

THE STORIES: GHOLAM



First name: **GHOLAM**

Last name: **HASSANPOUR**

Age: **27**

Country of origin: **AFGHANISTAN**

Living in **Greece** since: **2006**

SHORT SUMMARY

Gholam was born in Afghanistan during the war with Russia. He has an older brother and during the outbreak of the civil war he and his family travelled to Iran in order to find a better place to live. However, Iran was proven to be a hostile ground for the citizens of Afghanistan and once more, he was obliged to move, this time alone, to another so called “safe” country.

“FLEEING WAS MY ONLY OPTION”

GHOLAM’S STORY

Born in 1990, Gholam lived in Afghanistan for about ten years. During the civil war and after the US invasion in the country (2001 - 2002) his family decided to abandon its home, moving to Tehran, Iran, trying to find better living and political conditions. Nevertheless, in Iran, Afghans have not access neither to justice nor to educational institutions and they practically have no rights, thus it could be stated that they are entrapped in a limbo.

Knowing that abandoning Iran was his only option, Gholam left Tehran, reaching the borders of Turkey, where he was arrested by the local authorities which intended to send him back to Iran. However, he has managed to escape, following a group of another 20 persons who left Iran as well.

All of them, tried once more to enter the Turkish territory from another trail, where they were arrested by the Kurdish Army (PKK). They were detained and were asked to pay ransom in order to be released. After each one of them paid the amount of 200\$, the men of the Kurdish Army left them. Following a trip of ten days, on foot, by hitching and among many regions of Turkey, Gholam arrived at Istanbul where he was accompanied along with other refugees to the sea borders. All of them got onboard to a rib and after one day, they all arrived in Lesvos, Greece, during December 2005.

HOSTILE CONDITIONS IN GREECE

Upon arriving at Lesvos, he was arrested by the Greek authorities and was beaten. He was detained in a cell for 2 weeks in miserable conditions. Then, obtaining a temporary document which permitted him to leave and go to Athens and apply for refugee status, he came to GCR premises in January 2006 where he was referred to the Greek authorities responsible for accepting or rejecting the application. His first one was rejected and the lawyers of GCR referred him again after the necessary legal actions to apply in the regional asylum office in order to obtain the refugee status. His request was being examined for 8 years in the asylum committees! During these years he was employed as a delivery boy, as a leaflet distributor, he was asking for money at the traffic lights, he worked in a canteen, or as a waiter. He learned the Greek language in the streets of Athens and taking classes in the multicultural center Pyxis of GCR.

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TRYING TO INTEGRATE IN THE GREEK SOCIETY

After his level of Greek was satisfactory he went on to take classes in school (High School and Senior Highschool) and then he has managed to study mechatronics in a public vocational institution in Athens. During Highschool, he met the man who changed his life; his teacher, who took him in his home and started adoption procedures which never completed due to the fact that adopting someone is extremely time-consuming process. From 2010 he stays with the father of his teacher, who considers him as his son. He states that the attitude against him on behalf of the Greek society was very friendly and Greeks helped him to integrate into the society. He met his Greek girlfriend and plans to marry her after he completes his military obligations. In 2012, he was recognized as a political refugee and applied to become a Greek citizen. Due to the fact he was studying in a public institution his application was hastened and after 3 years he took the exams for the Greek citizenship, he passed them obtaining the citizenship and he is waiting to be called to fulfill his military obligation, provisioned in the law for all Greek citizens.

He has been working as a part-time interpreter in GCR from 2011 and as a full timer from January 2012. He speaks Farsi, English and Greek. Most of his friends are Greek and he considers himself as a fully integrated ex refugee, planning to create his own family in Greece. Every day, he helps his compatriots to obtain their documents and apply for asylum status. Furthermore, he participates in charity organizations, facilitating his community and his fellows to be actively engaged in integration policies and strategies.

In high school, I met the man who changed my life.