

Hello, my name is Josie and I would like to welcome you back to Trauma Talks, Rising from the Ashes a podcast series brought to you by the UB School of Social Work Institute on Trauma and Trauma Informed Care. This series provides an opportunity for individuals to share their story of how strength and resiliency have allowed individuals to rise from the ashes. Trauma talks follows people who have both worked in the field of trauma, as well as those who have experienced trauma. Here we will reflect on how trauma informed care can assist those who have experienced traumatic events to embrace a new life of wholeness, hope, strength, courage, safety, trust, choice, collaboration, and empowerment. Today I am sitting here with Kurkjian family. We have Tony and Jack, two boys, and Elias and Nivine, the parents in our family. We also have Mary who was part of a sponsoring committee to help this family when they arrived in Canada from Syria. On behalf of the institute, we would like to thank all of you for being here, and for talking to us. So now, I am going to let the family begin by sharing a little bit of their story on how they came from, going from, Syria and resettling in Canada. And I wanted to also add that there will be pauses in time to do some interpreting and translating for the family. So, at this time, whoever would like to reflect a little bit — Tony or Jack or Elias or Nivine, share whatever you'd like to about your time moving from Syria and coming to Canada, and what that experience was like.

2:55 **Elias**(Father): It was not safe, many troubles and rockets in Istanbul, inside my city, and many come inside my home and inside my street and uh, so, and uh I want a future for my son because many rockets keep coming and I afraid and I want to leave because no future in my sons and nothing for us. So I want to leave my city. But now the rockets go out my scared and maybe not scared for my sons.

3:55 **Mary** (Interpreter): So, Josie did you understand and get that?

3:58 **Josie**: Yes, I heard Elias talking about the rockets that were coming in Aleppo and it made him feel very unsafe, wanting a future for his sons.

4:21 **Mary**: So, Elias, the day you decided to leave Aleppo, you left with all your belongings, some of your belongings? How did you leave Aleppo? *pauses* Did you drive did you?

4:34 **Elias**: No I leave by bus, I take bus to Beirut. Before war, Aleppo to here, six hours. Now, in the war, it take time about sixteen hours! To drive bus from Aleppo to Beirut because the area very danger, and it take many hours to leave it. Change the way!

5:20 **Mary:** To avoid the fighting?

5:24 **Elias:** Because it takes this way, this way sixteen hours, dangerously, many soldiers from there and government. Dangerously! Six hours, but no... trouble, and uh sixteen hours.

5:49 **Mary:** So how long were you in Beirut then?

5:56 **Elias:** I stayed in Beirut, I go then back to Syria, and back. You know, I want because my son, I want my son Tony to take this because maybe I can't travel to Canada. Maybe I can't. What are you doing after if you leave? In Syria they have great weather and great nine. If you leave and don't take great mind, you can go to containment. He can't go with great nine or ten or eleven. You must take great nine after. We must have two searches done, great nine and great eleven.

7:14 **Mary:** So then, when you would go back to Beirut, you'd go back to Aleppo then? Sixteen hours then? And just you and Tony?

7:26 **Elias:** No all!

7:29 **Josie:** So you left Aleppo to go to Beirut, and then did you go back to Aleppo to be able to get your belongings?

7:45 **Elias:** No, I go back because no I don't have just clothes and things in my home.

8:01 **Mary:** They left everything. They still have an apartment that they own in Aleppo, but they can't go back because of the war.

8:12 **Elias:** It is danger!

8:15 **Mary:** Too dangerous, so their home is just sitting there. But, they don't know what the future holds.

8:22 **Josie:** And, what was the process like then coming to Canada? How did that happen?

8:33 **Elias:** We have uh, a brother of my wife, he knew a women, an American. She works with church. She know what we wanted to, to travel to Canada. She talk with the church, she talk with the people, the working church. And uh, she told me okay, give me your passport give me your paper for UN, United Nations, and I give her, I sent all the paper to the girl. She works in admin... you understand?

9:36 **Mary:** What happened was Nivine's brother and family became sponsored out of Beirut first, and then they went to Edmonton, Alberta in Canada. The church that sponsored them knew that Nivine and her family, as well as Kawlah who is Nivine's sister, their family wanted to leave Beirut and come to Canada as well. That church found sponsorship for both those families here as well.

10:19 **Josie:** Well, thank you for sharing a little bit about that. Something I am going to move into talking about is something called Trauma Informed Care. So, when I heard you talking about leaving Aleppo and also coming into Canada and being able to be near family, it sounds like the important parts of trauma informed care. The five principles of trauma informed care are safety, choice, trust, collaboration, and empowerment.

translation until 11:53 **Josie:** So, for just the next few minutes, what I am going to do is I am going to ask a question about each of those principles. The first one I heard mentioned was safety, and I heard Elias talking about Aleppo and Syria being unsafe. And I am wondering, at one point did you, the entire family, feel a sense of safety? Was it when you were in Beirut, or coming to Canada?

12:42 **Elias:** In Canada, ah yes. Beirut, same though. In Beirut, safe, but Canada better. Canada is safer.

12:55 **Josie:** In being in Canada, what about that experience feels safe? Is it the people? Is it where you live?

13:07 **Elias:** Because here no wars, the government they have peoples, and some people here, some people they help me and support me, and here safe. No war, no anything here. You put anything outside, no steal. *laughter from the entire family* Some people they put BBQ outside, in my country, they're BBQ! *laughs more*

13:58 **Josie:** That's good. Barbecues are important. And so, next principle was trust. When you were in Aleppo and Beirut, were there certain people, you felt, that could be trusted? Were there people or any kinds of organizations that helped you, that you trusted?

14:49 **Elias:** We know some organization through my church, she took some time to help. Every two months every three months. In Beirut.

15:12 **Josie:** The next principle is choice, and so I know that you had family that had been resettled in Canada. Were you able to choose then to come to Canada?

15:31 **Mary:** In a way you chose to come to Canada, but you had to apply.

15:35 **Nivine:** Yeah, a process.

15:37 **Josie:** And since you moved to Canada, have you been able to make choices where you live, or where the boys have gone to school? Are there choices that you have now in Canada?

16:02 **Nivine & Elias:** No. No.

16:05 **Mary:** Yes you can make choices!

16:07 **Elias:** What choices?

16:09 **Mary:** You don't have to live in this house, you can move to a different house, right? You choose to stay here?

16:15 **Elias:** Yes, I like this house!

16:17 **Mary:** So you've chosen to stay in this house. The boys too, they have choices where they go to school. Right now they go to a Catholic school and they don't have to stay at the Catholic School, but they could choose to go to a public school if they want to. They can choose work as well. But, English is limiting them in the work area.

16:44 **Josie:** Right, so not being proficient in English can make choices more limited. The next principle is collaboration, and I know Mary shared that she was apart of a committee from a Church that helped the family when they came to Canada. What was the experience with working with people from the church when you arrived in Canada?

17:29 **Elias:** We expect to the sponsor the help to my family and we are happy with the sponsor because the sponsor are very good people and they give me advice for what I doing, and they give me advice for what must I doing with your, what works for these schools and these futures because I don't speak English good and they teach my son everyday American, and come to my home every day after school. And teach my son mathematics, science, language. They give my sons anything they want from school. With supplies and paper, anything they want in school. Now my sons, they talk English good. And they happy with, my sons, they happy with Mary. Because Mary, she likes my sons and yes, we all love-like, we like Mary. And she like us! And, another sponsor Jeanette, and Lis, and Martin and many many people. What I need, they help me! Maybe they give me advice on what I want, and maybe they give me some things. And she take my wife to shopping, because when we come here, we don't know where shopping because we don't know this area. She takes my wife to the doctor to see if we need anything. Everything! Anything! Everything that we need. If we need to fix anything in our home, we talk with them.

21:06 **Josie:** So you have people, sponsors, who have been able to assist with everything. How does it feel, or how did it feel when you were brand new to Canada to have those sponsors? Was it challenging to rely on other people? Or was it really reassuring to have sponsors?

21:40 **Elias**: Yes, I when I came here to Canada, I don't have choice because I don't know here, anything! Also I trust the sponsor. I don't have any choice. I have new language, new talk, I don't have money, what I doing? I trust the sponsor. And the trust, they make good with me.

22:10 **Josie**: The last principle is empowerment, which when we are defining that, we said that is really focusing on strength. What has it been like to, you know, be a family that lived in Syria and now lives in Canada? Did you feel a sense of missing your country and wanting to return home? Or are you feeling really good and stable and safe in Canada?

22:48 **Elias**: Maybe I am in the family, I miss my country. But I have more than I have. I have family, I have friends, my sons and Nivine. My sons like it here because they now have new friends at school. And my wife, Nivine, she has sisters here, all the family is here. Only I am, I miss my family, my mother, my sister, my friends. Yes, all is, yes.

22:34 **Josie**: Sounds like having family and having safety are really empowering, and makes being in Canada a good place, and some place you'd like to be in. Is there anything else that you have thought of as we've been talking about resettling or living in a different country where you don't speak the language?

24:12 Elias is confused, Josie reasks: Anything the family would like to share about leaving Syria and coming to Canada that they haven't already talked about.

24:22 **Elias**: No, I am here and all good things. But only one thing I want, I want good job here. But as you know, because of the— the English is not so good, and the year, tomorrow is one year. Only I want a job because I am chemist, but here I don't, I am chemist, I have many experiences and I worked in manufacturing in my country, here I can't, uh...

25:46 **Mary**: His qualifications aren't recognized here. As well as the English is a challenge as well.

25:56 **Josie**: There may be students or people who hear this who either work with individuals who come from Syria, or possibly other people from Syria. Is there anything you would want to

say to them if they were listening to this? So other people who have had to leave Syria or their country?

26:23 **Mary:** Like advice that they would need and find useful.

26:28 **Elias:** I want the people from Syria future better for them, and to study English good because new country you might want to study English if anybody wants to come to America.

26:47 **Josie:** Well, thank you so much! On behalf of the Institute on Trauma and Trauma Informed Care, I really would like to thank the entire family for speaking to us about your story. We are really grateful that you have taken the time to talk about this.

27:00 **Elias:** Thank you.