Amira

By Reyna Ayala

I look around. White tents are everywhere, packed with people of all shapes and sizes. Children solemnly glancing around, their freedom stolen, everything reminds them of Syria. The white tent beside me fills with the sound of a baby crying. All of the camp's population: refugees from Syria, a horrific warzone. I enter a tent and see a child sleeping, then quickly think of Azaz, my hometown. The moment I snapped.

Bombing everywhere. Ummi, my siblings and I squeezed together by my father's embrace. Abbi's hand rested on my shoulder. We were all down in a cellar room, which was dark and cold.

Once we exited the room, when the Azaz bombing had stopped, we came to see the rubble. The school building turned to ruins. I could make out a poster that once hung in my classroom. Our house made of nothing but rubble. My doll laid between two bricks of our past home. With an airy feeling, I made my way to my doll. I picked it up and squeezed it tight, but felt nothing different.

I saw my neighbors all looking around, searching for anything left. Still stunned, I joined them. I didn't know what to look for. Reassurance? But nothing did so. I couldn't believe my eyes.

I uncovered a hand. This hand seemed familiar. The arm, shoulder, head and face now showing. Could it be? No. It couldn't, but she's there. I collapsed upon Jodee, my now dead best friend. Just yesterday she had been smiling, laughing. And now she never will. I felt helpless, so I sobbed. I pounded on her chest and yelled.

"Amira!" my brother, Ahmed, yelled. He always looked out for me. This was the only time he could not. Ahmed helped me to my feet, but I kept resisting. I slapped his arms. He had to let me be with Jodee. I did this until I fell weak from exhaustion and sobbing.

I crawled next to Jodee and reached out for her hand. She didn't reach back.

"Amira Kurdi?" my teacher asks.

"Present," I respond. Today is yet another day of drawing, because of the lacking in books. They say it's to ease trauma. Then why doesn't it work? I can't seem to tell anyone anything through a picture. I just need to use words.

After completing attendance, we begin on personal projects. I sit and wait for my thoughts to ease. A girl rises next to me to retrieve art supplies. She turns her head and I stare into her deep, brown eyes. The same eyes Jodee had.

"Jodee!" I yelled. I was furiously hitting against my brother's arms until my fist loosened and I lost my strength. My legs gave way and I fell down into the rubble. I crawled to Jodee with my last burst of energy. She didn't reach over. She didn't stand, laugh, or talk. She didn't look into my eyes, just up and into nothing. Jodee had lost me.

I sulk into returning back to the hard truth. Surrounding myself are more than 40 child refugees. Reaching for a pen and paper, all I can think about is Jodee. It is not fair that she had to suffer from someone else's problems. War kills so many, too many, for humanity to withstand. We need to stop war and begin peace. Why? Why do we kill? Why do we hurt? Why does anyone need pain or loss? Who benefits from war?

If I were to stand up and talk to the people, would they listen? Would they be inspired then go back to shooting guns? Would they ever follow through? I would never be able to speak to the people who could make change, for I am stuck here in a Turkish camp filled with white tents and scarred children. Maybe if I write a speech it will come true. I hope so.

*War. Injustice. The words make us quiver. If so, why? Why cause them if we all fear them, disrespect them, suffer from them? It can't just be ignorance or lack of knowledge... or can it? I, like many, saw violence and war. I snuggled up in my bed each night, falling asleep to the rhythm of gunshots. I saw my optimistic best friend become uncovered in the rubble of her home. My childhood lost, why not throw in my innocence? Of course, I'm not the only one who has seen these things but I may be the only one who will stand up. But think about this: if I have experienced these events then many other children have as well. This is not justice; it isn't right to put humans through this trauma. We come together, overthrow the obstacles and become united as one. But is it that easy? We cannot convert to fighting violence with violence, fire with fire. Then it is a long path ahead, filled with risks only some are willing to take.*

*I heard of this boy, Iqbal Masih, who has inspired me greatly. He was born in Pakistan then, four years later, sold as a child slave to a rug factory. At ten years of age, Iqbal escaped. He made it to the United States to tell everyone his story and how there shouldn't be child slaves, there should be child learners in school. After returning to Pakistan when Iqbal was 12 years old, he was murdered. A classroom he had come to speak in decided since he didn't reach his goal, building a school, they would do it for Masih. These wonderful allies raised enough funds for eight schools to be built.*

*Become my allies. Be my 'School for Iqbal,' as they called themselves. We can be 'A Peaceful World for Amira.' Those who experience some injustice, like Iqbal and I, have a right to stand up. They do this wonderfully, with the help of allies who often experience this as well. You have not. But knowing is close enough. Know, think, feel, protect what you know as justice.*

I rest my pen on the paper and walk away. Glancing back, I notice a man with pale skin, wearing a hat and carrying a notepad, pick up my fantasy speech and walk away. He hadn't taken it, had he? This could not be. He had stolen my thoughts and emotions. But maybe, just maybe, he would listen.

I had no idea, back in Turkey, this man was a reporter for The Washington Post. That he would lead to publishing my speech in an article. That he would interview me and ask for me to write my story. I would express, publish, and spread the word. Who knows if people do listen? Who knows what it feels like to live a violent, outside of the ordinary life? I do; many people around the world do. None of us deserve to lack in human rights.

After reading this Washington Post article, stand up and spread the word. Though you may not have felt it, you now know it, and that is a start. If enough people are willing to stop, we can. If enough people contribute and become alliances, we can be a strong species of human kind. Stop wars, stop pain. Start living.