

The Quarantine Monologues

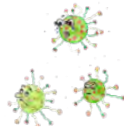
Refugee youth
write
during the COVID-19
pandemic



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Hellenic Theatre/Drama
& Education Network

member of International Drama/Theatre and Education Association (IDEA)

Athens, Greece 2020

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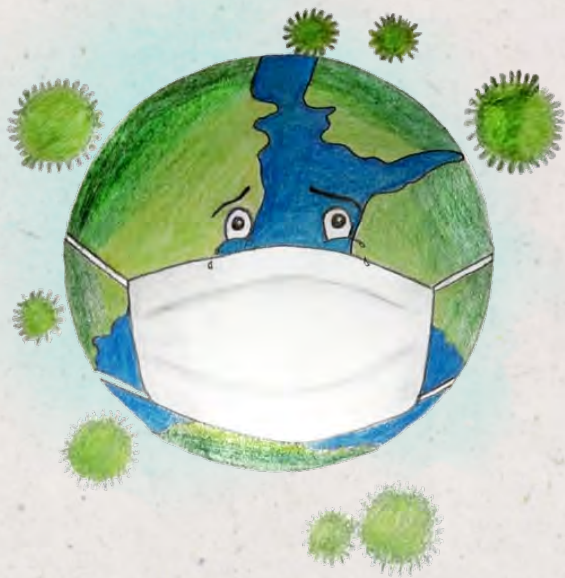
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UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is a global organisation dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people. For UNHCR Representation in Greece see:

www.unhcr.gr / great@unhcr.org





The Quarantine Monologues

The content of this book is the result of a series of online creative writing workshops, offered to 24 teenage refugees, both boys and girls, across Greece from April to May 2020, within the framework of “The Quarantine Monologues” action.

The teenage boys and girls who participated in the action write about their experience during the coronavirus-induced temporary lockdown in Greece.

What impact did the restrictions have on their lives and what were the effects of the lockdown on their expectations, aspirations, the challenges and struggles they face every day?

This action is part of the “It could be me – It could be you” project, an awareness raising project on refugees and human rights using drama and theatre techniques.

The project has been organised and implemented since 2015 in Greece by the Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network (TENet-Gr) in partnership with UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency.

In July 2020, when this publication was completed, and although most restrictive measures implemented to prevent occurrence and spread of COVID-19 cases had been lifted for the general population in Greece, there were still in place measures restricting the movement of residents in refugee reception centers on islands and accommodation facilities in the mainland, where some of the teenagers participating in this action have been staying.



Every Action Counts

The year of 2020 will forever remain engraved in our collective memory as the year that humanity faced an unprecedented health crisis, a pandemic. Most countries took measures to protect public health, measures that inevitably restricted for a certain period of time other basic human rights such as the right to freedom of movement, outside our homes and within and across borders. This restriction was also unprecedented for many of us – but not for all.

For the 26 million refugees globally, the deprivation or violation of basic human rights is a familiar reality. It is quite often the reason they were forced to leave everything behind in search of safety and protection for themselves and their families. This experience has taught them what it means to live with uncertainty and to see one's life turned upside down from one moment to the next.

In the face of the coronavirus crisis though, we all felt vulnerable. The virus has shown that it knows no borders and does not discriminate, although vulnerable populations, including refugees and other displaced persons, are at greater risk. This global crisis has tested our strength and endurance and has highlighted systematic inequalities in our societies. It has also made us realise how interconnected we all are, and how much we depend on each other. We can only defeat this virus when each and every one of us is protected.



During this pandemic, we have witnessed and heard about acts of support, collaboration and solidarity around the world with the common goal of responding to this crisis. Refugee volunteers have organised teams to keep those living in refugee camps informed about the novel coronavirus. People have rushed to help the elderly or people in need, regardless of their nationality, status or ethnicity. Doctors, nurses and caregivers, among them refugees and migrants, have found themselves on the frontlines in the fight against COVID-19, caring for patients and saving lives while risking their own.

Through the lens of the crisis, we have seen once again what compassion and humanity mean in practice. We have acknowledged our fundamental need to communicate, to co-exist and to work together to shape those elements necessary to go on with our lives despite the obstacles in our way. Young and old, we have felt that every single action can count. And it was primarily the youngest, the children, who knew this already. In the unprecedented lockdown we experienced, children and adolescents found a way to make the difficulties seem somewhat less serious. They found a way to communicate their thoughts and feelings. They talked about restrictions, about freedom and the future, enabling us to find hope among their words that we have collected in this book.

“The Quarantine Monologues” was a project that faced many difficulties brought on by physical distancing and a continuously changing reality, all to be overcome in a very short period of time. These difficulties were faced by both the coordinators of the “It could be me – it could be you” educational programme as well as by its regular protagonists – the school teachers and children. With the exceptional support and guidance of the project’s authors, a team of educators, interpreters, humanitarians, facilitators, and technical support staff worked for weeks with enthusiasm and dedication to ensure the project’s success. Through the screens of computers, smartphones and tablets, the team “met” 24 teenage refugees, both boys and girls. They affirmed that our need to communicate with each other and to truly “come together” enables us to overcome difficulties, a lesson for us all in times of uncertainty such as this one. Fulfilling this need can even create something beautiful, such as the 24 testimonies that follow. We hope you enjoy them!

Popi Dionysopoulou, Eva Savvopoulou

Communications and Public Information Unit
UNHCR Representation in Greece

July 2020



! 2020 !





Let Their Voices Be Heard!

“Do you stay home?”

“Do you maintain physical distance?”

“Do you wash your hands?”

“Does school continue online?”

At the end of March 2020, our lives changed dramatically due to the COVID-19 health crisis. Amongst others, we had to stay home, wash our hands regularly (for at least 20 seconds!) and maintain physical distance, while students were called to continue their school classes remotely via online platforms.

But what does “stay home” actually mean for children who live in refugee camps or facilities for unaccompanied minors? How does one “maintain physical distance” when so many people are crowded into containers set up as temporary shelters? Is it possible to “wash your hands often and for at least 20 seconds” as a refugee who has to wait in line for access to water? How can school continue online for students that do not own a computer, whose entire family shares a single smartphone that often does not have service in the camps where they live, and when mobile data costs money?

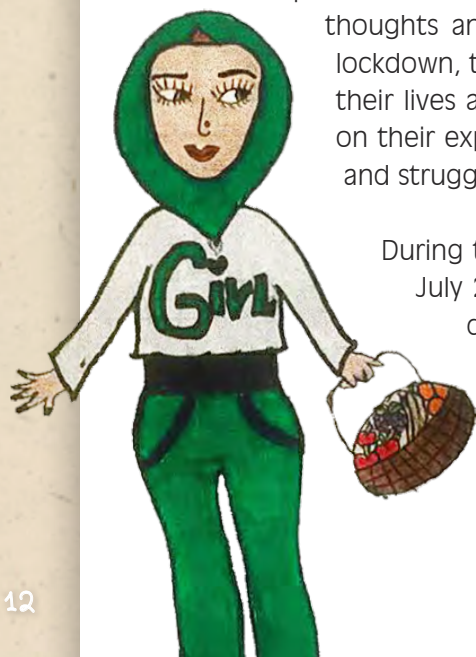
We wanted to explore how teenagers experienced the lockdown and confinement, recording their concerns, fears, and dreams, so we invited teenage refugees (boys and girls) living in various refugee accommodation centres, apartments and buildings across Greece to participate in online creative writing workshops.



Although it was easy to come up with the **idea**, given our previous experience with “Monologues across the Aegean Sea” (2016), its implementation seemed quite difficult, complicated by a tight time frame and the need to run everything online. After identifying teenagers interested in participating in online creative writing workshops, we needed to gain official consent by their parents or guardians. We needed educators to facilitate the online workshops and interpreters in many languages to support them. In addition to selecting an appropriate online platform, we had to ensure the teenagers could access and use it by obtaining and disseminating cell phones, tablets and mobile data packages. And, of course, it required a schedule that would be convenient for all the people involved living in lockdown in different regions across Greece.

The first phase of the action, the **preparation phase** (April 2020), was characterised by remarkable mobilisation efforts to find the adults who would act as “**local contacts**” between the organisers and the teenagers. Strong existing networking of the Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network (TENet-Gr) with numerous people and organisations relevant to the project significantly facilitated the process. Educational staff at TENet-Gr, Refugee Education Coordinators, professional staff in the Greek public education system, UNHCR and NGOs, all enthusiastically embraced the idea and made it possible to get the online workshops up and running by 30 April 2020. Their contribution was tremendous – they located teenagers willing to participate, solved problems related to technology, communication and access, found interpreters, and so much more.

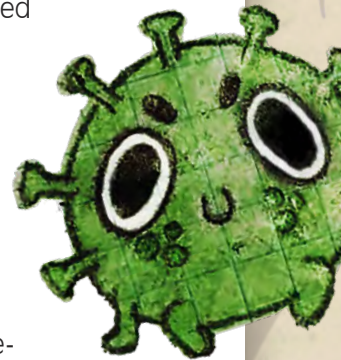
In the second phase (30 April – 18 May, 2020), the 24 teenage refugees (9 boys and 15 girls) who responded to the call, aged 13 to 19 years old from different backgrounds, coming from Afghanistan, Benin, Cameroon, Syria, Balochistan in Pakistan as well as of Egyptian, Iranian, Kurdish of Syria and Somali origin, were divided into three groups and took part in a total of 15 **online creative writing workshops** led by three authors. The teenagers stayed in refugee camps (Diavata, Thessaloniki; Filippiada, Preveza; Kara Tepe, Lesvos and Malakasa, Attica), in facilities for unaccompanied minors (accommodation shelters or apartments of supported semi-independent living) in the cities of Patra, Drama, Athens and on the island of Lesvos as well as in urban accommodation in Karditsa, Thessaly and Tripoli, Peloponnese as part of the UNHCR-supported ESTIA accommodation programme. The online workshops were supported by six interpreters (fluent in Farsi, Arabic, French, Somali, English) and 18 adults (teachers, psychologists, social workers, etc.), who acted as local contacts between the teenagers and the project coordinators. Through the workshops, the teenagers were encouraged to write short stories, narrations, diaries or poems in their native language, to draw and express thoughts and feelings about their experience in lockdown, the impact that the restrictions had on their lives as well as the effects of the lockdown on their expectations, aspirations, the challenges and struggles they face every day.



During the third phase of the project (June – July 2020), the writings and drawings produced by the teenagers were collected, **translated**, edited and prepared for **publication** in Greek and English, both in print and electronic formats.

The thoughts and experiences of all of us during the lockdown period were marked by strong contrasts. Among the first words that come to mind to describe this unique situation are confinement, interaction, separation, emptiness, isolation, free time, loneliness, exploration, thoughts, dreams, reflection and new plans. All these were also captured in various ways by the teenage refugees participating in the online creative writing workshops.

What is the lasting impact of this unprecedented lockdown and how did it shape our thoughts, feelings, and our general worldview, which is likely forever changed? What does the future hold – a trip, a reunion with loved ones, access to school or university? No matter what the dreams of these teenagers were, it is certain they matched the aspirations that each one of us had in terms of the life we would like to live and how that particular life has been redefined these past months.



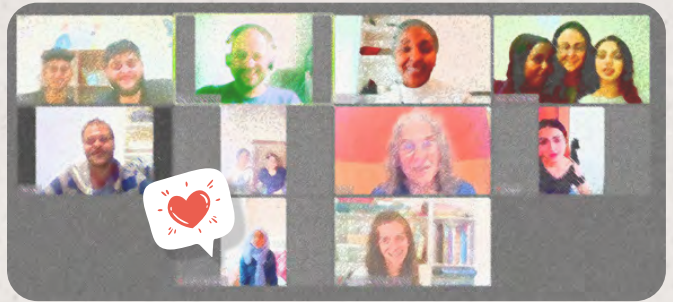
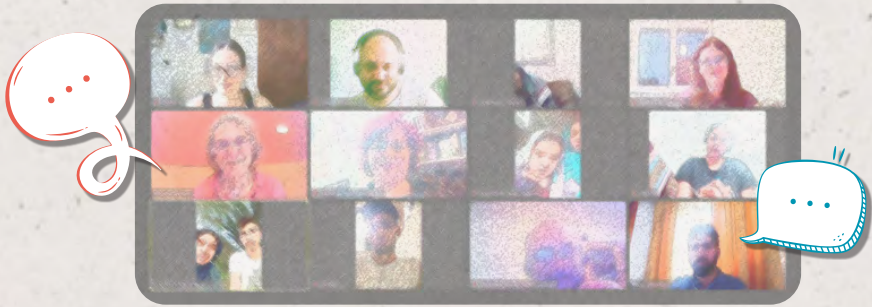
We hope that the words of these teenagers will travel as far as possible; to be read as a thread in the tapestry of world literature or as testimonies of those who have lived through a historical event; to be brought to life on stage and in song and to inspire educational activities and interactions fostering deeper understanding, closeness and mutual respect.

We simply hope that they will “connect” at some level with every one of us.

Nikos Govas, Katerina Alexiadi, Nikoletta Dimopoulou

Coordinators of “The Quarantine Monologues” Action
Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network (TENet-Gr)

July 2020





Words Are the Glue that Bonds Us Together

The series of online creative writing workshops, under “The Quarantine Monologues” action, was conceived to encourage and support creative expression through writing in teenage refugees during the April – May 2020 lockdown in Greece.

The resulting writings, collected and presented in this book, respond directly to questions such as “How did teenagers feel during the lockdown?”, “What were the values and strengths they leveraged to endure their already difficult living conditions?” and “What did they learn from the lockdown?”.

Still, their work also addresses issues that were never explicitly raised, thus constituting a unique testimony of the thoughts and experiences of a particular age group, consisting of people about to make their uncertain transition to adulthood.

One might need to read between the lines to uncover their anxiety, frustration, and disappointment, but also their strong will to live and their desire to make a new beginning. For these young people, their school and teachers as well as competence in Greek prove to be a true passport to a better life. They, therefore, worked hard to maintain their relationships with both their schoolwork and teachers throughout the lockdown, in addition to engaging in other educational and creative activities.

Upon the completion of this workshop series, we remain very grateful to these young people for all they have taught us and all we have shared. They have all now gone their separate ways. Perhaps some will leave their accommodation facilities in the future, others may move to another country and some may return to their birthplace. Nevertheless, this shared experience will continue to connect us, with words being the glue that bonds us all together.

Dimitra Didangelou, Nikos Kalaitzidis, Eleni Svoronou

Online Creative Writing Workshop Facilitators

July 2020

Written by

Amir, "I Do Everything I Can During the Lockdown"

Anis, "There Is a Solution for Every Problem"

Borahan, "Waiting Is a Sign of Love and Patience"

Daniel, "Ghosts"

Dariussh, "I Love the View of the Sea"

Farida, "United Against the Virus"

Fateme, "I Want to Have a Real Home"

Faten, "Life Will Return to Normal"

Fereshte, "When the Night Comes"

Ghazal, "How Much Longer?"

Ikram, "When the Coronavirus Became One
With the World - Flashes of the Lockdown"

Inas, "Positivity-Regularity-Routine-Repetitiveness
of Everyday Life"

Jovani, "Monsieur Le Masque"



- Khalid, "Love and Effort"
- Marjan, "Perseverance and Prayer"
- Maryam, "We'll Be Counting Stars"
- Masome, "Being Kind Is a Condition of Being Human"
- Maya, "The Lockdown Helps the Environment"
- Mehran, "Checkmate"
- Mohammad, "The Other Virus"
- Pardis, "The Pearl and Its Lustre! - Of the Sea"
- Rostam, "Rhythm"
- Sawsan, "Simple Things"
- Zahra, "Let the Dust of Sorrow Be Gone"

Some of the teenagers' names have been changed for protection reasons

Amir



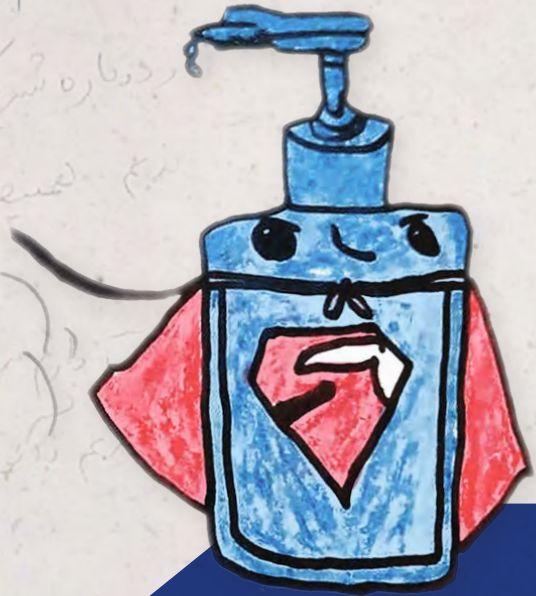
My name is Amir, I am 17 years old

I Do Everything I Can During the Lockdown

Before all this began, my day was very busy and I tried to keep it that way. Every day, I would go into town with my friends for a coffee and shopping. I used to play football for two hours in the afternoons and I would study and do my homework in the evenings. My days were lots of fun, until everything suddenly froze. So did I. So did everyone else around me.

At the moment, I am in lockdown and trying not to let it affect my thoughts and mood in a negative way. I try to keep busy, doing everything I can and staying focused on my personal hygiene. I use WhatsApp, Facebook and Viber every day to talk with my friends and, when they are not available, I play games on my phone. I spend a lot of time on my phone, but I also read books.





I do everything I can during the lockdown.

Since all this started, I watch YouTube videos every night to keep myself updated with what is happening in the world. The things I hear have a negative impact on my feelings and thoughts. Right now, as I'm about to go to sleep, I will empty my mind of negativity and fill it with positive energy.

I do everything I can during the lockdown.

Goodnight.

Anis

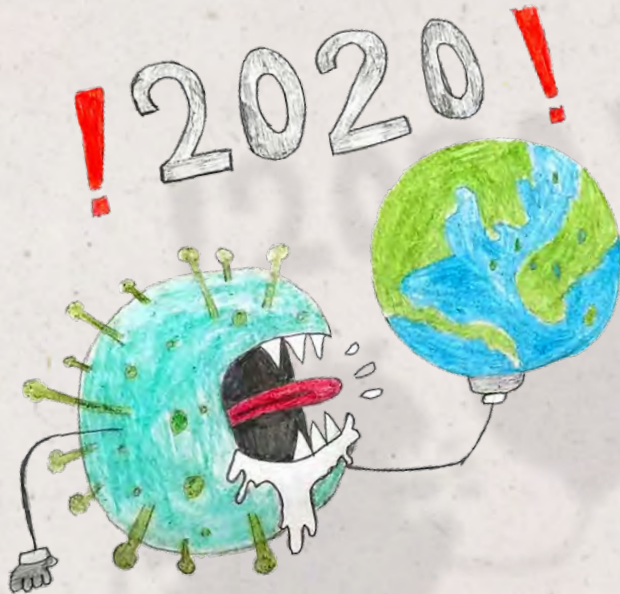
My name is Anis, I am 17 years old

There Is a Solution for Every Problem

During the lockdown, I wake up late every day. Since we don't have school, I don't have to get up early. But I don't like it. I'm a girl who likes to go to school and learn new things every day.

In the afternoons, I usually talk with my best friend who lives in Kavala, a city in northern Greece. During the day, I eat, pray, and spend time with my family. I'm really happy to spend time with my family because, despite all the awful things happening around us, we laugh and lift each other's spirits talking about the good things that have happened in our lives. It is very important to have your family.

Maybe these days are a kind of test of our ability to be more polite and thoughtful and make good use of this precious time together. I try to study, to draw, to play games that challenge my thinking skills. Every day I also do some maths, my favourite subject at school. I really love maths because it teaches me that "for every problem, there is a solution". Every night before I go to sleep, I think about all the problems in the world and how amazing it would be to find a mathematical equation for peace that would suddenly bring about peace all over the world. Sometimes I watch movies about the great wars of the world in different countries and how they ended. The fact that wars end gives me hope.



I try to stay away from the news. When I read the news on my cell phone, I cry a lot because everyday people die from coronavirus.

Poverty, wars, hunger, uncertainty. So many refugees are on the move for a better life. Sometimes I wonder why all this is happening, but no one has an answer for me. Only God. I truly believe in God and I know that one day all bad things will end. Because we are never alone, there is always someone to help us.

I know there are lots of children in the world without a family, so I thank my God and I pray for their health. It's difficult to be a refugee because you will always feel you are in a place where people don't want you. That's a horrible feeling, but it makes me stronger. I fled my country because I could no longer live there. If my country were safe, I would never have come here.



One day, I will prove to people who hate refugees that a young girl who fled her country can succeed.

Some nights when I lay down to sleep, I think about my future. What will happen, where I will be, in which country, and lots more questions. Answering all these questions on my own is like drawing a map with my time machine, and I really like it.

In the future, I want to live in Greece and to learn Greek very well so I can graduate from a Greek public high school. I want to finish high school and then to go to the best university to study mathematics. I want to become a mathematician, like the famous Greek female mathematician Hypatia, who lived in Alexandria, Egypt. If I were in Afghanistan, my cherished homeland, and everything was fine, I would prefer to finish university there. Then, I would open my own school and teach maths in my hometown: "Anis' School for Mathematics". I'm sure that teaching kids who love it, like me, would be very interesting.

Even if the situation in my country stays as it is, one day I will visit it and see my beloved grandmother, because I was only three years old when I left. I really miss everything I left behind.

These thoughts bring a smile to my face and I go to sleep with a wish for a new and better day. One day the war in my country will end and I will remember these days and smile. That's my greatest wish.

I will never forget the days I went to school with my friends, before it closed because of the lockdown. I really miss those days, walking together to school and laughing and joking along the way. I'm so sorry I couldn't hug my friends one last time, but I hope this coronavirus situation will end and I'll see them again. I want to share so many things with them...



Borahan

My name is Borahan,
I am 15 years old

Waiting Is a Sign of Love and Patience

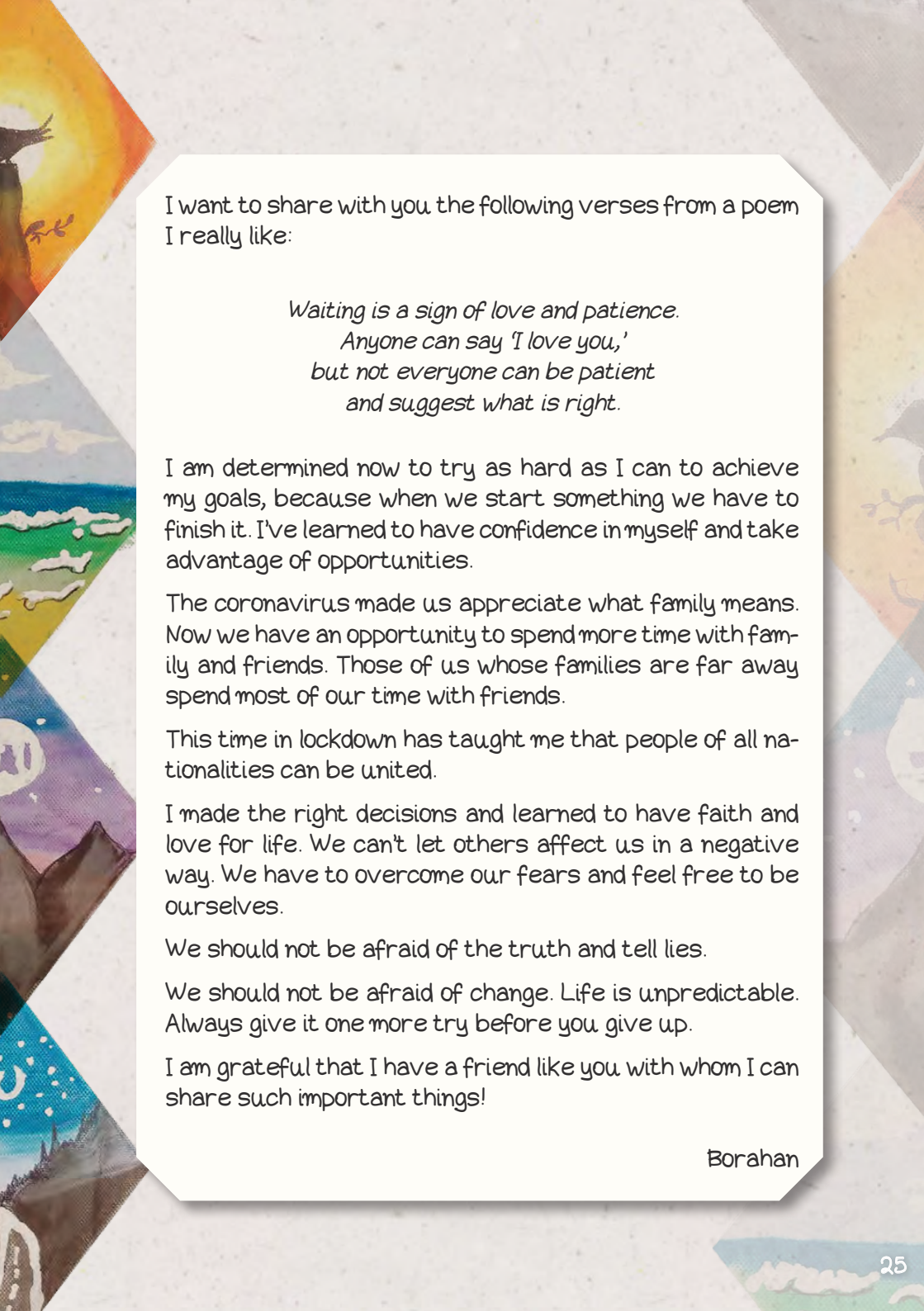
Hello, my dear friend!

I wanted to call you, but never got round to it, so I'm writing you this letter instead.

I wanted to tell you that I miss you very much during this difficult period we are going through. I hope we will get back to normal soon, so we can start exercising and doing sports again.

Before the lockdown, a good friend of mine and I were going to the gym, but now we have to stay home. One day my friend contacted me and suggested that we should work out together online. I was very happy about it.

I've been reading a lot of books and have learned some pretty interesting things. That's one thing I like about this period - most people have time to read. When I finish a book, a movie or a television series, I like to share it with my friends. I think we will learn a lot by sharing our impressions with each other, something we were not used to doing before. I saw a TV series with thirteen episodes that taught me a lot, and now I can share all that with my friends.



I want to share with you the following verses from a poem I really like:

*Waiting is a sign of love and patience.
Anyone can say 'I love you,'
but not everyone can be patient
and suggest what is right.*

I am determined now to try as hard as I can to achieve my goals, because when we start something we have to finish it. I've learned to have confidence in myself and take advantage of opportunities.

The coronavirus made us appreciate what family means. Now we have an opportunity to spend more time with family and friends. Those of us whose families are far away spend most of our time with friends.

This time in lockdown has taught me that people of all nationalities can be united.

I made the right decisions and learned to have faith and love for life. We can't let others affect us in a negative way. We have to overcome our fears and feel free to be ourselves.

We should not be afraid of the truth and tell lies.

We should not be afraid of change. Life is unpredictable. Always give it one more try before you give up.

I am grateful that I have a friend like you with whom I can share such important things!

Borahan

Daniel

My name is Daniel,
I am 17 years old

Ghosts

I am a newly arrived refugee on a Greek island.

Life was going well, but there was also lots of boredom, anxiety and self-absorption.

Everyone was suspicious of us.

They saw us as inferior, without any rights.

Our days were all the same: school, football, the market.

Loneliness and sadness were our companions, but we were trying to keep our morale high.

It wasn't easy at all to live surrounded by discrimination.

The lockdown established a unity in the home we are now staying, although we all come from different places.

We did not discriminate against Arabs or Africans.

United, we were sharing everything until we conquered
a new sense of security and a culture of acceptance of
each other.

After the lockdown, what is next?

We don't know much about the future.

We are slowly trying to find a new routine.

But I feel sad and anxious, afraid I'll lose my loved ones.

The idea of losing them
never stops haunting me.

*We don't know if you broke out at 9:30 a.m.
In the beginning, you were just another epidemic.*

From now on, our fate depends on you.

Wrath of God.

The end is foreshadowed.

Your action makes chemistry invalid.

Doctors are cancelled, scientists as well.

Isolation.

You, a multicoloured fabric.

*An undergarment worn on the nose
and hooked over the ears.*

As famous now as the Kardashians!

All-powerful like the Apocalypse.

*A barrier against the virus,
but you make our mamas suffocate
in a hot oven of exhaled breaths.*

Dariush

My name is Dariush,
I am 17 years old

I Love the View of the Sea

My journey as a refugee began almost a year ago, when we had to leave Iran because of some problems. In the beginning, we didn't want to leave the country irregularly, but there was no time, as we had to go immediately. The smuggler had told us he would send us to Greece in a week, but that didn't happen. We stayed in Turkey for fifty days, which I remember as the most difficult in my life.

One day, while we were in Turkey, the smuggler separated me and my brother from our parents, saying we shouldn't travel in groups to avoid drawing the attention of the police. Those two days we spent away from our parents were agonising, because our parents had been arrested and we thought we would never see them again. I had to stay calm and give my little brother hope. Finally, after some adventures, we were reunited with our parents and fled to Greece.



I will never forget that experience. It was the reason we were so happy when we arrived in Greece, as we thought it would be the end of our pain and insecurity.

Life in a refugee camp¹ is very tough, because your life itself and your daily needs depend on other people. You waste most of your time waiting in queues – queues for food, queues to use the shower, queues to use the bathroom, queues to apply for asylum, and so on. During our first days there, the volunteers helped us in any way they could. I saw all those volunteers helping refugees every day and I wanted to repay their kindness. So, I started helping them as an interpreter, which gave me hope and made me feel useful at the time.

¹ The word “camp” is preserved because this is how all teenagers refer to the accommodation facilities no matter what language they write in (*Ed*)

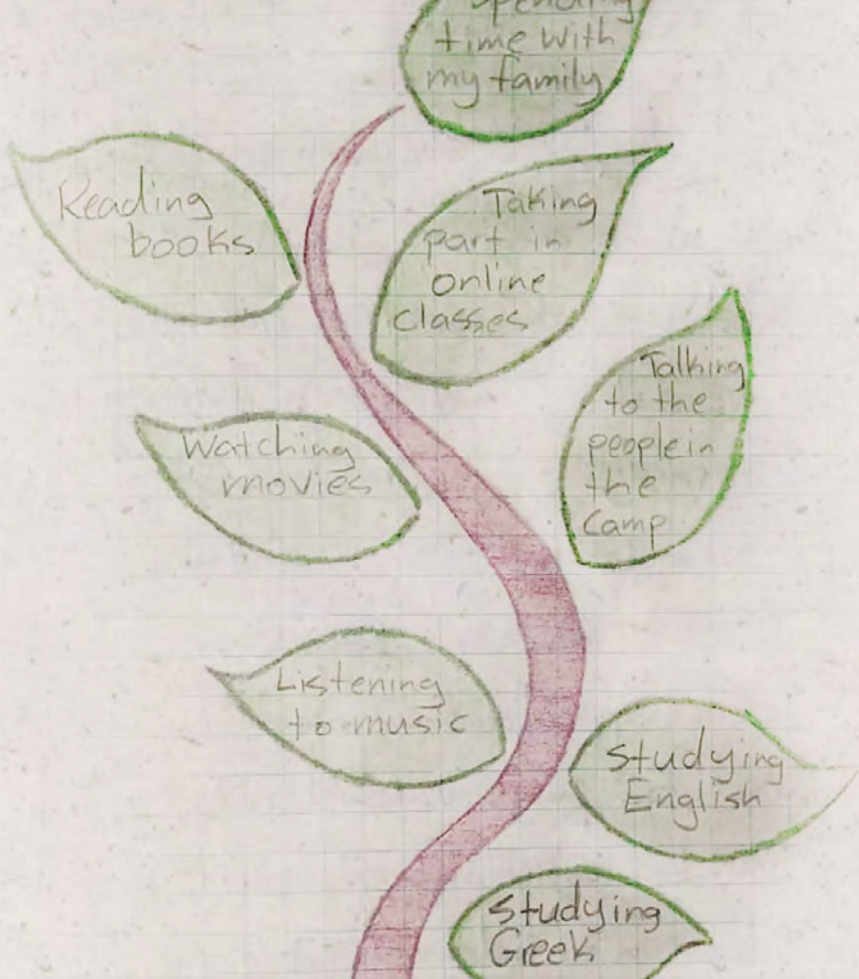
My brother and I also went to a school organised by an NGO that offered various classes for refugees. The school was a very good place for us – it got us out of the camp and we learned things.

Eventually we both enrolled in public schools. The first few months I only took Greek language classes with other refugees. After a while, I joined the classes with the Greek students, which was very difficult. Sometimes, during class, I felt like the students were making fun of me. I tried to communicate with them, but it was futile. I tried to sit next to someone, and they'd ask me to go somewhere else. Things were getting really hard for me because I'd never in my life felt so alone at school.

Then came the coronavirus outbreak, and I'm now thinking about all that. I really needed this time to work on my own and improve my Greek. I don't have a computer here to play games so I try to study for school. I am trying so hard to learn Greek because I can't say "I live in Greece but I can't speak Greek". I'm very glad I spoke English when I came here – it helped a lot.

The only classes I have these days are Greek and English, which we attend online. I have to admit that online classes are really boring, because the students can't joke around together.

I love that I can see the sea from here and I'd like to go for a swim, but I can't because we are stuck in the camp. I try and take walks around the camp and talk to the staff to practice my Greek. It think it is obvious how much I want to learn this language.



In the afternoons, I talk with my friends in Iran on WhatsApp and we play games on our phones together almost every day. I like that a lot because it makes me remember all the things I did with them in Iran.

In the evenings, I have dinner and talk with my family. I relax, read books or watch movies before I go to bed. I listen to music a lot - I really like Greek rap.

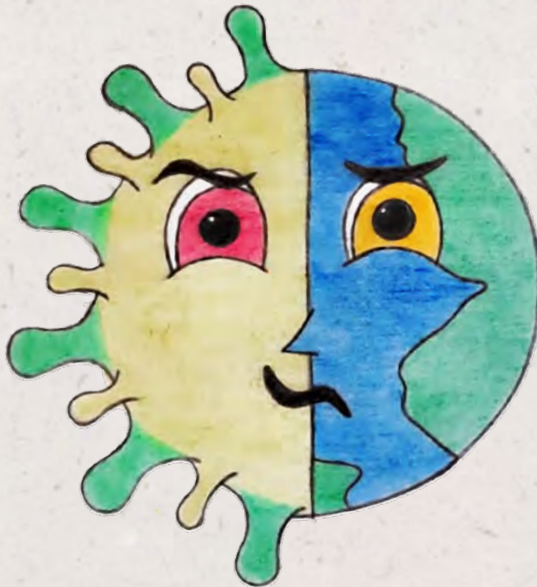
My life has gotten really boring, but I have to accept it and use my time the best I can.

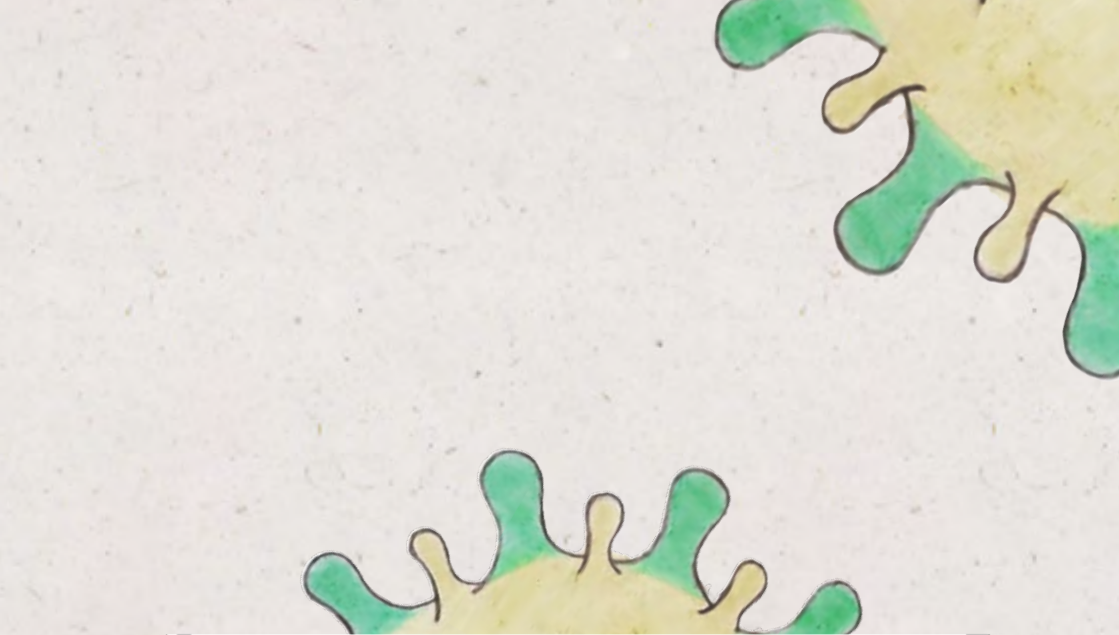
Farida

My name is Farida, I am 19 years old

United Against the Virus

The virus and the lockdown have shown me that our health is precious and all healthcare workers are our brothers and sisters. They are the ones who stand in front of us to fight this dangerous virus and they don't just do their jobs, but they sacrifice their lives for us.





With plenty of free time during the lockdown, I am given the chance to re-evaluate and get to know myself better, but also to appreciate the true meaning and beauty of my life. I have learnt to take care of myself in different ways so as to ensure my physical and mental health.

I feel like all these things we're experiencing have changed us.

With one hand we take care of ourselves, and with the other we join hands with our brothers and sisters to fight this virus together.

Fateme

My name is Fateme, I am 18 years old

I Want to Have a Real Home

These days, we are in lockdown here in Greece and have to stay home. I'm at home doing nothing! I'm really bored. To be honest, I sleep a lot these days... Haha! We don't go to school, all our classes are online.

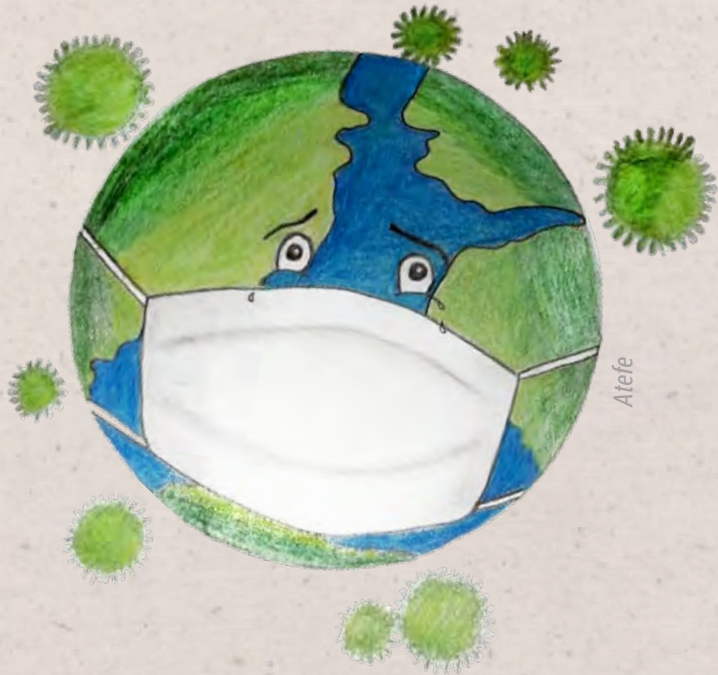
We can't go out to walk, so we walk around the camp¹ to stay in shape. I'm also reading a very interesting English book, and I'm trying to learn French.

Most of the time, I am with my family and on my cell phone on social media, like everyone else these days. I try not to listen to the news, because I hate to know how many people have died. I feel sorry for the people who are ill and in the hospital. Unfortunately, we can't do anything but pray a lot and ask God to help us.

During this time, I have learned to make every moment count, because it passes and is gone forever...

What strikes me is that everyone is afraid of each other and people try to go somewhere they will be safe. Some celebrities tell people to stay home, but their own houses are like palaces and they don't get bored staying inside. Lots of families will risk their lives, though, if they don't go to work because they don't have the money to stay at home...

¹ The word "camp" is preserved because this is how all teenagers refer to the accommodation facilities no matter what language they write in (Ed)



The lockdown was very useful in many countries and the best decision during the COVID-19 pandemic, but for some countries like Afghanistan, which is a poor country, it wasn't good for the economy. I mean, when you stay home, you can't go to work and when you don't go to work, you have no money and when you don't have money, how can you support your family?

Do we think of others? Do we think of the children who work in Afghanistan? Where are they now? What are they doing? Nobody cares about them... Nobody will help them. If the coronavirus doesn't kill them, hunger surely will.

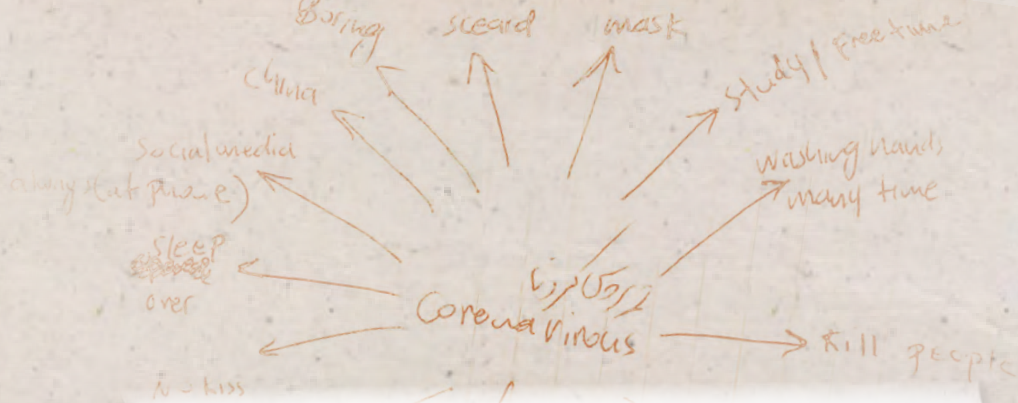


Many people are afraid of the coronavirus and try to protect themselves as much as they can, but others don't care at all.

Today I woke up earlier than usual because my sisters, my mother and I decided to go to the farmers' market. This one is very close to the camp, so lots of people go there for shopping. The bus stop is right in front of the camp so, whenever we go there, there are many people waiting for the bus. "There are lots of us here," I think to myself, "maybe the bus won't stop".

The bus finally arrives and the driver shouts that only fifteen people can get on, but no one wants to walk to the farmers' market in the sun. So we push each other to board the bus. I get on with great difficulty and my shoes get dirty. I hate dirty shoes! After a while we arrive and, because the bus is full, we have to get off very slowly. When I am out, I hear the driver talking to someone about us. The driver is very angry - I think he is right, because he is worried about the coronavirus, but he can't yell at us.

At the farmers' market my mother buys vegetables to cook for dinner. Then we have to wait again at the bus stop.



I'm very tired and thirsty, it's a very hot day. After five minutes, the bus arrives, but it doesn't stop. That's strange. Why does this happen? We go to another bus stop, thinking maybe we're at the wrong one... The bus doesn't stop for us at the other stop either. I'm very angry. Why? Because we're refugees and everyone thinks we have contracted the virus? But we're wearing masks and gloves. So we have to walk twenty minutes to the previous bus stop. We finally arrive at home, very tired and angry, and when I go to wash my hands, I see a lot of dirty dishes. No... I have to wash them now. I rest a bit and check the messages on my phone. After a while, my friends call and tell me my sister fell and got hurt while riding a bicycle. It was a bad ending to a very bad day...

I don't want to keep living in the camp. I want to get out of there and have a real home. I'm very tired and my life in the camp is stressful. This makes me very sad and miserable... I want to relax a little.

My greatest dream is for me and my family to be safe and to have a normal life like everyone else. I also want to study and go to the university. I want to become a dentist and have my own clinic, but I want to study in a different country.

I want a life without problems, just like everyone does. I don't want to be faced as a refugee.

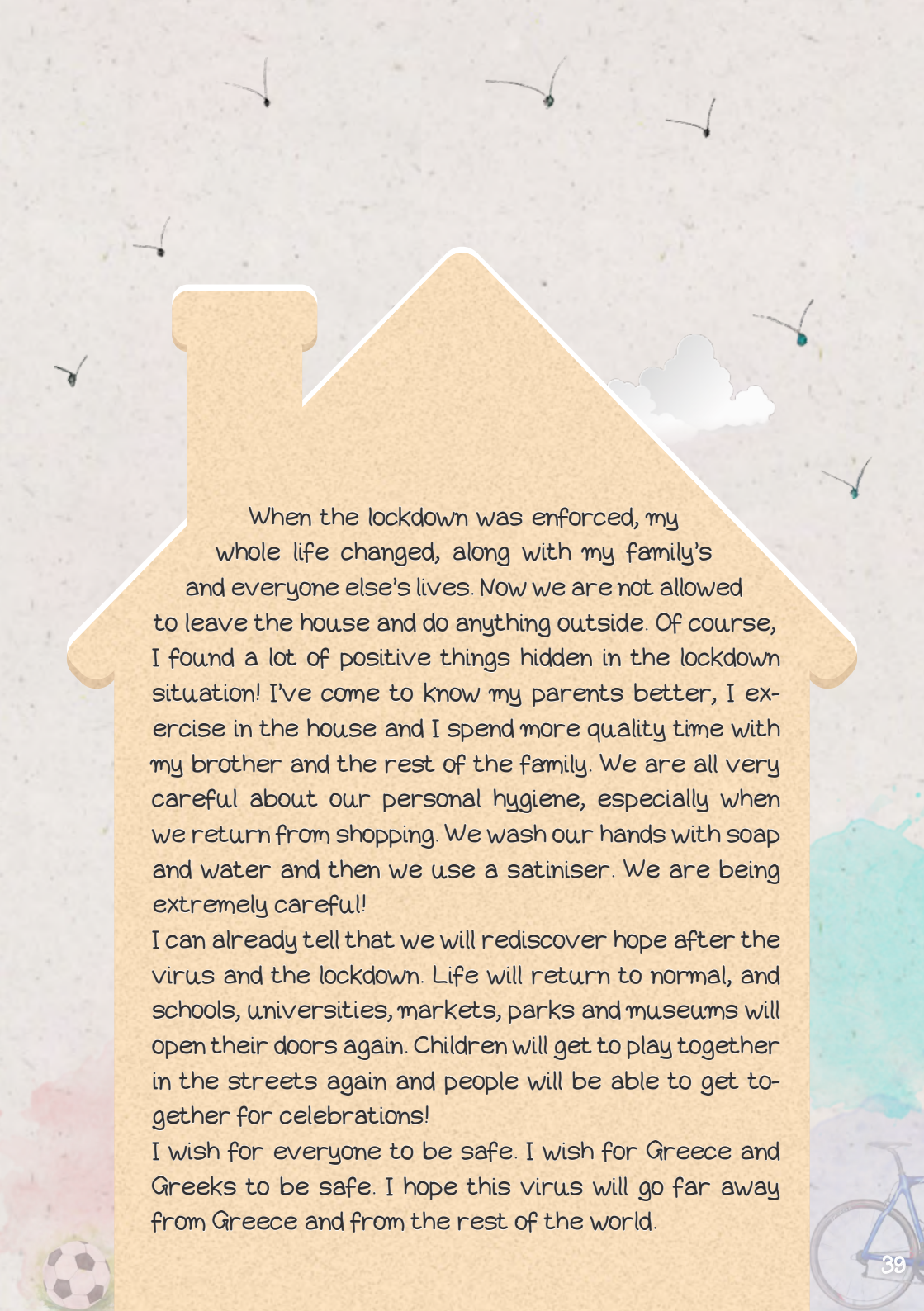
Faten

My name is Faten, I am 13 years old

Life Will Return to Normal

Before the lockdown, I was free to go out any time I wanted and go anywhere I wanted. I had the freedom to go to school and come back home every day to have lunch with my family. And in the afternoons, my family and I would go for a bike ride. We were free to spend quality time together at a park or visit museums and historical sites. Our days were so full. My friends and I spent most of our time outdoors and my brother and I, whenever we felt like it, played football, his favourite sport.





When the lockdown was enforced, my whole life changed, along with my family's and everyone else's lives. Now we are not allowed to leave the house and do anything outside. Of course, I found a lot of positive things hidden in the lockdown situation! I've come to know my parents better, I exercise in the house and I spend more quality time with my brother and the rest of the family. We are all very careful about our personal hygiene, especially when we return from shopping. We wash our hands with soap and water and then we use a sanitiser. We are being extremely careful!

I can already tell that we will rediscover hope after the virus and the lockdown. Life will return to normal, and schools, universities, markets, parks and museums will open their doors again. Children will get to play together in the streets again and people will be able to get together for celebrations!

I wish for everyone to be safe. I wish for Greece and Greeks to be safe. I hope this virus will go far away from Greece and from the rest of the world.

Fereshte

My name is Fereshte,
I am 19 years old

When the Night Comes

We were preparing for our asylum interview when the coronavirus pandemic affected Greece, so it was postponed.

The lockdown didn't make much difference in my life.

Either way, I was living in a refugee camp¹.

I didn't go on vacations or go out much with friends. I went to school and studied Greek and English, and the rest of the day I did chores around the house.

I'm the oldest child in the family, so I have a lot of responsibilities. I cook really well. I spend most of my time cooking.

I also started drawing during the lockdown.


When the lockdown is over, I'll complete the things I left unfinished.

I'll finish school, and my language classes.

I'll continue my studies.

I'm a bit worried about administrative procedures, like our transfer from this camp... The scenarios are not always optimistic, there are moments of sadness...

¹ The word "camp" is preserved because this is how all teenagers refer to the accommodation facilities no matter what language they write in (Ed)



When the night comes and I lay down in my bed, I do my school homework and study Greek, because I want to learn to speak the language and understand what my teachers are saying.

Our journey is evolving, so we have to evolve too.

You gain something from every step, I hope you also leave something good behind.

Ghazal

My name is Ghazal, I am 15 years old

How Much Longer?

I used to wake up early in the morning, go to school and after-school classes to learn Greek, English and guitar.

On the weekends, I would wake up later than usual, read a book or exercise for about an hour.

The lockdown came and changed everything. The schools closed and after-school activities were interrupted indefinitely.

But with the help of my teachers, I can study at home while protecting myself from the coronavirus.

The lockdown is the reason I picked up a pencil again.

Not to write, but to draw. And I am very happy about that.

It is also the time of the Ramadan¹. Now I can focus more on prayer and reading the Koran as well as other books.

When the lockdown is over, the first thing I want to do is to go to my aunt's house in Athens. I don't know if the schools will open and operate as they did before, or if I will be able to resume my routine.

We won't be able to have contact like we did before.

There will still be the fear of the coronavirus...

¹ Ramadan, or Ramazan, is a religious celebration of fasting, prayer, reflection, and community for the Muslims. It is also the name of the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, when according to tradition, the Koran was given to the people so as to guide them in life (Ed)

The coronavirus is like a person
on the battlefield fighting a hurricane,
not being able to see and killing innocent
people,
without a hunting weapon.
Although technology
has advanced tremendously,
this time
no country could
do anything to stop it.







Ikram

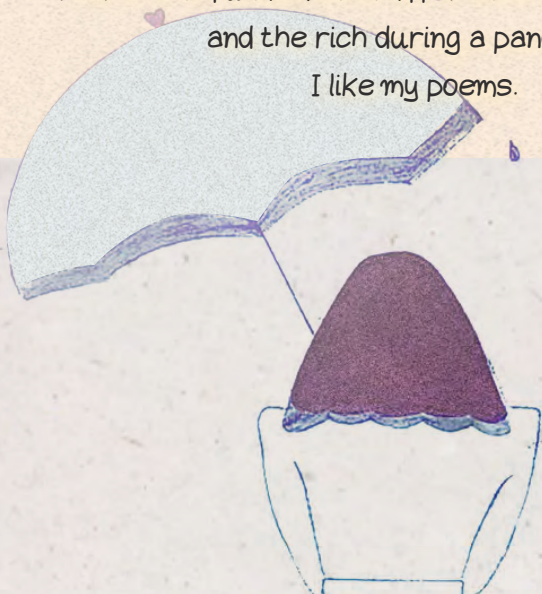
My name is Ikram, I am 15 years old

When the Coronavirus Became One with the World

Once you desired something
and then instantly turned from it.
Once you left something behind
and instantly longed for it.
Anyhow, that's the way the world worked.

Flashes of the Lockdown

Money is not so important.
The Earth does not belong to me - I am only a guest.
I realise the value of school.
I enjoy spending time with my family after all.
There is no fundamental difference between the poor
and the rich during a pandemic.
I like my poems.



Inas

My name is Inas, I am 17 years old

Positivity/ Regularity/ Routine/ Repetitiveness of Everyday Life

I think about the older people, as young children and teenagers can distract themselves by playing or studying. I think of the people who clean public places, since germs and viruses are there. I think of them, because no one helps them to clean up the street; we all think it is just their job. I disagree. We should all help to keep the streets clean and not only clean our own houses, but we don't. Before the lockdown, when there were no restrictions or boundaries, we did whatever we wanted, because we didn't realise the risk. But now that we do, we should help the cleaners.





The positive aspects of the present? A lot has changed in our current reality. It has taught us a lot because we want a change for the better in our lives. I notice we are starting to recognise that public health is our responsibility. We've started to pay closer attention to the needs of those around us and to help each other. After the schools closed, we came to realise their importance and how valuable education is. The shops and streets are cleaner now, all the better for society. I realised the value of freedom. As my thoughts become clearer during this lockdown, I now consider it my duty to help those who help society.

The positive things about the future? I believe that, united, we will solve the problems we are facing. Together, we will come up with many new ideas for the future. The cleanliness of public and private spaces will become a priority. We will be better informed about the past and more careful about the future. Our interests will turn from famous actors and singers to studying and research. Kids and teenagers will be more interested in how their parents feel than they are now. As teenagers, we will make sure that everything we do makes us happier and better people.

As for me, I will become a translator and help spread young people's ideas throughout society. For those of you reading this, get ready to live a bright and beautiful future.



Jovani

My name is Jovani, I am 17 years old

Monsieur Le Masque

There was a time
when no one recognised your worth.
Your existence was insignificant.

As the saying goes,
everyone takes turns to shine
or get a hairdresser's appointment!

Now your time has come,
Even though in the past
you were used only by vendangeurs,¹
by chemists and surgeons alike.

From now on we are all the same,
from surgeons to chemists and everyone in between.

You were forced on us,
under the pretext of physical distancing.
Oh, Monsieur Le Masque!

My dear, your time has come
to wield your influence
on this new world.

¹ Farm workers at harvest (Ed)

*When I hear of deaths on the news...
I know what it means to lose someone you love.
It's hard for me to be forced
to stay in one place, of necessity.
It can become traumatic over time.
We weren't expecting it, but it is already there!
What can we do?
We treat each other with respect.
We face it together.
Together we fight, but how about when we are
alone?
I can't believe this is happening!*



Khalid

My name is Khalid, I am 17 years old

Love and Effort

The first days of the lockdown were quite difficult because we went from going out with our friends to being confined in our houses. It was frustrating for me and I decided to do something to pass the time more pleasantly. Some friends and I got together and decided to make some short videos, which we then shared on social media. A lot of people liked them - it was encouraging.

I know these days are far from perfect, not only for us but for the whole world, but we have to be careful and keep busy with something until the lockdown is over.

It isn't as bad as we expected. I'm not saying we should be grateful for what is happening, but we are doing well and I truly appreciate the place I'm currently staying in.

Our life is made up of habits and routines. But these days lots of things have happened to us and changed us. There is a lot of pressure, which in some cases has driven people to fear, despair, failure, sadness and misery.

All this was not always pleasant, but we gained things we should never forget. If we think about it, we will understand that in some cases it was worth it. We came to appreciate what we had and still have, for example the value of our freedom, the value of our authenticity, the value of friendship and the value of our dignity.

Marjan

My name is Marjan,
I am 17 years old

Perseverance and Prayer

My life there was difficult. Every day felt like an entire year.

There was no peace and comfort. Everyone said this was hell.

Everyone was distressed and deeply sad.

We had to wait hours for a piece of bread.

There was no security, no feeling of home.

I was patient.

I endured the hardship.

I knew I was falling behind in school. I tried to find courage within, but then my mother and father got sick and my life became even more difficult.

I never would have believed I'd be in this position one day, but life brought me there. My brother got sick too, we were miserable, it was as if I was carrying the burden of the world's sorrows.

I had nothing. I looked up at the sky every day with eyes full of sadness.

What made me leave? Hate. It is the hardest decision a person has to make. Instead of living with your loved ones in peace... For a long time, we struggled with our two options, whether to stay or leave.

...hunting everywhere for
a mask,
wandering around to find
a mask.

If we survive
the coronavirus,
we will go crazy searching
for a mask...



When the coronavirus arrived here, luckily I was with my beloved family. I played volleyball with my friends, made drawings, stayed safe and prayed to God to protect me. I lit candles and prayed for the sick to recover.

I tried very hard to learn to cook. But I didn't accomplish anything that impressive! My brother and I had gotten a piano. We planned to take lessons and learn to play, but the lockdown put an end to that.

I want to continue my studies, to participate in volleyball matches, to do all those things I wanted to do and to go out again. To enjoy nature, to go to parties with friends and to make a new start with my sister.

Maryam

My name is Maryam,
I am 19 years old

We'll Be Counting Stars



It's been a long time since I heard from you. Where have you been?

I hope this letter finds you in good health.

I'm having a hard time here during the lockdown, not knowing what to do. It's just boring. It's like I'm in a cage. Nothing is the way I'd like it to be.



Sometimes, when I start to paint, my mom reminds me to cook dinner. Then, a little while later when I have some free time, I entertain myself with my cell phone... You know, social media.

Today my two-year-old niece made me feel good. My little nieces and nephews always make me smile. Like they say, babies are the greatest source of joy. I like having more time with my family. But I don't like that I've become even lazier than before. I feel like I've withdrawn more from the world. I'll feel better, more normal, when I get back to school and my classes.

The thing I still like is that these days I have free time and I can paint whenever I want. I can also shoot videos in daylight.

What I want most right now is to become a YouTuber and finish my latest portrait. The best news I've heard lately is that I'll be able to take creative writing classes, which will help me to write scripts for the videos I create.





My favorite word is "artist". Art is the only thing I want to do for the rest of my life.

These are my favourite lyrics:

*Lately I been, I been losing sleep
Dreaming about the things that we could be
But baby I been, I been prayin' hard
Said no more counting dollars
We'll be counting stars
Yeah, we'll be counting stars*

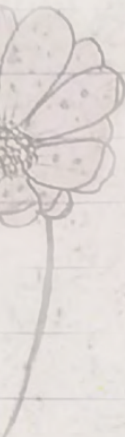
But I'm not writing to complain, just to relieve the burden of my thoughts.

As I write, it's late because I don't sleep much at night. It's midnight, my parents ask me what I want to eat, but I have no idea... After the meal, my mom told me I had to clean up my room before praying. I don't feel like doing it, but I have to. So, I finish cleaning up and I pray. I thought I would check my cell phone a bit. It's very late, "you have to go to sleep," said my dad. It's late, I have to say goodnight.

I'd like to hear about what's going on with you. I hope we can meet again, even though I know that might not be possible for a few years.

I'm waiting for you reply.

Your crazy friend,
Maryam



Masome

My name is Masome, I am 17 years old

Being Kind is a Condition of Being Human

Dear Sahar,

I've missed you a lot.

I hope everything is fine in Afghanistan and that you and your family are well. ❤️

Here, we have been in lockdown for two months now.

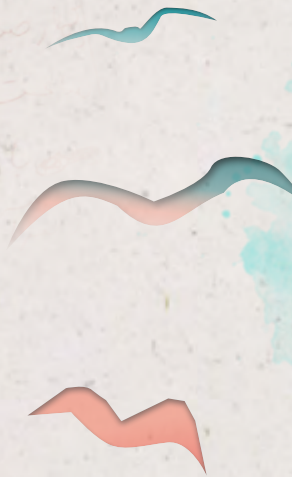
These days, I can read books and I like that the animals are free. What I don't like is that I'm far from my friends, I can't go out for walks or go to school.

I have more time with my family now. A few days ago, my nephew, my cousin's son, had his birthday and we made him a cake. We threw him a dance party and we all laughed and had a great time together.

The day before yesterday I saw a movie that I used to watch when I was little. ❤️

The schools may open next week. We are not allowed to go to crowded places like the supermarket and the farmers' market or ride the bus without wearing masks and gloves. If you don't wear a mask, you have to pay a 150-euro fine. 😞

Handwritten Persian text in red ink, including phrases like "Sleep", "Happiness mood", and "Alphome".



Once the quarantine is over, the first thing I will do is see my friends, go down to the beach and go shopping.

I hope the coronavirus will go away fast and leave the world in peace, because I miss the old world.

I've missed you.

I love you. Take care of yourself ❤️

Masome





Maya

My name is Maya,
I am 18 years old

The Lockdown Helps the Environment

I believe that from now till the end of 2020, pollution of the air, sea and rivers will be less than in previous years. The outbreak of the pandemic forced people into lockdown and reduced the activities of modern industry and manufacturing. The lockdown gives the planet a chance to be restored in part, due to reduced human mobility and economic activities. The imminent economic recession will be global and I hope that, for that reason, we will reduce lots of unnecessary government spending and look for alternative solutions to the problems we are facing.

Personally, I am spending more quality time with my family. I have become more careful about matters of personal hygiene, and all these things I think about have made me more aware and mindful. During the lockdown, I am resting both physically and mentally. I am strengthening my body and clearing my mind so that, in the future after all this is over, I will resume my school tasks and complete them successfully!



Mehran

My name is Mehran, I am 16 years old

And the Earth went into lockdown.

I still remember the names of the teachers,
the interpreter and the children.

Each of us was from a different
and faraway place.

Each of us children shared
our experiences with the help
of our cherished teacher and our interpreter.

Checkmate

I don't want to begin from the distant past,
but from the time before the coronavirus.
This whole story started when I arrived in Greece.
About seven or eight months ago.
The coronavirus stemmed from China
and made headlines all over the world.
But what happened to me at the time
made me very happy.
I felt really good, because I had just been transferred
to Athens. I started learning Greek.
In my free time, I went to parks
and wandered the streets.
At that point I started hearing something
about the coronavirus.
One country after another went into lockdown.

It came here too. I didn't want to go into quarantine,
but I had to, for the sake of my loved ones.
It wasn't that bad, after all.
I had Internet access and I played chess,
which I like a lot.
I suggested to my friends that we play together.
They didn't know how.
I started teaching them.
And now they are all excellent players.

Mohammad

My name is Mohammad,
I am 15 years old



The Other Virus

2030

I am sitting in my house in Canada,
and I'm browsing the web on my phone.

Suddenly I see a photo.

Sick people. In the hospital. Oh yes! I remember!

It was ten years ago, in 2020, with the coronavirus.

And the world has yet to forget that bitterness.

The taste still lingers, even though the events themselves
have been forgotten.

The coronavirus had a major impact on the world.

The majority of those who survived were infected
with another virus called sadness.

You don't get over it easily.

The coronavirus destroyed many lives.

Many people died during that time.

2030

As if they were innocent casualties of war.
Unarmed civilians.
This virus taught us a lot.
That it doesn't matter if you're rich or poor.
You have to wash your hands all the time and follow the basic rules of personal hygiene.
It reminded us that we are human and we have a responsibility to each other.
We were created to make the world a better place.



Pardis

My name is Pardis,
I am 15 years old



The Pearl and Its Lustre!

When the sound of the sea
meets the sound of seagulls and sparrows,
they create music!

I don't know what to call it,
I don't know who the singer is.

I have always wanted to be like the sea!
Sometimes full of silence
and sometimes wild,
deep and exciting!

The sea is not simply a word.
It is a boundless tranquillity, a beauty,
a blessing of which God deemed us worthy to give!

The sea can teach you how
to push the bad people out of your life,
leave them on the shore.
And keep the people who are important to you
in your own personal world.

The sea is God's most passionate blessing, so proud.
Be calm like the beach,
so others can be restless like the sea for you.



Of the Sea

When the lockdown is over, I would like to go to Elliniko,¹
to the beach of Agios Kosmas,
by the sea...
To hear the sound of waves
to watch the seagulls flying!
And the amazing sunset!
It is so beautiful, it is oddly calming.
When I look at the beautiful pebbles,
I can feel every moment and every wave.

¹ A suburb of Athens, situated near the Saronic Gulf coast, and also the area of the former Athens airport, Ellinikon (literally 'Greek') International Airport, which served as a temporary refugee camp.

Rostam


My name is Rostam, I am 17 years old

Rhythm

I did a lot of reading
and relaxed locked in the house.
I talked with both my parents
and cleaned around the house.

Forbidden to go out,
a new language took my time.





I couldn't see my friends,
or finish school on time,
though I was here the whole time.
Coronavirus, I was scared of you
but there was nothing
I could do.

Other than have patience.



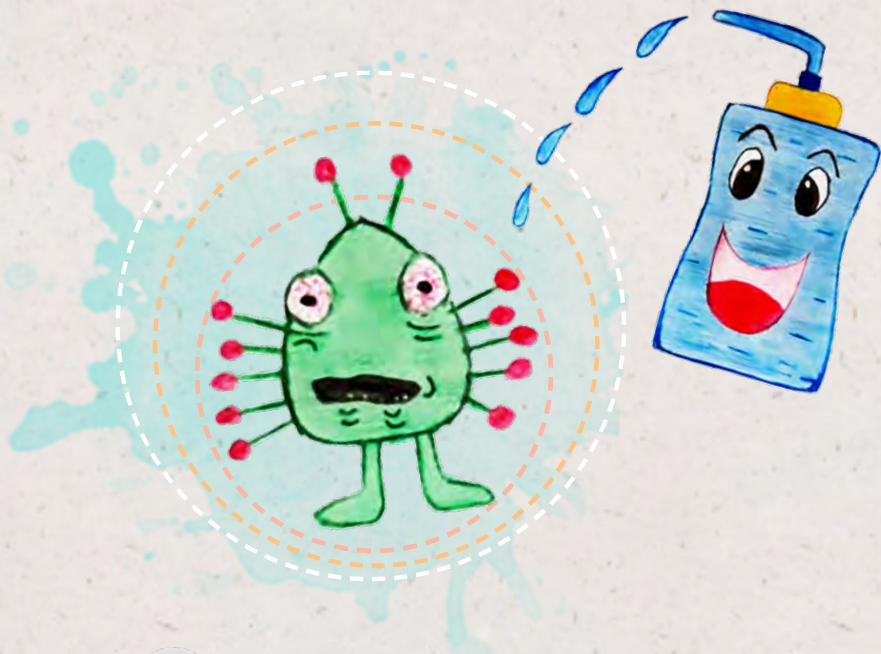
Sawsan

My name is Sawsan,
I am 18 years old

Simple Things

Before the virus and the lockdown, I saw the simplicity in my everyday life. I believed in it, and it never crossed my mind that some of those simple things I did weren't so insignificant after all.

Now, during the lockdown, I've realised that I was doing some of those simple things the wrong way, or that they should not be done at all. So, I've learned to do them the right way; before the lockdown, they were insignificant but in this short time they've become important to me.



I don't know what you think or believe about this virus and the lockdown. For me, they have served as a lesson on the importance of simplicity, and I learned not to underestimate everything I have accomplished in my life. Even the simple, daily and seemingly trivial things.

Zahra

My name is Zahra,
I am 18 years old

Let the Dust of Sorrow Be Gone

Hello my friend!

First of all, I hope you are alive and well. I miss you.

The days are difficult here. I hope they are better for you.

Today, I woke up at 15:00¹ with so many questions on my mind. There are questions for which I don't know if there is an easy answer, I just don't... Why did this happen? What happened? When will it end? When did it start? Are we all going to die? Why is everything so terrifying? And so on... But there are no answers to any of that.

I try to escape these unanswered questions, to push anxiety away, and to enjoy myself. I talk with my friends, play, watch movies, read, trying to think less about what has been happening. But it's become such a huge thing, no matter where you are. It's a watershed, leaving an imprint on everything. This disease is all over the social media and it has impacted everyone.

¹ Due to the Ramadan (Ed)

At 6:00, there will be an announcement at the camp² (*Attention... attention: the entire city is under lockdown. Avoid large gatherings. In case of an emergency, you can leave the camp but only one person per family, etc.*). This message is announced every day in many languages so everyone can understand. It's like we're in a movie.

Now that I find myself in quarantine, I understand much better the birds who are stripped of their right to fly and the animals in the zoos, forced to live in a small cage every day and not in their natural habitat. It is difficult for us and it's just as difficult for the animals to live this way every day. Aside from the animals, these days have also made me understand the situation of innocent people locked up in prisons, who are wrongfully convicted, or people fighting for years for their right to freedom. This is a very difficult situation...

Maybe we will realise that the right to freedom is precious for all living things, just as our freedom and our rights are important to us, and we are very unhappy these days. We have no right to take away anyone's freedom.

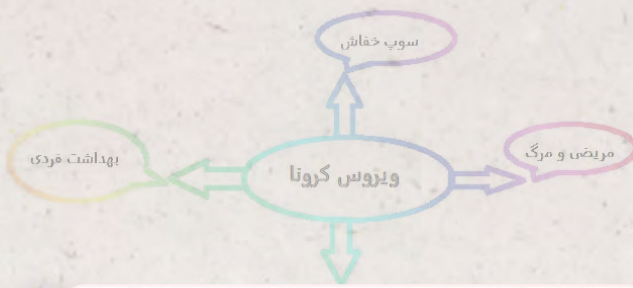
² The word "camp" is preserved because this is how all teenagers refer to the accommodation facilities no matter what language they write in (*Ed*)

I like the fact that having people in lockdown has given nature a chance. Nature that provides us with so many of the resources we need to live, giving us the oxygen that keeps us alive, but has been polluted by human activity. It has become more and more polluted and this period was an opportunity for nature to perhaps restore some of the resources that have been destroyed by people. In reality, it's a chance for nature to rebuild itself, to replenish the losses it has suffered all these years.

The lockdown was also an opportunity to be closer to our families and to appreciate them. We learned that a tiny virus -so small it is undetectable with the naked eye- can separate us from one another and take the life of someone we love. So, we must appreciate our loved ones because it may be too late tomorrow and they may not be with us any longer.

In addition, the lockdown made us remember friends with whom we've parted ways. Being refugees made us forget them or allowed them to forget us. The current situation made us understand how fleeting life is and that we may not be here tomorrow.

The future is beautiful. So many people want to become teachers, doctors, singers or something else in the future. But the future is just as scary as it is beautiful. Everyone believes the future is colourful and exciting, but it's not always the way we imagine it to be.



I'm afraid of a future I don't know. I will live a quiet life and I suppose I will eventually have a job I love. But I'm afraid of losing the people I love...

Despite that fear, my dream and my plan for my future is to live a quiet life with my family and have a good job working with computers. To accomplish what I want, I will fight my fears. I always believe that, just like anyone else, I can accomplish my goals. I will do it, I will make it happen.

I will see you again, my friend. Stay with me...

Let the dust of sorrow be gone.

Zahra

The “It could be me – It could be you” project

Project Coordinator

Nikos Govas

“The Quarantine Monologues” action

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