

# THE STORIES: YASSER



First name: **YASSER**

Last name: **MOTRAJI**

Age: **43**

Country of origin: **SYRIA**

Living in **Germany** since: **2012**

## SHORT SUMMARY

Yasser Motraji was a professor of Linguistics and Arabic Language at the university in Syria, married to a wife with German origins, two children. 5 years ago, he and his family had to leave his country because the German Embassy told them repeatedly that they are no longer safe and they should leave immediately. He came to Germany, for years he did little else but study German. He is often asked to tell about his story at events with refugees, volunteers and politicians.

Now he is a language teacher in Adult Education, works as an expert in matters concerning the Arabic language for schools and for universities. His dream is: to be a professor again, this time in Germany.

## “... AND I LOOKED AT THE HEATING.”

### YASSIRS STORY CONFLICT AND ESCAPE

Even before the world knew about the Syrian war, the threat to citizens with

foreign origins was already there. Yassirs wife has German origins, and that was dangerous. The German Embassy in Damascus sent them several emails and urged them to leave the country, as soon as possible. Especially his home town was under threat to be occupied by ISIS, and then it would have been impossible to escape and their lives would have been in danger. So they left.

### STRUGGLING IN THE NEW SOCIETY

Yassir and his family had the big advantage that because of his wife's roots they became a Schengen visa for the whole family and they came to Hamburg, because of relations living in Hamburg already. But the German police for foreigners demanded to be shown the mails they received from the German Embassy. They wanted to know whether he and his family really were in danger. When Yassir arrived, his family was one of the first refugees from Syria. The family arrived in Hamburg and they could live with Yassirs sister-in-law, in a flat of 40 square meters. They were supported financially by the German government, but nobody wanted to rent an apartment to them. Yassir started to learn German immediately and he tried for a job.

In the first week, he sent out 25 job applications, and from that time on, he sent out 15 applications per week. He applied for jobs as a translator or as a teacher.

His progress of learning German was amazing: within the first year he advanced to B1, and not much later he got his certificate of C 1, How did he do that? He told himself that he had to learn the language in order to belong, and fast. That was, in his opinion, his job. And he went at it with vigor: each day he learned 100 new words. In the supermarket, in the park, wherever he went, he wrote German words and their Arabic translations on papers and he never went anywhere without these papers.

**His motto:**  
**Learning is my job,**  
**that is what**  
**I get paid for.**

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His children got annoyed with him, even his wife, but he insisted on learning. But his situation was difficult: the small flat, 5 persons... so he sat in a coffee shop everyday and learned there. But he did not have the money for many coffees, so he nursed one cup for hours.

After 6 months the family found a small flat for themselves, but it was moldy. His daughters were not happy in Germany and wanted to go back to Syria, they felt left out in school because there were almost no Arabs in their school. But whenever Yassir thought about the situation and his troubles, he looked at the heating in the rooms they had. And he thought of other refugees in camps and tents, freezing. He felt that he was lucky to have escaped and was adamant that he would make the best of what he got.

## BELONGING AND GIVING BACK TO SOCIETY

Sitting in the coffee shop, learning German with all his flying papers for hours, Yassir was approached by a German couple, older than him. They wanted to know what he was doing all the time. He told them, and they offered to talk with him so he could learn German faster. And that is what they did. They helped Yassir's family in many other ways and the two families are still best friends, celebrating the holidays like Christmas, Bayram together. That was, in a way, the first experience of "belonging". After two years, he found his first job as a teacher for adults, teaching his language. All the time before he got his first job, he felt so low because he could not earn his own money and others had to serve him in the coffee shop. But he still had problems to understand the German society and their customs: why do they wait at the red line in the bank office?

**The German society has to show the refugees how to integrate.**

What does it mean? Nobody told him, he made a lot of mistakes. He demands that the German society should make an effort to show the rules and customs to the newcomers, and for them to obey these rules. And: this process of integration should start early on. Nowadays, Yassir is working in different jobs and pursues his dream of becoming a professor once again. He supports his brother who came with his family one year ago but does not receive any money from the German government. But he always makes time to appear at events or other occasions to talk about his story and how he found his way into the German society. He supports others on their way towards integration. He even has been asked by the Mayor of Hamburg to appear at a function of the City of Hamburg, regarding refugee work. In his mind, those activities are very important even though it means earning less money. But he always tells others that they can do what he did: give his first lecture in German at a university he applied at after only two years in Germany.

**Helping and inspiring others is important to him.**