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to the crisis, communicating with family members still in the war-torn country, but not being able to ensure their safety.

"It is heartbreaking for me," Ms. Aljijakli said quietly, from her Solon law office Aljijakli & Kosseff LLC., on Bainbridge Road. "As an immigration lawyer, I can't bring my own family here because the U.S. process is so restrictive.

"I haven't seen my family since 2009," she added. "We can't go there, and they can't leave."

Her close-knit family of cousins, aunts and uncles still in Damascus, are used to the missiles and crossfire.

Ms. Aljijakli last visited Syria when her now 8-year-old son Omar was 18 months old.

It is simply too dangerous to return. Sadly, she sees the conflict, which began in 2011, as one with "no end in sight."

It began with completely different and peaceful intentions, Ms. Aljijakli said, describing the war. It was March of 2011, when a political revolution took place, and common people decided to fight against an oppressive government for freedom of rights, she said.

"It was a very young movement, mainly students who wanted to make a change for democracy" from a dictatorship-driven government, she said.

She noted that for decades, the people of Syria were limited in freedom of expression when it came to politics.

Prior to the Syrian conflict, other revolutions were taking place in the Middle East, and many of those efforts were successful and people were optimistic, she said.

"Syria was a different story."

The government took a stance against change and the conflict turned into what Ms. Aljijakli called the "worst humanitarian crisis of our time."

More than 300,000 Syrians have been killed since the war began, leaving generations of children without their parents, Ms. Aljijakli said. About 4.5 million have escaped, and internally, there are more than 7 million people who are displaced.

2016 brings no improvements, she said.

The situation went from activists fighting the government in a "hopeful revolution" to a complete disaster, she said.

Ironically, the crisis began right around the time Ms. Aljijakli opened her own law practice. She had developed her expertise in immigration law working with nationally recognizing lawyers at top law firms around the country, including those in Washington D.C. and New York. As a sole practitioner fluent in Arabic, her phone rang constantly.

Calls came from refugees trying to come to the U.S. as well as those already here.

"My practice became consumed with the conflict in Syria as soon as I began."

She focused on helping people apply for asylum, and routinely traveled all over the country to help others.

"It's a matter of life and death for them," she said of the refugees.

Just recently, a Syrian in America called to tell her of his brother who was killed by a missile. He asked Ms. Aljijakli for help with getting his brother's widow and the couple's four children here. Another woman, 88, was trying to escape, but had no access to medical care and had lost vision in one eye.

"Everyone is trying to leave the country," she said.

She spoke of people leaving on the "death boats" and a mother who carried her child while walking country to country.

Ms. Aljijakli's own cousin got on a boat to Holland, and an aunt took her entire family

to Belgium.

"Their young children will not know Syria," she said.

The way things stand, neither will Ms. Aljijakli's children and that makes her sad.

"My best memories are of being in Syria with extended family," she said, spending months there at a time in summers. "If things can be resolved, (my children) can experience (seeing extended family every day). It's a beautiful thing."

Now, just about everyone there is trying to figure out a "strategy of survival."

Despite what people may think of immigrants, Ms. Aljijakli noted, many Syrians do not want to leave their country. "If they stay another day, they could die," she said.

Currently, the United States takes in about 70,000 refugees a year worldwide. Since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, 785,000 refugees have been admitted.

Of that amount, just 2,690 have been Syrian refugees, a tiny number, Ms. Aljijakli noted.

"The media exaggerates it like we are opening the flood gates," she continued. But that is far from the case.

The Obama administration is proposing to admit 10,000 more refugees by the end of 2016. Ms. Aljijakli said that many politicians have taken a stance on the issue of security, especially following the attacks in Paris, linking immigrants to terrorist activities.

No Syrian refugee has been connected to terrorism, she said.

Logistics make it extremely difficult for them to come to the United States, she explained, with stringent background checks and often waits up to two years for resettlement.

"This isn't the first time we have let in refugees," Ms. Aljijakli said. "There's already very strict screening in place. It is being presented like (this country) is a total open door."

Of the 4.5 million Syrian refugees, Ms. Aljijakli said, 75 percent are women and children. Less than 2 percent are unattached, military-aged single men.

"These are victims of persecution, women at risk and people with medical emergencies."

Some states and localities are taking a stance against refugees in their communities including the Ohio House Concurrent Resolution 31, passed last fall, opposing refugees in Ohio and the U.S.

"States don't have the power to direct immigration policies," Ms. Aljijakli said. "That is limited to the federal government by the U.S. Constitution."

What states can do is restrict resources for them, she noted, which makes achieving financial independence difficult for refugees.

"Assimilation is one of the hardest things," especially for those who did not come here voluntarily. "Many come from highly educated backgrounds, some doctors," she said, whose medical degrees are not recognized here forcing them to start from scratch.

"We see them struggle to assimilate and survive," Ms. Aljijakli said. She also describes the "peace" she sees on their faces when they are finally granted lawful immigration status.

It is that face that Ms. Aljijakli wishes more would see.

"If the American people can see what's happening there, and not focus on fear, things would be different," Ms. Aljijakli said. "We just need to look at the refugee crisis on a humanitarian level."

Police briefs

Driver goes in ditch to avoid crash

A motorist reported to Russell police Saturday that his brakes failed and he drove off the road on Kinsman Road (Route 87) and he needed a tow. Officers went to the location and observed a van off the road. The traffic had been stopped on Kinsman Road due to tree trimmers stopping traffic, and as the motorist went to stop, his brakes failed, he said. Instead of hitting the car in front of him, he drove into the ditch. A report was made.

Woman runs red light, hospitalized

One person was transported for injuries after a collision Jan. 20 in Bainbridge. In the

incident at Bainbridge and Snyder roads, a southbound car on Snyder Road failed to stop at the red light, striking another car. Sandra Beane, 73, of Auburn was extricated from her vehicle and was transported by the Bainbridge rescue squad to University Hospitals Ahuja Medical Center. Susan Lucas, 49, of Newbury was transported by the Auburn rescue squad to Geauga Hospital. Police cited her for failing to yield at a red light.

Driver hits mailbox

A vehicle went off the roadway on Hill Drive at Skyline Drive Monday in Russell. The driver told police he went off the right side of the road and struck a mailbox, causing damage to the box. Damage was also observed to the lawn at the roadside. The vehicle had minor damage as well.

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