

What is the story behind the individual who risks their life crossing a sea in small flimsy rubber boats made for 12 but packed with more than 45 people? What have they lived? What is their experience and how do they feel?

Over 1 million people, fleeing war, brutality, and discrimination have arrived on the shores of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Kos, and Leros in Greece since roughly April 2015. They have been through a kind of hell to get to Greece, often crossing snow-covered mountain passes on foot, being thrown in prisons, shot at by police trying to stop them, escaping undercover in the dark of night, walking hundreds of miles with small children and the elderly and disabled and always the goal – to get to Europe. To try to find a safe place to live and just be.

Individuals from around the world came to assist the Greek locals in welcoming and meeting the basic needs of so many people. For most refugees, landing in Greece was the first experience of kindness and love they had felt along their arduous journey. We heard their stories and our hearts broke open. What was a distant news report back home had become personal - these people were our family, our own sisters, mothers, brothers and grandparents. By being there in solidarity and giving from our hearts, what we were given back irrevocably changed us.

Since the devastating EU (European Union)-Turkey deal was implemented on March 20, 2016, all new arrivals to Greece are being forced into detention camps where often they cannot move freely until they have the proper papers, placing trauma upon trauma. With the Macedonian border closed there are now over 50,000 refugees in limbo in Greece, waiting to be told what their fate will be.

This winter while I was volunteering in Greece I recorded stories refugees told me about fleeing for their safety and what their lives

were like now. Most of the people whose voices you will hear and read I met on the Greek island of Lesbos in November 2015 and in the winter months Jan-Mar, 2016. You will hear Hamdi from Syrian describe leaving his war-torn country, getting to the Turkish coast, and taking the boat across the sea in the middle of the night. Fatimah from Afghanistan and Sham from Pakistan are some of the other people I met and who were willing to tell their story.

I also interviewed solidarity workers and Greek locals to better understand their experience. To volunteers I asked three simple questions:

What moved you to go to Greece to volunteer?

Did the experience change you and if so, how?

Tell us about something that happened that will stay with you for a long time, that you won't forget.

With permission I took each person's picture.

***'Greece, Refugees, and Love'*** is a documentary installation of the testimonies I collected. Hearing the stories born of this crisis and putting a human face to them reminds us of our humanity. Listening to the voice of the individual is an attempt to bridge the divide that is the result of vastly different daily realities and it is the hope that through deep listening, compassion and understanding will grow. This gathering of voices is another 'drop in the ocean' towards creating a world where our actions reflect our belief that everyone matters.

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(note: The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a refugee as “*someone who has been forced to leave a country because of war or for religious or political reasons*”. The UNHCR discerns between a refugee and a migrant. For sake of clarity, I use the term refugee interchangeably with migrant because in my mind, all these people are leaving their countries for legitimate reasons.)