The Incredible Stories of Dr. Shaar

One of the best parts about this job is getting to talk to people with incredible stories and Dr. Shaar certainly fits that category. Dr. Shaar is a computer science professor at SU but how he came to be here is very interesting. He is part of the Rescue a Scholar program, which “provides fellowships for professors, researchers, and public intellectuals who face threats to their lives and careers in their home countries.” (IIE.org) The way it works is the rescuers find a scholar that they believe will benefit from being at their institution as well as have the institution benefit from the scholar. Mitsy Perdue rescued Dr. Shaar his wife and one of his sons from Aleppo, Syria.

Teaching is not all Dr. Shaar does. He also writes lovely cultural stories about the unity of International Intangible Heritage with his wife as his consultant. He calls these stories portraits and he has written around 500-600 in the last 4-5 years. Over the past 6 months he has collected 60 of his portraits and translated 30 into English. I had the pleasure of reading a few of these stories, including one that compared English sayings to Syrian sayings. When it is pouring down rain here, Americans say, “it’s raining cats and dogs!” In Syria, they have a similar phrase but for snow. It goes “it’s snowing bed sheets!” He got his inspiration to do this from a comparative encyclopedia about intangible heritage which he and many others consider an Aleppo treasure. If he thinks something is missing in that book, he tries to write his own portrait to complete it. The goal of this portrait and many of his others is to try and show that intangible heritage can be similar in different countries and to show how small the world is. He writes at least one portrait every two days. Sometimes, in order to just get the story down quickly, he will post it as a Facebook status! He intends to draw caricatures for his portraits.

While here at SU, Dr. Shaar does readings from books about Aleppo. He talks about the author and why the books deserves to be translated and studied. Dr. Shaar has written his own book but has yet to publish it because it is about the social life in Aleppo. He is concerned because around 50% of the book is about personal family experience. He intends to publish at some point, however he told his son, if he does not publish it before he dies, then his son must for him.

Dr. Shaar is such a kind person with great stories to tell. I hope I can have the opportunity to read his book one day because I know it will be filled with fascinating stories and wisdom.