

Subj: **4 hours and 15 square meters**
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 From: scott.mccracken@iteams.org
 To: scott.mccracken@iteams.org

*CONDENSE
FOR SUNDAY (BY WED.)*

The following was written by Athens Refugee Ministry teammate Kallie Skaife...

31st October 2009

In 4 hours and 15 square metres

Monday 12. o'clock noon!

No sooner than our gates open there is a knock at the door of our tiny office. A young Afghan family man who is desperate for a job. His wife and children are at the Mother Teresa shelter for women and children. I do not know where he himself lives.

A newspaper under his arm, hope in his eyes. Perhaps today he will find a job. I have made a promise to look through the job adverts for him.

My heart also carries a hope. Perhaps today there will be an opening to bring something of the Lord into his life. But as phoning for jobs is extremely time consuming; would he mind if I just serve these three men who just came in?

He moves into the corner to wait as the three men need just a recommendation letter to accompany their application for asylum at the Aliens Police. One is from Mauritania, one is Afghani, the third is Iranian. They are tense and nervous. At the moment, following the recent change of government and their attempt to change the existing legislation, only 30 applications for asylum are being processed per week and for some time now none of the three have been among the 30. It is hard to be illegal, officially a nonentity, unable to go back to your country, but without a place to be in the new one where you have landed. A lot of people do not want to go through the process of legalization in Greece, hoping, by paying a smuggler an enormous amount, to be taken illegally to a better and richer country in Europe, like Norway, England, Sweden, or Switzerland, where they are told they may secure a better future. But they need work to find the money, and in order to find the work they need legal papers. It is a vicious circle as the one excludes the other and in the end their dreams are reduced to wishful thinking.

"Name? . . Surname? . . Date of Birth? ,"

The Iranian man does not know his date of birth!

He surely needs one for an official application! I suggest that he just chooses one. But after we choose one it transpires that he actually has a passport with a date of birth!

". . . but I don't remember it!"

The friend has to be contacted who keeps the passport in hiding.

". . . but I have lost his telephone number!"

Another friend has to be contacted who can contact the friend who keeps the hidden passport.

A round of phone calls, until he is found.

". . . but he's at work. He can't get hold of my passport now!"

The Iranian man is in despair. His one chance to get a recommendation letter from Helping Hands to accompany his asylum application, and he has not got his date of birth!

A knock at the door. An Iranian man who I call Wallace!

Just in time. Would he mind reading Jeremiah 29:11 to the three men from a Farsi bible?

'I know the thoughts I have for you, thoughts of good and not of evil, to give you a hope and a future.'

The word of God falls as visible dew on parched ground to the desperate hearts of the three men.

We pray with these three men. Wallace translates.

In the corner the Afghan man who needs a job listens and waits patiently, the newspaper under his arm. . .

As the door opens to let the three men out, an Afghan family finds its way into the office!

Mother, father and three children have been living for the last fortnight in parks and pavements.

We try by countless phone calls and contacts to find a shelter for them, but it proves impossible. The lists of homeless refugees every where in Athens are growing by the minute now, not by the day. It is estimated by the government that 5000 new people come into Greece each week!

And the autumn rains are already with us. . .!

This family's two older sons were abducted by the Taliban and they never saw them again. They do not know if they are dead or alive. The third son was shot dead by the Taliban, age 13! The mother, who resembles Indira Gandhi, shows me their pictures and then places them over her heart.

Her enormous eyes are a window to her weeping heart and the despair of her loss. Her husband's brother and her brother in law have been killed by the Taliban. The husband's legs have suffered extensive burns by them. Hunted by the Taliban, he has brought the remains of his family into Europe, hoping at least to preserve their lives.

They too are hoping to go further into Europe. But, there is no job, no place to live, no papers, and no money. They are left with only a dream to nurture. Will it come to pass?

How much I want them to know that their names, their tragedy, and their immense loss are known to a benevolent God who stands right next to them. I ask Wallace if he could read to them also Jeremiah 29:11!

Indira Gandhi smiles for the first time. God's word has entered her heart! Psalm 91 follows. Her tears fall freely; she throws her arms around me.

"Can you pray that God will reunite us with our sons?"

I know in my heart that a window has been opened. We pray. Wallace translates the prayer.

He has forgotten his own case and the reason he came to the office and is now my translator for the day.

He holds the Farsi bible and reads again Jeremiah 29:11, this time to himself.

"Where do you find all these nice passages?" he says, "This is for me also!"

"Yes, Wallace, it is!"

The Afghan man in the corner of the room listens and waits with the newspaper under his arm. . .

This desperate Afghan family is immediately replaced by another Afghan family of five.

The wife, a cheerful, beloved lady to us all; the husband, a quiet man, a 16 year heroin addict! He brought his family to Athens and hopes to go further into Europe! But he is not able to work, and other Afghan families will give them no shelter because of his addiction, so when this family found themselves on the streets of Athens with nowhere to go, two of our young colleagues took them into their flat for a few days!

Today is a glorious day. This man has agreed to go to a rehabilitation clinic and they are in the office to arrange the final details. We are all elated. After they leave the office, we find out that no

rehabilitation clinic will accept him without legal papers. Our hearts sink into our boots.

What now Lord?

A timely knock at the door. Omar comes into the room and into the conversation of the moment. He is sent by the Lord with the solution!

"The ministry to drug addicts, 'A Passage to Life', will take him without papers!"

We contact the leader of this powerful ministry, indeed he accepts to see him and take the risk, if the Holy Spirit directs.

Our hearts climb out of our boots in praise!

Omar stays on to proof read the Farsi book that will go into print shortly. It was given to me by the printers this morning!

Now I take a deep breath. It seems as if there is a welcomed pause.

I take the opportunity to open the paper and begin to scan the job adverts. The Afghan man has waited so long with such grace! The global crisis is affecting Greece this year, jobs are difficult to find and the man does not speak Greek.

The opportunity does not last long.

Wallace opens the door to let in an Afghan lady who needs an appointment with the hospital. She has a very advanced cancer blocking some parts of her body and after 7 days of specialized tests aiming for a specialized surgery she walked out of hospital having not been operated because she did not want a colostomy!! Now she can hardly sit down but, more than a new appointment and tests, she needs to be comforted. She has never seen a person with a bag and cannot perceive what this could possibly look like! She has so much fear about having such an operation in a foreign country whose language she does not understand, and no one to be with her. I tell her that I will be with her when she goes in and will be there when she wakes up from the anaesthetic. We have prayed many times for her, today we read Isaiah 53 and ask the Lord for her healing.

Wallace interprets.

The Afghan man listens and waits with the paper folded under his arm . . . !

She is followed by a young mother and her six year old daughter. They are in need of two blankets. They carry a big pile of medical tests. I glance through them. The diagnosis, 'parasites'. She and the little girl are plagued by tapeworm twice as big as the pencil I write with!!

Salem comes in. He is a wonderful Christian man from Iran, who found the Lord and got baptised in Turkey two years ago and stayed with us for a year. He has been deported from Switzerland back to Greece after 9 months and he now has only a few more days remaining to submit his appeal against the Greek government's rejection of his asylum petition. Another round of telephone calls to lawyers in order to find out the best way to represent his truly hopeless case. He comes from a very strong Muslim family of many mullahs and he is the only one from the family who risked his life to leave Islam and come to Christ. He is a courageous man but now he needs comfort and reassurance.

And what can I say about my invaluable friend Wallace?

His visits seem always to be appointed by God, and brighten my day! He knows all possible shelters, job possibilities, homes with the lowest possible rent that are available. He is well connected with the refugee ghetto in the centre of Athens.

His heart is butter! There is nothing he won't do willingly; he always offers all that he has got!

Today, once again, I feel he was sent and he became my voice to so many people. He read scriptures, translated people's stories, translated the prayers, made phone calls, gave out Christian

literature to those I forgot in the heat of the moment and kept some for himself! Through all that happened, his heart was touched afresh today, I have watched him all day at the corner of my eye!
We have all prayed for this man for months and while praying many times I have felt the tender heart of God towards him and have been astounded by His dealings. His life, for a long time now, is a constant, breathtaking balancing on a tight rope, between dangerous and shady activities and escaping prison, yet the Lord's hand is undeservedly, and scandalously at times, upon him! He knows it. The day Wallace surrenders his life to Jesus, his full story will be told.

I look at the clock. It is 4 in the afternoon!

Only God could pack so many cases, people, needs, emotions, prayers, tears, scriptures, phone calls, appointments, appropriate people at appropriate times, into 4 hours!

The Lord has stood in this tiny office of 15 square metres! We have drunk of His presence, and His immense grace. We have witnessed His amazing economy and tender movements in trying to reach people and we are astounded once again!

There hasn't been a moment to drink a glass of water since our gates were opened to let the people in, but our hearts are well watered and in awe.

What else can a man wish for?

Less than 12 hours ago, 100 metres from our entrance, there was a shooting, between Afghani and Pakistani gangs – and a man dropped dead. Another young man from Bangladesh who attends the Pakistani Christian Fellowship that meets on our premises on Saturday evenings was found dead, his throat slit, because of his faith.

And there have been so many Muslims coming to the Lord that the top mullahs of the Islamic community in Athens visit homes now to record who have been changing their religion!!

These are momentous days in Athens and we are living in the court of miracles!

It has been another intoxicating Monday in a cramped office of 15 square metres!

And heaven has recorded all else that took place, in every inch of our 400 sq.metre, packed-like-sardines-in-a-tin, hall!!!

Those of you who pray, please ask the Lord to finish what He has begun in all the above mentioned lives and please continue to pray for us.

We thank God for you, and send you all,
our love,
Kallie {and Jimmy}

Georganta 26, 145 62 KIFISSIA, Athens, Greece
Tel: +30 210 808 1524
mailto:jim.skaife@iteams.org

--
Scott & Vicki McCracken
Tel: (30) 210-65-28-191
scott.mccracken@iteams.org
<http://ellieboimccracken.blogspot.com>
<http://refminathens.blogspot.com>