

Moria Diaries



Moria Diaries

February 2020



Start Date: 02/03/2020

Today I landed in Mytilene, the Capital of Lesvos Island where Moria refugee camp sits. The ride from the tiny airport to my hotel was a little more than 10 minutes, but it was full of army trucks on the road. I've read in the last couple of days that there have been protests on the part of both refugees and local residents about the limbo posed by an unending stream of refugees arriving on the island, and no seeming plan on the part of Greece or Europe to resettle them. The festering situation seems to be exasperating everyone.

Upon arrival, I went straight over [Open Space](#), where we were launching a two week workshop with [The Azadi Project](#), with a cohort of 12 women from the camp, who had signed up for a digital story telling program combined with elements of mental health and self empowerment. The women in the program are strong and driven, having endured so much already, but still willing to do more as they look ahead at better lives in safer lands. They speak of loneliness in a crowded place, and a fear that never leaves

Moria Refugge Camp



Date: 02/04/2020

them. They've endured unspeakable abuses, but they have unmistakable hope still ahead. They talk about anxiety but quickly mix in perseverance as they envision creating a better future for their kids.

Real impediments stand in their way, and they know it. The fear of deportation is real. Repatriating to European nations is all but a glimmer though most of these people have no place else to go. Many will only speak in whispers around the trauma they've endured at the hands of patriarchal cultures and an unforgiving refugee crisis that mistreats them at every turn. But they hope the world will give them a chance to move on and forge a better future through hard work and emancipation. "Azadi". That has been the chant for protesters here. I don't know who can hear them... but they're crying out!

Feb 4:

Migrants gather to take the bus back to a Moria camp, from the These people are stateless and in a terrible state of limbo. Healthy productive men languish in camps and proactive brilliant women worry about their futures and that of their children, suffering in untold ways. This is no way to run humanity!

Most of the world looks away. Greece stepped up to accept refugees and give them safe landing but with no support, the situation becomes untenable for them.

MORIA REFUGEE CAMP

Moria Diaries



Date: 3/21/2020

March 21:

While Moria goes on lockdown, I'm remembering all the wonderful people there who persist with hope for a better tomorrow - this is "Khaleh". She is learning English from the genius who lives nearby. I miss them both...

March 30:

Through my husband's company which has been repurposed from the fashion industry to PPE production, I am helping Team Humanity in Lesvos, with their location at Moria, set up mask sewing with the women who can sew, in order to distribute free masks to Moria residents.

There have been two cases of COVID-19 on the Island. There have not been any diagnosed cases at Moria. Two camps near Athens have locked-down, with nine identified cases of Cronavirus in two locations housing refugees.

Moria Refugge Camp



Date: 3/07/2020

They string endless days together, struggling to keep hope alive so they can see a better day. No one ever told us they wanted a hand out. People said we want a chance - a chance to work hard, go to school, build a life, and to dream as simple a dream as to have a home with a front door...

March 7:

Sad but true — it's really a fight for survival where even the survivors have a pecking order. With so little opportunity afforded to haggard brown people on the run around the world, the differences matter. Even refugees have to compete for a sliver of opportunity. Ridiculous 21st century state of civilization. [#stopWar](#)

March 8th:

On this International Women's Day I'm thinking about the thousands of women at Moria and other refugee camps who struggle every day against the odds to stay healthy, feed their children, keep their dignity and survive to see a better day.

They all want you to know that although they are tired and hurt, they are undefeatable and proud. They are people, while they are refugees, and they hope to abandon this label as they look ahead to normal lives, with safety, stability, mobility and a home with a front door to call their own.

Moria Refugee Camp



Date: 02/05/2020

Feb 5

Today I was lined up and identified.

My heart raced as I searched for what I would say when an officer asks me why I'm volunteering on the island of Lesbos, at an NGO called [One Happy Family](#) (since burned down) to make a difference for humanity. Still, I have first-world resources that allowed my mind to settle, lining each up in my head to reassure a racing instinct pumping adrenaline. The women were more nervous. My ID was a passport. Theirs was a refugee card. I had every right to be where I was, working with a program to help teach women digital skills to serve a growing tech marketplace that may one day be their ticket to a new life. They had only a limited right to subsist at a refugee camp set-up to contain them.

I then headed over to visit Moria with the women going "home", as my guides. The camp is a sea of humanity engaged in raw subsistence. The place sprawls for seemingly ever, busting beyond its own boundaries, growing haphazardly bigger. On one side of the road is an unending sea of random desperation. On the other is an orderly oasis of equal desperation. One is run by a well funded Dutch NGO. The other is run by the UN and a strained Greek government, strapped for cash.

Moria Refugge Camp



Date: 02/05/2020

People roam in filth, aimlessly making the days string together. Everyone has a story of endless waiting and patiently making due. The rain pounded us, and the wind made the mud under our feet perilously slippery. The tarps were soaking in wetness at the top and sunk into mud at the bottom. Many navigated their way in flip flops or slippers.

One of my guides showed me where she slept in a simple, small tent staked in the mud, with her daughter and husband, for weeks before they were given a proper tarp and a square space to pitch it. They saved their Greek allowance (thank you Greece) to be able to buy wood, and construct a simple frame for the tarp. Then they lived in a square box. The box has no water, no electricity, no natural light and no toilet. No trash can, no walls, no floor, no dignity. Her daughter is small and usually cold. Today she shivered in the rain and wind until I put my beanie on her little head and promised gloves tomorrow. She sat, patiently, quietly, waiting for her mom. Her dad broke his leg a few weeks ago. With no medicine and no real care, he quietly heels in pain, as though these are the front lines of a war zone - but with families in the trenches.

As I walked the mud alleys randomly leading from tarp collection to tarp collection, leaping over rickshaw bridges and gingerly navigating makeshift steps over ravines filled with wet trash, my eyes would catch a glimpse of

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Date: 3/02/2020

We packed up, dusted off our hurt and moved to another location. In the end, we did what we came to do - we recorded our narrative and spliced together a great short film to tell the stories of resilient women who were, in their own words "undefeatable". But nothing happens for these women without a challenge. Still, they persist!

Mar 2:

A crazy news feed today with Taliban pledging to renew fighting, Coronavirus claiming more lives in more places and refugees drowning in the Aegean yet again, while braving gas-laced land borders between Greece and Turkey like human pawns in a brutal chess game. Global strong men who can't get enough blood on their hands need to be ushered out the door and a new generation that believes in negotiated coexistence should seize the day. War has achieved nothing. Conflict has brought us displacement. Human suffering in the eyes of children is unbearable! Raise your voice and make it stop...

March 7:

Everyone is angry - The locals for having to endure new waves of people that never seem to cycle off the island, the government for being bullied by Erdogan, Turkey for being left to fend for itself against Al Assad and the refugees for being pawns in yet another battle played out on their backs.

Moria Refugge Camp



Date: 2/24/2020 (Stateside)

ing in unbearable conditions. People persist in a way that can only be described as bare minimum - or even less. COVID-19 will be devastating!

Feb 24:

I don't want February to end because I don't want to forget where I've been or what I've seen. [#moriarefugeecamp](#) can not be forgotten and these people can not be ignored. They need so much - beginning with kindness / ending with a homeland - and everything in between. Stay tuned for ways to help...

Feb 28:

One of the sights where we tried to tape the girls telling their stories for the [@theazadiproject](#) video: the Evangelical Church of Mytilene. The girls finally loved the location and the look of the picture in the frame. We set up our Tripod, tested the sound, adjusted the angle and perfected the setting of the narrator - then began taping. The sun was pitched at a perfect slant and the girls were all smiles. Finally success! As the first girl, Latifeh, began to recount her harrowing tale of having lost her father at the age of 6 with little explanation, began working at a carpet weaving house at 7, and walking herself to school with no direction for hours under the hot Afghan sun - sometimes welling with tears then clearing her throat and regaining the composure to go on - a church elder pulled up in a silver car, rolled down the window and told us with specific disdain that we were not welcome to film in a corner, at the foot of the stairs.

Moria Refugee Camp



Date: 02/06/2020

what people endured - quietly, calmly, resolutely as though they knew, tomorrow would bring better.

Feb 6:

Met a few NGOs on the ground today. I asked a Dutch woman working with a [housing project that is building more housing](#) well into the olive groves surrounding an ever expanding Moria, what about the situation for women? "Absolutely terrible".

Personal security, feminine hygiene, privacy are all concepts that are laughably misapplied here. Kids roam mud alleys on their way to nothing, while parents scurry to and fro, with chores that turn the days to night - when darkness means sleep and recharge for the next day of waiting. Men loiter while women keep busy with chores - there is washing and wringing and sweeping all to keep untidy surroundings tidy. The Public bath seems unapproachable and kids are defecating in alleyways between tarps that serve as homes. Men are languishing - some look stoned. There are pockets of smiles, and glimpses of despondency everywhere. All told, it's humanity raw, and strained.

Feb 7:

These are my new friends. One has three children ranging in age from 2yrs to 10, and a husband who is a leader in the camp, distributing food. He got

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Date: 02/08/2020

punched in the nose yesterday for not having enough food to give. The other is here with her mom and autistic brother who needs serious care. She loves makeup artistry and wants to have a beauty blog from Moria. They all had hope when they got on the dinghy - thinking all their dreams will come true once they reached Europe. They tell of the slow reality sinking in that they are stuck in no man's land for the foreseeable future... [#HowWouldYoufeel?](#)

Feb 7:

We went on an adventure today - me and 5 Afghan girls ranging in age from 14 to 34. It was quite an expedition around Mytilene, through the narrow little cobblestone streets lined with tiny shops full of treasures, all the way to majestic castle ruins set against a deep blue Mediterranean as a backdrop. Incredible day, where the girls would giggle and twirl in the open air and the euphoria of new experiences among friends, until suddenly, something reminded them, they are refugees. Today, we stumbled onto "the Afghan hospital". It's the only care center refugees from Moria are allowed to go. No matter how sick or how frail, you begin here. If you're sick enough, you're referred inland, if you're deemed well enough to return to the camp, you retreat without a say. On the side wall of the hospital, someone had written, Moria = Murder.

Feb 8:

Moria Refugge Camp



Date: 2/15/2020

monotony of stringing days together while waiting for their asylum cases to wind through a labyrinth of laws that are known only through camp rumor and hearsay.

Stabbings, beatings and sexual assault are a daily occurrence. Survival of the fittest is the lay of the land. One of the husbands in our group said yesterday he had volunteered to manage the food line just so he could make sure the young and the meek don't go hungry. He doesn't get compensated - in this place of misery, he delivers good. People tell us all they want is to find a way to be productive, gain skills and have a chance to contribute to local economies around the world.

Illness is a calamity. With no real access to health care - even at the most basic level, a cough or a sore throat, a simple yeast infection or a skin rash, can be caused for worry. Something over-the-counter Triaminic and some vitamin C can relieve, festers and turns into fever and head ache and worry. Cold nights, unclean surroundings and overcrowding compound everything.... A quick run to the pharmacy yesterday solved at least half of the ailments our girls complained of this week. I can't begin to think what a proper clinic might do.

Right now, Greece and the authorities at the camp are focusing on urgent care and emergency triage (see below). Valiant as that is - and I met a Dutch ER nurse here working the clinic - it touches a precious few of the people persever-

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Date: 2/14/2020

good mothers - or whatever their hearts desire - and get advice/perspective from someone with roots in the same region as them. There was a lot of love in the air around me yesterday. I'll never forget it. I hope you all had love and warmth around you too!

Feb 15:

As I leave, I make plans to meet two other women volunteering here in Mytilene. One is with One Happy Family and has been here for a long time. The other just landed for her second stint at Lighthouse Relief. Her daughter runs — in Athens. We talk about the challenges, the resources people need, the information that isn't there, and the constant rumor mills that fill the hopes of thousands of people stuck indefinitely on an Island. Coronavirus is still a continent away...

The reality is that here on this Island, twenty thousand people have no amenities. The line for the toilet is hours long, it's public, the ground is fetid and air is putrid. Water is intermittent, as is electricity, and there are lines for everything. There is lining up for food, for showers, for the clinic, for a lawyer, for water - there's even a waiting list to get on a waiting list.

People want things to do - like language classes, dance classes, photography and film classes, cooking classes, sewing classes - anything to break up the

Moria Refugee Camp



Date: 02/09/2020

Meet my friend the bread baker, her husband and her two kids. It took a while, but then she trusted me enough for a photo. Her husband warmed up first, describing the *توتور* he built right there in a mud alley to sell bread to fellow Afghans who call Moria home. He said he'd been here for 8 months and expected a long wait. One of their daughters was sick, and crouched in the corner of the neighbors bake stall. The other two were healthy and curious. They all speak Farsi here, and are welcoming when they hear me greet them with a smile and a warm *اسلام*. I am grateful that they let me in, and tell me about their experiences. They are good natured, wonderful people, as I always expected Afghans to be. But they are mistreated and demoralized at every turn. They ask, what can you do for us? I choke when I say, I'll try to tell your stories. Ultimately, a shift in terrible global policies aimed at geopolitical gain and not humanity can change things for them. Not any aid worker, volunteer, small country or fledgling economy. Global good will and personal resilience in vast quantities will be needed to right the wrong of producing 80 million refugees around the world...

Feb 9

Dear global leaders running proxy wars in people's countries:
please stop!

Moria Refugge Camp



Date: 2/10/2020

Dear European nations beyond the shores of Greece: please do your part and resettle some refugees because Camp Moria is no way to expect human beings to live. These are dignified people, with resilience and hope, and they are languishing in conditions no human should face.

A young 19 year old broke my heart yesterday. A 60 year old stole my heart today. A little girl, just skin and bones, carrying a bag of garbage on a bitter-cold afternoon in flip-flops, scurried up to me, twice - her face brimming with shy curiosity and wonder. I gave her my sparkly beanie and the gloves on my hands. I had already given my spare gloves to another little girl who worked up the audacity to approach me and ask what I was doing there.

The smiles on their faces are priceless. The pride is admirable. The resilience is heartwarming and the pain is gut wrenching....

Feb 10:

Today was a sun-kissed Sunday at Moria.

In the morning, I visited [Lighthouse Relief](#) about 50 km away, where they run a 21 hour a day cycle of sea-watch, with high powered equipment perched atop two mountain locations facing Turkey, to detect incoming dinghies. They had an operation last night that saw them bring in 40 people. [UNHCR](#), the [UN Refugee Agency](#), has closed its local transit center at Skala Sikamineas, near

Moria Refugge Camp



Date: 2/13/2020

they never had before. An amazing set of women I truly am proud to be among. What they endure each night, when we casually tuck into warm blankets or take long showers, is unfathomable. The fact that one local CVS could save their lives should be embarrassing. Their message: We are fierce, we are proud, we are resilient, we are Women. We are the world's refugees and we deserve a chance to shine!

Feb 13:

Every day, my heart breaks for the kids. There is a child in the line at the public bathroom, having waited for more than 2 hours to get to the showers so his mom can bathe him. The voices in the background are saying, "the water's cold" It's February and the air is frigid. No one wants to be greeted by cold water. Most people here bathe about once a month. It's just not possible more often. With hygiene a real issue in an overcrowded camp, you have to admire the resilience of people still looking ahead at a better tomorrow. C'mon world, step up and reach out.

Feb 14:

Happy Valentines Day, everyone! Mine was spent with these beautiful women, on our last day together at Lesvos [@theazadiproject](#), where they got to connect with [@dr_schweetness](#) by Skype in LA, and talk about some of their ailments, as well as their dreams to become doctors or beauty bloggers or journalists or



Moria Refugge Camp



Date: 2/12/2020

and had to choke back tears:

Roots, they said, were the culture and the history upon which you build your existence;

Ground: the present upon which you rely to maintain balance;

Trunk: the backbone, the vertebrae that supports growth, the mother;

Branches: the music, the food, the language, the physical features, the accents that define who we are and help us show the world our true identity;

Leaves, fruit and flowers: the beauty that is the sum total of all the labor that has gone into creating the tree, from roots to the tips of the bounty at which the world marvels...

It was truly a marvel. So proud to know these ladies...

Feb 12:

We basically had a Vogue quality photo shoot today among the ruins of a castle along the shore.

The girls had the kind of day a girl might have anywhere in the world, smiling for the camera, letting down their hair, taking in the sites and posing for selfies or group shots with friends. They felt beautiful and saw themselves in a way

Moria Refugge Camp



Date: 2/11/2020

the landing spots. Now the refugees, shocked and soaked, go straight into quarantine at Moria camp. One of the girls in our [Azadi Project](#) has a tent near the processing gate. She could hear the new arrivals all night. Imagine that...

I left Moria likely for the last time as the sun set on another week for these people. A week where a 7 year old boy sold me a bag of stale cake I was happy to take just to see the glee on his face, a 10 year old girl who looked just like I may have as an immigrant 40 years ago let me help her wash dishes under the trickle of rationed cold water at the public basin, a 19 year old crouched to the ground like a hunchback to demonstrate the downward pressure he's felt his whole life - admitting he dulls the pain with whatever he can, and a 23 year old revealed the cut marks he's delivered to his own neck attempting suicide. "Be patient," I tell them, "your time will come."

In my head, I wonder, will responsible nations absorb these people and give them a chance?

Feb 11:

[The Azadi Project](#) and the [International Rescue Committee](#) on Lesvos did a workshop today for emotional strength. The women, all Afghan, were thoughtful and articulate as they considered how their favorite tree relates to being a human. The girls were so lyrical, I was allowed to sit in as the fortuitous translator,