

Syrian Mother Helps Bring Emotional Healing to Kids

Miriam* sits against a wall on a pad that will double as a pallet this evening. One of the 14 people who live here—and in the small, attached room that serves primarily as a kitchen—will sleep on it.

Children slip in and out of the unfurnished room, their bare feet padding quietly against the cement floors. They do not stay long, but the presence of strangers draws them back again and again.

Miriam is the center of this world—the touchstone. Little ones race to her, flop in her lap, then are gone. Older ones settle next to her for a moment and press against her. As long as she is here—as long as they can touch her—all is well. They seek the assurance of her presence, fly off, then return at unexpected intervals when something deep jars them and they need the reassurance of her presence again.

Sometimes it is only minutes.

Conversation between the adults is quiet, strangely quiet. There should be rage, hollering, fists beating the air. Or breasts. Or the wall. It belies the suffering Miriam and her family have endured.

There is nonchalance in the telling—passion and agony have been numbed, perhaps by the retelling—the need to retell again and again—of memories that will not die, that can only be quieted.

They tell of their city in Syria tumbling about them as the shelling came closer. The loss of friends, neighbors, family in the chaos, in the desire to survive, in the seeking of something as simple as water. They tell of the cousin who

died. The son. The uncle. The husband. They talk of their journey south to Jordan and safety, crossing the desert in the night on foot because the border was closed, avoiding army patrols.

They tell of those left behind, those in hiding, wondering who will survive. Of the son still fighting. What will become of him? The uncertainty if they will ever return home.

The stories are difficult. Still the children drift in, linger, listen, drift out. They, too, are caught in the cycle. They have heard the stories before.

They have lived them.

Miriam points to a little one, not yet 10, and tells—when his brother was shot down in the street—that the boy lingered over the body long enough to raise a fist against the gunman and scream before scampering to safety.

He is brave, she says. Then weeps.

Miriam is a good mother.

There is something unnatural here. In a place filled with cycles, one cycle is broken: it is unnatural for mothers to bury their children.

Our world is filled with good mothers. Mothers whose children died too soon and did not live to bury their mothers. It matters naught the agent—disease, violence, addiction, war, foolish decisions—it matters naught. The cycle is broken.

The good mothers are left to speak in whispers of the obscenities they witnessed. To repair a breach they cannot mend. To be the center for those who remain. To be the touchstone when the unexpected jars those they love and assurance is needed once again. To join with that good mother who walked with her Son to the foot of the cross.

*Miriam is the pseudonym for a good mother.

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