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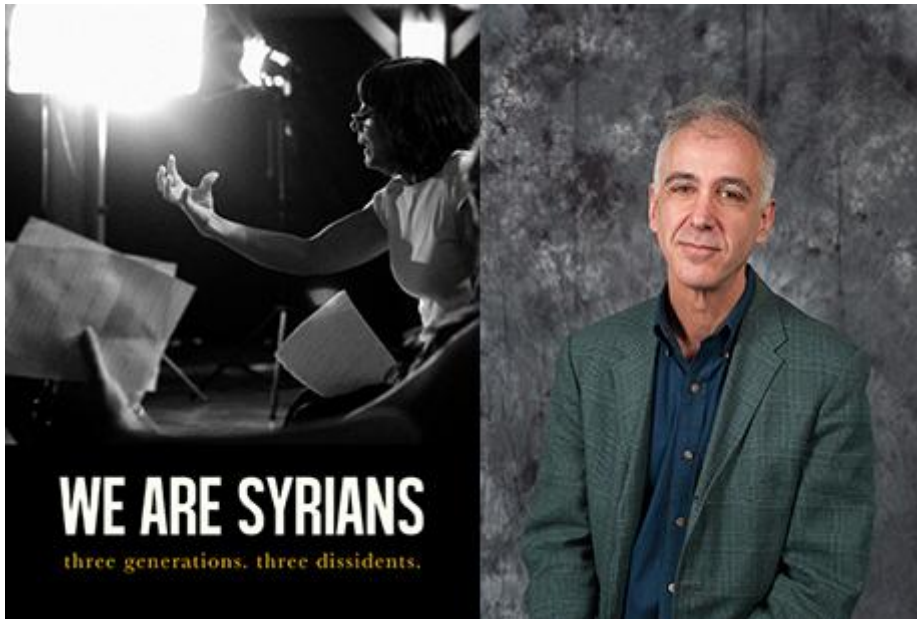
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# "We Are Syrians" Provides First-Hand Accounts of Battle Against Tyranny

RWU Professor Adam Braver and RWU graduate Abby DeVeuve edited new book, which will benefit Scholars at Risk Emergency Fund



RWU Professor Adam Braver (right), along with recent RWU graduate Abby DeVeuve, edited a new book of first-person narratives from Syrian dissidents.

July 31, 2017 | Edward Fitzpatrick

**BRISTOL, R.I.** – A new book edited by a Roger Williams University professor and a recent RWU graduate offers a trio of compelling first-person narratives from Syrian dissidents who fought to try to save their country from authoritarian rule.

When the Assad government wanted to silence them, student organizer Sana Mustafa, theater director Naila Al-Atrash and intellectual Radwan Ziadeh refused to stop making their voices heard. They organized, they protested, they made art.

The book, "We are Syrians," was edited by RWU Associate Professor of Creative Writing [Adam Braver](#) and 2016 RWU graduate Abby DeVeuve, who worked with Braver in the [Scholars at Risk Network](#), which advocates for imprisoned scholars and defends academic freedom. The book stems from an [RWU Student Advocacy Seminar](#), which partnered with Scholars at Risk to provide undergraduates with practical human rights advocacy experience. All author proceeds from the book will go to the Scholars at Risk Emergency Fund.



Abby DeVeuve '16, a co-editor, accepted the Courage to Think Award at the Scholars at Risk World Congress in 2016.

"We were trying to show the human side of what essentially has been a tragedy – a tragedy often told just in statistics and quick stories," said Braver, the University Library Program Director and the Northeast chairman of the Scholars at Risk U.S. Steering Committee. "We want to show the human toll of what's been going on in Syria through three generations of people – not just the current news cycle."

The younger generation is represented by Mustafa, who as a university student in Damascus took part in many of the early peaceful protests against the Assad regime. In 2013, she came to RWU in an exchange program called the Middle East Partnership Initiative. And while sitting in a classroom at RWU, she received a message on her phone saying that her father had been detained in Syria and that the rest of her family was fleeing to Turkey.

In an instant, Mustafa found herself unable to return home, with barely any money and only a suitcase packed for the six-week exchange program. Eventually, she was granted political asylum in the United States. She completed her education at Bard College. And last September, she spoke at RWU as part of a year-long series called "The Quest for Refuge." Her father's fate remains unknown.

The book also tells the story of Naila Al-Atrash, granddaughter of the famed general Sultan Pasha Al-Atrash, hero of the first Syrian revolution. Her plays have been banned numerous times by the Assad government. Now a visiting professor at New York University, she spoke at RWU in June as part of a Northeastern regional meeting of Scholars at Risk.

The book also tells the story of Radwan Ziadeh, one of the prominent intellectuals in the first Damascus Spring in 2000. He is now one of the most wanted men by both ISIS and the Assad government.

DeVeuve, who now works for Cengage Learning, said she worked on the book as part of her senior capstone project at RWU, aiming to demonstrate what she had learned while also making an impact on the community.

The combined stories of Mustafa, Al-Atrash and Ziadeh span nearly 50 years of Assad family rule and citizens' attempts to resist authoritarian government. "You get the whole cascade of how it all began and up to today and how it's affecting them currently," DeVeuve said. But she was particularly struck by Mustafa's story. "She was a college student at the time, too, and I was just imagining what she went through in an unknown country," she said.

The book represents the latest installment in the "Broken Silence" series published by UNO Press. Copies are available at [unopress.org](http://unopress.org) and all the usual bookselling outlets.

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