



Photo: Joseph McBrayer

Thought Leadership Corner

By Zinah

This month's featured thought leader is Zinah, a former refugee from Iraq and soon-to-be new American citizen. She shared her story and her gratitude through the following speech during the New Americans Celebration hosted by the Coalition for Refugee Service Agencies (CRSA) on Valentine's Day.

The Opportunity of an Open Door

Bombs are not unusual in Baghdad, but this one sounded close. Too close.

I took a deep breath to calm my pounding heart and climbed out of bed. I checked on my siblings — they were all fine.

Since I was born until I came to the United States as a refugee in 2014, there was always war in Iraq. War claimed the life of my older brother and forced my parents to flee, leaving me and my three younger siblings behind. Our doors had multiple locks. We checked underneath our car for bombs often. One day, there was a gun put to my head and I was asked to identify as either Sunni or Shia. The wrong answer could've ended my life.

But tragedy wouldn't define my life. A couple weeks before earning my Master's in Genetic Engineering, when I received the call that we were finally approved to enter the U.S. as refugees, I left it all behind for the prospect of safety and peace.

When my plane touched down in Atlanta, Georgia, I expected to start with nothing – but instead I was surrounded by amazing people and supported by wonderful organizations like **New American Pathways, Jewish Family and Career Services, Georgia Piedmont Technical College** and **International Rescue Committee**.

They lifted me up at a time when I felt all but broken. **They provided me with all the support needed to keep going through scholarships, trainings, and most importantly, great moral support.** Their inspiration helped me trust my inner wisdom, and the result: instead of *asking* why [this] happened to me, I acknowledged and accepted why this happened to me and I turned it into an opportunity to achieve yet another dream of attending school in the U.S. At this point, I was a full-time student, full-time mom, and worked two part-time jobs as an interpreter and afterschool instructor, and yet I still went on to graduate with my Database Specialist degree...earning a 3.9 GPA to boot.

After receiving several job offers, one stuck out to me the most – a unique staffing company with a unique mission: Amplio Recruiting, which supports other companies by connecting them to a notoriously dependable refugee workforce. I couldn't be happier to play a part. Now, I am giving back by way of helping other refugees find work.

Five years after my life was turned upside down, I am now thriving.

We're very grateful that the United States opened doors for our safety. We don't have to lock our doors with five locks, to check our cars for bombs, to hear kids cry because they lost family members. We used to wake up every day expecting we would be killed. Here, we wake up every day like it's our first day.

And while I am so grateful for all that I've experienced in the U.S., I recognize there are many displaced people who will not give the same opportunities I've been given. I plan to make the most of these opportunities so I can be an example to the world what can happen when refugees are given opportunities.