

Nonfiction

Out of the Shattered

As war destroyed the



UP
CLOSE

Cause and Effect As you read, look for how the war in Syria, and a call from America, have affected Cedric and Francois.

LOOK FOR WORD NERD'S 9 WORDS IN BOLD



A boy walks his bicycle through the ruined streets of Aleppo in 2014, more than three years after the Syrian war began.

d Land

country they loved, two brothers
found a new life in America

By Kristin Lewis

“Wake up! Wake up!”
Eleven-year-old Cedric Jacob and his brother, Francois, 15, were alarmed by their mother’s voice. It was a hot September night in 2012. A war plane had just dropped a bomb near their home in Aleppo, Syria.

The sound of gunfire rang through the apartment where the boys lived with their parents. A battle was raging in the streets below. And now they were trapped.

Hours passed. The battle raged on. By 2 p.m. the next day, it was clear that the family needed to leave.

They headed down to the street. Bullets were flying.

“We didn’t have time to think,” Francois says. “We just ran.”



Cedric Jacob (right) and his brother, Francois, in 2017

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THE-SCENES
VIDEO!

Syria has suffered with war and violence since 2011. Bit by bit, Cedric and Francois saw their city reduced to **rubble**. Their neighborhood had once been a happy and safe place. Kids played soccer after school. Families strolled in the streets. There were shops and restaurants and parks.

But the brothers' favorite places were destroyed by bombs and gunfire. One explosion shattered the window of their father's barbershop. School was often canceled because of bombings and street fighting.

The family hoped the war would soon end and that life would go back to normal. But their country was falling apart. Life in Syria got more and more dangerous and difficult.

A Terrible Crisis

The war in Syria has created a **crisis**. As of today, more than 300,000 people have died. Six million Syrians have lost their homes, though they remain in the country. Five million more have fled, sometimes with little more than what they could carry in their arms. They have streamed into Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt. They have piled into leaky boats, trying to cross the **treacherous** Mediterranean Sea to the shores of Greece and Italy. (From 2015 to 2016, at least 8,000 people died attempting this

crossing.) And they have camped out on the borders of Austria, Hungary, and Slovenia, hoping to be let in.

These men, women, and children are **refugees**.

Refugees are people forced to flee their countries because of war, **persecution**, violence, or natural disasters. They leave because they have no choice. Staying means putting their lives in danger.

Today, there are 22 million refugees across the world, according to the United Nations. That's more than the population of Florida.

And soon, Cedric and Francois would be among them.

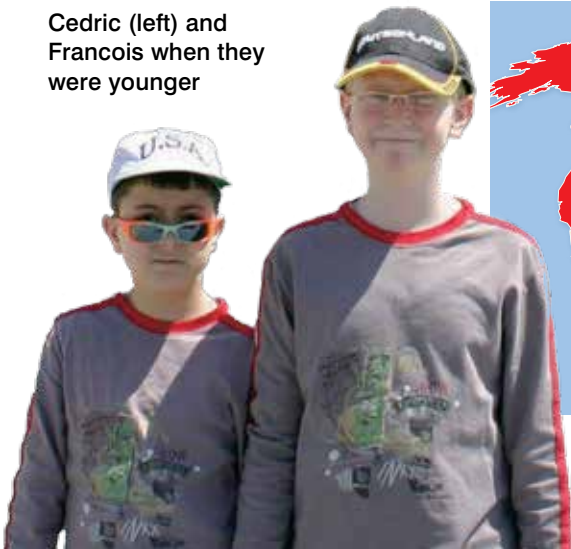
Just in Time

On that day in 2012 when the fighting reached their front door, the Jacob family knew that their lives were in danger. They had to get out—fast. After leaving their home, they ran down the block. Bullets flew around them. They ducked behind a wall to catch their breath. Then they kept running.

At last, they reached their car. They drove to a relative's house. The boys thought they would go home in a few days. But they never saw their home again.

After they left, a car bomb went off near their apartment building. It blew off

Cedric (left) and Francois when they were younger





BEFORE



AFTER

In October 2014, bombs destroyed Shahba Mall, one of Aleppo's most popular shopping centers. Aleppo was Syria's largest city. It was known for its beautiful buildings, thriving businesses, and rich history. Today, much of the city is in ruins.

their front door. In the coming days, more explosions followed. They had left just in time.

For the next two years, the family lived in a safer part of Aleppo. But conditions in the city continued to **deteriorate**. Often there was no power. At those times, they could not turn on lights. They could not use phones or computers. Food in the refrigerator rotted. Sometimes when the boys turned on the faucet, no water came out. Food, fuel, and medicine were **scarce**. Money was too. The brothers did their homework to the sound of gunfire. They played video games to block out the horrors outside.

Then one day, they got a call that changed their lives. Their uncle was an American citizen. He lived in Albany, New York. He had gotten permission for the family to come to the U.S.

"My first reaction was to be happy because Syria was extremely dangerous," Cedric says. "I was also happy because I heard I would have

more opportunities in America."

When they got the news, the family was visiting a relative in a nearby city. Cedric and Francois's dad made a quick trip back to Aleppo to get ready for their journey. His sons could not join him. It was too dangerous.

"I never had a chance to go back and say goodbye to my friends," Francois says. "I never had a chance to see Aleppo, the city that I'd grown up in, and look at it one last time."

Huge Challenges

Starting over in a new place is always a challenge, whether it's a new school, a new state, or a whole new country. It can be especially hard for refugees. Refugees coming to America may not know how to speak English. They might not know about traditions like Thanksgiving, the Fourth of July, and the Super Bowl. Many feel like outsiders. Sometimes refugees are met with fear and prejudice. This can make them feel unwelcome in their new country.

Then there are other problems. For parents, finding jobs can be hard. Even grocery shopping can be confusing, with aisles full

of strange foods that are nothing like what they were used to back home.

And many refugees, like Cedric and Francois, have experienced fear and danger. They've lost their homes and their countries. Some have lost friends and relatives too. It can take years to heal from the **traumas** and losses they have survived.

Starting Over

On an October night in 2014, Cedric, Francois, and their parents stepped off a plane at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York City. Their journey from Syria had taken five **arduous** weeks: five days spent in Lebanon, then a month in Jordan, as paperwork was filed and travel plans were made. Then there was a 12-hour flight to the U.S.

The boys were very tired. But they were glad to see their uncle.

"My first thought was, 'This place is cold. Is this real?'" Cedric says.

The next day, their uncle took them to the house he'd found for them in Nutley, New Jersey.

For the brothers, starting over was tough at times. After just five days in the U.S., they started school. They knew no one. They spoke little English. Still, they say they felt welcome.

"At lunch, I would sit every day by myself for 45 minutes playing on my phone,"



New Yorkers hold a gathering to show support for refugees.

Francois says of his first few days at his new high school. "Then one day, someone just said, 'Hey, you want to come and join us?'"

After that, Francois had friends. Cedric had a similar experience at his middle school.

Looking Forward

It's been three years since the brothers came to the U.S. Francois is now in college. He plans to study architecture or engineering. Cedric is in high school.

They've come a long way, but Francois jokes that his English still needs work. "I'm not gonna lie to you," he laughs. "My spelling is still horrific."

This fall, the family is moving to Saratoga Springs, New York. The brothers look forward to living in a place known for its green trees and soft breezes. Their dad will open a barbershop there, like the one he owned in Syria.

The brothers still think of Syria, of what they've lost. But they try to focus on what they've found: new lives, new chances, a new future in the land that has welcomed them. ■

WRITE TO WIN

In what ways has war changed Cedric's and Francois's lives? How has coming to the U.S. affected them? Answer in a well-written essay. Send it to "Refugee Contest" by Dec. 1, 2017. Ten winners will each receive a copy of *Wishtree* by Katherine Applegate. See page 2 for details.

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