

# A Place of Refuge

Thursday, 2 July 2015

## Another Day in Molyvos

Tuesday morning would be our last visit to help with the refugees. It's been important to do all we can to help but it's also important for us to have a holiday. However it's hard to make that decision and far from easy. Especially as everyone is working so hard and struggling for any help offered. But at least we know we have done something and on Tuesday once again it's clear our help will be needed. As the taxi takes us past the bus stop we see a group of about 15 men already starting to make the walk.

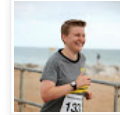
At The Captains Table we meet Tom who is from Holland but lives in Molyvos. Fami is also there and of course Melinda. In addition two other holidaymakers arrive - visiting from Holland - so we have enough help if needed. Melinda knows that a group of about 50 or 60 have landed at Eftalou and apparently there are two severely disabled people. The Dutch holidaymakers have a car so offer to at least pick them up and get them to the school. Whilst we begin the familiar routine of loading the car with supplies so everyone at least starts with refreshments. "Just another day in Molyvos" declares Tom. He is keen that they do all they can to help and that everyone works with the locals to ensure they are on side. There was a town meeting the previous week which highlighted the differing opinions. Many think helping makes it worse and if they stop people won't come any more. Most realise that's not the case - refugees will keep coming. Helping them actually means they pass through Molyvos quite quickly and don't cause any problems.

But in a country with a struggling economy and so many problems of its own you can understand why there is such fear and why burying your head and hoping this new problem will go away is a favoured option. Those working with the problem are those that have realised this isn't going to stop. In fact all you hear from those working with the refugees is an understanding this is the tip of the iceberg. The numbers will grow and grow. Each of these people has paid the traffickers \$1000 to cross from Turkey and an extra \$35 if you want the safety of a life jacket. Generally it's felt the Syrians have plenty of money when they arrive and will start to buy themselves things once they have papers. Plenty of people arrive with nothing.



Today we feed a steady stream of about 70-80 people. Mostly men from Afghanistan and a small group from Pakistan. There are some women and children and the two disabled men - one who walks with crutches and asks if we have any morphine. You wonder how he will cope with the walk to come? Yesterday had been some good news - for the first time a bus took everyone to Mytilene. They hope this is the start of things to come but due to the problems at the banks today everyone knows it isn't a lucky day for these new arrivals. What is good is that we have hats to hand out for those that don't have any head wear. The Greek sun is brutal it's 30 degrees at least. There is humour to be found as some of the men ask to exchange the bright yellow for a black hat - seems fashion is always important! Everyone is as always polite, grateful and come to

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shake our hands before leaving - allowing us to wish them luck and ensure they set off the right way.



A family from Denmark stop to speak to us and offer money. Their son (10 years old) wants to help. We explain we can't take money but they should leave it in the local supermarket where the orders for food go. The mother cries as she says she saw a woman with a baby who had a sign asking for money. Sadly we realise this isn't one of the refugees. They don't carry signs, they don't ask for money. What they have seen is the organised beggars who work the streets of Petra and Molyvos. You see small children working the beaches and taking any money back to the adults in cars. Sometimes they get rewarded with bags of crisps or sweets from the supermarket. Now they've realised if they work the refugee route people may give them more. It's a canny business move - but we have met over 500 refugees in our time here and no one has asked for money.

The friends and family of the man with crutches asks where there is a "W.C" - I have to explain no toilet - shock and disbelief as I shake my head - "but where?" the man asks me - "behind a tree" I point to the back of the car park. Again everyone is hopeful temporary toilets will be arriving soon. But soon won't provide these people with dignity today. We also talk about the walk as I provide one of the printed maps - he asks surely his friend won't have to walk. Everyone walks I explain. But you can hope that someone sees you and gives you a lift "it's chance" I say. He smiles a disappointed smile and looks to the heavens and raises his hands "this is chance!"



We clear up the little rubbish that is left once everyone has gone. The Danish journalist is back and he tells us he saw the boats arrive this morning. I ask him what things are like when they get to Mytilene - "appalling" - the holding centre has little and if you want a tent or a sleeping mat you must buy this yourself. Conditions are poor and I realise perhaps the trouble reported is justified.

Some are spending several days in unsanitary surroundings. What would we expect if we fled our homes? Imagine - suddenly that uprising we all seem so scared of in the UK actually happens and fearing for our lives we stream across the channel. Wouldn't we expect to find a toilet and some shelter when we got there?



Back at the harbour we find that a German lady who has lived in Molyvos for 30 years has paid for some new tents for the harbour camp. Now some of the people who end up here because they are rescued at sea will have some shelter whilst they wait for their bus. There is also news of a volunteer coming from Mytilene to stay a few days who speaks Arabic. He was meant to arrive today and hasn't. They hope he'll come tomorrow. We say our farewells to the new friends we've made. Saying sorry that we can't help anymore "it's okay you have only a few days left of your holiday" - is little comfort when we know for them it is relentless. But for a few hours today we've helped them to be able to stay in their restaurants or shops and try and live normal lives.



As we take the taxi back we see some of those we helped walking over the hills. The good news is that the man on crutches isn't there so we know he has been picked up. We see others resting in shade or more determined trying to get as far as they can.

Later after several hours by the pool and sitting at our villa bar having an early evening drink we see a group of men walking along the road - sadly we know this means that this afternoon more boats have arrived so the respite for those working so hard to help was short lived. I'm reminded of the kind words said to us as we left by the Greek man born on Lesbos who runs boat trips from Molyvos harbour, but helps when he can - "you have done a great job here, now it continues when you go home - change hearts and minds and make the politicians listen!"







Posted by Jo Frazer- Wise at 05:10



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