live with them and take part of their behaviors and part of their livelihood, but in return, our original country remains a great role in our lives.*

America is considered one of the largest continents with the largest community in the world . . . and you see people here during occasions and on their official holidays, including religious holidays, until now, with their own traditional clothes that they wore in their country [of origin], and with the traditions that they practiced on these religious occasions; they did not abandon them but rather preserved them. For example, the Indian community and the Pakistani community, I noticed these communities, and I see them until now, being proud of their traditional clothing in particular.

*I hope that this will be a bigger program to accommodate a larger number of future refugees.*



Image of Ali giving a workshop at the 2023 ECAR Gathering.