

THE REFUGEE EXPERIENCE

True stories



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The long journey to safety

Kahlid (19) and Housaam (24) are cousins and refugees from Syria.

*Kahlid and Housaam fled Damascus, because they were being persecuted by the regime of Bashar al-Assad. After a demonstration they and others were chased by the police and found refuge in an abandoned, bombed out building. That evening two cars arrived. Two men got out and climbed on the roof where there were two machine guns. They started shooting at the building until it was about to collapse. Those that survived ran into the street in all directions. While escaping Housaam was shot three times. Using all their savings they first fled to **Turkey**. From there they crossed through **North Macedonia** into **Greece** until their long journey finally ended in Kerpen, **Germany**.*

Kahlid and Housaam visited the Erasmus course at the Willy-Brandt-Comprehensive School and shared their experience with us. They are now practicing for their B1 level German exams and hope to begin an apprenticeship soon after.

A little chat with Mohamed

Two weeks ago, the Erasmus team of our school visited the Paster Institute, where we had the opportunity to attend an educational program together with refugee children. There we first met Mohamed, a young man who translated the program for the refugee children to the Farsi language.

The previous Sunday, we met again the refugee children at Eleonas refugee camp at Athens, where a festival took place, about diversity and acceptance. When I saw Mohamed, I talked to him. He seemed so happy, friendly and willing to communicate! I thought that it would be nice to introduce myself, hoping that he would do the same. I was right! He was indeed very friendly and ready to answer all my questions.

Mohamed is 22 years old, with dark skin and hair, but with a bright smile on his face. He came to Greece from Iran, two years ago, after a long and dangerous journey, through mountains, battlefields and seas. When I told him about how much I admire the civilization and history of Iran, ancient Persia, he reminded me the Greco-Persian wars that had been held during the 5th century BC. “We were enemies then, but now we can be friends”. It is strange to realize how human history changes the situations of our lives. Persians in ancient times came as conquerors, but now they come as refugees, looking for a better life.

Mohamed told me that it was his own decision to live Iran. “It was unbearable for me to live in such a country, where no human rights were accepted, and no freedom in personal choices was recognized”. I asked him what the cause of that oppression is and he explained me what a theocratic state is. “In a theocratic state, like Iran, the administration and legislation are organized according the beliefs of the prevailing religion. The citizens have to obey, despite their objections. If someone doesn’t submit, the punishment will be very strict”.

In order to achieve his freedom, Mohamed left behind his old life, but also his family, his parents and his brother, who weren’t able to follow him to his difficult journey to the unknown. “I might not see them again. Even though, I wouldn’t change my decision to leave”. Now Mohamed works for the Amnesty International as a translator. He is very lucky, because his knowledge of the English language has helped

him find a meaning in his life at the camp, and become useful for the other refugees. When I asked him what his plans are for the future, he told me that he would like to complete his studies and leave Greece for a county in Northern Europe. “I don’t know what is coming next. I try to go through the difficulties with courage and self-confidence. I enjoy my freedom every day, and I enjoy to meet people willing to communicate, as I am. I am looking forward to a better world, and I want to be a part of it”.

Good luck Mohamed! Perhaps one day we’ll meet again! Eva

The true story of a refugee

(This is the true story told by a student who recently graduated from the Willy-Brandt Comprehensive school in Germany. The names have been omitted out of respect for their right to privacy.)

This is a true story about an 18 years old boy from Damascus, Syria .He left Syria when he was 15. At the time he left he was doing his Abitur.(He was in the 11th class). He didn't leave alone. He left Syria with his father (43), his mother (42) and his two sisters (8 and 13 years old). His father was an important car dealer who bought, sold and rented travel busses and his mother was a kindergarten teacher who speaks French too. In Syria, there were two different cultures. The Alawites and the Syloiten. This family are Alawites and the others (including the police) are Syloits , so they weren't really accepted and the police haunted him and his family. They had two houses in Syria and one of them got bombed because of the war that had started.

During the whole time when they lived there, he got scared and was afraid for his life. At his school and on the street there was a lot of racism between the Alo- and soloits so he was always in danger. Then his father decided to sell his shop and house so that they could leave Syria. During the last three months before his family had left Syria, there was war so he saw horrible things like executed human bodies and dead bodies everywhere. In the middle of 2015 they left Syria and flew to Lebanon and from there they flew instantly to Turkey with a plane that was waiting for them. In Turkey, they spoke to people who helped them for a lot of money. . They were from the 'human mafia ' an organization that got their money by shipping and driving people away from the war, illegally.

He and his family traveled on a min-bus with fifty other people. They drove to the beach where they had to get on a rubber boat. They were on sea for two hours. The price for the whole journey was 1000\$ for an adult and 700\$ for a child. While on the boat he distinctively remembers thinking about which one of his family members he should save first if they were to capsiz. He was the only one in his family who knew how to swim.

When they finally got to mainland Greece, unfriendly and rough people met them. They were forced to leave everything behind. Although it was hard for him to leave his medicine bag with his Asthma spray behind, it seemed

insignificant compared to the sounds all the people lying motionless on the sand were making. He asked a journalist what was going on and he replied: "This is the sound people make who have drowned in water." ...

Then they got to a refugee camp where they had to wait for three days in pure darkness without light and any chance of contacting anyone. They got a survival pack on the first day with water and a one-man tent. After three long days, it was finally their turn to see the Greece police. Then their fingerprints were taken as well as all their dates and they were given new passes. Most of the workers there were very friendly, except for the Greeks. They were not. They were horribly unfriendly.

He and his family had to live in a terrible camp for three days while at this point all he knew was that his life had taken a catastrophic turn and they needed to leave this place. He felt like he had lost everything and there was nothing left. However, after three terrible and humiliating days, he and his family got permission to leave Greece. They were able to reserve tickets on a ship for himself and his family that gave them relative comfort. After about thirteen hours, they arrived at the capital, Athens. Then they went by bus to Macedonia, which took much longer- about twenty-four hours. The people we met in Serbia were very nice. They had food and drink for all the people who came newly to their country. The bus journey through Serbia lasted only two hours and then they continued on driving non-stop through Croatia on their way to Serbia. They drove thirty-four hours without getting off the bus. It was very bad to sleep in the bus because it was very noisy for the little kid's and uncomfortable.

Slovenia was a nightmare. his father waited for the proper papers. It was very bad. The food was terrible and they had to sleep on the floor. There were sick and dying people. After two days in this refugee camp, all the people became aggressive and wanted to go leave without precaution, but the police beat them and used tear gas and aggressive dogs. He thought that he was in a nightmare, but then the permit came through. Then they drove five hours through Austria by bus and the beautiful thing was that although they were incredibly exhausted and disappointed, they finally made it and arrived in Germany.

A refugee story

Kerpen – A Home to many refugees

In mayor Biehler's municipal office, we had a presentation by the representative of the United Nations for the life, travelling, conditions and the risks of a young refugee. He told us his story of his childhood when he had to leave and seek help from other countries around the world. He went to many countries but no one wanted to help him. When he arrived in Germany, he was happy because they provided him with basic living conditions and they decided to help him.

His origin is from Iraq. He also described the difficulties he had to face while travelling without food and water. He thanked Germany which was the only country to provide him a place to stay at the refugee camp. He described the room in which he lived in that camp. There he met a lot of friends, which also had their own story to tell. He told us that he had been in Macedonia for a short period of time and he had a good time in here. Now he lives in Koln where he works and has everything that he needs.