



F.O.R.G.E

at the University of Pittsburgh



This Issue:

WHAT IS FORGE? | TUTORING EXPERIENCES
CRISIS IN SYRIA | UPCOMING EVENTS



University of Pittsburgh graduate student Sammar Barakat speaks about her family's experiences under the al-Assad regime at last semester's FORGE event, "Crisis in Syria: Conflict, Transition, and Refugees".

WHAT IS FORGE?

FORGE PRESIDENT PRIYANKA KAURA

Forge is a service and advocacy student organization at Pitt, focusing on improving conditions for refugees in Pittsburgh and around the world. Our main service activity is in-home tutoring of recently resettled refugees, and we also are hosting campus events about relevant refugee conflicts around the world.

We work with Jewish Family and Children's Services refugee resettlement agency to match Pitt students with newly arrived refugee families. Every week, we drive to the homes of these families so that we can tutor them for 2 hours. We help children and adults improve their English skills so that they can succeed in their new schools and jobs. In the process, we learn about their culture, the challenges and rewards of resettlement, and we often develop close relationships with the families. Most of the refugees we work with are very new to the country – some have lived here for less than one year! The majority of Pittsburgh's resettled refugees are Nepali-Bhutanese, and we also work with some Burmese refugees. Pittsburgh will welcome Congolese refugees in the near future, and we hope to help them as well.

Our campus events focus on increasing awareness of the conflicts that force refugees to leave their homelands. Last semester we held an event about the crisis in Syria, and this April we will host a panel discussion about the progress and needs in Sudan. We are also involved in planning a summer camp called PRYSE Academy – a 3-week camp where refugee youth can improve their literacy and develop their goals of attending college.

YOU'RE MY TUTOR: A POEM

FORGE VICE PRESIDENT MIISHA REID

Waking up early sucks!
Alarm goes off, I hit the snooze, late....late....late....
Just my luck!

But how can I complain?
I've never had to go through any "real" pain
like,
Flee my country, escape brutality
Resettle here in a place different from my nationality

So I get up and I go! I'm off to connect them to this new world
in a language they don't know.

I can tell by the nod of their head after a long explanation,
their confused gaze in the midst of conversation,
and their smile after everything that I say
that.....

It's rough
But this family pushes through and through
They are so tough

They are eager. They are grateful. They are learners.
But to me they are also teachers

I have learned patience, acceptance, and determination
This large fun filled family has deserved my utmost appreciation.

You are my tutor.

UPCOMING FORGE EVENTS!

2 YEARS, 2 SUDANS: INDEPENDENCE AND ITS HUMANITARIAN IMPLICATIONS

April 9th, 2013 | @8:00PM - 10:00PM
William Pitt Union, Kurtzman Room

CONTACT US AT: ForgeAtPitt@gmail.com

VISIT US AT: <http://pitt.edu/~sorc/forge/>

ATTEND OUR MEETINGS: Wednesdays @ 9:00PM in Cathedral of Learning 221



FORGE EXPERIENCES: TUTORING WITH FORGE

FORGE PRESIDENT ALICIA QUEBRAL

In my four years as a member of FORGE, I have had a wide variety of experiences in tutoring local refugees. I started out with a family of seven Burundian children that my partner and I helped with homework. When they moved away from Pittsburgh and I was without a family, I spent the interim assisting at a Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council (GPLC) class, which had about fifteen ESL students ranging from true beginners to quite advanced students, from six or seven different countries.

Then I was fortunate to join a new “family” of Nepali-Bhutanese teenagers- two brothers, their cousin, and their friend, who my tutoring partner Eva and I referred (and still do) to as “our kids”—even though they are about the same age as me. They were in high school at the time, and their English was fairly advanced. Rather than teaching them ESL in the traditional sense, Eva and I helped

them with their homework, even though they were much better at math and science than they were.

“... I have learned more from them than I ever did in a classroom...”

I was amazed at how much they pushed themselves, taking Advanced Placement and College in High School classes, despite having only been in the United States for a few years. Even more amazing were their personal stories, of having been born in exile, of having spent the first sixteen years of their lives growing up in refugee camps in Nepal, and then making the brave step of moving to Pittsburgh to start all over.

In the midst of taking advanced classes in high school, part time jobs, extracurricular activities, helping their parents with their younger siblings, and being active members of

the local Bhutanese community, they always stayed focused on the future. Eva and I helped them practice for the SATs, write essays, and fill out their college applications. I am happy to say that today, all four are in college and doing well, studying criminal justice, computer science, and neuroscience - all in addition to finding time to do things like Semester at Sea and becoming an Air Force reserve.

When I say that Eva and I “helped”, what I really mean is that we were just along for the ride. There is no doubt in my mind that these four young men would have accomplished exactly what they set out to do no matter who was or was not involved. In the two years I have known them I have learned more from them than I ever did in a classroom, and I know I am a better person for it. My time spent with them and our continued friendship is probably the most fulfilling thing that I experienced during my time at Pitt, and I will always be grateful that FORGE led me to that experience.

To Bhagawat, Narayan, Sam and Yadhu: I am so proud of all of you! And to everyone at FORGE, thank you for being such a huge part of making my time at Pitt amazing!



CRISIS IN SYRIA: CONFLICT, TRANSITION, AND REFUGEES

FORGE MEMBER KUSH PUROHIT



As an advocacy organization at Pitt, FORGE hosts a public campus event every semester to highlight ongoing refugee conflicts around the world. Last semester, FORGE hosted a group of three featured speakers to give presentations and lectures about the Syrian refugee crisis.

Dr. Basel Termanini (*pictured*) educated attendees about the historical context and background that led to the Syrian civil war and the displacement of millions of Syrians.

Student Sammar Barakat spoke to the audience about her experiences living in Syria under the al-Assad regime, applying for asylum in the US, and how her family is currently coping with the constant threat of violence in her homeland.

Lastly, Laila Al-Soulaiman, a Pittsburgh resident and high-school student, discussed her plans to use art as a way to bring attention to the Syrian refugee crisis and help the millions of refugees and IDPs currently living in Syria.

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