

The Mosas:

A family's pilgrimage from war to freedom

By Izzy Ellery
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Imagine being a child in war-torn Iraq. Turning on the television to see Saddam Hussein's trial. Waiting outside for school buses that never come. This is how junior Leen Mosa and freshman Nuha Mosa lived their childhood.

"Every time something would happen, my sister would wake me up because my bed was next to a window," Leen Mosa said. "I couldn't stay there because if something happened, then the windows might shatter and fall down on me ... the aftermath of a bomb."

"I remember most of the trial after Saddam Hussein was captured because they aired it live," Leen said. "I also remember when the air raid sirens went off. We would all go in the basement and wait there until it was done."

Leen and Nuha's father Sahir Mosa realized that this atmosphere was not the place to raise Leen and Nuha and their two older sisters, Sara and Dayana. He saw the United States as the right place for their family because "it's a free country with valuable opportunities."

"It was too dangerous and we tried to go (to school), but the schools were falling apart, teachers weren't good and buses weren't coming," Leen Mosa

said. "I wasn't getting anything out of it, like no benefits. I wouldn't learn, so we had to go for better opportunities, better jobs."

They were able to leave the uncertainty of Iraq by moving to Syria while they waited for the United Nations to accept them like they did other Iraqi refugees.

"It was a long process. We got rejected like six times but we kept re-submitting our paperwork," Leen Mosa said. "Sometimes they pick other families that are in more danger or are better off in other places. Because of that, we stayed in Syria for four years."

In their four years in Syria, the Mosas adapted to the culture and people, but still sought a better life.

"During the process of coming here I wasn't excited by many things. I was really nervous and sad at leaving everything behind," Leen Mosa said. "It was a little bit messy and confusing."

The eldest Mosa sister, Sara, enjoyed her four years in Syria.

"In Syria, I liked the intermediate culture, not too traditional and not too open-minded. (It) was the first experience outside of my own country," Sara said. "The people were very nice and welcoming and had the same values as us, so we didn't feel foreign."

Once they came to America in 2008, the girls began

school, taking ESL (English Second Language) to catch up. In Syria, the girls were taught basic English, but the curriculum followed British-English grammar rules. They had to jump blindly into a new school with a new language.

Nuha's fifth grade teacher Karen Gallagher coached her through her first year in American schools.

"(Nuha) worked with a wonderful ESL teacher who provided additional support," Gallagher said. "I also worked closely with the ESL teacher to modify lessons and find alternative ways to assist Nuha. She was open and willing to share information about her culture. I wasn't nervous about teaching her, in fact, I was thrilled to have her in my class because she sparked an interest in my students to learn more about people in other countries."

Even with the assistance, Leen's transition wasn't breezy.

"School is really important to me, but I was really nervous about it," she said. "How was I going to understand what they were talking about, what the lesson was? I can't do my homework, I can't take tests. It was freaking me out, but the teachers were really nice and they helped me out."

Nuha Mosa shares this belief, and says Americans, in general, are considerate.

"The people here are a lot

more understanding and nice about a lot of things," Nuha said. "The people here are really different so it kind of helped us get used to it here."

After four years here, the Mosas are still adjusting and learning the language and culture of the states. To Leen, there are times when it still feels like a dream.

"The whole experience was kind of intriguing. I didn't know what to expect of coming here. When I first came here and everything was in English, and there was a bunch of trees everywhere – it was so dream-like. I couldn't take in the moment yet," Leen Mosa said. "It wasn't until a couple of months later that it finally hit me, like this is where I'm going to be the rest of my life."

"It's not like I'm going to go back or I'll wake up and be back in Syria."

ABOVE: In Iraq in 2001, from left to right: Dayana (10 years old), Leen (5 years old), Sara (11 years old) and Nuha (four years old).

BELOW: The girls at Parcels Middle School in 2012, for Nuha's 8th grade promotion ceremony. From left to right: Leen (15 years old), Nuha (14 years old), Sara (21 years old) and Dayana (20 years old).



300 WORDS: A SERIES

Lunch helper: Al Fox

By Dayle Maas
& Kim Cusmano
EDITORS

"A couple kids didn't even talk. They ranted and raved a little bit, but they didn't talk."

Head custodian Al Fox describes the original communication between him and his lunchtime clean up crew – special education students.

When Fox worked at South High School, the special education teachers approached him and asked if there was anything their students could help him with. The 17-year Grosse Pointe Public School System veteran was eager to comply. He and the teachers decided that the students could help clean the cafeteria and surrounding areas after lunch.

"I learned a lot," he said. "You have to have patience with everybody. It doesn't matter if you had a good day or a bad day, seeing those kids do that kind of work and know they are getting something out of it is beneficial in my opinion."

Fox has moved to North and has continued the program here. With the expanded AI Magnet program, eight students take part in the cleanup service.

"Now they are actually talking. Not clear, clear ... you have to listen. You have to have patience."

The students work Tuesdays and Thursdays to tidy the cafeteria after lunch. Fox has seen progress in the students' work skills and in their communication.

"If they need something, they come get me, they tell me," Fox said.



Janitor Al Fox

This year, one student in the program is further expanding his vocational skills by doing a work study with Fox. During fifth hour every day, he helps Fox with any tasks the custodial staff might be faced with, whether it be taking out the trash or sweeping.

Fox understands the patience it takes to work with all students.

"I'm a custodian, the day boss, the day foreman – if there's anything, we're all teachers. We're all teaching somebody something."

Editor's note: 300 Words presents glimpses of everyday life that often go unnoticed. There are exactly 300 words. You can count them if you want.

Where's the beef?



By Melina Glusac
STAFF REPORTER

When most people go to Taco Bell, they order a meaty taco or maybe a beef burrito. Junior Alana Page opts for a cheese quesadilla instead.

Page is the definition of a staunch vegetarian, having never eaten meat in her life.

In fact, her whole immediate family is the same; her brothers, aunt and parents are all vegetarians.

"When [my mom] got married to my dad and they started a family, they decided that was how they wanted to raise us," Page said.

The inspiration for this lifestyle choice stems from Page's mother. She read *Diet for a New America* by John Robbins, a book that explores the methods of meat production, how the animals are raised and the consequences of these choices. The read was a sobering experience for the once-unsure vegetarian.

"All of the cruelty that's associated ... with the raising of poultry was disturbing," Eve Ann Page said.

Page never forced the herbivorian diet on her kids, though.

"I was just cooking for the family, and so they ate what I made," she said.

It's hard eating vegetarian, even at restaurants – at least not to Page.

"There's so many different options without meat, and you can always get stuff made without meat," Page said. "It's what I'm used to."

She is uncomfortable, however, when she has to explain her situation to people.

"It's usually awkward when I'm at someone's house and they don't know," Page said. "Their parents will be like 'Do you want a turkey sandwich or something?' and I'll have to say, 'Uh, I don't eat meat.'"

Page is what is qualified to be called a lacto-ovo vegetarian; she refuses to eat beef, pork, poultry, fish, shellfish or animal flesh of any kind, but will eat eggs and dairy products, and when Page says she doesn't eat meat, she really means it.

"I will eat fish, or I will eat chicken if I have no other option and I need to have some protein," Eve Ann Page said. "Alana is the only one in our family who will not eat meat ever."

Actually, Page keeps up the strict diet by choice, according to her mother.

"I don't force the kids now. Alana is a vegetarian because she wants to be."

Even if things do get difficult, Page says her veggie-filled regime is worth the hassle, mainly because she feels no desire to try meat due to never having tasted it.

The question then becomes one of health: how does Page get her protein?

"There's soy meats, there's beans, there's protein bars," she said. "There's a lot more things than people think there are. There's so much...that people don't know about just because they're not really open-minded to it."