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Photo by Lindsay Silsby / Painting by Elizabeth Thayer

AEHAM

Aeham is a musician from Yarmouk, a mostly-destroyed suburb of Damascus in Syria. When the bombing began in 2014, Aeham pushed his piano on a vegetable cart through the rubble and played his music. In the fall of 2015, Aeham's piano was burned in the street and his life was threatened. He had to leave behind his wife and two young boys and flee his country.

With 600,000 of his fellow Syrians, Aeham made the journey to Germany, a distance of 2,400 miles (3,800 kilometers). Aeham

now lives as a refugee in Wiesbaden, Germany, and continues to play his songs of sorrow in concerts throughout Europe.

"I have a lot of memories from music. I didn't [used to] play a lot of pain music. Now I play a lot of pain music because I have pain. I talk about Syria and play music, tell the people my story but it is not changing anything..."

"There has been a place [in Yarmouk] made for reading underground. It is a safe place for 100 children. I have a friend who makes music [there], makes jokes with the children.... it helps the children to not stay in the street because it's very dangerous in the street... [Once] a sniper killed [a child] when she played piano with me [in the street]. Twelve years old was her age. Yes, it's good to play with the children under the ground, not outside..."

"In this dirty war nobody can have a decision. You dying or (fleeing). You have it only one way. Nobody in Syria is safe."

On December 18, 2015, Aeham was awarded the International Beethoven Prize for Human Rights, Peace, Inclusion, and the Fight Against Poverty. In August 2016 he was reunited with his wife and two children in Germany. He continues to travel and sing to raise awareness of the plight of his fellow Syrians.

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Photos by Lindsay Silsby

AHMAD

"My name is Ahmad. I am here with my wife and 23-day old child. We are from Afghanistan.

"My family and my wife's family didn't agree to our marriage, so we went to the court to get permission to marry. Her family wanted to give her to another man from their family who was already married and had a wife. In the end, we went to the court again and we got married there.

"After we were married we found a house in a different zone, but my wife's family found us and they assaulted me and hit me. My jaw was seriously injured and my knees and legs as well, and they took my motorbike. Both of my legs were broken. We then moved to Kabul and my wife got pregnant. Again, we were threatened by them, so we decided to leave the country. We heard that Europe was a safe place for living, so I sold everything that we owned and we left.

"We walked from Afghanistan to Pakistan, and from Pakistan to the Iran, which took 5 days. At the beginning of our journey, it was desert and my wife was pregnant. The smugglers in the Pakistan told us it would take 5 hrs to the next stop where another group were waiting for us. It was mountains and snowing. After 18 hours of climbing and hiking we finally arrived. After that we were detained for 5 days by the smugglers in Turkey until the money was transferred to them. They locked 35-40 people in a big room and nobody could go in or out. After they got the money, they transferred us to Istanbul, and after 2 weeks, we went by bus to Izmir. In Izmir they put 54 people in a 7-meter boat and took us to Greece. We are living in very hot tents and in a very difficult situation.

"I ask the developed countries such as the USA to give refuge to our helpless people and help us start a new life again."

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Photos by Lindsay Sibley

ALI

At 14, Ali was a top student with a bright future, but fate placed him and his family in the center of hostilities in northern Afghanistan. On their way to school one morning, he and his cousin were caught in a car bomb explosion. His cousin lost both legs and Ali's left leg was severely injured. He endured years of pain while his family sought medical help, but finally his leg had to be amputated. He began walking on an old prosthetic leg. Both Ali and his cousin completed their schooling. Not long after, their village was attacked by local militants. Ali helped identify and bury dozens

of his friends and neighbors in a mass grave.

"This was very difficult," Ali said. "I was living with my [widowed] mother. There were two Taliban groups fighting in my district. Because of this fighting 318 people [in my village] were killed. Children, women, men, everybody. I saw them. And afterwards, everyone was fighting everywhere. The Taliban was trying to force us to help them. My mother said, 'You must go to another country. You can't stay here.'"

Ali said goodbye to his mother and siblings and began the trek over two mountain ranges; he walked over 4,900 km (3,050 miles) to Greece. Along the way, he joined a group of two women and five children. He encouraged and protected them along the way, sometimes carrying the children on his back. His plastic leg broke several times, and he repaired it with sticks and duct tape.

Ali made it to Greece just as the Balkan Route was closed, which blocked his progress. He stayed in a Greek refugee camp for six months, where a donor was found to buy him a new state-of-the-art prosthetic. Before it was delivered, Ali's best friend at the camp died in a swimming accident. Ali decided to leave. He made his way to Paris by lying on a cross-beam under a semi-truck for over 30 hours through Italy and France. For a time, he lived in a tent under a bridge in Paris. However, volunteers soon found him a safe place to stay and brought him his new prosthetic leg from Greece. Ali currently has an apartment, speaks French, and spends much of his time reaching out to his fellow displaced countrymen.

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AZIM'S MOTHER



Photo by Lindsay Slisby / Front Photo by Liz Thayer

"I have six children, 4 girls and 2 sons. My husband was a soldier. He lost his two feet when he was fighting to defend his homeland. He died four years ago because his feet kept pouring out filth. His liver was destroyed due to the effect of that bomb which cut his feet.

"When he was alive, everybody protested and told us, 'Your husband is crippled and he cannot protect his wife and children.' That was our situation until he died, and after his death, it got even worse. They said that, since my daughters had no father anymore, they had no guardian. Thus, [my

daughters] must get married. But the girls did not want to. They said that girls must not protest. It is not a custom in Afghanistan for girls to talk. They have no right to study and work, they must get married.

"If my son-in-law had not helped us [escape], they would have forcibly married my girls off, and not only they would have destroyed their lives, but their studies would have been in vain, too. I could not accept this. I came here so that my daughters could have a safe shelter, and a good life. We had no security there at all. If we manage to go to a better country, the studies of my girls can advance further, and we can live in security.

"There is no one here who dares to take them forcibly and do whatever they like with them, and there is no one here to poison them in their schools. I carried them from school to the hospital twice for poisoning. There is no security there at all anymore. If I went back to Afghanistan, my daughters would be destroyed, and I would be worse than them. They also swore that if we come back they will kill my son-in-law.

"I brought my daughters here with me and told them that, whatever happens to my life, I would bring them wherever they want to go so that they can continue their studies.

Thank you. Thank you. I thank you."

Azim and his mother and five siblings are currently living destitute in a camp in Serbia, trapped behind closed borders and cut off from opportunity. They are unable to go back, and unable to move ahead.

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Photos by Lindsay Sibley

BARAAT

“My name is Baraat and I am here in this camp with my wife and three children. We left our country seeking a better place, not as the helpless refugees we are now. In Afghanistan, I was a singer. We left because the Taliban and ISIS do not like music and singers, but I had a good life there. I had a house, a car and a good income.

“I worked in the Baglan district for a local radio program called Sana and as a singer for official events and ceremonies. One time, I was singing at a wedding party when the local Taliban attacked me because I was performing for the women's part in the wedding. After that, I decided to move to the city of Kabul, but, as everyone knows, it is always dangerous with suicide bombings and the Taliban. Again, my life was threatened in Kabul. The Taliban threw a letter with their threats into my home. I still have that letter. Another time at about 2 a.m., two men attacked me after coming out of an event at a restaurant. I ran to my car and escaped.

“After that, I decided to sell everything I had and leave the country to protect our lives. I left behind everything including my mother and brothers and sisters. We are in a very bad situation now. We are exhausted, and we can't go back to our country where my life was threatened. We never imagined we would have to live in a tent when we left Afghanistan, but my wife is in our tent now because she is sick.

“We hope this awful situation will be over soon and our children can go to school after having missed two years. I didn't let them go to school when we were in Kabul because I was afraid the Taliban would kidnap them. “

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Photos by Lindsay Slesby

BASIR & SORAYA

Basir:

"We had a good life, a house and a car and a good income. I used to work on trains in Herat (Afghanistan) before the Taliban threatened to kill us. We had an 8 year-old daughter, which the Taliban kidnapped from in front of our house. She passed away from her injuries 2 weeks before we left the country. We didn't have hope and we decided to leave the country."

"I don't believe that our country will ever be a safe place to live."

"We came here and we can't go back due to the dangerous conditions which still exist in my country. The Taliban is still there. We can't go back."

"We wish we could have a safe and peaceful life in our future."

Soraya:

"I wish and I hope our daughters will find success in the future, and that they can be able to study and live well. I was a teacher in the Afghanistan. My daughter loves Mathematics and English."

Basir and Soraya were interviewed in a camp in Greece where they live with their two surviving daughters.

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Photos by Lindsay Silsby

REFUGEE CHILD

I Am a Refugee Child

*written by Monsoor, from Afghanistan
Moria Camp, Greece*

April 12, 2016

I am a refugee child
My wish is peace
I am innocent
There is no question about that

We escaped away from threats
We were faced with bullets, guns, explosions and
many other things
We hope for peace, friendship, good behavior and
good treatment
And my wish is peace (x2)

I am a refugee child
I lost my country
Because of pain, disasters and punishment
I'm in a grave even though I'm alive
Disasters and sickness keep coming
But my wish is peace (x2)

I am a refugee child
I will become calm
And my mouth will be sweet
When you laugh with me

We didn't come here to eat and drink
Our decency was under attack
My wish is peace (x2)

You're broadcasting human rights
Hey merciful people
The refugees are with you and part of that
humanity
Tell me, without helping the people, what is
your wish?

PEACE

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Photos by Lindsay Sibley

FIROZ

"We were very happy in Syria and our lives were good. Everyone in my family lived nearby. We were in and out of each other's homes. Our family worked as carpenters.

"Then ISIS invaded our village. They began killing people without mercy because we don't share their religion. They're killing everyone. They slaughter people in the name of God. They don't bury them, they just throw them in pits.

"We left to Turkey to work and to find a safe place. When my aunt was preparing to go to

Germany, I told my father I wanted to go too. He said, 'Let's go. Get your things ready.' In two or three hours we were on our way. I left with my aunt and her children. My parents did not come.

"We brought things with us to put in the boat but the Turkish smugglers didn't let us take them. At sea, the waves and rain and wind were crashing on us. The smugglers took us halfway and then pointed and told us to go towards a light [in the distance] and they left. The waves were high, God almighty!

"We almost reached the island but there was a hole in the boat and we sank. There were Nigerians in the boat who helped us — God reward them. There were five of them in the boat and about twenty children. The island was just trees, no people. We made a fire to warm up and remained there two days.

"Fishermen came by and could see us. They told us they could take us to the beach [in Greece] if we would give them 100 euros for every six people. We paid because we had no other choice. We all paid. Some of us were taken by inflatable boat, about a hundred people.

"I am thirteen-years-old and I worry about my family. My father loves me. My mother and father are sick. I want to be with them, but I can't. I'm worried about my family all the time, every minute. It's hard without them. They want to come but there is no money. The borders are closed, they can't.

"I wish [success] for those who try to help bring families together. I want to thank you all so much for listening to my story. And may God make you well for listening."

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Allyson



HOLDING ON

Holding On
oil on linen

by TSOS artist Elizabeth Thayer

"I met Saaedah in Germany and was enchanted by her bright, light blue eyes and sweet temperament. She was living in an apartment with a number of women and children who had been separated from husbands and fathers somewhere along their flight to safety.

"They are included in the 11 million Syrians who have fled their homes, hoping to escape the horrors of civil war and find some kind of peace. Saaedah is one of the lucky ones that escaped with family. 33% of all minors from Syria arriving in Greece in 2015 were alone. In 2016, the UN reported that of the 6.5 million Syrians who had been internally displaced from their homes, an estimated 2.8 million were children. Of the 4.8 million registered Syrian refugees, half were children.

"It is a crisis that will not just go away. Millions of normal, everyday people are sitting in temporary housing, refugee camps, or worse, waiting for life to begin again. I kept the brushwork in this painting loose and expressive, hoping to convey the turmoil and upheaval so many young people are experiencing at an early stage in their lives. They live in uncertainty, but are remarkably resilient and cheerful in bad conditions. They hold up the best they can, and cling to the most important things - loved ones, faith, and hope. They are Holding On."

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JALIL

Photos by Lindsay Sibley

Jalil was a journalist in Afghanistan who received a death threat from the remnants of the Taliban who still control much of the country. His family decided that he should flee the country for survival. Because it currently costs about 10,000 Euro to be smuggled from Turkey to Germany, his mother and sister decided that he should use all of their money and go alone. They are still in danger but they decided that they

could more safely wait until he was secure and able to earn some money in Europe.

Jalil escaped from the camp in Moria, on the island of Lesbos, because it was so unsafe there. He said that fights were breaking out in the camp nearly every night. He found a hole in the fence at the camp and ran as fast as he could. Because he was a trained runner — he was once on the national track team of Afghanistan — he was able to outrun the police. He ran to the port, found a ship, and jumped on it as it was leaving. After arriving on the mainland in Greece he made ten unsuccessful attempts to leave Greece and enter other countries in Europe. Each time Jalil was caught either by the Greek police, the Serbian police, or the Bulgarian police. He swore he would try 40 more times, and wouldn't stop until he achieved his goal.

“God told me,” he said in an intense whisper, “you decide what you want to do, and I’ll help you do it. I decided that I wouldn’t stop until I leave Greece, and I know that I’ll get out of here without having to return to Afghanistan.”

Jalil was 23-years-old when he died in an accidental drowning last September (2016) in Greece.

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Photos by Kristi Burton

KAADAN

Dr. Abdul Nasser Kaadan, of Aleppo, Syria, is a highly regarded orthopedic surgeon and scholar who was nominated for a Nobel Prize in literature in 2012. But his honors, credentials, and vital work could not keep him safe in his home country.

"I was living near Aleppo University, which is still under the government's control. I left in early 2015 when the situation became very dangerous. There were bombings every day and attacks on civilians. One of my colleagues at Aleppo University was killed

in a bomb attack, while he was in his car with his son; they both died. Another colleague, a surgeon, was arrested by the government and tortured for giving medical treatment to an injured patient who happened to be a member of the opposition. This is what my family and I faced every day."

Dr. Kaadan and his wife, Roua, fled to Turkey where he worked as a university professor.

"I left my private hospital, my private clinic, my cars — I left everything behind and some of them are destroyed now, but I'm not thinking about how I lost something. I'm sad, but I'm also happy because I have good health and a good mind. If I have those two things, money is nothing at all."

Dr. Kaadan began looking for another country where he could begin a new life and a new job, one where he and his wife would be safe. Dr. Susan Matt, chairman of the History Department at Weber State University offered him a job teaching classes on medical history and the Syrian conflict. They arrived in late December 2016 and have been amazed at their reception here. "We were welcomed from the beginning," Dr. Kaadan said. "This is truly a new world."

The Kaadan's current visas allow them to remain in the U.S. for three years. Roua is taking daily English classes and their circle of new friends is widening. Utah, they are discovering, is a welcoming, secure place to live.

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Photos by Lindsay Slesby

KHALDIEH

"My husband is Palestinian. [He migrated to my country]. People introduced us and it was fate. I was seventeen and he was thirty-five. It was beautiful and we were happy. My husband didn't have one particular job. He worked as a fisherman and he painted. I was a housewife.

"[Then] there was bombing and war. Missiles and mortars were dropping. Three of my brother's children died. They were twenty years old — my sister's children and brother's children. They were all around the same age. We escaped from death so we could save our children.

"We were smuggled out. We escaped by car to Turkey. We lived in tents. Some of us left for Germany. We traveled in a boat. It was a big boat. It had three hundred and fifty people. The boat was sinking. The smugglers left us in the middle of the sea and they jumped [to escape]. We had many children on the boat, so for the sake of the children my husband took over [the steering]. My husband was obligated to steer so he could save the children. Then the Greek police arrested him and he hasn't been out since.

"I continued on my own with my children. I was five months pregnant and alone with six boys. I suffered a lot. I was on my own the whole way. I was very tired. I don't have a brother or a sister. I don't have anyone. I'm by myself with six children.

"We suffered a lot on the way. Praise be to God, God gave us strength. Patience. From one country to the next, we would get off one train and board another, get off another train then board another. In the middle of the night - the train let us off at three in the morning. Then we walked for about two or three hours until we reached the next train. I remained in Serbia for four days sleeping on the muddy ground without food or drink until we got our documents. Then we came to Germany.

"I just want my husband to get out of prison and come here. I want my husband to be able to raise his children. We want to bring our lives back together again the way we were before. I wish for a better life for my children. I wish my children a happy life and I hope their futures improve."

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Michael H. Hays 2016



Photo by Lindsay Silsby / Painting by Elizabeth Thayer

MUSA

“My name is Musa. My dad was in the military and also a civil engineer and he was educated. I graduated in computer science. I am a computer scientist and a graphic designer. And my brother, he’s Down Syndrome and blind. My mother is a biology teacher. My wife is 23-years-old. She is an artist and painter. She is in the tent with my son. And my son is five-days-old. This is my family.”

In Afghanistan, as part of a U.S.-funded project, Musa helped create a database of Afghan military personnel. He also helped

identify terrorist spies, which put his own life in danger. He was attacked twice. Once an RPG fired directly at his car went through one window and out the other without injury to the passengers. He wasn’t as lucky the second time. A terrorist on a passing motorbike attached a magnet bomb to his car. The resulting explosion propelled Musa through the windshield. He barely survived. His bodyguards were killed.

From a camp in Greece, where he and his family were halted as they escaped to Europe, Musa explained:

“We were a rich family in Afghanistan. My dad was a civil engineer and was earning enough. My mom and I were working. So economically, there was no problem at all. Nothing. We are not here for economic reasons. We are not here for vacation. We are not here for having fun. We are here due to security reasons.

“I’m educated. I know five languages. I have skills. We all have skills. We can use them. I don’t want economic support from any other country. I just need security. I just need peace. I just need to live.

“In a time I was playing with life; I was enjoying, but now life is playing with me. I don’t know what is my destiny. Or how long I will be staying here. We will see what will be our destiny and what they will decide for us.”

We have obscured Musa’s face to protect his identity.

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Photos by Lindsay Sibley

NADEEM

“My name is Nadeem. I was a businessman selling goods in Afghanistan, but we are now living in Greece as immigrants.

“We came here because we were threatened by the Taliban, and our lives were in danger. They sent me some life-threatening letters during the night and the security segment of the Taliban also sent us warnings.

“The Taliban kidnapped me. I was their captive for some time. They told me, ‘You should do business on our behalf. You can transfer our goods by hiding them among your goods. You must cooperate with us and obey.’ I paid \$30,000 US to free myself.

“After that I stayed in hiding for one month in Kabul. While I was hidden, I worked to find a way to go out and come here. We could not continue living in our homeland. My income and my life were in danger. In fact, forget income, my life is more important. We felt the danger. Our children were in danger.

“Our future is not ours at the moment. We cannot say what will happen to us in the future, it is not in our hands. We feel that we are captives here as our paths are blocked. We have no options. It is a very bad situation.

“We want our voices out there so other people are aware that we are in a very hard situation. We experience such high temperatures during the summer, and such cold in winter. Our children have no particular destiny. We all have no particular destiny.

“We have no control of our fate.”

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Photos by Kristi Burton

PAT

"My name is Pat. My father married three wives. He belonged to a society that worships idols. It was a tradition in our village. Me, I like to serve God and did not want to worship the idol. So I left my village. I went to another village and lived there until I was eleven years old.

"I met a man named Joseph. He said, 'Do you want to marry me?' I said, 'No, I'm too young for marriage.' But we married anyway.

"Then when I am married at the age of eleven, I had twins — a boy and a girl. And my father said,

'Twins are an abomination. This is bad Juju [dark witchcraft].' He did not want to see twins; his society forbids twins. But me, as a Christian, I know that all children are good because God gives them to you.

"For a few months nothing happened, but then my father began looking for me. Even the village was looking for me to bring the children to initiate them. This is the mark of initiation. They take you to a place and lie you on the ground and bring a knife and cut you to give you this mark. At the ceremony they sometimes kill goats, kill fowl, or kill hares and use their blood. They believe it will save you. But it will not save me. It is God that saves a person. I did not want my children to have it. I said, 'No.'

"My husband said, 'Let's leave this place and go to another village.' My man was afraid. He knew people were looking for me. So we started walking [to get away]. Then, I don't know how -- they found us.

"They were dragging me away and my husband said, 'No, no, you can't take my wife away.' They took a machete and said, 'If you don't let us have this woman, we will cut you.' My husband said, 'No, take me, instead.' But they said, 'No, you are not the one we want. It is this woman and her children that are bringing problems to us because they are an abomination to us.' So they hit my husband with the machete and he was bleeding. I tried to protect him and that is the day I got this mark for they hit me with the machete, too.

"They took my children and my man was dead. My heart felt dead, too.

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#CHILL | TSOS



Photo by Liz Thayer / Front photo by Lindsay Sisby

OMED

"My name is Omed. I'm from Afghanistan. I loved my country when I was there. I played and went to school. I lived in Kabul. When I was at school, some of my classmates weren't nice with me. They usually used dirty words [because of his ethnicity and the fact that his sister and mother had jobs outside the home]. They even disturbed the teachers more often, so they had to use a stick for punishment. They didn't let me and other students study well at school.

"I like Chemistry so much and I want to be a famous chemist in the future. I want to have a future, therefore my parents took me here [despite] all the problems and difficulties. I want to be an useful person and to catch my desire and I'm sure I will do that.

"My sister and my parents tried hard to get me here, and from now on, I have to do my best.

"Thank you very much."

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Photos by Lindsay Sibley

ROKSANA

"My name is Roksana. I am from Afghanistan. I always was an ambitious girl and had high goals, so the first thing I did was to find a job near our house. I was a consultant and saleswoman for women's cosmetic products. I faced many problems when I was working there. People harassed me because I was a girl. They said to my parents, 'This is not good that she has a job. You should take control and not let her work there.' I wanted to encourage people to think freely and wisely and not to be so fanatic. I wanted them to allow women to work, so I willingly faced the many challenges.

"Later, I received a job offer to work for [a] political party. As the first woman to work for them, I wanted to set an example for other women. During that time I had many problems. Sometimes in the middle of the night they threw stones through the window of our home and yelled many bad words. Sometimes my colleagues were beaten because they worked there. I was not frightened for myself, but I was afraid that if something happened to me, my family would be persecuted, too. One day there was a suicide bombing on the way to my home just 5 minutes before I left the office. My mother said we could no longer stay and must leave the country. I wasn't happy after hearing that because I wanted to [stay and] start a business there.

"My mother traveled with 4 of my siblings through Pakistan into Iran. They were kidnapped by a group who demanded a ransom of 20 million Toman (\$6,227). Eventually, they allowed my mother to call me and ask for the ransom. It took my father and me three days to sell our home and everything we owned to get the money.

"I am a young girl experiencing a very difficult time in my life. I have tears in my eyes sometimes when I think about all of it. We very much wish none of this had happened. It is not easy to start over. But I have hope for a better life."

After a long and harrowing journey, Roksana and her family made it to Germany where she and her siblings and mother have an apartment and are attending school.

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Photos by Lindsay Sibley

RAHIM

Rahim has an MA degree in International Relations and Diplomacy and worked as an interpreter for the US forces in Afghanistan. Once forces left, people who had worked with the US were targeted by terrorist groups so he fled the country with his wife and young daughter.

"We have been in this camp for 2.5 months. We didn't plan to stay in Greece. We came because we wanted to go farther, to go to a country so we could start a new life. But right now we are like, trapped in Greece. We are trapped in this camp. Nobody hears our voice. Nobody.

"The [other refugees] wanted to come to a safe place to experience a better life, but right now they came and they see that every door is closed to them. I came with just my wife and my daughter. The rest of my family still lives in Afghanistan and they are in danger too, because they are my family.

"The [terrorists] came to our country and they destroyed it and they made all of the people homeless and jobless. Almost all of the members of our families have been killed by all of the people in the conflict. We are not a part of all of those corrupt things happening in Afghanistan. We came here as humans, as people, so we need your help.

"And the thing is, we want you to consider all of the refugees. If you come and see this life of the refugees, pretend your family is at the same level of lifestyle. What would you think? What would you say? We are people! We are humans!

"We have hope. Don't try to break our hopes – the refugees' hopes – because this is the only thing we have, in our hearts and our minds. Other than hope, we don't have anything else. Every day the refugees keep praying and nobody hears their voice except God. They are still waiting.

"Even me – when I see my daughter in this situation I sometimes think, what is going to happen to my daughter? She's two years old right now – If she grows up and we're still here – there's no point.

"But still, we have hope. With all of these difficulties, with all of these problems, we have hope."

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Photos by Lindsay Sibley

ROYA

"Landlocked" describes Roya's home country of Afghanistan. Rough, towering mountain ranges stand like brazen guards against the skyline, forming a rocky border beyond which looms another world. It was over those mountains that this mother of five fled on foot, risking her life for a chance at freedom from more than three continuous decades of war, tribal conflict, suicide bombings, and rampant abuse of women.

Because she was a Shiite in a Sunni system, she often suffered open discrimination. But worse, Roya was a woman, and a working one, at that.

As a school teacher, Roya was hounded and threatened by the people in her circle, who claimed she was a heretic for disobeying the higher law and working outside her home.

"Women's rights are totally trampled," Roya explained about daily life in Kabul. "The woman has no value. In truth, in Islam the woman has great value, but in Afghanistan they are not committed to human rights, nor true rights as taught in Islam."

Roya tried to empower other women in her community. "[I] told [women] that they have rights according to the Koran. But, one day they gathered the women in the mosque and the men asked me, 'Why do you inform our wives? You made our wives shameless and stubborn like yourself!' They caught me and kicked and beat me in the Shaar [large public] Square. They injured me. I was at home for 6 months because of the injury and was completely unable to walk for 2 yrs."

After her daughter started receiving death threats, Roya decided to finally free herself and her family from being literally and figuratively landlocked. They headed on foot through those looming mountains. Just the trek from Kabul to Iran lasted a full month, with an especially perilous border passage lined with police who shoot to kill or at least to maim, and prowlers who exploit the vulnerable (women and children) in unspeakable ways. Without visas, Roya and her children went illegally. "We paid a lot of money to a smuggler. But he abandoned us at the border to Iran."

Roya made it with her children to Germany. After more than a year living in camps, she is has settled in a town. Roya is finally free to study and train professionally, and no longer feels landlocked.

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RUNNING WATER

Running Water

oil on linen

by TSOS artist Elizabeth Thayer

Their whole lives were destroyed: comfortable homes, communities, families, studies, steady jobs, and hopes for the future. They fled, carrying little but the hope of a safer future with them. Now they wait, paused for who knows how long in tents on the site of an abandoned factory in Greece. Comparatively speaking, it is not the worst place to wait. This camp has the luxuries of a small school room, a medical unit, an electric strip for charging phones, two rows of port-a-potties and a shower unit and running water from a hose for drinking and for washing. For most, running water used to be a common convenience that was taken for granted. Now, like the hope that keeps them going day in and day out, it is a precious, sustaining necessity.

Barbara Kingsolver wrote, **"The very least you can do in your life is figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope. Not admire it from a distance but live right in it, under its roof."** And that is what these refugees do. They cling to hope in an ocean of uncertainty.

In the words of Rahim, a refugee from Afghanistan, **"Other than hope, we don't have anything else. Every day the refugees keep praying and nobody hears their voice except God. They are still waiting. But still, we have hope."**

"Running Water" is currently for sale with all proceeds going to TSOS.

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Photo by Lindsay Skiby / Drawing by Elizabeth Thayer

ZARRIN

"My name is Zarrin. I am from Afghanistan. I was a teacher, an English teacher. In Afghanistan I had a big house with a garden. My husband was a rich man; he had lots of money. My children studied in a top school.

"All the time the Taliban was warning my husband. 'Why does your wife go to school and teach children? If your wife goes to school we'll throw acid on her face and take your children.

"They don't like education, don't like women go to school.

"After that it was very difficult for me to make a decision because I liked my life but I worried that maybe the Taliban would steal me or my children."

After receiving numerous death threats from the Taliban, Zarrin and her husband fled their beautiful home and endured an arduous journey from Afghanistan through Iran and into Turkey. Then she came up against her greatest fear — the sea crossing between Turkey and Greece.

"I went to the ship despairing. When we got into the boat, lots of water was coming in — my clothes, my children — I thought maybe my children would be dead in the sea. When the boat began to go out into the sea, because the sea was like a storm, the boat tipped and the [smugglers] took the people out. The sea was very stormy! Much! The waves were coming into the boat but the police were coming and when my husband saw, he shouted that he didn't want to stay here so we got back in and tried again.

"My husband had collected lots of money and our money was with me in the back [of the boat]. The [smugglers] said to me, 'All in the back, all people must take and throw your things into the sea. If you do not throw everything into the sea, maybe you will all drown.' The ship was full of water. Water! My dress, yes, my clothes were wet. I was so distressed I didn't remember my money in the backpack. The Mafia took all our things in the back [of the boat] and threw them into the sea.

"When we arrived on the island, in Greece, my husband asked me. 'Where is your bag?' I said, 'In the sea.' When my husband saw my bag was not in the boat, my husband began shouting and fell out onto the ground. The doctor came and examined my husband ... he checked him and after that they brought an ambulance and gave him oxygen because he didn't have breath. Because he lost the money.

"All the time in my dreams I see my family drowning in the sea. Sometimes in the night I am crying in my dream. My husband calls me, 'Why are you crying?' When I sit in my place I think about the journey, about the sea. I don't like the sea. I don't want to ever go back to the sea.

"Now we don't have any money here because I lost the money. This life is really difficult for me. This is very difficult for my family."

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Photos by Lindsay Sibley

SANAZ

"We were in Syria. Our life was very good. We were very comfortable and happy. Then one day we awoke to find that the planes were bombing us. We had nothing to do with it, we weren't on either side. A bomb demolished our house and my uncle's house. My uncle died. The war had reached us so we left to Turkey.

"In Turkey, my husband began working, but they didn't pay him for his work. We began to go hungry. My husband left Turkey with his younger sister before I did because we didn't have the money to leave together.

"When I finally left to join him, I was five months pregnant. I suffered a lot on the way. I brought my husband's young brother with me. We slept in the streets and we got sick from the cold and sunburned. My children suffered so much with me.

"While in a boat between Turkey and Greece, we were let off onto a deserted island. The weather was very cold. We began taking off the lifejackets we were wearing for the sea and setting them on fire to get warm. My children got very sick in their chests from the cold winds. We were all exhausted.

"After waiting so long and being so cold, we begged fishermen nearby to take us from the island because no one had come to rescue us. They asked for money. They said they would take each family of six for 100 euros... My children had a terrible fear of the water. They didn't want to get into the boat again. We were on the water from 7 a.m. until 1 a.m. the next night. We were all so tired. We went to a camp in Greece. I gave birth in the camp and remained there for two months. I suffered and my children suffered too."

The smugglers threw Sanaz's bag with everything she had, including her cell phone, into the ocean. Clear up through the Balkans she had no way to contact her husband or family. The line had been severed. Finally arriving at the German border, Sanaz had no address to give the authorities, no way to reunite with her husband. She and the children were registered and assigned to another city. They are waiting to be reunited.

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Photos by Lindsay Sibley

ZURVAN

"My name is Zurvan from Afghanistan. I have six people in my family. We had a good life.

"I worked as a clerk in a spice shop for a company. Twice we sold spices to a western company. Ten months later, I saw there was a letter behind the mirror of my motorcycle. It was a threat from the Taliban that said, 'If you are living in an Islamic country, why do you sell spices to a foreign company?' [That western company] helped people. The Taliban does not understand this. They say, 'If you help this [company] you are not with us. You must be with us and cooperate with

us. Otherwise, you must be killed. You will be sentenced to death.'

"Because of their threats, we escaped to Iran and found a human smuggler. The smuggler told us that the route to Turkey required one hour walking, but instead it took us 10 hours. We traveled a maze of mountains and rivers with our children and we did not have anything to eat, so we were hungry. We remained in Turkey for one week. After that, we traveled to Greece, but had many problems there, too. We got lost twice and the inflatable boat they told us could carry 25 to 30 people was loaded with 65 to 70 people.

"Now we are here in this camp in Greece. We cannot go forwards and we cannot return to Afghanistan. We have lived in this tent for many months.

"Here, nothing is easy for immigrants and there is no hope. It feels like we are not human, like we have been expelled from human society. We are like sheep. Is this what the European community wishes for? Is this Human Rights? Is this Humanitarianism?

"Back in Afghanistan, if the Taliban had acted on their threat, they would have killed just me. Now that I think about it, instead of losing six members of my family I would have been the only one to die. It would have been much better.

"Who will listen to our pain and heartache in this desert and jungle here in Greece?"

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