

April 24, 2016

Dear Friends,

I am writing today because I need your help. It's about something very important to me and I believe that we all need to be concerned about it. The majority of reporting on the Syrian refugee crisis has portrayed them as dirty, sad, despondent, and perhaps dangerous. Numerous US polls have shown that a large majority of Americans don't favor allowing Syrian immigrants into our country. That's not what our country is based on, these are not American values, and the whole story is not being told.

The untold story of the benefits and strength that Syrian immigrants can bring to a community needs to be brought to light. The majority of Syrians leaving their country are intelligent, successful people whose lives were ripped out from under them and, while they didn't want to leave Syria, have left to find a new place to put down roots and make a meaningful contribution to their new community.

I have created a project called "Open Minds, Open Doors" which will tell that untold story through words and pictures. We are a three member team: myself, Dr. Dana Janbek, a Jordanian born professor at Lasell College who has been researching the refugee crisis, and Amy Bracken, a veteran journalist and international scholar who has reported extensively on immigration.

Together, we will tell that story that opens minds, and opens doors. The concept is simple. We will travel to Europe and the Middle East to photograph and interview successfully settled refugees in their new home. We will show them as they are: contributing members of their community. Accompanying each series of photographs will be a specially written questionnaire. We will photograph them, interview them, and reveal them as human beings, not so different than you and I.

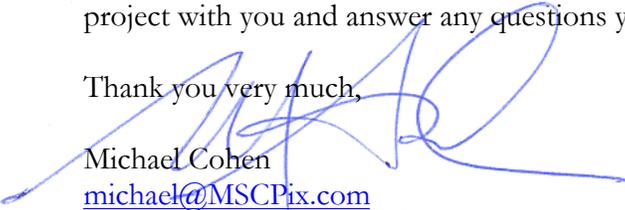
I need your help to connect me with others in your network who can introduce me to 1) strong media contacts in order to get the final product published in a major newspaper or magazine, or 2) large financial support from individuals, their companies or foundations as we create a traveling exhibit that will tour nationally to reach thousands more Americans. The result will be a way of educating our community and opening their minds to a part of the Syrian refugee story that they were unaware of. With this project, we can make a difference.

The result will be a journalistic piece and traveling exhibit with poignant photographs and insightful answers from 20 men, women and children who have found their way out of war-torn Syria and have made a new life, in a new place.

The planning is underway now and we will make our first trip to Europe in August. We anticipate the project to be complete and ready for public display by January 1.

Please think about how you can help. Share this letter widely. I would love to discuss any aspect of this project with you and answer any questions you may have. Remember, they could have been us.

Thank you very much,



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