

DESPERATE JOURNEY

A full-page background image showing a sunset over the ocean. The sky is filled with soft, golden light and scattered clouds. Numerous birds are seen in flight, silhouetted against the bright sun. The ocean waves are visible in the distance, and the foreground shows a sandy beach with some water.

APH PROJECT

Desperate Journey

Storyteller Idil Sen
Scenarist Mina Leila



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We dedicate this work, which is based on true stories, to the thousands of people, who are deprived of their liberty and who still face persecution in their home country, Turkey. To the innocent people of Anatolia, who had to flee their country, who are separated from their families, and who lost their lives while crossing the Aegean Sea and Maritsa (Evros) River.



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Editor's Note

After the alleged coup attempt of July 15, 2016, thousands of people lost their jobs and were subjected to court trials and proceedings on the grounds that they were Hizmet Movement members. Hundreds of people, who do not have a hope to survive in this grueling atmosphere in Turkey, are striving to leave the country illegally by venturing into the risk of crossing the border and facing death in order to live freely. There were people who drowned in this difficult and harsh journey.

The account you read is a true story, but the real names and places have been changed for the safety of the victim's family.

We would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this endeavor by preparing the visuals and dealing with the script of the narrative, and during the interview phases. Our sole wish is that the injustice and lawlessness and victimization that many have been suffering from will come to an end as soon as possible by the reestablishment of the rule of law.

About Hizmet Movement

Hizmet is a transnational civil society initiative that advocates for the ideals of human rights, equal opportunity, democracy, non-violence and the emphatic acceptance of religious and cultural diversity. It began in Turkey as a grassroots community in the 1970s in the context of social challenges being faced at the time: violent conflict among ideologically and politically driven youth, desperate economic conditions and decades of state-imposed ideology of discrimination where the un-elected members of the state penetrated excessively in people's lives and mandated a particular lifestyle.

Over the years, Hizmet has transformed from a grassroots community in Turkey to a wider social effort around the world where participants come from all walks of life — they are culturally, geographically, linguistically and religiously diverse. Their work centers on:

- Promoting philanthropy and community service
- Investing in education for cultivating virtuous individuals
- Organizing intercultural and interfaith dialogue for peaceful coexistence

Hizmet participants are inspired by the ideas, life example and vision of Fethullah Gulen, who advocated for deeper personal spiritual devotion that is expressed in social work through the understanding that serving fellow humans is serving God.

For more information: **www.afsv.org**

Introduction

(APH Project – The Project of Recording and Archiving Hizmet Movement Persecution)

Advocates of Silenced Turkey (AST) is a non-governmental organization that runs its activities on a voluntary basis. The aim of AST is to bring before international public opinion the human rights violations including torture and the unlawful court trials and proceedings, which have been encountered in Turkey for the last two years. After the coup attempt of July 15, 2016, more than 160,000 innocent people lost their jobs in both the public and private sectors, with accusations and unjust convictions of being connected with the coup attempt. When the state of emergency administration, which was announced on July 20, 2016, gave the state unlimited authority to combat the terrorist organizations, the fundamental principles of a democratic society and the most basic principles of universal human rights and values such as freedom of expression and freedom of press were devastatingly damaged. Today in Turkey more than 60,000 people from prestigious careers such as soldiers, members of the judiciary, doctors, teachers, journalists and

academics, including 16,000 women and nearly 700 children, have been detained and imprisoned.

As Advocates of Silenced Turkey, we engage in a number of activities in order not to keep silent about the injustices that have been taking place in this long period of suspension of law in Turkey.

The project of recording and archiving the testimonies of victims aims to shed light on the injustices suffered by thousands of people in Turkey. Through the endeavors of our volunteers, the victimizations and hardships that the victims experienced have been recorded both in spoken and written forms. The main purpose of this work is to ensure that the victimizations are recorded in an accurate and impartial manner. Thus future generations may come to learn and comprehend the injustices and the victimizations from firsthand sources. On the other hand, it is a lofty goal to bring the oppressions that the victims in Turkey have been and are exposed to to the attention of academics, media organizations, human rights associations, prominent community leaders and government representatives at the international level.

“Desperate Journey” is the product of a long-term endeavor. Each of our works is the compilation of real life stories encountered by real victims. However, their real names and scenes of events have not been revealed for the safety of the victim’s relatives in Turkey. We would like to thank everyone who made tireless and valuable contributions to this work, and we wish the fundamental values such as the rule of law to be established in Turkey again.

Editor's note on AST and APH Project

I Met My Husband at My Mother's Funeral!

I would like to tell my story starting from the middle; the moment when I met my husband. I cannot describe it as the best day of my life, on the contrary, it was the most unpleasant day of my life (May Allah not give us a worse one). It had been 20 years since I had lost my father. While seeing my mother off to eternity and expecting Allah to show me and my siblings a way, I would meet my future husband.

I was a young beautiful girl... Therefore, the number of candidates who proposed was pretty high. But unfortunately, not only was I an orphan because of the loss of my father; I was also an orphan from the loss of my mother. This resulted in candidates to change their mind about marrying me. They were aware that if they married me, they also would have to take care of my younger sisters. Nobody wanted to take that responsibility on their shoulders. How do I know this? From the confessions I heard from people around me. "We really liked you and wanted my son to marry you, but because of your sisters we changed our mind." was mostly what I heard. Yes...No one dared to take such a responsibility. Except for my husband...In the following years, he was going

to consider them as his own sisters, support them financially and emotionally, and not prevent me from taking care of them. The reason I mention this is to show the positive personality of my husband.

My introduction to the Hizmet Movement was through my husband. As a result of his good intentions, I had no problem entertaining guests who were visiting our home. I did not see any problem enrolling our kids in the schools affiliated with Hizmet because of the success rate of the school and they were treated lovingly by their teachers. I would have sent them to better schools if they existed, but Hizmet schools were the best. Only my kids? All the educated and elite people in my city were sending their kids to the schools of Hizmet as well because the quality was undeniable.

I was a hairdresser. I opened a salon and I was successful and had a good number of clients. Both at home and work my performance was very high.

What Happened on July 15th?

The AKP (Justice and Development Party) government and especially the President has been saying that, “The Hizmet members orchestrated the military coup” in the last two and a half years. Do you know what I was doing that day? I had just given birth and I was breastfeeding my newborn baby! My other kids were playing games that day. My husband was out of the country and called me and asked what I was doing. I said nothing and told him I was putting the baby to sleep. He asked me if I had heard the news and I replied no and asked him what was wrong.

My mother-in-law and sister-in-law were with us and we immediately switched on the television. What is a coup? How is it performed? I had no answers to these questions. The bridge was blocked, tanks, some soldiers...My father-in-law searched the TV channels and told us that we did not have to panic because he had witnessed military coups in the past and it was clear to him that this was not a coup.

The following day was the weekend and I had a lot to do for some brides since I was a hairdresser. I was texting with the brides, I was scared and told them that I could not get out of my home because I had a little baby. I said, “Please check around and if it is not a real coup then I can come there”. The next day my staff and I were able to meet and I was able to do their hair for the weddings. Some of these young brides had to cancel their weddings, and those who didn't cancel had to have their wedding ceremonies in a simple setting. We thought that the July 15th coup came and past but we would come to realize that many innocent people would suffer the aftermath.

Your Passports are Missing!

Our financial situation was not bad and my husband would occasionally go out of the country. In fact, he was hoping for us to live abroad. He was talking more about it the past couple of years. Then I got pregnant. Since I found it difficult to go on an adventure while pregnant, I encouraged him to travel and find out the possibilities for us to live, work and be happy. If he found a place, I would move there, but if not he would come back. I could not dare to change my life for an uncertainty.

My husband had left the country in March, many months before the coup attempt. In fact, he was a civil servant but since I just gave birth at that time, he used his bi-yearly paternal leave and flew to the US. He had been planning to settle there and wanted to take us. I had wanted the same, but was waiting for our baby to get a little older. Then the July 15th incident happened.

All the personal days of civil servants were cancelled, they did the same for my husband and wanted him to come back home. However, as we considered the general situation of the country, this did not make any sense to us. What made sense was for us to go to him. But we unfortunately had not applied for our American visas. Because of this situation, my husband told me to go to Germany and wait for the visa process there. There was nothing wrong with this, because we went abroad many times, and since I had been attending many occupational workshops I had a Schengen Visa.

A short time later we bought tickets and went to the airport with my kids. There, the airport officials were going to confiscate our passports and

shamelessly tell us that our passports were lost. I said, “How come they are lost? Here, I hold them in my hand!” Because we were a well-known family in the city, people began to look at us. They began to approach us and tried to see what would happen to us. They took us from a room to another a couple of times and in the last room, they put a paper on the table which was stating that our passports were lost and they ordered us to sign it. I got mad and refused to sign it. I had left the country many times and there was no reason to deny my departure. I was holding them in my hand and showed the official that I owned them. All of a sudden he grabbed them and took them and I had to sign it involuntarily.

We ended up returning back home. I could not even understand what had happened and I was so upset. In the following days, the rumors about us were going to spread more, people were going to tell lies about us and this was going to make me even sadder. I was so sad that I wasn't able to go to work for several days.

Police Coming to Our House

For a while I didn't leave the house due to my sorrow. Then one morning, our doorbell rang. I covered my head with a scarf and as I half-opened the door, I saw many policemen standing there. I told them my state of dress was not proper and I would let them in the house if they would hold on a second. I was told not to shut the door and a female police officer entered the home and told me to get dressed.

The woman was going to come to my bedroom and I was going to change in front of her. The baby was crying loudly in the cradle and she did not even let me pick her up. But I insisted and moved to get my baby. Right when I turned towards the crib I notice the Quranic prayer that was written in Mr. Fetuallah Gulen's cursive handwriting hanging on the side. Since I knew that it would be kept as evidence against me, I grabbed it silently. Then I told the lady officer that I had to go to the bathroom to change my baby's diaper. I needed to get rid of the paper or hide it, but since it was a Quranic verse and I wanted to respect it, I was not able to throw it away. Thus, I took it in my mouth, chewed over and over and swallowed.

Then the policewoman who entered my home told me that she was leaving and closing the door and wanted me to open the door when she rang the bell. She told me that they were going to enter the house, read our rights and search the house again. I was confused about what was going on but then I figured out that they had needed a staged show where they would videotape the operation.

As I opened the door again, they rushed into the house all together, and they talked about my husband being a member of a terrorist organization, FETO (An abbreviation for a false terrorist organization) and they searched everywhere one more time. After the coup attempt we had to throw all of our books away or get rid of them somehow since newspapers, CDs, and books were considered serious criminal evidence. We had to remove our books which could fill half of a big truck. This was devastating to us since they were all valuable books from which we had always benefited when something was bothering us.

But some of them we somehow forgot to hide and the policemen could see what we had not been able to see. One sermon video of Mr. Gulen, one old Zaman newspaper issue and a Sizinti magazine. This was all the necessary evidence they needed to accuse us of being terrorists. Not weapons, pistols, or knives, but newspapers and magazines...

Of course the search took hours. It is our tradition that no matter who they are, if someone visits our home, we always host them nicely. While they were looking for evidence to prove that we were terrorists, I was serving fruit, water, juice, napkin etc. to them. They were both eating what we offered and trying to prove that we were criminals. It was a tragic and comical scene. They were acting the opposite when the cameras were on. They were asking, "Did your husband go to religious gatherings, was he an active Hizmet member, did people from Hizmet come to your home?" I responded, "I told you I don't know anything. Surely my husbands' friends used to visit us but this cannot be a crime! We sometimes had gatherings with my friends."

They exaggerated everything so much that they even reviewed my son's cartoon videos and confiscated them. I got mad and eventually lost my temper. I shouted at a policeman, "Stop this nonsense! Isn't it clear that these are only cartoons? How could you take them as criminal evidence?" In a very angry manner he said, "How can I know its content?" I asked him how he could

confiscate something as criminal evidence without knowing its content but he could not give any answer.

Finally, after searching my home for hours, they confiscated my kids' and sister in law's computers, my cell phones and many other things. I reacted since it was my work phone. There were private pictures of my clients that I was using in my social media accounts after I received permission. All the phone numbers of my clients and all my business life was in that cell phone. I begged them to take the others and to leave that one with me but they did not listen. As they were leaving with all our belongings, they did not give us any documentation. The meaning of this was that we would never be able to get back our laptops, tablets, cell phones which were holding all our memories of our past including my kids' baby pictures and videos.

And what was worse was, since the police brought the building manager and the custodian with them together, many bad rumors were going to spread among the neighbors. We were one of the first families who were raided by the police after July 15th and both my husbands absence and the police raid to our home was going to result in much gossip and lies about us. Things were going to get so bad that I sometimes would not be able to enter the apartment building. I was going to my shop, working and coming back and crying. This was all I could do.

My Kids' School is Being Shut Down!

In addition to all this tragedy, my kids' school was shut down in the following days. As I mentioned previously, there was no better school in the city. Allah knows it that I never worried for my kids when they were in that school. We were able to obtain all the education for science, social activities, and character. Both my husband and I were working hard and as a result we had sometimes forgot the kids at school. But every time I remembered and went to the school late, I always found the teachers with my kids together. I did not even worry about my kids for a single day while they were there.

Now, their school was shut down and we got into a dark atmosphere where we did not know what to do next. The kids were out of school and we didn't know what school to send them to and if they would adjust. They were all unknown.

Eventually, one of the family friends helped me enroll my kids in a neighborhood school with his kids. Our goal was to keep the kids together and they could overcome these problems more easily. Unfortunately, while attending the school, the principal asked for a bribe shamelessly and insulted us as well. He said, "You could give a lot of money to that private school. So you should give us money as well!" And unfortunately, the friend of ours had to bribe the principal to be able to have him register our kids. There was no justice left in the country and as a result there was no place we could file a complaint.

In the first day of the school, in order for my kids to adapt more easily, I went to the school with them . I was trying to keep them from any insults and

did not leave them alone. Unfortunately, the government made a big propaganda video about July 15 and at the beginning of the school, parents and students had to watch it. They were spreading lies and claiming that Fethullah Gulen was a bad person who was Jewish and an enemy of Turks, and his sympathizers were all immoral people who were trying to take over the world. With all these lies, they were polarizing all the people in the country. There was a countrywide witch hunt against the members of Hizmet and my kids hated the school the very first day because of this. I consoled them and told them not to be sad. I told them their father was not a bad person and did not hurt anybody.

In the following days, my son who was in middle school was unfortunately going to be isolated by his teacher and classmates. He was well-educated in his previous school and could not adapt to the new school. His classmates were messing with him and as a result he got involved in some fights. I learned this later and he told me that he could not take it when they said bad things about his father. To hear these kind of things was so depressing.

I Sold My Home and Car!

In the following days, the social pressure increased so much that I could not even get in or out of my home. As a matter of fact, since my mother-in-law was taking care of my baby, I had begun to stay in her home. I heard that there were more police raids in my home and finally I decided to sell it.

This was naturally not easy for my kids and myself. I did not have my husband, friends, or school environment that we had before. Absolutely nothing! In addition to all of this, one of my clients took a picture of the “For Sale” sign in the window and shared it with everybody. I felt so humiliated. It would not be true if I said I never got depressed but for a while, I didn't even leave my home. As I was doing this, they would end up spreading more rumors that I had gone to jail.

We moved to my mother-in-law's home, but my father-in-law was a difficult person. My sister-in-law was attending university in Istanbul and my mother-in-law was staying with her during the school semester. However, since I gave birth and alongside this I was facing a lot of problems, she decided not to leave me alone and stayed with us. As a solution to not get her daughter in trouble, she sent my father-in-law instead and she stayed with me.

However, after a while, my father-in-law came back. Apparently, there was a problem between them. He began to complain to his wife about us, “We look after them. Let somebody else take care of them. You will come with me to Istanbul or else I will divorce you!” Before we could figure out what was happening, they immediately went to Istanbul for a few days. This would make

our lives even more difficult because my baby had gotten used to her grandmother and I had to find someone to look her after.

I couldn't find anyone to babysit. I even offered to pay beforehand if someone would accept. Nobody did. I asked my sister and she accepted. Something was wrong with my baby, we were not able to calm her down. She cried so much that we decided to take her to the doctor. The doctor was going to tell me that the baby's ear burst and this was too much pain even for an adult. I began to ignore my job because I wasn't able to worry about it. I was busy with my baby's recovery and was still trying to get her used to her aunt. By this time, we had sold our home and car and I was not going out often. Even though there were so many rumors going on about me, I was still thanking Allah for my situation. People were feeling sorry for me and nobody was reporting me to the police. I was very sure that I would go to jail if someone reported me. Many mothers were going to jail with their babies and these were such horrible days for everybody.

The end of semester break was over and my mother-in-law was back. I was going to leave the baby with them, go to work, and see all the people who were talking behind my back, making innuendos while smiling at my face and asking ridiculous questions. I was following my husband's advice and not responding or arguing with them. I only argued with a girl who had been one of my customers for years. She was a well-educated and nice girl who was working as the public relations coordinator of a company. One day she said, "Sister, I want to ask you a question if you don't mind. They claim that you are a courier and you transfer money in suitcases when you go abroad. Is that true?"

It was such a stupid question that I could not take it anymore. I said, "Don't take it wrong but if I were so rich why would I put up with your terrible mouth smell? I would stay home and take care of three kids happily. Besides, do I fly on a jet so I can carry money in suitcases? I fly in the economy class and the

amount of money I can carry is known. Please add some intelligence to your question!”

There was certainly a decline in the number of my customers. Alongside the people who didn't come to my shop, there were also people who were telling me that they liked me, but not my ideas. The ones who were still my customers were the ones who really liked my business or the ones who wanted to gossip. Sometimes they were trying to talk behind my back with my employees and get information about me by asking questions. Allah knows that I never responded to them and ignored them.

I was not surprised by the rumors that spread about us or by the people who were happy for the raids against my home. I was only feeling pity for them. Even my mother who passed away 18 years ago was born in this town. I mean, these people knew us from our babyhood and they also appreciated my husband a lot. My husband always looked after my sisters, provided education for them, and help them get married. Now, all of a sudden, he happened to be a terrorist!

The time was passing by...My husband was far away and my kids and I were without him for a year. Because his passport expired, he had to apply for asylum. We were living among the people who lost their mind in this open prison. Our passports were cancelled and he had to stay abroad for the fear of arrest. We had to accept our destiny and were waiting for the day when our Lord would make us come together again.

During this time because of the problems I was having with my father-in-law, I had to rent a home in my sister's name and I bought a small car. I found a good school and enrolled my kids in there. Although my husband was not there, we could get our life together. However, we were still living in the state of fear.

But then things began to get much worse because the government increased their brutality and illegality under the state of emergency. We began to hear that they were arresting the women whose husbands fled the country and they were also giving the kids of those families to orphanages. Their goal was to force their main target to come back to the country. As the number of these cases began to increase, my husband and I became really anxious with the fear of facing the same problems.

We were talking on the phone every day. He was crying and I was doing the same...What would we do if we faced those problems? I was trying to hide it from my kids but whenever I happened to see a policeman, I either changed my way, hid, or buried my head in the glove box. Our life was based on fear and we were continuously in state of anxiety and stress.

We are Leaving the Country Illegally!

My husband came up with a solution. He was going to help us to flee the country. But how? He told me to leave it to him. I got excited and regained my hope.

One day he called me whispering and told me to find \$50,000, go to a park, and give the money to a guy there waiting. Although I was confused, I did what he said. But I was not going to take the money there, instead, I was going to have it done by a friend. After a while, that friend called me in panic and told me that someone took the money and left! The guy told him that he was going to bring the passports but what if he did not? There was nothing to do and I could only say "I trust Allah and there is nothing to do but wait."

Finally, after a nervous couple of weeks of waiting, my husband called me again. I only figured out when he began to say mysterious words like, "Same place...Go there again..." It was like a movie scene and I went there and began to wait. What was the guy like? How would I know him? I did not know anything. Eventually, I would somehow find the passports. My husband reminded me many times not to leave the passports at home. In the following days, I was going to keep the passports with me at all times. In conclusion, we spent a huge amount of money on them and I was literally almost stuck to them until I received a phone call from my husband...

He called me again and told me that we had to go to a harbor city. A relative of mine was going to meet with us there. I was going to tell my kids that we were going to a vacation but they could take only one pair of shoes and clothes with them. They were confused about what kind of vacation it was. I told them we

were going to buy more when we arrived there and their father arranged this vacation. They did not question further when I stated this. They even cheered up.

I was going to be even more shocked when I arrived. We stayed in my relative's home and my husband called me and told me that we were going to leave the country illegally. What? Aren't we going to take a flight? He answered no and told me that we were going to go to Greece by a boat. Per his statements I began to cry. I could never ever do this! I could not dare to do this! My relative said, "Sister don't get me wrong but not with three kids, if I were only by myself, I would not take this risk." And this made me even more scared. My husband got mad at me since I was having a dilemma and told them not to scare me. He told them not to interfere and make me change my mind and that he wanted the best for his family.

I requested some time to think over it and hung up the phone. My relative was still saying the same. I knew my husband was a sensible person. This was something I tested so many times in my 18-year marriage. Whenever I did not listen to him, I always regretted it and suffered. He never misled me in the past. Finally, I made up my mind and decided to go as he said!

...

We had to go to another city. I was feeling as if I was going to my death and going to learn that they cried a lot for us. At the end, we started a journey where we did not know whether we were walking to the arrival or departure from our loved ones.

We spent a huge amount of money but it was apparently a very well-organized trip. One cab driver was taking us and after a while transferring us to another cab. There was a well-organized group set. Anyway, after a nervous trip for 10 days, without knowing what was waiting for us, we were going to arrive at the Rhodes Island to stay in our new address.

We are Regretful and Want to Go Back!

It was the 22nd of the August...It was a luxurious boat like a cruise yacht. We were told that our trip would take approximately 9 hours. The captain was going to take us to our destination by visiting different places. What was waiting for us was not only uncertainty and fear. We all got seasick! We were terribly dizzy and throwing up continuously. It was so bad that even though there was nothing left in our stomach, we were still vomiting. I began to think that we could not complete that trip. I called my husband and had to tell him our situation and apologized to him for not continuing our trip.

In a state of panic, he was going to contact the middleman and hear the answer that we were okay and vomiting was not a big problem when you compare it to staying back. It was maybe easy for him but neither me nor my kids had any strength to go on. My husband called me again and begged me to endure some more and told me that everything would be better with Allah's help. All in all, he was trying to reach us.

Me and my kids decided to be patient no matter what happened to us. I am grateful to the captain because he acted quickly and we arrived at the Rhodes Island in 4 and half hours. It was an awkward feeling and we were one step closer to being a family again.

The person who met with us helped us move to a home where we were going to stay for 4 days, fulfill our needs, buy tickets for our flight, and go to an airport. He said "You will continue alone from this point." Our tickets were for

Brussels and our friends from the Hizmet Movement were going to meet us there.

In a state of nervousness, we began to wait for the check-in process. The passports were real but because we left Turkey illegally, there was no seal on them. They immediately took us to a police station. What if they sent us back to Turkey? In a foreign country, I was in a police station with my three kids and had the language barrier as well. My older son was trying to communicate with his limited English and my baby was crying continuously. Helplessly, I called my husband and told him that we were detained. He requested to talk with the police. In fact, this was not possible but since he felt sad for my helplessness and fear, the police commander accepted this request.

My husband had a long talk with the man and told him that we were not criminals but we had to flee from a dictator's brutality. He begged the police commander to let us leave and reach him. The police commander checked his watch and told me that we should hurry because our plane was about to take off. I cannot express how much me and my sons were relieved. I was thankful since we could overcome this obstacle. We took the plane without facing any problems and flew to Brussels comfortably.

Hello Europe!

A young couple who were members of the Hizmet Movement met us in Brussels. It was so cold for us after Turkey and Rhodes Island that they took off their jackets and put them on my kids. In order to make us feel more comfortable, they offered to take us to a hotel which they had already reserved. But we were so scared and anxious that we were shaking. I told them honestly that me and my kids were so afraid, we did not want to go to a hotel and would like to stay at their home with them. The young wife was a lovely person. She smiled warmly and stated that it would be an honor for them to host us in their home.

That woman whom I did not know at all, hosted us so nicely that it was impossible not to be impressed. Her husband was going to stay at his mother's home to make us feel more comfortable and we were going to take a good sleep in a peaceful place after all these difficulties we had. We happened to find ourselves at a wonderful breakfast in the morning..

After a couple of days shopping for winter clothes for my kids and myself, we were going to pass to Germany with the help of the beautiful people of the Hizmet. They were such good people that we were not scared or worried when we were with them . As a matter of fact, we stayed in the house of a brother who was on vacation. They were so humble and nice that they could even give their homes' keys to people whom they did not know.

My husband told me that we would stay in Germany for 15 days but the length of time increased to one month. The Eid holiday was just ahead. We

were going to spend our time there but would not get bored for even a single day. Each day someone different hosted us at their homes, showed us around, and served food to us. Indeed, none of those people was expecting any profit but the sake of Allah.

I had a chance to listen to their stories when I stayed in Germany. Some fascist Turks who were supporting the dictator in Turkey unfortunately existed in Germany as well and they were doing their best to give a hard time to the people like us. They started a social lynch campaign, were isolating those people, invading their shops, and spreading lies about them. Evil was evil everywhere. The victims of the dictator were unfortunately dealing with this kind of problems as well.

We Say Goodbye Three Times...

We were just getting used to Germany when my husband called and told us that we were going to fly to Mexico City. We said goodbye to people but we were going to learn that the time zone difference caused us to leave one day early. We had to go back confused.

Same stress the next day...We packed up, said goodbye and hit the road again. We were about to get in the airplane when my husband called and told me not to fly. The officials detained the Turkish family who arrived there before us and interrogated them for hours. Because, we needed to go there as tourists and if you cannot make them believe you, they would send us back to Turkey and we would not have another chance. I learned afterwards that it was the only entry point and in order not to scare me more, he did not mention it.

But our luggage was already in the plane so what could we do? There was nothing to do. The luggage, plane tickets, hotel reservations were all gone to trash. We had to go back to Germany and were going to be confused as we arrived there. Because the people there got so sad that they cried for us to leave and became so happy as they met us again.

We bought tickets for the following week and hit the road again. My older son told me "Mom let's not say goodbye to each other for Allah's sake! We have to come back and become funny." Fortunately, we were going to make it this time. However, we were scared of leaving the airport since we did not have a seal on the passports. They were brand new and clean. My husband had

warned me about being ready for all possibilities. We were completely at the hand of the interrogation officer. We could wait for hours or pass easily. I was doing what my husband told me to do. He told me to use body language to communicate with the officer and the kids not to have a conversation at all. As a result, when the officer asked me why the passports were so new, I was not going to say something but make gestures meaning I did not know. He was going to get mad and order me to speak English or German, but I would still remain silent. I continued this psychological battle for 15 minutes but would be able to pass eventually.

Me and my son could not believe that we made it as we sat in the plane. We had been really afraid. We were flying to Cancun and my husband relieved me by saying that two lawyers were waiting for us there. If we faced any challenges, they were going to help us.

Anyway, some people met us there. As they were dropping us off at the hotel, they told us that we were going to stay there for 3 days. I was so afraid that I said "For the sake of Allah, please take us in the shortest possible time! We do not want to wait more!". As a response they said "I can take you but you will have jetlag and cannot endure it". I begged him that I did not care and wanted to move on immediately, if possible early in the morning.

Therefore, we moved to Mexico City by a car early in the morning. We were going to move to another city after we stayed there for a night. Of course with our guide...In the airplane, everyone had a dark skin except for us. The guide told us to pray to not be a suspect in order to not to be detained. We were very close to freedom...

We got out of the plane by saying prayers. We were faking to be happily chatting with my kids while I was having so much fear inside me which only Allah could know how much. However, I was also feeling that an invisible hand was going to take and help us! It was as if our fate was being written while we were walking alongside a narrow hallway. Lastly, when a soldier touched my

shoulder I felt an extreme fear. Luckily it was only to warn me to put our luggage on the X-Ray device.

Finally, we were going to leave the airport. The guide told me that his part finished then and we were going to continue by ourselves. But how? He was going to take us to the border and we were going to walk from that point. We were right in the middle of the movie "The journey to hope". We were not going to have our phones anymore. For the last time, I talked with my husband and the lawyer in Mexico. The lawyer told us that we needed to pass the border, he would follow us, this trip would be difficult but we did not need to worry. We were starting another stressful trip again!

To Walk Alongside the Mexican Border is in Our Destiny!

Our guide left us at the Mexican Border after having us eat food. He wished us luck and we began to walk quickly with the luggage in our hands. Everywhere was full of people like us who were walking with luggage in their hands. We were speeding up as they were speeding up and they were doing the same as we were speeding up.

Out of breath, we finally reached the end of the long line. Although the lawyer reminded me many times, I was going to forget the word “Asylum” and feel panicked. Eventually, my son typed it in the cellphone and showed it to the man “We seek asylum”.

Then they took us to another room. They wanted us to take off our earrings, necklaces, belts, etc. and we were happy. I mean we could make it and were granted asylum. We were expecting to be greeted and move on easily. We were going to be able to figure out the reality in the following hours. Then they took us and we began to proceed through an endless hallway such that it was so cold and they were locking the doors from behind as we passed through them. We began to feel anxious. That anxiety reached the maximum degree as they told me that my son cannot accompany me more! But why?

They separated us in tears. I was crying while my son was screaming “Mom!”. The little ones also began to burst into tears too but they forced us to separate. They were going to take us to the women and children dorm and my older one was going to be taken to the adult men dorm. I could not speak English and as if that is not bad enough, now they were separating me from my

son. Our cry was echoing in the hallways. We had a serious trauma and left each other in tears. My poor son cried so much and kicked the walls that they decided to let us see each other for 10 minutes. We were both scared, helpless and did not know what was waiting for us.

In that very cold room, as I was about to fall asleep wrapping my little ones around, the big iron door cracked open noisily. One man came there and announced my name. Try to imagine a room with no windows and no time. You do not know whether it is day or night, or for how many hours you are there.

They took me to interrogation. I could express myself with the help of an online certified interpreter. Why did you pass the border? Who and what are you? I told them that my and my husband's family were members of the Hizmet and I was a sympathizer as well. They asked everything from my job to the city I was born in. I told them that I was seeking asylum since we did not have safety in Turkey and they could take my kids away from me there. I had a lot of trouble but I could not live without my kids. As they listened to me the policemen began to understand our situation and apologized to us for treating us badly and stated that they did not know what happened to us. Afterwards, they were going to be incredibly nice to me and my son who was staying in another room. Even, one of the policemen visited my son and consoled him that it was a temporary process and it had to be like that for a while.

We were going to stay separated from my son and I cried because of this situation continuously. Then, I was going to be interrogated under oath. All in all, what I was telling them was not fiction and I was going to talk about the same things again. We were the people who were paying tax, not committing any crime, ordinary citizens and the government staged a fake coup to be able to name hundreds of thousands of innocent people as terrorists. Finally, they asked me what I expect from the US. I said "Nothing. I only want my right to be a free person."

We were going to stay there for the following 2 days. To know that my poor son's eyes were getting bloodshot and not having an appetite to eat anything was pushing my patience. Time was passing by so hard, I was crying here and he was crying there. At last, I wanted them to let my other son stay with his elder brother by using hand signs. They fortunately did not deny my request because my older one was going to tell me later "Everybody was speaking Spanish around, the lights were too bright, the mattresses were on the floor, the toilets were getting plugged, I could not sleep at all and was about to go insane. As he came, I began to talk and was relieved with his help"

When it comes to me, I was getting my courage from my baby. In the days that felt like centuries to us, even though he could not speak, I was talking to him, holding his hand while he was sleeping and gaining strength from him. I surrounded him with blankets and when I was making a signal that he was sleeping, nobody was approaching us.

Then, they transferred us to another place by busses. In our new place, we were staying in a police station like place during the day time and then being taken to a hotel like one at night. To keep the doors closed was not allowed but at least we had private restrooms and beds. My baby could unfortunately not take any other food but mother milk. He was naturally not able to eat the sandwiches given to us. We were receiving one cup of milk and grateful even for this. We were going to stay there for 6 days. The same routines were in place every day. We were searched during both getting on the buses and hotel rooms, taken to different rooms all the times. It was the same for days and nights.

In the 10th day, we became happy too early again when they said they were going to transfer us. The kids were so happy with the hope of reaching their father. Just then, we were grouped into 3 families each and each groups were assigned a civil servant for them. One of the civil servants told my son that we look like rich people and he could go to New York like the other teenagers. My

awesome son was going to answer him in a mature way and say “It had to be that way”.

We were going to have the biggest embarrassment as we were taken to the airport. They first took us to a room like a laundry and made us wear tracksuits after taking all of our clothes (The baby’s clothes as well) including our socks. All the groups were dressed the same color. Tracksuits which make it clear for the other people that we were fugitives. I was so embarrassed and sad that I could not keep my head up and look at anybody’s face.

Later on, I was going to learn that one civil servant asked my son why he was sad and heard that I was sensitive about clothes and did not become happy with the tracksuits. As a result, he favored us and gave the shoes, jacket, and the sweaters of the kids back. I was at least able to get rid of the slippers on my feet and this relieved me a little.

I was planning to meet my husband when I got off of the airplane and was relieved with the thought of the nightmare ending. Furthermore, as the plane landed, I requested the civil servants to give my pants back since I did not want my husband to see me in these tracksuits. But the female civil servant told me that I needed to be a little more patient and there was some more left.

Another Camp!

As we got in the car, it was raining so heavily and we were going to have another trip full of fear through muddy fields. As we arrived the trailers which were placed into the middle of a scary field which were fenced with bars like the ones in prisons, they were going to make us wear tracksuits, have X-Ray, blood test etc. again. And questions...Questions like "Have you been raped or harassed sexually? Are you pregnant?" which should be normal but at that moment, I felt humiliated and began to cry. Luckily we have never had those kind of problems but it was apparently occurring some times. It was like this nightmare would never end!

And the photo taking process...My nerves were shot and I was crying continuously. They took my photo as my eyes were bloodshot. They already contacted my husband and I was going to cry more as I heard his voice.

It was midnight when we were placed in that trailer we were brought to at 6 am to complete the process, where to close the curtains and to go out were absolutely not allowed. We were extremely tired and fell asleep immediately. We were sleeping for almost an hour and got awoken and taken out again. I took the baby and left but had no strength or motivation left.

In the office that we were taken, there were a lot of papers for us to sign. We were dumbfounded as the civil servants left after the signatures. What were we waiting for? All of a sudden my husband came inside! That moment was indescribable. As if we met him after long years, both him and us began to cry. We hugged each other, cried, cried, and cried...

In the following 17 days, we were going to stay in the camp and my husband was going to visit us from time to time. But I cannot define how difficult it was. We were going to different places every day. For example, you are waiting for the kids' shots and as you are waiting in the line they become sick then go to the doctor line, and then medicine line. They also give medicine only enough for minimum usage. People are blowing their nose on their clothes and flies caused by germs get on you. A healthy person would be sick in that doctor line.

Food is another problem because they mostly cook Mexican food and we cannot eat it. Kids cannot eat, babies cannot eat but they never treat us badly. Especially the cafeteria workers were loving us a lot. The woman who was distributing the food was giving extra pot soup and pointing at the baby to make me feed him. They were so happy for us the day we were finally leaving the camp.

Days were passing and we were somehow getting used to the camp. One day, they suddenly called us to an interview. As I was waiting my turn, my name was going to be announced and I was going to be surprised because my name was pronounced correctly for the first time. I figured out how it happened as I got inside. There was a young girl who was the daughter of a Turkish father and a German mother who apologized to me for not being aware of us after such a long stay. She really felt sad about us being there with a little baby. I was thanking her over and over again but she was telling me that it was her responsibility to help us and people like us shouldn't be there for such a long time. Indeed, me and my kids were suffering from vomiting and diarrhea, the baby was not able to make his toilet since he was not eating much. It was not allowed to bring food from outside. In short we were all miserable.

At Last!

Finally, the time came...We were at the end of the gathering adventure which took weeks. I cannot skip the see off part since it was so awesome. As if we were their relatives, the camp workers came and hugged us and said goodbye to us. As we were leaving with my husband and kids I said "Alhamdulillah! Alhamdulillah! (Oh Allah Thank you!)

It was not a very long time that we started a new life with the belief of the bad days we had were gone. We kind of reset our lives. How is it to start a new life while so many innocent people are arrested? We feel sad, cry, pray to Allah for them but we have to hold on to life as well.

My husband was a hardworking person in Turkey. He used to help everybody. He sometimes exaggerated it and neglected us while he was helping the people in need. To be honest, our family ties got tighter recently. We leaned on each other more because we felt the agony of being separated and really tried hard to meet again.

Contrary to many friends of ours, we have been able to bring our savings from our assets' sales. This made things easier for us. Even though I could not perform my job again, my husband started a new business. Our Lord gave us a chance for a new start and hopefully the other friends will be able to do the same.

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Desperate Journey

The adventure of life.. The things lived.. The chain of events that come about in our lives... A life into the unknown, full of excitement and enthusiasm, but also equal parts of danger and risk... An escapade... All of these descriptions are true; yet they still fall short of truly describing the story of Ms. Idil. Sometimes one needs to dig deeper than the words in order to be able to see the crystal clarity of some stories.

The adventure called life, described in some dictionaries as the "flow of water". When described in such words, it helps you take in and deeply feel the adventures that Ms. Idil and her children have gone through. All of a sudden when you hear the word "ma' " (Arabic word for water) you don't just think of water anymore. A single drop of water turns into a flowing river at times, or a lake, or a sea, or maybe even an ocean. A drop of water becomes a human being. At times it becomes the fine line between life and death. And then it becomes a whole different phenomenon. At times, you paint the color of water into a beautiful blue or a magnificent green; it speaks of hope and joy and life. Other times, it falls out of your hands and covers itself in a cloak of pitch black. It reminds you of fear and sorrow and anger, even death in its most unrelenting form. Sometimes, it separates you, far away from the ones you love... a union that is put off until the life after. And yet there are times when roads are joined and that single drop of water becomes a friend, a companion, it helps you overcome obstacles and becomes the means by which you are reunited.

The story of Ms. Idil and her children is a story of patience, of submission, of struggle and trust, alongside anger, disappointment and indecision, a story of fear and tears. When you know that the story is anything but fiction, the way you look at your surroundings, the way you behold people and objects is transformed. As you look once more at the blessings you have, and you witness, or listen to the struggle of others who are striving to hold on to those same things, you are awakened with the reality that these are not merely words being expressed. Things such as freedom, and family, and a calling so great that you are willing to devote your whole being to it...