



# BEYOND THE FIRE: Teen Experiences of War

## TEEN REFUGEE TRANSCRIPTS

The following are transcripts of the audio stories told by teen refugees at [www.beyondthefire.net](http://www.beyondthefire.net). Teachers can use this text version in the classroom, especially when computer access is limited, to help their students learn about the lives of teens in war. Questions related to each teen's story can be found on the site as well—please see the Travelog Questions.



## **BEYOND THE FIRE: Teen Experiences of War**

### **Naima Margan, Somalia**

#### Normal Life in War

My life was pretty normal in the sense that, what is normal to me is seeing cars filled with weapons, going past your house. People carrying guns all the time. Bullets flying by and sometimes a few miles away there's the actual fighting and the people that were fighting, were kids. And they were 16, 17, 18. Those were the people that were riding those cars with all these weapons, because that's the only thing they can do. Everywhere you go you're reminded by something that's there. You see a person with no legs walking with their hands or a person with no hands. It's a reality, really, for you.

### **Naima Margan, Somalia**

#### One Evening At Dinner...

My house in Somalia... well it was right in the center where everything was happening. It's a huge house and we used to run around it. We had a goat, my Mom, it was hard for her to get milk, so she would milk the goat for us. We had a little well because, the water system broke down when the war started and so that's where we used to get our water.... I also remember one time we were eating dinner... it was just really calm, my Mom is telling a story and we were like shoving food into our mouths and out of nowhere this bullet comes like, flying by and scrapes my sister's hand. You can still kinda see the scar there.

### **Naima Margan, Somalia**

#### Waking up to War

When the war started I was about three, four years old. It's hard for me to remember that day that I really recognized there was war. You wake up to those weapons it's a reality for you after a while. There's nothing you can do about it. It's not normal for a kid to be talking about the war 24/7 because even though it's going on, you're not in it. You're not part of it. When you're in that kind of situation you kinda have to find a niche; a place where it becomes normal, and have that time to yourself. You kind of try to talk about kid stuff because you have that sense that there's war there is like, fear and that normal kid personality that you have, changed a little bit.

### **Naima Margan, Somalia**

#### Living in the United States

My life changed, I guess for the better because I have more opportunities for me here than I did there. I am like thinking about my future. I am thinking about what I want to become. I have goals right now. If I was still there I wouldn't be thinking the way I am. The days would have went by... nothing to look forward to. I'm definitely proud of my life. I wouldn't be who I am. I wouldn't be as motivated, and I wouldn't be as eager to be something, if I haven't been through what I've been through in Somalia and Kenya and here now.



## **BEYOND THE FIRE: Teen Experiences of War**

### **Muhiddin Abou, Somalia**

#### **Grow Up Fast or Die Fast**

When I was about the age of seven, it was either grow up fast or die fast. Growing up fast is realizing there's no time for playing. You have to act more like an adult and staying home, looking after the younger kids... so I wouldn't be going outside playing sports and not knowing where they are. My parents... they would focus more on trying to keep us alive, trying to keep us out of war and it was our job to keep each other safe and it was their job to keep us alive with food. Most people were dying of hunger than of guns. If I would act childish and went playing outside then you could have two sisters and one brother dead. It's common sense... you see little kids outside playing around and getting shot. We had seven brothers and four sisters which is still what we have right now. But when we were in Somalia, it was eight... so one ended up dying.

### **Muhiddin Abou, Somalia**

#### **Attacked by the Rebels**

One day that my dad was at work and my mom was at work, too and then they came to our house saying that they need tires. My big brother was there. They knocked on the door, asked for tires, and our brother just slammed the door right in their face and they shot and shot. The smaller of mine almost got shot right in the eye. The bullet went right past his face. They shot five to six ammos and just drove off and left. My dad decided to leave after all this. We moved out at night. There were guys waiting for you right outside the door. So we moved out at twelve o'clock at night when everybody's sleeping and it's quiet. Loaded up, us and a couple of other families who wanted to move. There was nothing we could talk about. We were all afraid, all quiet. We just kept clothes and food. So we just left the house almost full.

### **Muhiddin Abou, Somalia**

#### **Always Moving: Life as a Teen Refugee**

We just crossed the border, we entered Kenya, seen all lights and I thought we were sleeping in a building. They were like, no we're sleeping outside. We're like, okay! Slept outside for two days, when we finally got that apartment we were wishing for. We lived in that place for a year. And then they said that we were going to move into a camp. Camp! I didn't even know what that meant. So we moved into a camp, we got tents. Okay! This is different. It's getting worse in every step! We came from living in a big house to living in a small house.... We ended up in the street for like four or five days. We ended up in Kenya where we had to live outside, and we ended up in a year in this house, and we ended up in a tent for eight years, and we're like okay, this is getting worse and worse every step of every year.



## **BEYOND THE FIRE: Teen Experiences of War**

### **Lila Farah, Somalia**

#### The Knock on the Door

We knew something was happening. I would overhear my mom and her friend talking about moving before this big thing happened and we were wondering what this big thing was. It was a war. People running around with guns knocking on each person's door. Somebody came on our door, they were knocking on it. They had a gun. At that time, my dad was in jail. We didn't have somebody to guard us and stuff. My mom had to say that we're not that tribe you're looking for. We're a different tribe. But they would notice, they'd get suspicious. And they would have this gun at her head, to her face and stuff. Let us see your house, if somebody else is in here. If she was lying or something, so they would come in the house and throw everything out. They would do this every day until we left. We had to leave. We had to go to my dad's sister's house. My mom was talking to a couple of her friends. That's when she heard our house had been burned. They burned it.

### **Lila Farah, Somalia**

#### Getting Shot

When you open the door, you could just smell the gunpowder stuff. You could smell the blood. You could smell the fire. Some people burned in their house I heard. To me it was the end of the world. I'm like, what is going on. What is this place turning to? What's happening out there? I was a little kid, I was like seven. A lot of times I had to be locked out because I was so interested to go outside. Yeah! I was so interested to see what's happening that I dumbly went outside. I went around the back yard of my aunt's house. I went in a little place and then I saw this guy with a gun, you know. I was like, what is he doing. And then I started running. Then he just shot me in the leg. I was crying, crying. I thought I was going to die. A lot of blood was coming out. I was scared. I was feeling my blood in my hand. I was crying and crying. My other sister, Sarah, she came out, and then my mom came out, and my aunt, everybody started coming out. They took me to hospital. They got the bullet out first, of course, and then they sewed it up.

### **Lila Farah, Somalia**

#### Living with Fear

I would hear little kids crying, mothers crying, fathers yelling. It was a little town, so you could hear everything. We were frightened. We thought we was going to die.... We would hear other doors being knocked on. We would feel like it's us next, you know.... We would always think that we're next, we were going to die. They would shoot our mother, shoot somebody. We would not joke around, but say some stuff like... if mom dies. We would think of the wrong stuff. My big sister would think like, I would grab you guys if mom dies and get you out of here and stuff.... I would be screaming at her. Be quiet. Mom ain't going to die. And she would be like, what if, and I would be like, it's not if. Mom's not going to die, so just be quiet. We're not next. I was always thinking of the positive side. They were thinking of the negative side, and we would fight.



## BEYOND THE FIRE: Teen Experiences of War

### Winnie Kassa, Sudan

#### Memories of Home in Juba

I don't have very strong memories of living there. Basically having the joy of waking up in the morning and going to school, after coming from school playing with your friends, climbing trees, enjoying being outdoors, not worrying about how that person looks at you and everything that goes around here in the States. Back then it was just enjoying being a kid. Everybody got along with each other and we all loved playing sports together, eating mangos together, you know. You had to go for the ripe one I climbed on mango tree, fell off, but learned my lesson. My brother used to always go with his friends and they'd all climb trees and stuff. Simple stuff that you miss little things now that you wish you had.

### Winnie Kassa, Sudan

#### Escape to Safety

I think I moved from there when I was about six, and came to Kenya. My parents actually haven't explained to me why we left. It was just like "Oh, yeah, we're going on vacation to see our aunts and uncles, so we have to go now," so I'm like, "okay"... tagging along... decided to go see a few lost friends that I haven't seen, and cousins, new cousins to me. We stayed in our uncle's place, so that was fun. There, my father found an apartment and we stayed there. There was this night when I asked well, are we ever going to go back and they were like, "No, I think we're going to be staying here," and stuff, so I'm like, Okay! I actually didn't have a problem with it at all because most of the people most of the people in Sudan were moving out and some of them were coming to Kenya.

### Winnie Kassa, Sudan

#### Hoping for Peace

My mom's side of the family, most of them were killed, seven people at once, including my grandfather.... I don't know how many of them are left. My mom's sister lives in Portland now. My mom didn't know where her sister was for 14 years. (pause) After hearing that you've lost a certain amount of people, it's just like, you get used to it. Oh! A few more to go probably and you're probably going to hear bad news every other week. So, you have hope for peace. You hope that one day this is going to change, but it just every year by after year. Oh, still, peace has not come. Nothing is resolved. Makes you wanna just stand up and curse for no reason.

### Winnie Kassa, Sudan

#### Go Back to Your Country!

I feel safe in Portland. I can walk around any time, but nowadays I'm thinking not to. I had a few incidents where I'm walking down the street you hear this person scream "go back to your country." Once I was standing at the bus stop and there was this old guy in his car, he drives by, slows down, rolls down his window and looks me straight in the eye and says *go back to your country*. And I'm just looking at him. It's very hurtful. I don't even know who you are. And how dare you say something like that to me. Is it because I'm a foreigner? Is it because I'm black? Why you treating me like this? There's so many questions you wanna ask, but how are they going to answer it? I didn't choose to be here. It wasn't my choice. If my country wasn't in war, I would love to be there.



## **BEYOND THE FIRE: Teen Experiences of War**

### **John Makol, Sudan**

#### **Attacked by the Military**

The military attacked our village at night. We were all sleeping. Suddenly there was the sound of gunfire and I ran outside. My parents were not around. Many people were killed in front of me. I ran away as fast as possible and joined a group of people that were fleeing. There were some adults who were guiding us to safety, telling where to go. In the group, I saw my uncle who had also escaped. I asked him if he knew where my parents were, but he said don't worry about your parents we'll find them but right now we need to find a safe place. I didn't know if my parents were alive or dead. I just thought at least I was safe with my uncle.

### **John Makol, Sudan**

#### **Walking a Thousand Miles to Safety**

It was a long journey, maybe more than 1,000 miles, walking for days until we reached Ethiopia. The soldiers followed us as we ran from one place to the next. They would attack us and many people were killed. We kept running. Some people were too sick or too weak to keep up with the group and would fall behind. We didn't see them because they died or were killed by wild animals. Our situation was hopeless and I thought we were going to die soon. We ate the leaves of trees because we could not find food. When we reached Ethiopia, things got better and we felt ok, we got food and clothing. We were there for two years. Then the civil war started in Ethiopia and we had to run once again.

### **John Makol, Sudan**

#### **Harassed in Atlanta**

Sometimes if I feel some difficulties like somebody mistreats me then I miss my parents. Where I go to school sometimes I don't speak like Americans and I am also different from them because I am really black, so some other kids they keep yelling at me. And they say look at this person, he is too dark. Why is he like this? I don't tell them anything because I know I'm God's creation, not my own. I didn't create myself. I feel mad why they do that when I am a person like them. I have two legs, two hands, two eyes. The same intellect, you know. I feel mad why they do that to me.



## **BEYOND THE FIRE: Teen Experiences of War**

### **Chuku Manseray, Sierra Leone**

#### **Walking Home from School**

From school when we're going home we talk about when we grow up, how many kids are we going to have, what we are going to become, how we gonna be in the future... My own thing was, I want to become a doctor. Some of them want to become business manager. We were not able to think about like, we are going to have war in our country. We don't think about that. But as time passed, a lot of people died. They take a lot of people, like my friend, they take all three. I was safe because...when the rebels came I was at my aunt's. And when everything is finished, I hear that my three friends were taken away, the rebels took them to go to the bush.... When they came, they just find kids like us, and just rape, just kill. When they catch you, they going to give you drugs, like they gonna inject you to become one of them.

### **Chuku Manseray, Sierra Leone**

#### **Child Soldiers at the Door**

My mom and all the families they were in the house. When they were in there, the rebel, little boy, came to the door and knock and he was holding a gun. The long one—bigger than him. The boy said, we want money from this house. We heard that your husband is from America so we need one million dollars. And my mom said, hah, my husband can't even send me money like five hundred or something like that. So they say you wait for us here, we're going to kill you here, we're going to burn you, everybody going to die.... So my mom told the other family that we have to move and go to the other apartment of the neighbors, and they were all looking out the window when the boys came in. When they came, they just put the gas and light the lighter, the fire just burned. My bicycle burned. My sister's bicycle burned. Everything. The house go down!

### **Chuku Manseray, Sierra Leone**

#### **Escape from Freetown**

We decided to go to Conakry in Guinea. My father just sent money and said you guys have to pull out to Conakry. We didn't know anybody in Conakry. We went on a boat. My mom didn't go because the boat was full, so me, my sister, my grandma and my cousin, we just go. We take six days on the water. We were just throwing up. I was sick. The boat was so full of people. You can't even step your foot, you're going to step on someone. Everybody just want to jump in the boat and go to a safe side. Every night I cried. I cried every night. I cry for my mom, say oh my God, she's the only one left there. I was scared for her. The Guinea ...the government said we can't land, so the captain go there and talk to the people, they let us land.



## **BEYOND THE FIRE: Teen Experiences of War**

### **Nyeweh Yombah, Sierra Leone**

#### Life Back Home

We only have one city, it is Freetown. I kinda grew up with a lot of kids around me. We have all of our family relatives living in the same house, so we have my uncle's kids, my auntie's kids. Growing up there was kind of fun actually... just come from school, eat and play, play, play. We don't used to worry about we growing up, we just play all along.... My dad, he didn't like us to be going to public schools, so we mainly went to private schools. I was into all this extra curriculum stuff like drama and dancing after school. I used to be in the Girl's Guide, it's like Boy Scouts but for girls. We do camping; we stay at school for the entire weekend, making bonfire camps, going on camping trips and that sort of thing.

### **Nyeweh Yombah, Sierra Leone**

#### Thanksgiving Day

It was a Sunday morning because it was my Thanksgiving Day. My mom took us to the salon, we did our hairs and everything. Around seven o' clock, my dad had a call from her sister that lives in the western part and she told my dad that if he heard any gun shots and my dad was like uh-uh we didn't hear no gun shots yet. As soon as he put the phone down that was when we start hearing people running from down the street coming up the hill.... People start hearing gun shots down the street and people start running and saying the rebels are here, the rebels are here.... We didn't know what a gunshot was or what guns were. We just heard sounds boom, boom, boom. As soon as you heard that you know straight that's what is going on right there. Once my dad took notice that this is not going to stop he tell all the adults to pack up our things. So he started sending the little kids back to the provinces.

### **Nyeweh Yombah, Sierra Leone**

#### Refuge in the United States

My dad was the one who told us the news.... When we came home from school one days, he said guess what... we got our papers to come over here. We were happy actually.... We had this notion that once you get to America, you don't need clothes. They provide you clothes, they provide you things to wear and all that sort of thing. So our entire clothes, house things, we just gave them all away to kids and our cousins also. When we first got here I remember my parents were saying, they have to pay our rent for the first two months, but then after that, they gave us food stamps. The food stamps did help a little, but then sooner or later they took the food stamps away and then, because my dad found a job. And it was not a worthwhile job, it was just something he found one day because he doesn't want to sit at home no more. And then, all of the sudden they stopped paying the bills, so my parents had to depend on themselves to pay the bills.



## **BEYOND THE FIRE: Teen Experiences of War**

### **Facia Carter, Liberia**

#### **Waking Up Afraid**

My life was not really normal because there were war, always war. We're always running from this place to that place. It was not stable, like a stable condition where you stay in one house until you grow up. We were always traveling and going to this other place and coming back. We never used to be comfortable. We go to school and worry that the rebels will come one day. Every day I wake up, we don't know what's going to happen. So I think about, am I going to die today, because every day there is something, some kind of problem in the country.

### **Facia Carter, Liberia**

#### **No Power and No Water**

I was 14 or 13 years old. I have to go to school, come back, and there was not water running through the faucet. You get bucket and take it to the pump and get water from the pump one time or two times a day. Sometime when it's the dry season, you stay at the pump the whole day, because you can't get water. Actually, I never saw water running through a faucet in Liberia. There was no electricity. You buy candles and light it in your house. I studied by using a candle. I lit the candle and put it on the table and study.

### **Facia Carter, Liberia**

#### **War Shuts Down the Schools**

Sometimes the situation, the war makes them close the school down. They think the war will come in the city, so they close the schools. The principal or the school board, they write a letter telling your parents that they don't think it's safe for the kids to be out that day, so they shouldn't be in school. Then we stay home for the next day or for the next few weeks. There was a lot of kids in the classroom who was, too old for the class. Some were 20 years old in fifth grade because of war. They would stay home for a few years and go back to school.

### **Facia Carter, Liberia**

#### **Life in Virginia**

I like going to school every, every morning. Oh yeah! I enjoy school.... I'm in the tenth grade and I'm in my school's homecoming. I'm in the powder-puff girl's football. No boy allowed to play it. (chuckles). The school is very big. I like everything about it. People ask me where I'm from. What they do there, how they live. What's up with your country? Every day it's on news, I feel so embarrassed because it doesn't show any good picture of the country. It shows just the ugly picture.



## **BEYOND THE FIRE: Teen Experiences of War**

### **Abou Sangare, Liberia**

#### **Captured by the Rebels**

When the war started I was playing at home. My brother and my mother were in the kitchen. My father was at the mosque. At 9 to 10 am we heard guns and see the rebels burning houses. Everyone was running. The rebels killed all the people in the mosque. My mother cried, "Abou your father is dead. They say your father is dead." So my mother took me to hide on the roof. They came to burn our house. There was a lot of smoke, smoke, smoke.... My mother said ok. We have to go down, if the rebel sees us they'll kill us but that is better than stay here and the fire burn us. When we went down, they saw us. They came to beat my mother and beat me and take us with them.

### **Abou Sangare, Liberia**

#### **Working at the Rebel Camp**

They were taking the people to walk with them, to walk to their camp. Two soldiers controlled us and the others were shooting people. Even if they didn't like you, they'd shoot you. We walked to their camp. There they give job to my mom and give me job too. My mom cooked their food. Each morning the rebels would round up everyone, they'd look at you and sometimes they'd kill someone. They said that my mom knows how to cook so she will be safe there. But every time they would beat her. Three months later UN troops came to burn down the camp and rescued us.

### **Abou Sangare, Liberia**

#### **Refugee Life**

I was in Guinea for six years but was living in a camp – where the refugees from the war would be safe. It was very hard and was very difficult because my mother didn't have anyone but only me and my small brother. They had killed my father. We lived, like many, many people, not in houses. We made a hut from tree branches and we put a plastic sheet for the roof and stay in it. All the people stay like this. We didn't have enough food. Sometimes the camp people bring us food, but after a few days it was finished and we would go out to the city to find food.



## **BEYOND THE FIRE: Teen Experiences of War**

### **Zubair Nejrubi, Afghanistan**

#### **My Father is Shot!**

I was nine years old.... I remember it was a Friday afternoon about three o' clock, that a fire rocket came up from the north and hit the south. The rocket actually hit close by my house. My father was outside the door and a piece of rocket came and straight hit on his heart. And then he came in the house and he was holding a paper towel on his head and said I have been shot. Once he said that word, then he lay down on the ground and blood came out of all the places. It was scary. All of my family, my brothers, sisters all of them were screaming what happened to my father. Then my mom ran outside and called the ambulance. There was no ambulance. One of our neighbors had a car and when he got outside our house my father was already dead.

### **Zubair Nejrubi, Afghanistan**

#### **Nothing to Do!**

We had school if you go there they only teach you about the Koran. No math, no science, no biology, no history. Nothing! No athletics. Just stay there. No chairs to sit, you have to sit on the ground. No power, no electricity, nothing. No laboratory. Nothing.... I had no other choice.... I had nothing to do. If I try to find a job they won't let me to work because I was too small.... From the morning we came out there was a shop we sit there till lunchtime then go home, eat your lunch, come back stay there till night and go back home. That's all we did for three years. Horrible! Just sit there, look at each other and talk every single day.

### **Zubair Nejrubi, Afghanistan**

#### **Walking on Land Mines**

There is a Taliban checkpoint and on the other side there's a lot of... land mines... so they can't get through because of the mine, so they were forcing people to walk on the mine, blow up the mine so they can get through to fight. When they got no choice, they come back to Kabul. Taliban are searching houses for boys and young men to take with them to the north and try to force them to walk on the mine line and blow up the mines so they can get through.... I heard one of my friends say my uncle's son has been dead walking on a bomb for the Taliban to get to the Northern Alliance.

### **Zubair Nejrubi, Afghanistan**

#### **A City Bombed to Rubble**

Once you enter Kabul, you feel like you are entering a place that has been in war for so long time, you know. You can see a lot of place that has been shot with a rocket, shotgun, machine gun. You can see a lot of destroying of tanks, weapons on the street, bullets. Kabul has been changed. When I was young it was a lot of big buildings. When I grow up I didn't see any of them. The buildings are all gone you know. No more buildings. It was horrible. No one can imagine how you live on it. It is really funny you know that. Imagine a person who is 16, from the date of his birth you find out that his country has been in a fight and he has never seen peace or something like that.



## **BEYOND THE FIRE: Teen Experiences of War**

### **Shaima Abdul, Afghanistan**

#### **The Taliban Come to Town**

I remember we used to wake up at seven a.m. to get ready for school. Classes started at eight a.m. One day we went to school and saw the Taliban soldiers outside. They said school was closed. They told all teachers to go back home. They said there's no school for girls and you can all go home. Don't come to school anymore. We got really scared and went home. The Taliban closed many places including doctors' offices. After that, we couldn't leave our house for a month. We were always inside, us girls and my mom. After some time, my parents made a hole in the wall of our house, between our home and the neighbors. So we could go to our neighbors from inside the house and not risk being seen outside. For us kids this was great, we were just playing.

### **Shaima Abdul, Afghanistan**

#### **Where is my Father?**

I remember, it was like one or two at night when the Taliban came to our house. They knocked on the door and said they were poor people looking for food. So my mom opened the door. The Taliban pushed her aside and came into the house and grabbed my dad. They beat my father and took him away. Some days later we got a letter from my father saying that he was in jail in Kandahar and that we need to send money for his release. So my mom went there and she took some clothes for my dad. But she didn't have all the money the Taliban were asking for so they sent her back. She went again two or three times. Ten days went by and my father was still in jail. Then we stopped getting letters from my dad. We waited for six months and then we moved to Pakistan.

### **Shaima Abdul, Afghanistan**

#### **Weaving Carpets to Eat**

When we got to Pakistan my mother worked for two months, but then she lost her job so we kids started working. We found a neighbor who was willing to teach us how to weave carpets so we went to his house to work. The first few days, my brothers complained and wanted to stop working but I explained that if we didn't work we would not be able to take care of ourselves. After about a month, we started working from home making rugs. I was ten years old and my brothers were ten, nine and eight. For the first six months it was fun, but after that I was just exhausted. We started work at four o'clock in the morning and finished at 11 at night. We had a hard time, but we decided to stay because we did not have any other choice. It would take us a month and a half to make a six by six meter carpet. Some of the bigger carpets took us ten months to weave. We were paid \$200 every two months. It was good money in Pakistan. That's why we were working.



## **BEYOND THE FIRE: Teen Experiences of War**

### **Jelena Serenac, Bosnia (Yugoslavia)**

#### Growing Up With War

When I was three and a half years old, that's when the war started in Yugoslavia. During that time I didn't know much. I sensed that something was wrong.... We all came to a point well, if we were all meant to die, you know it's going to happen, so we kind of accepted it. We tried to see it as it could happen to us, so we should prepare ourselves to deal with it. When it hits you, when somebody that you knew or someone you're close to or their family or somebody, had just died. Seeing that scene, that loss, it's really unbearable. You understand war and you're forced to grow up sooner than most kids do.

### **Jelena Serenac, Bosnia (Yugoslavia)**

#### Lucky to be Alive

There were times that it got really bad. We'd be going to school and then just all of a sudden the sirens would go off and we'd all of us just have to stop what we were doing and the teachers would all get us away from the windows, near the walls or in a basement... during that moment everybody is trying not to panic... we'd all be scared and look up to our teachers like they were our mothers and fathers, and they were during that time.... For hours we'd be sitting there and wondering where our parents are, whether they were still alive or not. And then you'd see parents running trying to get us so that we were at least all together. Looking back we're really lucky to still be alive, because there were so many people that died in crossfire, kids, women, men... for nothing.

### **Jelena Serenac, Bosnia (Yugoslavia)**

#### Experiencing War

War it shouldn't even be an option. There's so many intelligent people we should be able to find a way to not start a war. The people die just for what, really? What do you solve? Nothing! Who gets more land over what or who?... The kids who don't experience war they should never experience it. But they should know about it because you never know what tomorrow brings you. And they should have some kind of understanding of the kids who grew up in a war or are still in a war and having some sense of what they are going through, some understanding. And they shouldn't take so many things for granted.



## **BEYOND THE FIRE: Teen Experiences of War**

### **Beserta Osmani, Kosovo**

#### **Five Minutes to Leave**

I remember with my mom, we went to the food store to get milk. My dad was very nervous that we might not come back because he heard that there were people being kicked out, but we got home and at about four actually, we saw some people out of our building leaving. And we're like, what's going on, and they told us that a few blocks away people are getting kicked out, and we just couldn't believe it. But then my dad stepped out of the house and.... He actually saw people and he just told us to get out as soon as possible because he didn't want to get stuck in there. If you say something, they will just shoot you or something. And then we left our house in five minutes. We just took passports and some bread. And we left, you just left everything that was once part of your life.

### **Beserta Osmani, Kosovo**

#### **The Train to Nowhere**

We left our house and there was a big line of people walking downtown to the train station. You would think that the whole people in the city were out on the streets, just making their way to the train. Nobody was speaking, it was so dead, the train station was crowded with people. The first train just passed by and we couldn't get on. And when the next one came, my dad got in through the window. That's how we all got in, we had no idea where the train was taking us. We were hoping somewhere out, the drivers that were driving the train, they would stop at where they had the army bases because those were the NATO targets. So they would stop there just to create panic. They were thinking that the NATO might hit the train and then to blame the NATO for it. Then we made our way to Macedonia.

### **Beserta Osmani, Kosovo**

#### **Stranded at the Border**

When we got off the train, at the border, the Macedonia and Kosovo border, the police, they made us just walk through the railway track. They didn't want to leave us go off the track because they were saying that the fields have mines in them. They just wanted to humiliate the whole population, imagine two people at a time on a railroad track. When we arrived, there was a big field and it was crowded with people that had arrived there before. They were stuck in that field for weeks. Some of them had lit some fire with pieces of wood. And there were organizations giving food. You would see sick people there. There were some that were really dying there because it wasn't a very good area. You had no shelter, you had nowhere to sleep. There were families that were saying that it was raining last night, people were getting sick. It was very sad.



## **BEYOND THE FIRE: Teen Experiences of War**

### **Fatma Alzerj, Iraq**

#### **Escape from Nasiriyah**

My dad, he was in the Gulf War and he realized that Iraq was losing and he was afraid so he, to keep the family safe, tried to escape. He got my mom, me and my little brother, Ahmed, packed up and gone within just a few hours. My little brother, the second youngest, he was left in Iraq. He was with my mother's family at the time. They were in the countryside and we were in the city and we had to leave at that certain time because they were opening up the gates for that one moment. If you don't step and go over it you are not ever going to go through it again. So it was a must. That was another reason why it was so hard for them, my parents because they gave up a child for the safety of their other children.

### **Fatma Alzerj, Iraq**

#### **Growing up Fast!**

In the beginning it was very adventurous. It was like oh my god, wow. I can see these incredibly new things and meet these new people. And then later on, after many more moves it was exhausting, especially for someone as young as I because my mother depended on me. I had to grow up pretty fast. I was changing diapers by the time I was four, five. I had to be a lot more mature and very adult-like at that age. I felt like I had to be an adult and it got to the point that whenever I acted like a child—when I whined or when I wanted something—I would feel guilty. I felt like I was letting my family down and my mom down.

### **Fatma Alzerj, Iraq**

#### **A Slap in the Face**

It's not fun watching my parents have to suffer all over again. They suffer maybe with different problems, but still it's like going over it all over again, the pain and all that stuff. We came here and got three months' assistance from the government. I don't know who came up with that, but whoever did apparently never learned to speak another foreign language and learn it like this. My parents did not. I did. In less than a year, I was fluent in English. I learned fast, but they only know how to say "hello," "how are you," "goodbye." So it was like a slap in the face. They brought us here, which everyone told us everything would work out and all that stuff. They were so kind to us during the three months. They brought toys for my little brothers and then one day they stopped coming... I really distrusted them afterwards.



## **BEYOND THE FIRE: Teen Experiences of War**

### **Fouad Saleh, Iraq**

#### **Losing Family**

When the war came, everyone was just running. Many people were lost from their family, parents lost. Some people died on the way, people couldn't find their daughters or sons. When we were in Syria, every day I remember my parents talking about it. They would cry, especially my grandmother. We had also lost part of our family... my mother's brother was left behind in Iraq. He could not come with us. Just a few months ago, we found out that he was still in Iraq. For ten years we didn't even know where he was or where he lived so we could send some money to. He is there now by himself, alone.

### **Fouad Saleh, Iraq**

#### **Unwelcome Guests**

I remember when I was five years old I start in first grade. I went for three years then quit. We went to public school, which the government paid for us. It was hard to live in the refugee camp and the school was really far away. It took an hour to walk there. Especially in the winter it was very cold, it took an hour to an hour and half to get there. The Syrian people had everything, they had a bus to take them to school and back. But they didn't do that for us because we were living in a camp and there made a difference, between refugee and citizens. When I quit school, I had to sit at home, there was nothing to do. I was too young to find a job.

### **Layad Saleh, Iraq**

#### **Working as a Child**

When I was ten years old I started working to help my family because it was too hard to get enough money to buy food and clothes. I worked on construction projects, carrying bricks up the building. I also carried cement up to the builders. It was very hard for me to take these bricks to the second and third floor. It was difficult to work constantly for five hours a day.... Sometimes I worked from ten AM to five PM. The summers were very hot there and it was even harder to work in that heat. I worked for two years. My older brothers were also working there. They saw that I was having a really hard time working. They told me to stop and to stay at home with my younger brothers. They continued to work.