

GAIS MASRI

Syria



Elana: So where are you from?

Gais: I'm from Syria..from Damascus. I was born in Damascus. My mum and dad are originally from a city call Hama.

Elana: When did you come here?

Gais: I came here in 2014, 26th of September.

Elana: Do you miss home?

Gais: I do, I do miss home. So much. But like all my friends left from there so...there is no home if everyone leaves, if you get me. I mean at some point I'm thinking of going back, if everything will be fine... I don't think it'll be fine anytime soon.

Elana: What do you miss the most about home?

Gais: I miss the weather. It used to be so good.. I mean if you compare it to here, here's so cold..but I mean, apart from that you miss the place you were more. As in, the street, going out with your friends and family... what you do during Eid...you go and meet your family, go to places and have fun, that's most of what I miss actually. Apart from relatives and stuff.. I miss my relatives and stuff, my grandpa...

Elana: Are they all still there?

Gais: My cousins are there, aunts are there, my grandma left, apart from that... everyone went away. I have some cousins in Germany. Some in Sweden. The rest I actually don't know where are they.

Elana: But is your immediate family here? I mean Amer is here...

Gais: So my brother came in 2009, I think...anyway, he used to be here before us so like after the stuff went terrible in Syria he started convincing us like come here, why do you want to go back, it's so dangerous, stuff like that...I didn't want to in the beginning, because I was like if I go to this country, I won't be back for years. So I was fighting against the idea but after I saw that, after I saw everyone started leaving, I was like just go. There's no point going back... because I faced some terrible stuff in Damascus, in school and that, so I was like there's no point in fighting this. I'll come and see what will happen.

My friends went to Holland, to Germany, some of them went to Syria actually.

Elana: They went to Syria?

Gais: Yeah they went back. Basically, I lived in Dubai for around 1.5 years, 2 years, so the same people came from Syria to Dubai and we were in the same school so it was like an amazing thing, altogether. So after that everyone finished school and wanted to leave, one went to Ukraine, one went to Jordan, some went to Syria. People went back to Syria...they actually regret that because they are living alone. Their families stayed outside, and they are just living alone and they are like the same age as me so it's difficult for them to face everything alone... I'm still trying to convince them to go out, like what's the point of staying there. There's no point. You miss your home, you miss everything but like after that what will happen? There's nothing to do there.

Elana: Are they just staying because it's what they know? Or...

Gais: Because they miss the country, that's the only thing. They can't get away from the memories, the good memories. But at some point you have to move on, as in like...a terrible thing is happening there so there is no point of staying. We did fight, we didn't stay. We lost, so we had to like just leave. In terms of them, they went back just to stay at home. They are going to university but like you are going and you don't know if you're going to live or die. Or if the government will take you to their prisons and that. It's so dangerous.

And like, whenever I call them, their families always call them and just check if they're alright. Like 24/7. Because you don't know, you don't know what will happen...that's the thing. See, I remember like 2 weeks ago, the American thing happened, when they started bombing Damascus... I was honestly like, I told my friend at 2am, it was around 5am there. There was a rocket, it came like literally 2 streets away from him.

Elana: You could hear it??

Gais: Yeah yeah yeah, you can hear the people shouting and that. He was laughing, he was like surprised, I don't know what to say. It was so weird. I was just like take care of yourself and that. They were hiding in a basement, so I was like, are you happy now? Are you happy of going back to Syria and facing all this bad stuff? He was like, this is what we have to face. So I'm still trying to convince them, but they won't listen.

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Gais: ... (cont'd): or study in unis here, because it's better, you know? In Syria they are good as well, the universities and that, but you can't really compare it to Edinburgh university. This is what I was trying to say to them...if you go out, get your certificate from there, you're safer for a while and you study and nothing will happen, and you will go back at some point, you won't just leave.

Elana: Are you officially a refugee here?

Gais: yes, I am a refugee. I think at some point, in two years, I will be a Scottish person. Haha.

Elana: You just have to pick up the accent now!

Gais: Yeah haha. I remember when I went to high school...basically here you have to pick which classes you want to go to like biology, chemistry, physics and that...and it took me two months to realize I'm in biology class. I was like what? Am I actually in biology? Cause I thought it was chemistry. And the fact that you don't understand anything, you go to the class, you just look at the teacher, trying to pretend you understood anything.

Elana: did you speak a lot of English before you came?

Gais: See, my father, when we were young, he used to tell us to watch movies a lot. To improve our English. And we used to listen to a lot of songs and that, so kind of had an idea about English and how to speak it. And I used to be so good at English in Syria, I used to be the best one out of all of my friends, because I had an idea. Sometimes my father used to speak to us in English. When I came here it was different, basically in every single school, they don't teach you how to speak. They only teach you the rules, like writing and grammar and this stuff. In terms of conversation, the only thing I knew was 'how are you, I'm good.' But you can't open a proper conversation with anyone, you can't start a conversation with anyone. Cause when I came here, I made friends, but I used to be so silent. I didn't know what to say to them, how to give them an idea of what I mean. It took a while. It took 5 months to start kind of talking and speaking, asking questions in school. It was a bit hard. But the thing I did was try to mix with the people a lot, cause this is the only way you will learn. Going to events, parties and this stuff. When I tell everyone I've been here for two years, they're like really? Your English is so good. They're surprised. If I stayed with Syrians, I will only speak Arabic. So I stopped seeing them, and started speaking English!

Elana: What was it like applying to university?

Gais: I started high school in the midterm, it was after October. Everything was difficult. I made a mistake, which is that I took the hardest subjects, I took physics, I took chemistry, biology, maths and English. People in the school were like wow you're so smart! I didn't realize until I finished high school (that I did something unusual.) When I came, I did the maths test, and all the teachers were like are you sure you wanna do this? And I did it and I got a C. Everyone was like how did you do that? Lots of people failed that exam. I said just don't read the question, look at the equation, do the equation, and that's it. I failed everything...apart from physics, I got a C in physics. And I applied to Napier, to Edinburgh college, I had a place in Edinburgh college and I went there for a year. I did first year in uni. It's kind of like foundation.

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Gais: So I went there and I had some difficulties with one of the teachers, who wasn't realising that everything is hard for me. So for example, they were giving us reports for 2 thousand words- it was so difficult for me! He used to give us so many, and I failed them, and I told him I am trying my best. Even some Scottish people failed it because it was very difficult. But I kept saying you cannot compare me to Scottish people, I have only been here for 3 years. Even though I passed every single subject in the entrance, they were way harder, but this subject is just 'wow', so different. The best thing I can do now is to go to Edinburgh Uni, take all my stuff,

all my highschool and college stuff which I passed and go to one of the admissions and just speak to one of them and tell them the story, because I deserve a place. I went there, spoke to an amazing guy, such a gentleman, the nicest guy I've seen. I told him I want a place in Napier and that I applied, and he said no worries do it through UCAS, send your personal statement and we will see. So I did that, and I got into Napier but I got into first year not second year as I had hoped, sometimes it makes you feel sad because one year is wasted, but at the same time you learn new things. I was okay with it, first year I will just learn more. So they started showing us how to write reports and basically preparing us for what is coming for us, it was very easy.

Elana: What was the biggest shock, besides the weather?

Gais: Not the same society. In terms of my mom, she like gets afraid for me going out at night, so when I meet someone like my friends she says 'watch out, there are wrong people in the streets' you don't know who is going to come to you and hit you.

...

Elana: Yeah, most drunk people here are pretty friendly

Gais: Yeah, like some people just come and hug you and you think they're your best friend. But she still has the idea of 'watch out walking at night'. I mean it's good advice for someone who is twelve years old... I mean it's a safe place, it's not dangerous and I am trying to show my mom. She is just afraid and does not like to be out at night or when I am out at night. She just does not want to go out to get the bus at night. But apart from that, nothing was bad actually, I was afraid at first that I was not going to make any friends I thought it will be hard for me in terms of English. But from the first day I went to school, I made loads of friends in the first day and then after 3 months too. After 5 months every single person in this building was my friend. I just tell myself not to listen to my brain sometimes. Just go with it, have fun because everything just gets easier. Unless you are a weird person.

Elana: What were your first impressions of Scotland?

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Gais: It reminds me of a city called Hama, It is where my dad and mum are from and it's like a small city, really old city, so it is kind of the same, 2 streets and that's it and the people here are nice, none of them look at you in the way they ask "who is that", they are all nice they all listen to you when you want to speak to someone and they are friendly. I didn't face anyone who has been racist, for me they were all fine and welcoming. Whenever you say you are from Syria, they say "Oh my God you are from Syria!" and I always say, yeah I am from hell basically. They start asking you question "so who do you have in Syria? How was it in Syria like?" So basically the questions you are asking me, I was used to being asked those questions every single day. Like, same stories, over and over. Like, what was your first impression? It was amazing. And uh, just right for summer, ready to have a good time.

Elana: Haha if we ever get there. So has your impressions of Scotland stayed the same or changed since you first came?

Gais: It changed when I made more friends.

Elana: How so?

Gais: because the first few months I used to always speak to my friends back in Syria and saying : "I miss home, I want to go back home, I can't wait to go back home, It's only five years"...this, I used to talk to my relatives, to convince my relatives like "come here, just go anywhere near here". I made some friends, these people changed everything, these people actually helped me to improve and understand this place. Understand how to deal with the people and speak with the people, how to be good to the people with me. Apart from that, honestly like I didn't face anything bad... Except for that professor I told you about *laughs*.

Elana: Can you tell us about your hope or wishes for your future here?

Gais: Yes, I mean when I get my certificate, After I don't know how many years, I'll stay here, because my future is here, because the stuff I am studying right now is basically about wind turbines, when I focus on something I want to focus on wind turbines... and in Scotland I read an article they have some projects for 2040, so basically my future is gonna be here, I don't think Syria will have this kind of things... yeah it will take Syria hundreds of years to get this stuff. So I'll still go back to Syria to visit, but I don't think I'll go back and stay there forever.

Elana: More opportunities here.

Gais: Yeah and I live here now, my friends are here, I am used to going out... *laughs*

Elana: Has there been a stand out experience from your journey or time here besides the story with that professor?

Gais: ...A good one, going to school, I miss school a lot! Like high school was the best stage in my whole life. I enjoyed that, like if they ask me to go back I'll go back again.... Yeah high school was the best thing, to be honest.

Elana: Where did you go to High school?

Gais: I went to James Gillespie's, near the Meadows and Tollcross.

Elana: If you could tell one thing to Scottish public what would it be?

Gais: Thank you for everything and thank you for being so nice to us. I honestly didn't think people would be this nice and can't understand what some feels like losing everything, like losing friends, losing family, facing bad moments. I mean because you know what they say: "No one can feel what this person feels, because this person saw everything and these people, whatever you say to them, they won't really feel what's inside you... you know what I mean? Saw someone is dying basically, no one knows what it feels like unless they see it with their eyes. Some people were like "it's ok man, you'll be fine" but... Yeah I mean, after all they are still trying to help and be so nice with you. Yeah thank them, I want to thank them. They are amazing people.

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