2nd Place Winner High School

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Grade: 11

Thousands of Miles Away Just for Rights

My grandparents left Syria in the summer of 2012, almost more than a year since the war has started. Fortunately, they had my family waiting for them at O'Hare airport, ready to take them back to my house. There are other immigrant families trying to flee the war zone who are not as lucky as my grandparents. These families do not have someone waiting for them in America, someone that has a roof on top of their heads at night, and food on the dinner table.

There are families that do not have someone waiting for them in a country that has freedom.

What started the civil war in Syria was lack of freedom of speech, assembly, and press.

People protesting were getting punished for going against their leader, they would either be imprisoned for life or shot. It was a serious crime to say anything against the government. My grandma always lived in constant fear for my grandpa getting punished. My grandpa always expressed how he felt and was not afraid to tell someone he did not like his president. Once my grandma told me she was glad that my grandpa did not know how to use the internet, for he would have bashed the government online. If he did so, the government would have tried to find him and kill him.

A few months after my grandparents arrived, my dad took me, my grandpa, and my brother to a protest that was going on in downtown. I do not recall much of it, but it was about how the Syrians deserves to get their rights. I do remember people chanting, holding up the flag of Syria, and signs that had words written in Arabic on them. I do not know how to read Arabic, so I had no idea what the signs said. My dad told me that if we were in Syria at that moment, we would all get shot. Luckily, we were in America, where we had the right to protest, even if it was against the government.

Fast forward to the summer of 2017, where my grandparents were visiting their country after 5 years. Their home was destroyed by bombs, so they had to stay with my aunt. They were upset that their village was destroyed, destruction of buildings was all they could see. Luckily, where my aunt lived was pretty safe. My grandma was devastated about her home being destroyed. She wanted the government to hear what she had to say about them. She was not able to do anything about it though, especially if she wanted to stay alive.

When my grandparents came back home, they kept saying how lucky they are to be living in America. They would prefer to live in Syria over America, but only if the citizens of their country had the same rights as the citizens of America did. America itself may not be that great but everyone has their freedoms. We all have the right to say what we like and protest against the government. We should all be grateful to not be living in a country where we could be arrested or killed for expressing how we feel. Citizens do not realize that they take their most of their freedoms for granted. Some people may say they hate America, but they need to be grateful for what they have in this country.