

# Quest for Survival and a Better Life

Nada H. Alhashimi

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Study the title.

Think about the word *quest*. What does it mean? What sorts of quests have you been on in your life?



*In this photo, refugees flee by bus.*

## A Dark and Terrifying Night

When suddenly darkness fell over a city dominated by the sound of cannon fire and gunfire, innocent lives were *extinguished*. Their souls flew high into the sky. It was June 9, 2014, in the city of Mosul. On that day, my family and I, including my parents and all my relatives, left our town under heavy gunfire. My children were so scared on this dark and *terrifying* night. All we could hear were gunshots, and all we could see were people rushing, screaming, and trying not to get killed. My kids asked me, “Why did you take us out of our rooms while we were sleeping?” They were screaming and crying when they saw the horrific scenes. “Mama,” they asked, “What’s

going on? Are we going to die?”

We ran away from our neighborhood with a small bag containing our personal documents and some spare clothes. We came across some neighbors. They were in their car. They said, “Come

with us. Let us take you to a safe place.” We got into their car and drove together.

## A 58-Hour Journey by Bus

We reached the *outskirts* of Mosul and stayed there until the morning. After that, we rented a car and drove to the city of Erbil in northern Iraq. There, I sold all my jewelry and bought five tickets for a bus that took us to Turkey. It was me, my husband, and three children on a 58-hour journey to Ankara. We were sad, devastated, and desperate. We were going into an unknown world. We couldn’t imagine what we would see. We didn’t know whether we would survive or find refuge. Everything was dark at that time. All we knew was we had to flee our home in Iraq.

## Learning Turkish on YouTube

When we arrived at the United Nations office, they greeted us. They understood our story. They sent us to a safe place to stay until we got permission to go to the United States. We went to Samsun, Turkey, and we settled there for about two and a half years. I started learning Turkish via YouTube. I joined my Turkish neighbors in all their activities, and I pushed myself to learn a lot from them. As for my husband, he worked as a waiter in a restaurant. I didn’t want to talk about



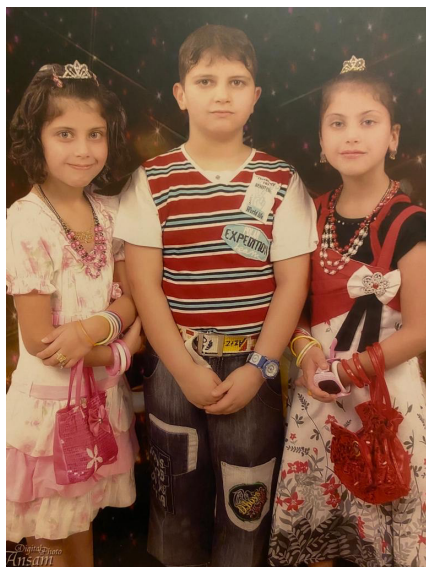
*Find Iraq and Turkey on this map. Identify other countries.*

my suffering, the loss of our warm home in Iraq, or how ISIS erased our memories and *demolished* our homes. We watched the news and cried about what was happening in Iraq. All these things make me feel pain now.

Only three months passed, and life began to improve. I'll always remember the *virtues* of my new neighbors, who helped me learn Turkish and supported us in our new life. As my language skills became stronger, I became more independent and began working with a charitable organization that supported refugees with food, clothing, and housing. During that time, my boss suggested that I help the Arabs and translate for them in the city's hospitals. At first, I was afraid because this was a big responsibility. People's lives would be in my hands. To improve my skills, I studied medical terminology when I came home in the evening. I trusted that God was with me. I *triumphed* over my despair and succeeded in my work. Gradually, I gained strength. The Arab people that I helped were proud of me. I became a role model for women in a country of *expatriates*.

### An Indescribable Joy

In November 2016, we received a call to resettle in America. We *rejoiced* to meet my brother and his family after a long separation of twelve years.



They had already been living in the U.S. for five years. It was an indescribable joy to see them. We rented a beautiful house in South Portland, Maine, enrolled my children in American schools, and my husband



The author with her twin daughters, son, and husband.

and I started to work. The beautiful days kept increasing little by little. We felt safe, stable, and free. We practice our religion without fear. The sun always rises after the night. We must feel hope, no matter how painful and unjust life is.

### AFTER YOU READ:

1. Study the vocabulary in bold italics. Can you define the word based on the context?
2. The author says, "The sun always rises after the night." This is a figurative statement (as well as being literally true). What does it mean in this context?

Nada H. Alhashimi is a student at Portland Adult Education in Portland, Maine. Her birthplace is Mosul, Iraq. Currently, she lives in Portland, Maine, with her beautiful family consisting of her husband, son and twin daughters. She is very happy to be a U.S. citizen now.

