HADEEL Ali Al-Rubaiyi, 22, from Iraq, feels as if she has been living her life all over again since she moved to Kuala Lumpur three years ago.

Coming from a country still suffering from the after effects of war, Hadeel has found peace and sanctuary in Malaysia, a country which she has come to love and admire.

"I was a sophomore at the University of Technology in Iraq when my dad took up a posting with a Malaysian oil company in 1998. Conditions in Iraq then were quite bad, so the move to Kuala Lumpur was the most sensible thing to do."

"Settling down in Malaysia was easy, it was putting my academic life back together that was the difficult part."

The difference in educational systems has resulted in Hadeel having to repeat her tertiary studies.

"I didn't know that local institutions did not accept credit transfers from my university, so I had to start all over again."

Her initial plan was to go to Canada for her undergraduate programme. So, she signed up for the Canadian Matriculation Programme.

"But because my English was poor, I had to do a three-month intensive language course instead."

That was a major setback, but Hadeel decided to use that opportunity to sign up for a twinning programme in Computer Science with Western Michigan University which she felt offered her a tremendous opportunity for personal growth.

"I was doing a science course in Mathematical Applications in Iraq, but decided to switch to Computer Science here instead. I believe it is the field of the future."

It was not easy for Hadeel to adapt to campus life in a different country. Being the only child, Hadeel was used to being pampered and having her parents attend to her every need.

"That was something I'd never done before. Back home, my dad would drive me to the campus."

"It feels like I'm living my life all over again. The past three years have been a period of learning, of discovering new things, getting to know people, their cultures, the food..."