

My story: Towards a peaceful future in Syria

Written by Alissa Jeub

Tuesday, 17 September 2013 12:22



Two years ago when the war started in Syria, I saw my husband, my friend at the time, losing his hair by the handfuls because of the stress of watching the war in his country from overseas.

A year and a half ago he couldn't take not knowing the real situation in Syria. Despite my worry, he went to Syria; he and told me on our broken phone conversations that all was "OK" but it wasn't good in remote areas. This is my story. This is one story out of millions.

My story with Syria runs a little deeper than many Americans. I have walked in those dusty streets. Closing my eyes I can smell and taste the Falafel cooking, drinking that strange Arabic coffee as the prayer call rings out in the background. I can hear the salesmen trying to catch that last customer saying, "*Yellah, yellah,*" the Arabic word for let's go. I look around in amazement as so many different kinds of people live together peacefully, going to those cozy small, warm, Arabic houses sitting on Arabic couches; I remembering being in those houses that are now nothing more than dust and broken rocks.

I take myself back and remember wondering at that time, "How much can you thank someone who gives you a meal that cost them a week's wages?" Syrians do that. They will just give you the best of what they have because you're their guest and its culture to give you the best of what they have. Slaughter the fattened calf if you will. Syrian people are some of the most beautiful and peaceful people I have ever met. They love to share with you the best of what they have.

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My friendship with my husband grew as we traveled the Middle East. I looked up at the pyramids with him and his family. We saw the blue mosque and I watched on curiously as he and his family prayed, laughed, lived and loved with each other in a different way than I was familiar with. As time went on, I kept coming back to him for advice on how to deal with my family, friends and life. His words always rang with love and respect. There was something in his culture I wanted to be a part of, something so beautiful and breathtaking.

If someone had told me as a Christian American woman, at 26 I would be sitting in a mosque with my shoes off and my hair covered, converted to Islam and getting married, I would never have believed them. I had always been the woman who had envisioned the big church wedding, the white dress and walking down the aisle. The adventure has been amazing. My husband and I met overseas; he is Syrian with most of his family still living in Syria. We finally decided to have a small party and get married in Turkey on New Year's Eve. Most of his family couldn't make it because of the war and none of my family could not make it because of not having passports, extensive travel and lack of notice.

Living with Syrians over the past nine months has taught me so much. It's taught me to give whatever I have to help people because some will always have less than me. I cherished staying awake all hours chatting, drinking tea and coffee because I'm with loved ones and those moments are worth more than sleep. I have come to realize while living with my husband's family and hearing their stories that these people have lost so much. They still ask me to come into their homes to share their happiness. I may never be able to understand this fully. If it was me, I wonder if I would have lost all hope, if I would have given up. I have found Syrian people are so strong and so faithful to their culture and God.

This is the face of the Syria I know and have experienced. They are kind, generous and willing to give because they love to share all they have. The past two months of my life in Turkey have been not only living next to, but living in a one bedroom apartment with my husband's family. As a new bride this is not what I had expected; however, at the same time I was thanking my lucky stars that I didn't marry into the family down the road who had seven adults and one child in a one bedroom apartment. I was also so grateful that I had a roof over my head and not a tent or, even worse for some Syrians, nothing at all.

While in Turkey I was sitting on my balcony watching as the people turn on and off their lights and bang pans in a peaceful way I felt like to say, "Please let us live our lives." I sat there listening to the ocean and feeling a bit of electricity as I was being a part of history – to see people stand up for something real. I watched a country stand up for and ask for religious and personal freedom; something I, as an American, could never begin to understand living without, as I have had it my whole life.

I keep asking myself how many people must die or who must die before Syria can have peace again. Why do people have to die to bring peace? Isn't it an oxymoron to bring peace through violence? Living in Turkey for most of this year was hard for my husband's family as they missed their home. We have seen a lot of unrest in Turkey as well, but mostly peaceful protesting.

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Fast forward to August 2013. There has been one of the worst attacks in Syria ever in the capital of Damascus as a chemical weapon was used and took the lives of more than 1,400 people. I couldn't tear my eyes off the television. I had come back to the United States to be with my family because I was homesick for the USA after not seeing it for two years. I remember hearing the news on Sept. 11, 2001, at the age of 15, of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon – it seemed like the whole world stood still that day. The concern was on the individuals that were in the Twin Towers and Pentagon that day, whether or not they escaped, and how this would impact their families. As I sat in front of the television listening to the reports of the chemical attack in Damascus I felt as if my world was standing still. The feelings I felt on 9/11 were coming back again – only this time they were more personal.

In my mind, it will always be the moment where "my everything" stopped. Who should I call? Was my husband's family safe? How far did the devastation reach? All I could do was cry and hope that it wasn't my best friend's dad who died, my husband's grandparents, or my sister in law. I realized there was nothing I could do; I had never felt so hopeless or lost. As the reality and devastation hit me in that moment I did the only thing I knew how to do, I prayed. I said, "God I have nothing, I don't know what to do, I give you all this and pray for peace."

Who are the bad guys here? Too many people have asked me that. Honestly, I don't know. There were problems and bad things happening; one day someone shouted enough. As an American I treasure the freedoms we have and feel that everyone should have that kind of freedom in the world – a freedom to live, pray and love how they want as long as they are not hurting others.

I was flying over the United States going to New Mexico while President Obama gave his speech about the six ships sitting by Syria. I looked around. Was I the only one crying on the plane? Was I the only one thinking about all the lives that are to be lost if we go to "save" Syria? How is killing so many innocent lives "saving" anyone? Is there no way to bring peace peacefully? Is there no way to bring assistance from other countries without the further loss of life?

I sit here wondering, who will stand up for the Syrian people? I will. I will stand up for them; I will stand up *with* them. I stand with them for a better future and life, but in a peaceful way. You can't fight fire with fire. Syria, please remember the good times. Please unite and stop fighting. The words of Eminem's song "Not Afraid" ring in my ears.

"I'm not afraid to take a stand/Everybody come take my hand/We'll walk though this world together/Through the storm whatever weather/Cold or warm/Just letting you know that you're not alone."

In my wildest dreams I could never imagine my words reaching the ears of President Obama or others in the Oval Office, but I can try to get my voice heard. If it were heard, I would put those men and women in the shoes of a Syrian grandmother, the one who stands there shaking as men burst into her house, through her doorway where she and her husband started their lives together, the doorway her children ran through when they were young, and her grandchildren

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now run through to see their beloved Nana, only now to be told at gun point to leave and never come back.

My mind and my soul can't take it anymore. If I could have my wish, it would be no more death, fear and torture. We all grieve the deaths and the losses of so much life. I feel though that grief and death need not warrant more violence. Please could we play the Syrian national anthem and ask the Syrians to unify and come together instead of brothers killing brothers? The United States, along with others, has such a power. I hope this power can be used for healing a broken country to give hope to its weary people. Mr. President, I'm asking you to try another option to bring peace.

This is my story and these are my thoughts. My tiny little voice, if it touches one heart or changes one mind in a peaceful direction then I am truly happy. If it reaches the ears of the White House and helps people move towards a peaceful future, then I have accomplished what I wanted.

Youtube video: [My Syrian Story as an American](#)