In the emergency room at MSF’s field hospital in Hammam Al-Alil, a woman regained consciousness and immediately burst into tears. She looked as if she wanted to say something but was too overwhelmed with grief to speak. MSF nurse Hannah and translator Suhaib Majed waited nearby to listen to her and console her. Ten minutes passed before she was able to speak. At last she turned Suhaib and said: “My son who died looked exactly like you. Please may I hug you?”

Thirty-two-year-old Suhaib remembers the scene as if it were yesterday, though it took place two years ago. The woman had lost her only child when a mortar shell hit their home during the Iraqi government’s battle to regain control of Mosul. Suhaib visited her several times in the field hospital’s inpatient ward, where she would hold his hand and kiss it, each kiss leaving a scar on his heart.

Such is his love for Mosul that Suhaib stayed on in the city even when he knew his best hope was to leave and find a future elsewhere. “I thought of leaving the city,” he says. “But I doubted that I could find myself outside it. Mosul is my life. Now I’m married to the girl I love. We are building our own little kingdom whose national anthem is a love song that never wears out.”

Suhaib’s experiences in Mosul had left him with many questions, and he turned to writing to help find the answers. “Writing is a form of self-discovery through beautiful syntax – especially important given the lack of spaces where you can express your thoughts in our society,” he says. “I’m convinced that writing with any depth can only come out of adversity, and in order for me to be creative, my writing has to be authentic.”

Suhaib no longer works as a translator, but as field coordinator support at MSF’s post-operative care hospital in East Mosul. His responsibilities include representing MSF to local authorities and writing regular reports on developments within the city that are relevant to MSF’s activities. “What I like most about my work is that it is unconventional,” he says. “It combines my passion to stay informed of all the developments in the city with my passion for writing. It has also helped develop my personality and language skills.”

Suhaib believes that his work environment is a healthy one in terms of its professionalism and the objective nature of its decision-making processes. He enjoys listening to all the different viewpoints that are voiced. “I want people to remember me as a peaceful person who respected their personal freedoms,” he says. “I believe this is key to the security and peace that our society so badly needs.”