

## The long journey to safety

Kahlid (19) and Housaam (24) are cousins and refugees from Syria.

*Kahlid and Housaam fled Damascus, because they were being persecuted by the regime of Bashar al-Assad. After a demonstration they and others were chased by the police and found refuge in an abandoned, bombed out building. That evening two cars arrived. Two men got out and climbed on the roof where there were two machine guns. They started shooting at the building until it was about to collapse. Those that survived ran into the street in all directions. While escaping Housaam was shot three times. Using all their savings they first fled to **Turkey**. From there they crossed through the **FYR Macedonia** into **Greece** until their long journey finally ended in Kerpen, **Germany**.*

Kahlid and Housaam visited the Erasmus course at the Willy-Brandt-Comprehensive School and shared their experience with us. They are now practicing for their B1 level German exams and hope to begin an apprenticeship soon after.

Kolpingstadt Kerpen – Migration, Flucht, Asyl



*Flucht: Syrien*



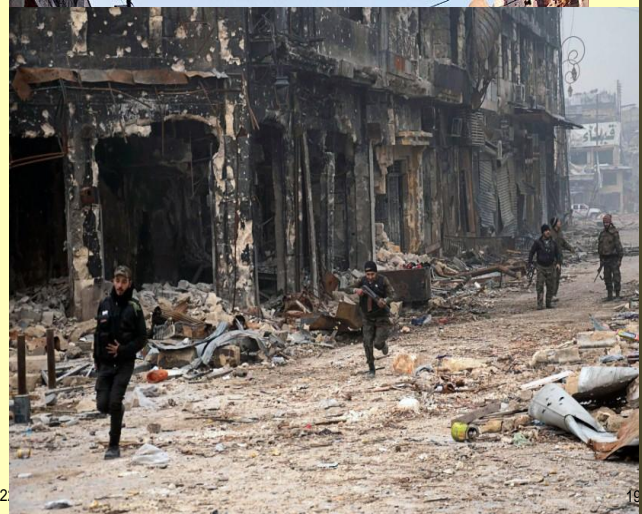
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Kolpingstadt Kerpen – Migration, Flucht, Asyl



*Flucht: Die Heimat verlassen (Syrien)*



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pictures taken by Housaam

## The true story of a refugee

(This is the true story told by a student who recently graduated from our school. The names have been omitted out of respect for their right to privacy.)

This is a true story about an 18 years old boy from Damascus, Syria. He left Syria when he was 15. At the time he left he was doing his Abitur. (He was in the 11th class). He didn't leave alone. He left Syria with his father (43), his mother (42) and his two sisters (8 and 13 years old). His father was an important car dealer who bought, sold and rented travel busses and his mother was a kindergarten teacher who speaks French too. In Syria, there were two different cultures. The Alawites and the Syloiten. This family are Alawites and the others (including the police) are Syloits, so they weren't really accepted and the police haunted him and his family. They had two houses in Syria and one of them got bombed because of the war that had started.

During the whole time when they lived there, he got scared and was afraid for his life. At his school and on the street there was a lot of racism between the Alo- and soloits so he was always in danger. Then his father decided to sell his shop and house so that they could leave Syria. During the last three months before his family had left Syria, there was war so he saw horrible things like executed human bodies and dead bodies everywhere. In the middle of 2015 they left Syria and flew to Lebanon and from there they flew instantly to Turkey with a plane that was waiting for them. In Turkey, they spoke to people who helped them for a lot of money. They were from the 'human mafia' an organization that got their money by shipping and driving people away from the war, illegally.

He and his family traveled on a min-bus with fifty other people. They drove to the beach where they had to get on a rubber boat. They were on sea for two hours. The price for the whole journey was 1000\$ for an adult and 700\$ for a child. While on the boat he distinctively remembers thinking about which one of his family members he should save first if they were to capsize. He was the only one in his family who knew how to swim.

When they finally got to mainland Greece, unfriendly and rough people met them. They were forced to leave everything behind. Although it was hard for him to leave his medicine bag with his Asthma spray behind, it seemed insignificant compared to the sounds all the people lying motionless on the sand were making. He asked a journalist what was going on and he replied: "This is the sound people make who have drowned in water." ...

Then they got to a refugee camp where they had to wait for three days in pure darkness without light and any chance of contacting anyone. They got a survival pack on the first day with water and a one-man tent. After three long days, it was finally their turn to see the Greece police. Then their fingerprints were taken as well as all their dates and they were given new passes. Most of the workers there were very friendly, except for the Greeks. They were not. They were horribly unfriendly.

At this point all he knew was that his life had taken a catastrophic turn and they needed to leave this place. He felt like he had lost everything and there was nothing left. However, after three terrible and humiliating days, he and his family got permission to leave Greece. They were able to reserve tickets on a ship for himself and his family that gave them relative comfort. After about thirteen hours, they arrived at the capital, Athens. Then they went by bus to Macedonia, which took much longer- about twenty-four hours. The people we met in Serbian were very nice. They had food and drink for all the people who came newly to their country. The bus journey through Serbia lasted only two hours and then they continued on driving non-stop through Croatia on their way to Serbia. They drove thirty-four hours without getting off the bus. It was very bad to sleep in the bus because it was very noisy for the little kid's and uncomfortable.

Slovenia was a nightmare.

He and his family had to live in a terrible camp for three days while his father waited for the proper papers. It was very bad. The food was terrible and they had to sleep on the floor. There were sick and dying people. After two days in this refugee camp, all the people became aggressive and wanted to go leave without precaution, but the police beat them and used tear gas and aggressive dogs. He thought that he was in a nightmare, but then the permit came through. Then they drove five hours through Austria by bus and the beautiful thing was that although they were incredibly exhausted and disappointed, they finally made it and arrived in Germany.