

# From My Story...

## I learned to be a voice

I've been meaning to write this story for days, a story about myself. There were words I couldn't bring myself to write, maybe because they carry deep wounds or perhaps because I didn't dare to confront the indescribable horror and hardships of life that we endure as journalists in northwest Syria. **"We're surrounded by fear, fear of becoming the next target, fear for our loved ones, for our lives, which are under constant threat".**

This is what my days are like, today and even in the past. I lived in my city for four years under ISIS rule. I worked as a nurse and paramedic in a field hospital, and although I initially chose this job, it later became my lifeline more than it was a matter of choice. It was my way to escape detention, death and indirect threats against me and my family.

Every day, I witnessed wounded women, men and children. Everyone was a victim of the relentless bombings or violations committed by ISIS against anyone who defied their orders. The bodies of young men who had been executed were displayed on the roads, as a chilling warning to intimidate and silence those considering rebellion or disobedience.



شبكة الصحفيات السوريات  
Syrian Women Journalists Network



Fear ruled our lives during those violent years, it was a feeling that lived with us every single moment. Everything felt terrifying, with death closing in from all sides. We lived in constant dread for our own lives and the loss of our loved ones, gripped by the unrelenting fear that we might never survive.

Shortly before we escaped, the pressure and restrictions had intensified. At that time, I was working in the emergency department, treating bodies that might lose their lives at any moment, while I myself lived in constant terror, with no chance of escape and the suffocating siege of the city.

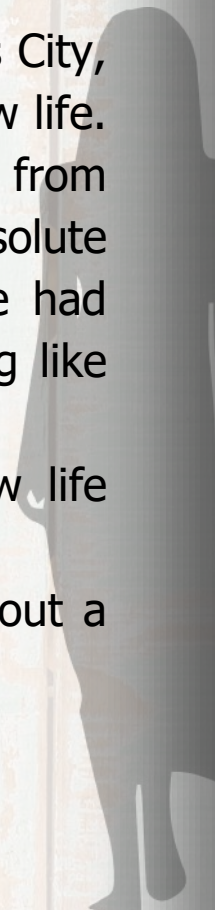
### **We Were Finally Able to Escape**

The route was extremely treacherous, littered with snipers, mines, and bodies of people who tried to escape but failed for one reason or another.

We survived and successfully reached Jarablus City, it felt like crossing the gate of death into a new life. Only 20 days later, Al-Bab city was liberated from ISIS's grip, and we returned to find absolute destruction everywhere, nothing was left, we had nothing left, no house, no life, it was nothing like the city we once knew.

With both pain and hope, we started a new life from scratch.

I had to confront this new reality and carve out a place for myself once again.





In 2017, I ventured into journalism, initially volunteering with the Syrian Civil Defense at the Women's Center. Part of my role involved documenting the center's activities, and I often found myself wondering: How was I unable to document the abuses and violations happening right before my eyes when ISIS controlled my city? How did they manage to strip us of every means or tool during that time? They had prevented all forms of communication with the outside world. Even internet access was only available in specific lounges, which were subject to their strict censorship.

After a year of volunteering in the Civil Defense, I stopped and began attending advanced journalism training. Meanwhile, I also took the baccalaureate exam, earned my certificate, and started studying at the Media Institute. I continued with the training and learned how to be a voice for those who lived through the horrors of bombing, displacement, and suffering. I learned how to document their stories and carry their messages to the world. I encountered many tales that deeply affected me; sometimes I would cry with them, and at other times, I would try to comfort them and ease their pain.

Until 2021, I worked with many media platforms and humanitarian organizations, where I witnessed and heard many painful stories of Syrian men and women who experienced displacement, living in camps, bombings, and other harsh conditions.



I got married and gave birth to my first child, it was a new era and a new life, but it didn't hold me back from my work. Quite the contrary, it marked the beginning of new and impactful projects, especially with the presence of my husband by my side, who is also a journalist. I continued working as an independent journalist with local and international media channels, agencies, and newspapers and became part of a life filled with stories and scenes that remain etched in my memory.

### **The 6th of February Earthquake**

The earthquake that shook my world on February 6, 2023, was a defining moment in my life. I was there, documenting the events of that day, and I can still hear the screams of those trapped under the rubble until today. The images of mothers and fathers who were impatiently waiting for the rescue of their loved ones still break my heart, there was nothing more difficult than seeing hope fade from their eyes. With my camera, I captured the devastation just as I documented the joy in the eyes of those who survived.

Those scenes still haunt me to this day. I haven't been able to forget the horror we experienced that day, the fear of the aftershocks, of losing our loved ones, and of becoming the next victims. I was working alongside my husband, but my mind was always with my child and my family.

A year and a half have passed since the disaster, and we are still trying to return to our normal lives, but life is no longer what it once was. We are adapting to a new reality full of challenges and difficulties, and we continue to work despite the fear that accompanies us every day.





## **Today, Is a New Work Day**

Nowadays, my interests are diverse. I work on multiple approaches and topics, but what attracts me the most are the stories of women survivors of detention. Their stories are a testament to the indescribable suffering and pain they endured. Yet, they themselves carry a message of hope. I strive with all my might to convey these stories to the world so that everyone knows what these women lived through, and how they managed to rise again.

In this unstable country, there is no safety, I always live in fear of being assassinated or arrested, or of my family being harmed.

Every day brings new challenges in a country witnessing ongoing conflict and struggles. We are often prevented from documenting the events unfolding before us, as if the truth is being suffocated day by day.

On August 26, 2024, my husband and I were covering the First Industrial Trade Exhibition in the city of Al-Bab. We were startled by a checkpoint set up in such a way that it seemed we would be arrested brutally. They took my husband away and this was one of my biggest fears that haunted me daily. They separated us and took us to two different places, and I didn't know what could happen to us.

After two hours of fear, interrogation and humiliation, they released me, but my husband remained detained. We were arrested without a clear charge, in a horrific manner I will never forget. They stormed our house and confiscated all our equipment as if we were criminals.





Seven days passed until my husband was released unharmed, but it felt like seven years. Since then, fear hasn't left us. Today, we are still working, but that fear always accompanies us. Will we ever be able to live without the constant fear of being arrested or killed?

Despite all the circumstances, I graduated from the Faculty of Media and Communication at the University of Aleppo in the areas liberated from the Syrian regime's control. The conditions were not ripe for success, however, we managed to cheat on life with moments of happiness and joy.

What lightened the burden of my days were the conversations with my daughter, my husband, my family and friends. I set goals for myself and every time I worked hard, my greatest motivation was to escape these circumstances and find a place where I feel like a human being. A place where I wouldn't measure time by how many hours we had electricity, and where we wouldn't be haunted by nightmares of murder or panic attacks.

Today, I feel happy and proud. My degree will not be wasted, and will not be hung on the wall as mere decoration, because I truly love what I studied. I have been working in my field for years. I have achieved some of my dreams, at least, and most importantly, I have become a strong, resilient woman who defies all circumstances to stand firm.

I am Nabiha Al-Taha, a Syrian journalist and correspondent for the Aleppo Today channel, and this was my story.

Lastly, extreme conditions are always the beginning of another route.

**Nabiha Al-Taha**